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 あたらしい 本 が しゅっぱん された ‘A new book has been published’. In contrast, it is not frequent that a verb is used for adnominal modification as in たべる ものが ない ‘There is no food to eat’. The main usage of verbs is the formation of the predicate, as in 雨 が ふれば 夏 と も は か ゆ し だ ‘If it rains, the athletic meeting will be called off’, and はげしい 雨 が ふった ‘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 かく ‘write’, for instance, conjugates as follows: かいたり (parallel construction form), かきなが拉 (adverbial form), かき/かいて (suspended form), かく/かいた (adnominal form), かけば/かいたら/かくと (conditional form), かいても/かいたって (adversative conditional form), かく, かいた/かくと (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, かれ wa, こおひ o, and おりしこ ni in かれ wa こおひ o おりしこ ni なんだ ‘He drank his coffee with relish,’ are all connected and bound to the verb なんだ. 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, はる ‘break/shatter’ requires a が-case noun phrase and お-case noun phrase, as in に spell て ろ Y o はる ‘X breaks Y’. おける ‘give a gift’ requires a が-case noun phrase, お-case noun phrase, and に-case noun phrase, as in に spell て ろ Z ni Y o おける ‘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., あ は, にтомつ が おちる ‘Look out! The package is going to fall’), and the other group (stative verbs) (e.g., こノ へや に わ 在 tsukue が ある ‘There are desks in this room’), expresses the present with the ru-form. Motion verbs are able to express aspect (e.g., かれ wa わい o なんだ/なんで いと て ‘He drank/was drinking wine’), but stative verbs do not possess this function (e.g., つぶて に けむ hon が aru/あっって いる ‘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., こおひ に い ‘I will/Let’s go to the park’, こおひ に い ‘Go to the park!’), and non-volitional verbs such as こまらむ ‘be in a bind’ that cannot express will, command, or prohibition (e.g., こまらむ, ふんを通る, そんの こと で こまらむ). Further, there are verbs that cannot express will and command but which can express prohibition (e.g., おどろく, ふんを通る, そんの こと で おどろく ‘Don’t be surprised by such news’).

- Loss of Verb-Like Characteristics
  Typically, verbs express movement and are capable of forming predicates. The verb ある ‘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 はかげて いる
‘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

(Nitta Yoshio)