■ Basic Sentence Patterns

Basic sentence patterns are so called because they are basic.   Whether a pattern is considered basic depends on the frequency of usage, ease of acquisition, whether it exhibits basic word order among the predicate and essential elements, whether it is the source of derivation and expansion, and how useful it is in varied situations in daily life.

Interest in basic sentence patterns is mostly practical, and exists largely in Japanese language education for foreigners and native speaking students.   The study of basic sentence patterns flourished during World War II, when Japan promoted Japanese language education in South East Asia.   After the war, some started to make an effort to logically describe basic sentence patterns as part of grammar study.

One of the early descriptions of basic sentence patterns is *Nihongo Renshūyō Nihongo kihon Bunkei* "Basic Japanese Sentence Patterns for Japanese Practice" by Seinen Bunka Kyōkai.   In this book three types of sentence patterns are described: patterns used in various situations (e.g., command, permission, prohibition), patterns concerning the use of words (mostly dealing with the classification based on the use of particles and auxiliary verbs), and patterns concerning sentence structure (based on the structure of the subject, predicate, and so on).

Since then, a two-category distinction of structural sentence patterns and expressional sentence patterns has often been used. Structural sentence patterns concern the structural aspect of patterns and differentiate sentence types, such as simple, complex, and compound sentences, and handle the placement of case components (e.g., *~ni ~ga arimasu, ~ga ~ni ~o agemasu*).   Expressional sentence patterns concern the speaker's intent of expression, such as request, invitation, and warning, and the content of expression, such as cause and effect and temporal relationship. Categories such as sentences of existence, statements, questions, and commands, also belong to expressional sentence patterns.   There has also been an attempt to develop integrated sentence patterns, which comprehensively describe not only the structure and expressions but also intonation (e.g., *Hanashikotoba no Bunkei* "Sentence Patterns of Spoken Language" (1) & (2) by National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics).

Another attempt to describe patterns is to sort them by the hierarchy of sentences.   In this line of thinking, Mikami Akira advocates the following types of basic sentence patterns in his *Kihon Bunkeiron* "Study of Basic Sentence Patterns".

Tier 1 Patterns of *Koto* 'Proposition':   *X ga dō suru ka* 'What X will do', *X ga donna de aruka* 'What X is like', and 3 other patterns.

Tier 2 *Koto* 'Propositioin'+ Speaker: Three patterns according to the topic-declaration relationship of topic-present, topic-omitted, and no-topic.

Tier 3 *Koto* + Speaker + Interlocutor: Four patterns: declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory.

Tier 4 *Koto* + Speaker + Interlocutor + Situation: Two major patterns based on the condition of transmission: regular style and polite style.

Yet another attempt is to situate the sentence in the 'written discourse' process, where patterns are seen as contributing to the creation of context in the text.   Hayashi Shiro's positional sentence types are based on this view.   His classification includes categories such as the 'starting sentence type,' 'following sentence type,' and 'turning sentence type' (see *Kihon Bunkei no Kenkyū* "Study of Basic Sentence Patterns," *Bun no Shisei no Kenkyū* " Study of the Attitude of the Sentence").

In Japanese language education, the instruction commonly moves from more basic to less basic sentence patterns.   Especially at the beginning level, basic sentence patterns take up a significant place in the instruction.   Much care has to be taken as to what criteria are used to categorize the patterns, which ones to include in the learning objectives, and the best sequence for learners to learn them.   Currently in Japanese language education the two-way distinction of structural sentence patterns and expressional sentence patterns is commonly used.   The Direct Method and Audio Lingual Method often put emphasis on structural sentence patterns.   More recently, teaching methods that put emphasis on communication, such as the communicative approach, criticize the aforementioned learning methods for being overly grammar oriented, and there is a shift toward putting more emphasis on expressional sentence patterns.

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