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Book Review

Mark Irwin and Matthew Zisk. *Japanese linguistics, The Japanese language I.* Tokyo: Asakura Publishing. 2019, x, 311 pp, 5,280 JPY (hardcover). ISBN: 978-4-254-51681-4

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Since the 1960s, a renewed interest for Japanese linguistics has produced a number of publications, including scientific articles, books and monographs, both in English and in the Japanese language, and the field of Japanese linguistics in general, and of its sub-fields (phonetics, grammar, syntax, etc.) in particular are quite well-covered: Miller (1967), Tsujimura (1999, 2013), Iwasaki (2002), Miyagawa and Saito (2008), Hasegawa (2014) to name but a few. Nevertheless, this new publication by Irwin and Zisk (2019) may also serve as a significant contribution to the field for reasons that are illustrated below.

Although the book is designed as a *vade mecum* for undergraduate students with some knowledge of general linguistics, there are several features in this publication which might be profitable for Japanese linguists to take notice of, especially those who are writing or willing to write on this subject in English. This publication is a very informative and wide-ranging overview of the field of Japanese linguistics, which shows an unusually broad and comprehensive covering of many issues, including some units on Braille (pp. 123–125), public signage (pp. 131–133) and non-verbal communication (pp. 177–179). The book is divided into eight chapters, each comprising several units for a total of 86.

The first chapter is an introductory overview of Japanese, its typology, its history and its affiliation. It rightly emphasizes that Japanese is only one sub-branch of the so called Insular Japonic. The other Japonic languages, once spoken in the Korean peninsula and recorded in fragmentary evidence, consisting mostly of toponyms, form instead the Peninsular Japonic branch of the Japonic family. In the past, it was customary to regard Japanese as a unique language, but, as the authors rightly underline in this volume, Japanese is a typical SOV language, with adjectives and genitives preceding the substantive, and postpositions in place of prepositions. This is in line with the typological generalizations about constituent order formulated in the 1960s by Joseph Greenberg.

The second chapter deals with phonology and phonetics, and includes many topics such as consonants, vowels, phonotactics as well as discussions on suprasegmental features such as pitch-accent (units 2.6, 2.7). The authors correctly

emphasize that Japanese is quite common in terms of typological phonology. Indeed, most world languages have inventories which fall in the range of 20–37 phonemes, with the cross-linguistic mean being 31 phonemes. Japanese, with its 21 consonants is in accordance with this range. Furthermore, like many other languages, Japanese shows contrasts in oral plosives at four places of articulation: bilabial, dentalveolar, velar and dental (restricted to affricates). It is worth-noting that, at the end of this chapter, the authors offer an exhaustive scheme of the phonology of Japanese through time, discussing how the vowels, consonants and glides of Old Japanese have changed in Early and Late Middle Japanese, as well as in Modern Japanese. In particular, they introduce (pp. 31–32) with clarity of exposition a thorny argument such as *onbin*, a series of sporadic sound changes which left Early Middle Japanese looking much like Modern Japanese in terms of both phonology and morphophonemics. In particular, they have rightly pointed out that, on the one hand, *onbin* led to a major typological shift in the phonological structure, while, on the other, it affected the shape of the inflected forms, causing a change in the morphophonological structure of verb and adjective inflection.

Chapter three, the longest of the book, deals with grammar and syntax. It starts with a discussion on parts of speech and word order in general, and then touches on many topics, such as derivative particles and topicalization. Some thorny aspects of the Japanese language, such as the distinction between *wa* and *ga* as well as the use of *wa* as a topic marker are discussed in this part with great zeal. The chapter begins with a brief but thorough exploration of the parts of speech and word order, and again ends with an insightful discussion about the diachronic changes in the grammar of Japanese. Although for space reasons the authors certainly have not discussed every aspect of the grammar of earlier periods, they highlight some of the major grammatical developments relevant to modern Japanese, such as examples of archaism in fossilized expressions (p. 97). Another example is the discussion about the four verb classes of the modern language against the seven verb classes of Old and Middle Japanese, viz. consonant-stem, single vowel-stem, dual vowel-stem, N-irregular, R-irregular, S-irregular and K-irregular. Clear and detailed examples of suffixes alternations, as reflected in each verb class, are schematized on page 95.

