■ Nouns

Nouns depict people, things, and events, and serve as semantic constituents of sentences as the subject, object, and so on, of what the sentence describes.

Semantically, nouns are classified into ones that represent people, concrete and abstract things, events, and phenomena, time and physical space, and so on.   There are also special nouns, such as pronouns, which are void of lexical meaning and which have only a demonstrative or deictic function, and quantifiers, which express quantity.

When a noun appears in a sentence in relation to the predicate, it may accompany case particles, adverbs, or nothing at all.   A noun may function as the subject, object, adnominal modifier, adverbial modifier, or as a circumstantial.   A noun may also form a predicate, accompanying *da, dearu, desu*, and so on.

Nouns combine with verbs, adjectives, and other nouns, and assume various semantic roles as constituent units of various situations.   Their semantic roles include expression of the subject and object of movements, states, beginning- and end-points of change, and attributes, as well as temporal, spatial, and causal situations.

Nouns range from very noun-like nouns to ones that are close to *na*-adjectives, semantically and structurally.   *Kenkō* 'health' and *byōki* 'illness' are considered to form a pair of opposites semantically, but structurally, *kenkō* may be used both as a noun and *na*-adjective, while *byōki* may only be used as a noun. *Benkyō* 'study' may be used as a noun and also it forms a *suru*-verb, but *fubenkyō* 'lack of dilligence' has the status of a *na*-adjective.

The noun *ashi* 'foot/leg' is a body part, and is used as the subject and object of a sentence. *Hadashi* 'barefoot', on the other hand, no longer possesses the concreteness expressed by *ashi*, and its concept shifts more to stativity.   Thus, *hadashi* is not easily used as a subject or object; its function shifts to modifying the manner of movement and is used in the phrase, *hadashi de*.

Even when nouns represent concrete events and things, they may at times obtain predicationality in performing a syntactic function.   That is, at times, when a noun becomes the predicate, the substantiality of the noun is lost.   Instead, the attribute that is given to the event or thing emerges and the noun functions to predicate attributes.   *Ōkami* is an animal and is qualified to be used as a subject or object.   When one makes a casual remark, *Aitsu wa ōkami da* 'That guy is a wolf,' *ōkami* in this utterance no longer denotes the animal, wolf, but wolf-like characteristics.   This utterance is considered to be a shortened form of *ōkami no yōda* 'like a wolf.'

Nouns function as the predicate of a sentence by accompanying *da, dearu, desu*, and so on and form so-called noun-predicate sentences.   The basic structure of such sentences is *A wa B da* 'A is B,' and there are two kinds. One is a sentence of identification where A equals B, such as *watashi wa Suzuki desu* 'I am Suzuki.' The other is a sentence of attribution where B expresses A's attribute, such as *Suzuki san wa kōmuin desu* 'Ms Suzuki is a civil servant.'   In a sentence of identification A and B can be switched and the relationship still holds: *Suzuki wa watashi desu* 'Suzuki is me.'   In a sentence of attribution A and B cannot be switched over as in **kōmuin wa Suzuki san desu*.

Among the nouns, quantifiers are unlike other nouns and behave in a singular manner.   *Sannin* in *Sannin no gakusei ga oshaberi shite iru* 'Three students are chatting' describes the number of the students and appears in the position of adnominal modifier.   Such function is seen in other nouns as well, but the floating of quantifies as in *gakusei ga sannin oshaberi shit eiru* 'There are three students chatting,' and the transposition of the quantifier as in *gakusei sannin ga oshaberi shite iru* 'Students – there are three of them – are chatting' are grammatical phenomena that are specific to quantifiers.

→数量詞 Quantifiers (2-B), Case (2-D)

● Reference

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