

Emotional adjectives in Japanese and their subjectivity

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There is a group of adjectives such as *sukida* (like), *kiraida* (dislike), *hoshii* (want), *ureshii* (happy), *nikui* (hate), *koishii* (miss), which describe people's emotional states in Japanese. Kuno (1973) introduced the term 'transitive adjective' for some of these adjectives because they behave like transitive verbs as indicated by English translations. They are altogether classified as 'emotional adjectives', and most of the Japanese emotional adjectives are used to express speakers' own feelings and emotions. However, the adjective *sukida* (like) and its antonym *kiraida* (dislike) seem to be free from such a restriction. Teramura (1982) notes this fact and briefly explains that *sukida* or *kiraida* are the adjectives which denote more objective state and character, but this fact largely remains unaccounted for. This research argues against the views in previous literature, and tries to shed light on the subjectivity of emotional adjectives in Japanese from the cognitive linguistics point of view, based on the empirical data from a large corpus.

The data from the corpus actually show that 48.3% of the occurrences take some kind of first person topic with the emotional adjective *sukida*. When it takes third person topics, corpus lines indicate that they go through the same processes as other emotional adjectives, i.e. the addition of modal markers, structural changes in terms of subordination and so on. If there is no overt structural coding observed, those third person topics usually appear in the past tense, which is the same as other emotional adjectives. In other words, *sukida* behaves no different from other emotional adjectives in principle. This research focuses on one of the productive adjective formation processes in Japanese, and relates the process to the subjectivity of these emotional adjectives.

Adjectives in Japanese form a pattern 'noun+*-ga* (nominative case marker) +adjective'. Often the nominative case marker *-ga* is dropped to form idiomatic patterns, and those 'noun+adjective' eventually form single adjectives and they are used in the predicate. This adjective formation process allows a generalization of the adjective meaning, for example, *yakyuu-ga sukida* (like baseball) becomes *yakyuu-zukida* (baseball-lover). *Sukida* is one of the most frequently used adjectives in this word-formation (1157 of this are observed in the corpus), and its antonym *kiraida* (dislike) is also observed to be highly frequent in the process. It is argued in this study that the adjectives used with third person topics have this generalized quality rather than the emotions of the third person. This explains why the other emotional adjectives such as *hoshii* (want), *ureshii* (happy), *nikui* (hate) are never used with third person topics, because they do not participate in the adjective formation process, therefore, they do not have the association to the generalized meanings besides the speakers' own feelings. Based on the above observation, the research concludes that the frequent adjective formation process is entrenched in the Japanese native speakers' mind, and it is connected to the usage of emotional adjective in question by a taxonomic link.

Keywords: cognitive corpus linguistics, emotional adjectives, subjectivity, entrenchment, taxonomic link

References

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