DENOTATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS OF VERB-CONTAINING LEXICAL UNITS IN JAPANESE

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Annotatsiya: Maqolada yapon tilidagi fe’l tarkibli leksik birliklarning denotativ va konnotativ ma’nolari tahlil qilinadi. Erkin fe’l birikmalari, qo‘shma fe’llar, frazeologik birliklar va pragmatik jihatdan belgilangan fe’l konstruksiyalarida lug‘aviy denotatsiya bilan baholovchi, emotsional, uslubiy va madaniy konnotatsiya o‘rtasidagi munosabat ko‘rib chiqiladi. Misollar orqali ma’no kompozitsionligi, semantik shaffoflik darajasi va kontekstning roli yoritiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: denotatsiya, konnotatsiya, yapon tili, fe’l, leksik birlik, qo‘shma fe’l, frazeologizm, semantika

Аннотация: В статье анализируются денотативные и коннотативные значения японских лексических единиц, содержащих глагольный компонент. Рассматриваются свободные сочетания, сложные глаголы, фразеологические единицы и прагматически маркированные конструкции. Особое внимание уделяется взаимодействию предметно-логического значения с оценочными, эмоциональными, стилистическими и культурными оттенками.

Ключевые слова: денотация, коннотация, японский язык, глагол, лексическая единица, сложный глагол, фразеология, семантика

Abstract: This article analyzes denotative and connotative meaning in Japanese lexical units that contain a verbal component. It distinguishes referential or event-structural content from evaluative, emotional, stylistic, interpersonal and culture-specific associations. Free combinations, lexical V+V compounds, idiomatic expressions and pragmatically marked verbal formulas are discussed as points on a continuum of semantic transparency. The study argues that the interpretation of verb-containing units depends not only on the lexical denotation of their components but also on conventionalization, register, speaker attitude, collocational history and discourse context.

Keywords: denotation, connotation, Japanese, verb, lexical unit, compound verb, phraseology, semantics

Lexical meaning is not exhausted by reference to an action, process or state. A linguistic unit may identify an event while simultaneously conveying evaluation, emotion, social distance, stylistic register or cultural association. In Japanese this distinction is particularly visible in verb-containing lexical units because verbs frequently participate in compounds, idioms, light-verb constructions and conventional pragmatic formulas. The denotative–connotative distinction is therefore useful for explaining why two expressions that describe roughly the same event may differ sharply in tone, social meaning or interpretive effect [1; 2; 3].

Denotative meaning can be understood as the relatively stable conceptual content that allows a lexical unit to identify a class of events, states or relations. In a simple unit such as hon o yomu “read a

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book”, yomu denotes an act of reading and combines compositionally with its object. In the compound hashiri-dasu “start running / burst into a run”, the first verb contributes the manner of motion and the second contributes an inchoative boundary. Denotation is therefore not limited to single verbs: it may be compositionally distributed across a multi-element lexical structure [4; 5].

Connotation refers to conventional or contextually activated associations that accompany denotation without simply duplicating it. These associations may be positive or negative evaluation, intensity, familiarity, respect, vulgarity, literary coloring, gendered style, age-related style or social positioning. Japanese offers especially rich evidence because speech-level choices can alter the interpersonal effect of a verbal expression. For example, taberu “eat”, meshiagaru “eat” (honorific) and kuu “eat” (plain/rough in many contexts) overlap denotatively but differ in social and stylistic connotation [6].

Verb-containing lexical units can be arranged along a scale from semantically transparent to opaque. A free combination such as tegami o kaku “write a letter” is highly transparent. Many V+V compounds are partially transparent: yomi-hajimeru “begin reading” is easy to interpret from its components, while compounds such as kiri-nukeru “get through / overcome (a difficult situation)” have broader conventional meanings that cannot be predicted by simple addition. Idiomatic units show still lower transparency. NINJAL’s work on Japanese verbs and compounds explicitly treats idiomaticity as gradient rather than absolute and relates it to semantic transparency and corpus behavior [7].

Japanese V+V compounds are a major source of lexical enrichment. In lexical compounds, the combination may develop a conventional meaning that is narrower, more intensive or more metaphorical than the meanings of the component verbs taken separately. For example, mi-otosu literally contains miru “see” and otosu “drop”, but the conventional compound means “overlook / fail to notice”. Kaki-naosu combines kaku “write” and naosu “repair/correct” to denote rewriting or revising. Such compounds show how denotation can become lexicalized while additional connotations such as completion, repetition, intensity or error correction are conventionalized [5; 8].

