A Corpus-Based Look at Japanese Benefactive Verbs *ageru, kureru, and morau*

Japanese benefactive verbs have traditionally been investigated rather extensively with particular attention given to semantic and pragmatic dimensions (Ooe 1975, Kuno 1978, Shibatani 2000, etc). Studies have centered upon fascinating arrays of examples where notions such as perspective and viewpoint are encoded as part of lexical meanings. In this paper, we attempt to change the focus and make a corpus-based investigation to look at their usage in actual discourse, thereby obtaining a more complete understanding of these verbs. Specifically, we focus upon three verbs, *ageru, kureru,* and *morau,* in two sets of spoken corpora: the Pac Rim/Japanese Corpus, comprised mostly of face to face conversational data, and the CALLHOME corpus of telephone conversation. Although usage both as main and auxiliary verbs (i.e. *yatte ageru* 'do (something) for (someone)') has been examined, in this paper we present our findings chiefly for the former. In total, we identified 100 examples of benefactive main verbs, and the cross-corpus distributional patterns are focused upon and discussed.

Firstly, a very prominent skew in the frequency of occurrence of the three verbs was discovered. Specifically, *kureru* is used much less frequently than the other two verbs (only 10% of the total number of examples). *Morau* 'get' and *kureru* 'give' have been said to be used to describe similar situations where some item is transferred to the speaker or her/his associate, the recipient. For *morau,* the subject encodes the recipient, while for *kureru* it is the agent. One might suggest that for *kureru* there is a conflict in perspective such that the subject, which is a typical grammatical position for the speaker cross-linguistically (Keenan 1976), does not encode the speaker. This may result in *kureru*'s less frequent use compared with *morau* (larger than 1 to 6 ratio). It seems fair to say that *morau* and *kureru* are often treated as a set in the literature due to their semantic similarities, which may be unrealistic as they seem to be treated rather differently by speakers.

Most of these benefactive verbs appear with an explicit NP denoting the object that is transferred (hereafter P). The ratio of explicit Ps for these verbs (approx. 90%) is significantly higher than what is reported for verbs in general in Japanese and cross-linguistically (approx. 50%; Du Bois 2003). Examination of these in context shows that explicit NPs are sometimes used to introduce new participants into the discourse (Du Bois 2003), as in (1)-(2). However, quite a few Ps are found in (semi-)fixed expressions such as *ichibetsu kureru* 'have a look' where the P does not introduce a new referent which can be talked about in the discourse, as in (3). Further, as shown in (1)-(2), the subject argument of the verb (hereafter, A) is typically not overtly expressed; the ratio of explicit mention is approx. 10%, comparable to what is reported for verbs in general in the literature. It thus appears that Japanese benefactive verbs show a strong tendency to be used only with P, suggesting they might be associated with a template [P V].

Finally, there is a skew in the distribution of realis and irrealis in the use of the three verbs. That is, while the frequency of irrealis among the three verbs is more or less proportionate to their overall occurrences, realis is much more frequently expressed with *morau* as in (2), accounting for 80+% of realis examples. We take this to be an outcome of *morau*'s endpoint orientation where realized benefactive events tend to be viewed from the perspective of the receiving end, which results in the frequent use of *morau* 'get'.

To sum up, our corpus-based investigation reveals fascinating new facts about benefactive verbs in Japanese, which can be best studied with actual discourse data.
(1) Talking about a sukiyaki get-together.

W: sukiyaki wa ashita de= (We will have sukiyaki tomorrow, and)
nanka mottekuru no wa kyoo desho? (they will bring stuff today?)
H: u=n to omou kedo? (yes, I think.)
W: shungiku age yo (I will donate crown daisy (sukiyaki ingredient).)

(2) Trying to select a restaurant for a dinner party. N just came back from one of the candidate restaurants and tells Y on the phone:

N: shashin deta panfuretto moratta kara (I got a picture booklet so)
Y: un un (mhm mhm)
N: ano sore o anata ni okuru kara. (I will send it to you.)

(3) omizu o ageru 'give water (to plants)/water (plants)'
  shiki o ageru 'have a wedding',
ten o ageru 'give points'
denwa morau 'get a phone call'
onomimono morau 'order a drink'
kekkon shootaijoo morau 'get a wedding invitation card/get invited to a wedding'
kuroobi o morau 'get a blackbelt/blackbelted'

References