The fourth chapter deals with the writing system. It is not limited to a fairly trite discussion on *kanji*, *hiragana* and *katakana*, but also includes many less-discussed topics such as punctuation, script mixing, and orthographic license. In the first part of the chapter they introduce the difference between *on-yomi*, i.e., borrowed readings transmitted to Japan over multiple historical periods, and *kun-yomi* which, instead, evolved gradually over time. In addition, they correctly identify four different strata within *on-yomi*, viz. *go'on*, *kan'on*, *to'on* and *kanyo'on* (customary readings). Furthermore, the undergraduate student who is learning

how to write an essay in Japanese will find the unit dedicate to punctuation very useful, as he or she will familiarize with the different punctuation marks used in Japanese (e.g., *kuten*, *tooten*, *kagikakko*) as well as with their usage (e.g., *tooten* should never be placed immediately before a particle or conjunction).

The fifth chapter is dedicated to lexicon and word formation. This chapter, too, covers a wide range of topics, including homonymy, polysemy, heteronymy, slang, jargon and discriminating vocabulary. In this chapter they also present a thorny morphophonemic process known as *rendaku*. Although in English publications it is often referred to as ‘sequential voicing’, voicing was not the phonetic property which distinguished Old Japanese *tenu*es from *mediae*, and thus the translation appears to be a misnomer. Albeit it might seem that *rendaku* is related only to phonology, the authors have good reasons to discuss it in a chapter dedicated to word formation. In fact, although Japanese *mediae*, which reflect contractions of a nasal with a following obstruent, have always been phonologically distinct from *tenu*es, a number of them derives from *tenu*es either by phonological neutralization of *tenu*es as *mediae* after nasals or in morphophonemic alternations as a result of *rendaku*. For instance, *sakurabana* (cherry blossom) probably derives etymologically from *sakura-no-pana*. As the authors rightly point out, *rendaku* is thought to have originated out of the reduction of a particle with initial nasal, with the most plausible candidates being the genitive *no* or the dative *ni*. They have also rightly observed that, despite being phonologically unpredictable, *rendaku* is blocked, according to the Lyman’s Law, when the second syllable contains an internal *mediae*, as, e.g., *kamikaze*.

Sociolinguistics is the scope of the sixth chapter. Hence, it introduces honorifics, registers, gender, as well as language in subculture, non-verbal communication and attitudes to language in general. As the expertise of the present reviewer does not lie in these topics, I shall refrain from offering judgments on this chapter. Nevertheless, the present reviewer was delighted to learn something new about the *Nihon shuwa* (Japanese sign language) and how, for instance, it is influenced by the complex writing system which, notoriously, encompasses two syllabic alphabets plus *kanjis*. The syllabary created for the Japanese sign language is called *yubimoji* (lit. ‘finger letters’), and it may be regarded as a system of manual *kana*.

Chapter seven deals with language contact and dialects. It includes units dedicated to Sino-Japanese, foreign borrowings and Japanese pidgins and creoles, as well as dialect diffusion and classification. In particular, they present different schemata for dividing dialects, while pointing out certain difficulties with less rational and more all-encompassing indigenous theories which consider both Ryūkyūan and the moribund language of Hachijō as dialects of Japanese. Unfortunately, as rightly pointed out by the authors, the issue towards such

classification, which is also lauded by the Japanese government, is politically motivated. It corresponds to viewing Sardinian as a dialect of Italian, and not as a separate Romance language. For what regards language contact, the present reviewer was also delighted to see that the authors have mentioned the tactic employed during the World War II to circumvent the loanword prohibition period: the use of ‘imitations’. This practice, which is also widely used in academic writing, aims at reproducing foreign words and grammatical structures using native morphemes. The authors mentioned and also briefly discussed all four types of ‘imitation’: loan translations, loan meanings, loan derivations and loan syntax.