Idioms demonstrate the clearest separation between component denotation and unit meaning. Expressions such as kao o tateru “save/maintain someone’s face; uphold someone’s honor” cannot be interpreted adequately as a literal action involving a face and standing something upright. Similarly, te o yaku literally “burn one’s hands” conventionally means “have trouble handling someone/something”. The denotative content of the whole unit is socially and culturally conventionalized, while the concrete bodily image contributes connotative force. This coexistence of literal imagery and figurative interpretation is characteristic of Japanese phraseology.

Many Japanese verbal expressions carry cultural associations related to hierarchy, group membership, responsibility and interpersonal sensitivity. Expressions involving enryo suru “refrain / hold back”, ki o tsukau “be considerate / take care about others’ feelings” and sassuru “infer / sense without explicit statement” are not untranslatable, but their pragmatic load is culturally salient. Their denotation can be glossed in English, yet their connotation includes expectations about appropriate social behavior. Therefore, lexicographic description should separate a basic semantic gloss from cultural-pragmatic commentary [2; 9].

Japanese lexical units often encode register through the choice of verb, auxiliary and formula. Iu “say”, mōsu “say” (humble), ossharu “say” (honorific) and kuchibashiru “blurt out” can refer to speech events while differing in respect, stance and manner. Likewise, yaru, ageru and sashiageru can participate in giving constructions but differ in social orientation. Connotation is therefore partly grammaticalized in Japanese: interpersonal relations are reflected in lexical selection and verbal morphology, not only in optional adjectives or adverbs.

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Connotative meaning frequently grows from metaphorical extension. Japanese verb-containing expressions use body-part nouns, motion verbs and spatial schemas to conceptualize abstract experience. Ki ga shizumu "one's spirits sink" uses vertical motion to express sadness; me o samasu "wake up / open one's eyes" may extend from a bodily event to intellectual realization; michi o kirihiraku "open/cut a path" may denote pioneering a new possibility. The denotative event schema creates an image, while repeated figurative use establishes an evaluative or emotive connotation [3; 10].

A lexical unit does not carry all possible connotations equally in every occurrence. Context selects and strengthens particular readings. The verb warau "laugh/smile" is denotatively neutral with respect to attitude, but in context it may express friendliness, embarrassment, mockery or superiority. Similarly, damaru "be silent" can connote politeness, resistance, fear, indifference or strategic refusal. The analyst must therefore distinguish conventional connotation, which is relatively stable in the lexicon, from discourse connotation, which emerges from a particular communicative situation.

Translation requires preserving not only what a verb-containing unit denotes but also the social or emotional effect it produces. A dictionary equivalent may capture the event while losing register or cultural nuance. For this reason, bilingual lexicography should provide usage labels, collocations, example sentences and semantic networks rather than isolated glosses. NINJAL's Basic Verb Handbook project and Compound Verb Lexicon reflect this principle by linking grammatical, semantic and usage information and by providing corpus-based examples [7; 8].

Table 1. Denotative and connotative dimensions in selected Japanese units

Unit	Basic denotation	Typical connotative/pragmatic value
食べる taberu	eat	neutral/plain
召し上がる meshiagaru	eat	honorific respect
食う kuu	eat	plain/rough, colloquial in many contexts
見落とす miotosu	fail to notice	error/oversight
手を焼く te o yaku	have difficulty handling	trouble, burden
顔を立てる kao o tateru	preserve another's honor	social face/respect
気を遣う ki o tsukau	show consideration	interpersonal sensitivity

Denotative and connotative meanings in Japanese verb-containing lexical units form an integrated semantic system. Denotation provides the event or state that an expression conventionally identifies; connotation adds evaluative, emotive, stylistic, interpersonal and cultural associations. The boundary between the two is not rigid. In V+V compounds and idioms, repeated use can lexicalize what was once a context-dependent inference, while discourse can activate new connotations even in semantically transparent expressions. The most adequate analysis therefore treats Japanese lexical units on a continuum of compositionality and conventionalization. For translation, lexicography and language teaching, an isolated English gloss is often insufficient: the analyst must also explain register, collocation, social relation and cultural-pragmatic function.

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