

ON TELEGRAPHIC SENTENCES IN JAPANESE

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1. Introduction

500 telegrams are analyzed. Attention is given to typical telegraphic sentences with the assumption that they are constructed tersely with some syntactic simplification aimed at minimizing the cost of the message. Particular interest may be directed to aspects of general syntactic structure and their implications for studies of linguistic peculiarities in certain kinds of pathological performance.¹⁾

A Japanese telegram uses katakana, numbers, and some special symbols including punctuation and telegraphic codes. Charges increase for every five letters (including special symbols) in addition to the basic charge that covers the first ten. The compactness in telegraphic communication accordingly may vary in each case, since the senders of the messages have a tendency to use more letters within the limits for a given charge. Telegraphic sentences may, however, be expected to show certain syntactic characteristics typical of extremely compact communication, such as is also observed in newspaper headline constructions.²⁾

2. Style and syntactic conciseness

Telegraphic sentences vary in style and syntactic conciseness in conformity with the purposes they are used for.

Telegraphic messages for congratulations and condolences come closest to containing ordinary sentences, with little syntactic and stylistic simplification.

Typical telegraphic messages, on the other hand, are those which are sent in the form of reports, requests, commands or questions. For these sentences, the plain style is used, i. e., the desu-masu style is not adopted. This does not, however, imply corresponding unmarked forms on the lexical level. Polite expressions represented by honorific or humble nouns and verbs are used, e. g., kitaku 'your house (honorific)' and ukagau 'come (humble)' in (1).

(1) アスキタクニウカガ³⁾ヨヨロシクタンオミタシ

asu kitaku ni ukagau yorosiku tanomitasi
(tomorrow)(your house)(come)(wish (your) favor)
'Visit you tomorrow hope it convenient for you.'

Typical telegraphic messages naturally prefer shorter lexical items, e. g., humi 'letter' rather than tegami 'letter', as in (2).

1) Cf. Imamura, and Ohashi.

2) Cf. Uyeno & Fujimura.

3) A katakana which has dakuten, the two dots or a small circle attached to a katakana marking the consonant change, e. g., カ^o(ga) vs. カ(ka), or パ^o(pa) vs. パ(ha), is counted as two letters in a telegram, and leaves one blank space after it on a telegram form.

- (2) フミミタ
 humi mita
 (letter)(saw)
 'Received letter.'

Extreme cases are those in which a single kana stands for a word, e. g. セ (se) represents gozen 'morning' and コ (ko) gogo 'afternoon'. It is also conventional to represent 'money' with a circle.

3. Telegraphic sentences

3.1. Predicates and sentence types

A telegraphic sentence consists of a predicate and some noun phrases, as ordinary sentences do.

The predicate that contains a compound verb ⁴⁾, however, can be abbreviated to the nominal base alone, for both non-past and past affirmative declarative sentences, e. g., kettei 'be decided' in (3) and enki 'postpone' in (4). This will of course result in the ambiguity of tense.

- (3) サイヨウケツテイシキユウシユツシヤサレタシ
 saiyoo kettei sikyuu syussyasaretasi
 (employment)(decided)(promptly)(wish (you) come to office)
 'Application accepted please report immediately.'
- (4) シケンニチエンキカネアトサンゼンエンツイカネガウ
 siken itiniti enki kane ato sanzenen tuikanegau
 (exam)(one day)(delay)(money)(in addition)(¥3000)(request to add)
 'Exam delayed one day send additional 3000 yen.'

A nominal predicate also stands alone without the copula in affirmative declaratives, e. g., yotei 'plan' in (5) and yongoosya 'car No. 4' in (6).

- (5) コウアンマルニミヒナカハマニハイルヨテイ
 Kooanmaru nisanhi Nagahama ni hairu yotei
 (The Koanmaru)(23rd)(enter Nagahama)(schedule)
 'Koanmaru arriving Nagahama the 23rd.'

4) Compound verbs are those which consist of a nominal base and a verb stem su 'do' such as kettei-su 'decide'. The form su cannot be substituted for by such verbs as yar 'do'. It is purely a formal element and the nominal part, e. g., kettei 'decision', determines the meaning of the compound verb.

- (6) コンヤハジ" ヨコテツクテ" キタウヨコテマテ" ムカエ
 konya hatizi Yokote tuku dekitara Yokote made mukae
 (tonight)(8 o'clock)(arrive (at) Yokote)(if possible)(as far as Yokote)
 (meet)

タノム 四ノコ" ウシヤ

tanomu yongoosya
 (request)(car No. 4)

'Arriving Yokote 8 p. m. car 4 meet if possible.'

In an appropriate context, where semantic content of the noun phrase is understood, a nominal predicate such as yongoosya 'car No. 4' by itself constitutes a sentence. ⁵⁾

Interrogative sentences in a telegram use the sentence-final particle ka as ordinary sentences do, except where the particle ya replaces the particle ka, e. g., (7), or where an interrogative adverb alone characterizes them ⁶⁾, e. g., (8).