The eighth and final chapter deals with language education, research and policy. It introduces a number of disparate arguments, including government language policy, dictionaries and lexicography, language software and researches on the Japanese language both from Japanese and foreign scholars. Although references are not included in the text, the authors have consulted and integrated an impressive amount of bibliographical sources which they have included at the end of the book (pp. 249–257). In general, the authors’ observations on the current state of the various fields dealing with Japanese linguistics, as regards both its strengths and weaknesses, are invariably objective and clear-eyed, and thus well worth the careful consideration of the field at large. The style is rather colloquial, at times somewhat chatty (see, e.g., pp. 92–93), but this reviewer’s preference is for this type of concise and informal expression over the long-winded and overly formulaic style of certain past textbooks. With the foregoing in mind, we now proceed to address the few issues contained in this, nonetheless, very valuable publication. It is felt that including, in a hypothetical second edition, the few points mentioned in the present review would be a promising way to make their arguments even more solid and complete than they already are.

On page 23 (Chapter 2), Irwin & Zisk write: “Pitch accent differs from tone: in the former, variation in pitch is restricted at the most to one or two positions within a word, while in the latter, variations in pitch typically affect every syllable or mora in a word.” This is, perhaps, the only passage in their book to be slightly misleading. In the past, phonological typology has frequently relied upon three basic assumptions such as exhaustivity, uniqueness and discreteness to formulate a trifurcated classification of prosodic types, i.e., ‘stress-accent’ vs ‘pitch-accent’ vs ‘tone’. While in the past it seemed reasonable to assume that, because F0 is also an important phonetic factor in the realization of stress-accent, “a language in which tonal oppositions are realized solely in terms of F0 would not be able to support an independent stress-accent system” (Hyman 2006: 249), we now know from cross-linguistic data that this assumption is incorrect. Leaving aside the fact that one may also object that tone, stress and pitch might be grouped together as overlaid suprasegmental features which share the same functional similarities, such as

culminativity and rhythmic alternations, and whose phonetic variations such as, e.g., duration, intensity, F0, etc., may be realized in the spoken language, as well as on a musical instrument, the history of word-prosodic typology is far more vague and debated than one might assume from the discussion about pitch-accent given in Irwin & Zisk (pp. 23 *et passim*). Even their definition of tone is not completely palatable. For there are languages, such as Cantonese, where tones contrast paradigmatically on syllables, and languages where tone system has a *syntagmatic* dimension, which we would expect, instead, from a stress language. Japanese, intended as the variety spoken in Tokyo, has been characterized as both an accent and a tonal language (Meeussen 1972 [apparently unknown to the authors], Haraguchi 1977; McCawley 1978; Pierrehumbert and Beckman 1988; Poser 1984), depending on whether linguists want to typologise it according to the properties of prosodic systems or according to other linguistic properties. If by pitch-accent system we indicate “one that generates tonal patterns through different placement of a marked tone on a syllable/mora in an underlying domain, which is independent of both the syllable and the word” (Ding 2006: 1 [also unfortunately absent in the bibliography]), it follows that only Tokyo Japanese, where the distribution of H and L tones is highly constrained, would be a representative example of a pitch language. Osaka Japanese, for instance, where one needs to know whether a word begins L or H, does not fall squarely within the parameters of a pitch-accent system (cf. Ding 2006: 18–25; Hyman 2009: 218). Furthermore, from a cross-linguistic analysis of tone languages, linguists (e.g., Meeussen 1972; Schadeberg 1973) have pointed out that this ‘restricted tone system’ is also exhibited by languages in which tones are, instead, sparsely distributed (Hyman 2006: 236, 2009: 219ff). Hence, it follows that the type of pitch-accent exhibited by Japanese may simply be described as a tone system at one end of the restrictedness scale. In fact, Hyman (2006, 2009) has exposed the weakness of the tripartite classification by pointing out that, whilst it is possible to define tone and stress, there is no independent definition of ‘pitch-accent’, which instead can pick-and-choose properties from both the tone and stress prototypes. Hence, in Hyman’s (2006: 229) broader proposal of ‘tonal languages’ as a language in which tone must be lexically specified for certain morphemes, we may confidentially put those languages which have been described as possessing pitch-accent systems, including Japanese. This argument should deserve at least a mention in a chapter interested in providing a state of the art of Japanese phonology.

