
The uninflecting word class *rentaishi* in Modern Japanese

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In this paper, I focus on the role of the language-specific and in Western linguistics mostly neglected Japanese word class *rentaishi*, literally 'noun-modifying words', which entered the language as the Japanese equivalents to adjectives in Western fusional languages, and highlight their language-specific and typological relevance for the debate on uninflectedness.

Japanese has a rich inflectional morphology for verbal categories. Grammatical suffixes such as tense, aspect or modality are added to verbs and the two adjective groups and cause stem alternations. Compare: *no-mu* drink-NONPAST 'I drink', *nomi-tai* drink-VOL 'I want to drink', *nome-ba* drink-if 'if I drank'.

Contra this, *rentaishi* can be described as a, not universally accepted, word class through the criteria *restriction to attributive position, the inability to inflect and morphological diversity* (compare: *a-ru* 'a certain'; *rei-no* 'mere'), different to the nowadays mostly morphologically based major word classes (Nitta et al. 2000).

I will show that, historically, the introduction of this word class at the beginning of the 20th century, is connected to the awareness of Japanese linguists that Japanese adjectives can inflect for tense and appear predicatively, while adjectives in (fusional) Western languages need a copula to do so and do not inflect independently, but in accordance with their head noun (Kim 2006). To fill the gap of dependent attributive modifiers unable to express predicative categories independently, they introduced a dedicated word class to which they added all syntactically restricted and morphologically deficient lexemes.

As an outlook, I discuss whether this word class should be maintained in Japanese, or whether relevant lexemes should be incorporated as defective members of other word classes, those they morphologically belong to (Lehmann and Nishina 2015), or even the group of adjectives they were kept apart from in the first place, and put forth arguments for both sides.

References: Kim, E. (2018). Kindai bunpōgaku ni okeru keiyōshi rentaishi gainen no keisei ni tsuite. "Adjective" kara "keiyōshi", "rentaishi" e. *Nihongo no kenkyū* 2(2), 123–137. • Lehmann, M. & Y. Nishina (2015). Das japanische Wortartensystem. In Y. Nishina (ed.), *Sprachwissenschaft des Japanischen*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 163–200. • Nitta, Y., S. Muraki, M. Shibata & M. Yazawa (2000). *Nihongo no bunpō* Vol. 1. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.