

## ■ Verbs

### ● Basic Characteristics of Verbs

Typical and representative verbs express movements and actions. Because verbs express movements, they have the grammatical function of forming the predicate of various clauses. Japanese verbs alter their word form in connection with this function.

Japanese adjectives also change their form and serve as predicates, but the function is to express attributes, and the main usage has to do with adnominal modification, as in *atarashii hon ga shuppan sareta* ‘A new book has been published’. In contrast, it is not frequent that a verb is used for adnominal modification as in *taberu mono ga nai* ‘There is no food to eat’. The main usage of verbs is the formation of the predicate, as in *ame ga fureba, undōkai wa chūshi da* ‘If it rains, the athletic meeting will be called off’, and *hageshii ame ga futta* ‘A severe rain fell.’

### ● Conjugation and Grammatical Categories

Verbs change the form and become the predicate of various clauses to form sentences. This type of word form change is called conjugation. The verb *kaku* ‘write’, for instance, conjugates as follows: *kaitari* (parallel construction form), *kakinagara* (adverbial form), *kaki/kaitte* (suspended form), *kaku/kaita* (adnominal form), *akeba/kaitara/kakuto* (conditional form), *kaitemo/kaitatte* (adversative conditional form), *kaku, kaita/kakō/ake* (conclusive form). Each form may serve as the predicate of the clause where it appears.

Verbs, when used as the predicate, possess grammatical categories such as affirmation/negation, tense, politeness, and modality. Verbs also possess the grammatical categories of voice and aspect, which are specific to verbs.

### ● Combining Ability of Verbs

The primary function of verbs is to form the predicate of a sentence. As the predicate, the verb has the function of uniting adverbial components and integrating them into a sentence. The components, *kare wa, kōhii o,* and *oishisō ni* in *Kare wa kōhii o oishisō ni nonda* ‘He drank his coffee with relish,’ are all connected and bound to the verb *nonda*. This “case governance” is at the very core of the verb’s ability to combine. This is a function with which the verb selects the noun phrases with which it can combine in order to realize the movement or state it expresses. For instance, *waru* ‘break/shatter’ requires a *ga*-case noun phrase and *o*-case noun phrase, as in *X ga Y o waru* ‘X breaks Y’. *Okuru* ‘give a gift’ requires a *ga*-case noun phrase, *o*-case noun phrase, and *ni*-case noun phrase, as in *X ga Z ni Y o okuru* ‘X gives a gift of Y to Z’.

### ● Lexico-Grammatical Sub-Categories of Verbs

Verbs are classified into several grammatical sub-categories according to their behavior toward tense, aspect, voice, volition, command, and so on.

The *ru*-form (basic form) of one group of verbs (motion verbs) expresses the future (e.g., *Ah, nimotsu ga ochiru* ‘Look out! The package is going to fall’), and the other group (stative verbs) (e.g., *Kono heya niwa tsukue ga aru* ‘There are desks in this room’), expresses the present with the *ru*-form. Motion verbs are able to express aspect (e.g., *Kare wa wain o nonda/nonde ita* ‘He drank/was drinking wine’), but stative verbs do not possess this function (e.g., *Tsukue no ue ni hon ga aru/\*atte iru* ‘There is/\*is being a book on the desk’).

With volition and command, there are volitional verbs that express will, command, and prohibition (e.g., *kōen ni ikō* ‘I will/Let’s go to the park’, *kōen ni ike* ‘Go to the park!’, *kōen ni iku na* ‘Don’t go to the park!’), and non-volitional verbs such as *komaru* ‘be in a bind’ that cannot express will, command, or prohibition (e.g., *\*komarō, \*unto komare, \*sonna koto de komaruna*). Further, there are verbs that cannot express will and command but which can express prohibition (e.g., *\*odorokō, \*unto odoroke, sonna koto de odoroku na* ‘Don’t be surprised by such news’).

### ● Loss of Verb-Like Characteristics

Typically, verbs express movement and are capable of forming predicates. The verb *aru* ‘be/possess/ exist’ is atypical in that, by expressing a state, it does not possess aspect.

Morphologically, *aru* lacks the negative form, *\*aranai*. In expressions such as *bakagete iru*

‘ridiculous’ and *togatte iru* ‘pointy’, the verbs only appear in the *teiru*-form in the formation of the predicate, and these verbs are used more in adnominal modification than in the formation of the predicate. This makes these verbs very similar to adjectives. The verb *tsureru* ‘take someone along’ has a limited usage that is built around its *te*-form (e.g., *Kodomo o kōen ni tsurete iku* ‘I will take/take the child to the park’).

→ 活用 Conjugation (2-B), 文法カテゴリー Grammatical Category (2-B), 情態動詞 Stative Verb (2-G)

● References

Miyajima, Tatsuo (1972) *Dōshi no imi, yōhō no kijutsuteki kenkyū* (Descriptive Study of the Meanings of Verbs and Their Usage). Shuei Shuppan.

Takahashi, Taro (2003) *Dōshi kyū shō* (Verbs Chapter 9). Hituzi Syobo.

(Nitta Yoshio)