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## Towards a Fictional Grammar of Early and Late Middle Japanese

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Sebastian Balmes

Universität Zürich

sebastian.balmes@aoi.uzh.ch

Research on classical Japanese narrative literature frequently refers to characteristics of Early Middle Japanese (EMJ, 9th–12th century), which to a certain extent are also shared by Late Medieval Japanese (LMJ, 13th–16th century). The most debated issue is arguably the function of the auxiliary *-kyer-*. Since the 1930s, *-kyer-* has been considered to mark transmitted past, although it has also been proposed that it expresses speaker commitment rather than indicating an external source of information (e.g. Frellesvig 2011, 76). Lewin (2003) has called its function ‘epic preterite,’ although it clearly differs from Hamburger’s (1957) concept for a number of reasons. Most importantly, *-kyer-* does not lose its temporal function. Because it has both objective and subjective functions, *-kyer-* demonstrates that for the language of fiction the distinction between a ‘colloquial’ and ‘literary mode’ (Iwasaki 1993) could be misleading.

Another question a fictional grammar has to address is: how ‘vague’ are EMJ narratives? There is not always a clear distinction between first-person and third-person narration, and EMJ has a particularly strong tendency to omit arguments, especially subjects. There have been attempts to explain this by switch-reference, but the exceptions are so numerous (Fujii 1991, 137–141; McAuley 2002) that it is doubtful to what degree this concept is applicable to Japanese. It seems that vagueness was also employed as a literary technique (Jinno 2020). By contrast, perspectivization is remarkably clear in EMJ literature (Balmes 2022, 434–435).

Based on the assumption that fictional narratives not only possess literary but also linguistic characteristics, this paper addresses some basic issues regarding a fictional grammar of EMJ and LMJ. Because non-literary texts have been put down in Sinographic writing, such an analysis has to be based on a comparison of different types of text. At the same time, one needs also to take into account that the degree of fictionality may well change within a given work.

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