Second, it is quite regretful that the authors, with their 280 and more pages to fill, have discussed only in a marginal way Sino-Japanese readings such as *go’on*, *kan’on*, *to’on*, etc., all the more as one of the two authors is interested in the relationship of Japanese with Sinitic languages, and has discussed some of these arguments elsewhere. In particular, it would have been useful to remark in what

aspects did *go'on* readings, also referred to as *wa'on*, differ from *kan'on* ones (also called *sei'on*). It should be pointed out, in addition, that two different layers must be distinguished within *to'on* readings: *so'on*, which arrived in Japan during the late Kamakura period (1185–1333), and *to'on* proper, also referred to as *toso'on*, which was introduced by the monks of Obakusan at the end of the seventeenth century, and possibly reflect the pronunciation of a Ming (1368–1644) variety of Southern Mandarin. Comprehensive and detailed studies on Sino-Japanese include Todo 1959, Numoto (1986), Ogura (2014), etc. The monumental work in six volumes by Ogura (2014) is regretfully and quite surprisingly absent in their bibliography.

Third, on page 244 (Chapter 8), they present some major results on the Japanese language. Setting aside the fact that, perhaps, Ono's (1953: 55–56) proposed development of Japanese vowels [e, ë, i, ə] from diphthongs and Arisaka's (1944: 681) study on the distributional patterns of Old Japanese vowels might have deserved a mention, it would have been also useful to illustrate certain early discoveries made by Western scholarship, or at least to mention some diachronic facts which emerge from a survey of the missionary linguistic activity. For instance, one might point out that the grammars written by the Jesuit missionary João Rodrigues (1561?–1633?) provide many now-lost contrasts, including the difference between a mid-high *ô* [o] and a mid-low *ō* [ɔ], and certain prenasalized voiced obstruents, as well as indirect information on suprasegmental features such as “sandhi”.

A last remark must be addressed to certain unreferenced quotations which occasionally occur in the book. In at least two occasions (pp. 218, 243), the authors quote apparent authorities like Motoori without referencing their work in the same context. It is suggested that the authors treat Motoori as a source, and tell the readers in which book he wrote what, as his works are not included in the bibliography (pp. 269–270) and Motoori is not canonic enough to be just quoted as if everybody knew all of his works. Also, caution must be taken against the frequent use of new terminologies which are supposed to illustrate “new” linguistic concepts, such as ‘topolect’, a term coined by Victor Mair (1991) by calquing Chinese *fangyan*, but that has not met with universal endorsement (cf. Branner 1999: 383; Orlandi 2019: 141).

Despite these minor remarks, the undergraduate students as well as the readers interested in Japanese linguistics may count themselves fortunate to have availability for reference, as well as for a point of departure in their own investigations on any other sub-field of Japanese linguistics, this new publication by Irwin and Zisk (2019), who have also the merit of having reduced an extraordinarily vast field into a book of a manageable and practical size. In conclusion, for the clarity of exposition, as well as for its unusually broad coverage, this book certainly

deserves to be recommended to anyone interested in obtaining a general understanding of Japanese linguistics.

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