

The relationship between grammar education and its “practical use” in prewar Japan

Yuta KAMMERA

1 Introduction

This paper aims to identify how grammar education in prewar Japan implemented the “practical use” of grammar and the issues that surrounded it.

The grammatical system used to teach *kokugo* (the Japanese language as a school subject) in middle schools, or so-called ‘school grammar,’ has been the subject of a lot of criticism over the years. The main reason for this criticism lies in the fact that the methods for teaching school grammar have been based largely on memorization and do not adequately relate to subjects such as writing and reading. According to Morita (2013), research findings on grammar education in the 2000s have led to an emphasis on the learner’s subjective attitude. However, at the same time, he states the need for further study of the kinds of knowledge that should be applied to improve linguistic competence.⁽¹⁾ The process of overcoming teaching methods based on memorization, and the process by which grammar education facilitates learner skills such as writing and reading, is still only partially complete.

The content of school grammar today is based on the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture’s government-designated textbook “*Chuto Bunpo*”.⁽²⁾ For Etsutaro Iwabuchi, the chief editor of “*Chuto Bunpo*,” the aim of grammar education was to consciously learn the “laws” of language, and to cultivate “confidence” and “a sense of respect” towards one’s own language.⁽³⁾ As “*Chuto Bunpo*” set out objectives and content that did not place importance on the relevance of grammar to other subjects, its teaching methods also could not help but become isolated from subjects such as writing and reading. We could say that the objectives and the contents of “*Chuto Bunpo*” have created challenges linked to school grammar today.

Not surprisingly, however, it was not as if the grammar educationists during the postwar era had overlooked such circumstances. Since the end of the war, during the so-called “grammar boom,” arguments put forth by scholars such as Masaru Nagano and Kenji Morioka and private educational organizations like Kyoka Kyoiku Kenkyukai and the Jido Gengo Kenkyukai repeatedly criticized school grammar.⁽⁴⁾ So, why were such criticisms unable to change school grammar?

One reason lies in the fact that there has not always been enough historical examination into why today’s school grammar has become fixed in such a way, in addition to studies on the history of postwar grammar education. It is also worth noting that it was not as if advocates prior to “*Chuto Bunpo*” unquestioningly accepted these set objectives that were separate from skills such as writing. The Junior

High School attached to Tokyo Higher Normal School (1907) argued that even for subjects necessary for grammatical descriptions in linguistics, the unnecessary content regarding learners' "practical use" of grammar should be omitted.⁽⁵⁾ In other words, even during the Meiji and Taisho periods, there was a clear relationship between grammar education and the "practical use" of grammar. Moreover, "practical use" is to be understood as that which facilitates linguistic activity regarding written language, in the form of writing and reading.

The criticisms against grammar education thus far have focused on school grammar teaching methods based on memorization and the content of school grammar that allowed for such methods to be implemented. However, there has not been enough examination of the root cause of this purposeful abandonment of the "practical use" objectives in prewar grammar education, or in other words, why prewar grammar education could not work toward "practical use" and overcome its challenges. A historical examination that looks into why the efforts thus far have been unsuccessful is essential if we are to properly criticize grammar education.⁽⁶⁾

2. The transition from "practical use" to "comprehension"

This chapter discusses what caused the syllabus objectives to transition from "practical use" to "comprehension" by looking into a brief account of prewar grammar education history. The changes in the syllabus as the curriculum present a valid perspective on the historical examination of prewar grammar education. The Meiji 35 (1902) Chugakko Kyoju Yomoku (middle school syllabus) set in place subjects that combined grammar and writing under the name of "grammar and writing." Moreover, as a point of consideration when teaching, it requires focused instruction on the conjugations that are easiest to mistake. The Meiji 35 syllabus encompassed practical objectives for responding to learner errors (likely regarding writing, etc.).

However, the revised Showa 6 (1931) Chugakko Kyoju Yomoku required "comprehension" of the "characteristics of the Japanese language" under the single subject of "grammar." Moreover, ideological provisions of nurturing the "spirit of protecting the Japanese language" were also included.