- (7) ライツキーニヒ一ハ° フネガ エルヤ
 raituki itisanhi ippaku negaeru ya
 (next month)(13th)(stay over a night)(request)

'Arriving 13th next month would like to stay overnight if convenient send reply.'

- (8) ハクラクノケンイカガ"
 Hakuraku no ken ikaga
 (Hakuraku's case)(how)

'Request opinion Hakuraku case.'

5) Theoretically any phrase may constitute a telegraphic sentence if it is appropriate in the given context. It is, however, rare in telegrams to find a predicateless sentence, which is quite common in newspaper headline constructions. Suppose we had (a) in a telegram:

- (a) ヒガ" イセ" ント" ニオヨブ"
 higai zendo ni oyobu
 (disaster)(country-wide)(extend)
 'Disaster widespread.'

We can understand the semantic content of the sentence by the first two noun phrases alone, and predict the verb oyobu 'extend' that follows even if it is not used. Here, in spite of the fact that the predicate is a redundant element, it is needed in a telegraphic sentence. Without the verb oyobu 'extend' (a) will sound like a newspaper headline. In this respect the telegraphic sentences are closer to ordinary sentences than are newspaper headlines that are constructed to represent only the essence of their succeeding articles.

6) The same usage is found in newspaper headlines. Cf. Uyeno & Fujimura, p. 151.

Telegraphic imperatives are commands and requests marked with the imperative form of their predicates as in ordinary imperatives, e. g., (9) and (10).

(9) 五ヒコ"セ"ン九シ" シユツトウアレ

gohi gozen kuzi syuttoo are

(5th)(a. m.)(9 o'clock)(appearance)(have-imp.)

'Please report 9 a. m. the 5th. '

(10) 一三ヒニホ"ンコウクウニテツク フルマヨウイシテクレ

itisanhi Nihonkookuu nite tuku kuruma yooisite kure

(13th)(by Japan Airlines)(arrive)(car)(prepare-request)

'Arriving 13th Japan Airlines send car. '

Besides these, there are many cases in telegrams where declarative sentences with certain types of predicates are used in making requests; tasi (or tai) 'want' in (1) and (3) ⁷⁾, negau 'wish' in (4), tanomu 'request' in (6) and kou 'beg' in (11) below.

(11) コ"レニラクコウ

gorenraku kou

(contact)(beg)

'Please contact. '

All of these predicates have the illocutionary force of doing something by saying them. ⁸⁾

Dominant use of these predicates in telegrams may be due to the fact that it shortens the sentences, and secondly it sounds more polite than using plain request sentences such as (1), since it forms indirect expressions of request.

7) The predicate phrase syussia-sare-tai may be accounted for as the result of predicate-raising in derivation. Here, syussia-sare is the passive form used as an honorific verb that corresponds to the plain verb form syussia-suru. It should be noticed that neither the plain form syussia-suru nor another honorific correspondent syussia-nasaru can be the predicate of the embedded sentence of the higher verb tai 'want' to convey the same semantic content as that of (d) below. Compare:

(b) syussia-si-tai '(I) want to go to the office'

(c) syussia-nasari-tai '(He) wants to go to the office'

(d) syussia-sare-tai 'I want you to come to the office'

In (b) and (c) the subject of the higher verb and the embedded sentence are identical, while in (d) they are not.

8) Cf. Austin for his performative-vs. -constative view.

3.2. Noun phrases and particles

In ordinary sentences noun phrases are marked by particles (post-positions) showing their case relationship with the given predicates or the relationship with the context; e. g., the topic of a sentence is marked by the particle wa.

Among these particles, we may find some used just as markers of surface relationships, some giving more contentive information and some in-between the two. The particle ga, the surface subject marker, and the particle o, the surface object marker, will be of the first kind, while the particle kara, the marker of the source or starting point, and made, the marker of extent, are of the second. Particles such as ni⁹⁾, e. g., 'to', 'at', can be either relational or contentive depending on the case. In a typical telegraphic sentence some of these particles are ordinarily suppressed.¹⁰⁾

For the particles that are contentive, such as made and kara, there is no significant difference in their use in telegraphic sentences from that in ordinary sentences.

On the other hand, the particles ga and o are suppressed, e. g., saiyoo in (3) above, Yasui butyoo in (12) and Yamasita in (13) (the suppression of the particle ga), and humi in (2) and mukae in (6) and (13) (that of the particle o).

(12) アスイブ" チヨウ=ニヒウカカ" ウヨロシク

Yasui butyoo nisanhi ukagau yorosiku

(director)(23rd)(visit)(request favor)

'Director Yasui arriving 23rd.'

(13) ヤマシタハヒ一ハ" シニテタツヨコハマエキニムカエ

Yamasita hatihi itiban nite tatu Yokohama eki ni mukae

(8th)(by the earliest)(train))(leave)(at Yokohama station)
(meet)

タノム

tanomu

(request)

'Yamasita leaving 8th first train meet Yokohama.'

9) Cf. Ishiwata for a thorough discussion of ni-phrases in relation to their predicates.

10) The use of the term "suppression" here does not necessarily imply any assumption as to the existence of the forms ga or o in the underlying structure. In the following discussion, nevertheless, simply for ease of comparison between the telegraphic sentences and the corresponding ordinary sentences, descriptions may be read as though these particles had been deleted by an optional rule which is characteristic of telegraphic sentence grammar.

Among the noun phrases that are supposed to be marked by the particle ni, only noun phrases that indicate the time of the event always suppress the particle, e. g., nisanhi in (5), hatizi in (6). Other possible cases are those that indicate the location and that immediately precede the clause predicate, e. g., ... Yokote (ni) tuku in (6).

The suppression of the particle ni in temporal phrases may be explained simply as avoidance of redundancy, while the same strategy in locative phrases is restricted by the word order.

In connection with the particle ni, let us compare (14), (15) and (16).

(14) キタノウミワシ マニカツ

Kitanoumi Wazima ni katu
(win)

(15) キタノウミワシ マカツ

Kitanoumi Wazima katu
(win)

(16) キタノウミワシ マアブ^ル

Kitanoumi Wazima yaburu
(defeat)

(14) is read as 'Kitanoumi won over Wazima', but (15) cannot be interpreted this way. (15) will be taken to mean that Kitanoumi and Wazima won. (16), which contains the verb yaburu 'defeat' as the predicate, will be interpreted two ways: 'Kitanoumi defeated Wazima' or 'Kitanoumi and Wazima lost the matches.' The verb katu 'win' takes a ni-phrase but not an o-phrase. In (15), however, it is impossible to read the second phrase as representing a ni-phrase of which the particle ni has been suppressed, and it is read as the conjoined noun phrase that substitutes a part of the subject noun phrase of the sentence. In (16), on the other hand, since the verb yaburu 'defeat' takes an o-phrase, the second noun phrase can be read as representing the object noun phrase.

From the above we may conclude the following:

1. In surface structures, a ni-phrase is always marked by the particle, except in the case of a temporal phrase, or a locative phrase that immediately precedes its predicate.

2. The surface subject and object noun phrases are not marked with particles. When they cooccur in a sentence, the subject phrase precedes the object phrase.

3. Conjoined noun phrases are not necessarily marked with particles.

Lastly, it is common to have the suppression of the particle wa ¹¹⁾, which marks the topic of a sentence, in a telegram, e. g., Hakuraku no ken 'Hakuraku's case' in (8) and tekkotu koozi 'steel-frame work' in (17).

- (17) テッコツコウジ ヨテイト ウリシンコウチユウカネキ シコウニ
tekkoto-koozi yotei doori sinkootyuu kane ginkoo ni
(steel frame work)(as scheduled)(in progress)(money)(into the bank)

フリコミタノム
hurikomi tanomu
(payment)(request)

'Steel construction on schedule request payment to bank.'

There is also the case where the suppression of the particle wa is replaced by the use of a comma as in (18), although this will not lessen the number of letters in a telegram.

- (18) カブ ヌシソウカイ、ゴ セ ソルジ カラキヨウワカイカンニテカイサイ
kabunusi-sookai, gozen kuzi kara Kyoowakaikan nite kaisai
(general meeting of stockholders), (9 a. m. on)(at Kyoowa Hall)(hold)
'General stockholders' meeting Kyowa Hall 9 a. m.'

4. Summary

Sentences used in telegrams are examined in view of their syntactic simplification. A typical telegraphic sentence is in plain style but uses honorific or humble verbs and nouns. It is constructed with a predicate and some noun phrases as ordinary sentences are. In a telegraphic sentence, however, a compound verb uses only its nominal base as the predicate of an affirmative, declarative sentence. A nominal predicate without

11) The particle wa also marks a contrast. In that case the particle wa is usually not suppressed, e. g., wa in (e) below.

- (e) トンヤカ ワニオイトワケ ニキンシハライワツキニワリヒキトスル
tonya gawa ni oite wa genkin-siharai wa tuki niwarihiki to suru
(wholesalers) (cash payment)(per month)(20% reduction)
イケンウナ
iken una
(opinion)(by urgent telegram)

'Wholesalers approve 20% monthly discount if cash urgent reply requested.'

In a telegram the letter ワ (wa) is frequently used for the particle wa, which is normally written with the kana for ha.

the copula alone is also used as the predicate of the same sentence type. This will result in the ambiguity of tense. The subject particle ga and the object particle o are usually suppressed, and so is the particle ni in a temporal phrase. The suppression of the particle ni in a locative phrase, on the other hand, is restricted to the case immediately preceding the verb. The particle wa, which marks the topic, is usually suppressed, but may be replaced by a comma.

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