We can see here that from Meiji 35 to Showa 6 was a period marked by a process whereby the objectives of grammar education were transitioning from "practical use" to "comprehension." From here, examining the factors that caused the syllabus objectives to change from "practical use" to "comprehension" would be effective in addressing the original problem of why "practical use" in prewar grammar education was abandoned. The characteristics of the content of each syllabus are described below.

2.1. Issues concerning the "grammar and writing" subject of the Meiji 35 syllabus (1902-1911)

The following can be ascertained by comparing the textbooks compiled by the editors who published

approved grammar textbooks before and after the Meiji 35 syllabus. First, as included in the provisions of the Meiji 35 syllabus, (A) a contrastive analysis of spoken and written language shows that there are substantial descriptions in most of the textbooks. For example, in Masao Shioi's textbook before the Meiji 35 syllabus, only the *kami-nidan* (upper bigrade) verbs “*oku*” (to wake) and “*otsu*” (to fall) are included.⁽⁷⁾ On the other hand, in a textbook after the Meiji 35 syllabus, the *kami-ichidan* (upper monograde) verb conjugations “*okiru*” (to wake) and “*ochiru*” (to fall) (spoken form) were also included.⁽⁸⁾

On the other hand, (B) For items regarding sentence components, there is no conclusive view between the approved textbooks on the kind of sentence components that should be included. The following is represented in a table.

Table 2 Sentence component names after the Meiji 35 syllabus

Today's terminology	②Otsuki	④Ormiya	⑥Shioi	⑧Mitsuchi	⑩Dobunkan
subject	主語	主語	主語	主語	主語
predicate	説明語	説明語	説明語	説明語	説明語
modifier of an inflectable word (I)	客語	客語	賓語	客語	客語
modifier of an inflectable word (II)	客語	補語	副賓語	補足語	補足語
modifier of an inflectable word (other)	修飾語	修飾語	修飾語	修飾語	修飾語
modifier of an uninflected word	修飾語	修飾語	修飾語	修飾語	修飾語

(As cited in Kammera (2016))

Furthermore, the content, such as what is to be taught regarding sentence components, that which corresponds to modifiers and modificands,⁽⁹⁾ and that which corresponds to subjects and predicates,⁽¹⁰⁾ is not defined. From the above, we see that while vocabulary-level content, such as contrasts between spoken and written language, is well developed in the grammar textbooks from the Meiji 35 syllabus period, sentence-level content, such as sentence components, was not well established.

The factors resulting in such content can be attributed to the educational philosophy on grammar of the creators of the Meiji 35 syllabus. Kuwasaburo Takatsu, one of the creators of the Meiji 35 syllabus, thought that systematic instruction linking phonemes to grammar was required to write proper sentences using spoken language.⁽¹¹⁾ Takatsu commented in relative detail on kana orthography and accidentence. Regarding syntax, however, he only stated the need for the classification of sentences in addition to identifying the rules for composing sentences.⁽¹²⁾ It was not as if Takatsu sought a new grammar education

system to enable proper sentences to be written from spoken language. For Takatsu, conventional phonology and vocabulary theories of the time, as well as content that involved revising the style of writing into spoken language, was sufficiently “practical.”

It was not as if grammar education regarding the “Grammar and Writing” subject of the Meiji 35 syllabus had sufficiently addressed its relationship with writing education. This may be a reason that it was criticized as having “too much useless detail” by Junior High School attached to Tokyo Higher Normal School.

2.2. “Practical” considerations during the Meiji 44 syllabus period (1911-1931)

With regard to the textbooks compiled by the editors who published every approved textbook before and after the Meiji 44 syllabus (Group A), the versions before and after the syllabus were compared. Of the textbooks compiled by the editor who published approved textbooks for the first time after the syllabus, those that had been published up until Taisho 7 (Group B) were analyzed from a similar perspective. The results found that, particularly for the Group B textbooks, there were measures implemented to cover sentence components before word class definition. The following is represented in the table below.

Table 3 Treatment of sentence components in textbooks during the Meiji 44 syllabus period

【Group A】				【Group B】	
<Before Year 44>		<After Year 44>			
	Sentence priority		Sentence priority		Sentence priority
Kanazawa		Kanazawa		Secondary education subject	
Takahashi		Takahashi		Fujioka	○
Haga		Haga		Japanese and Chinese classics	○
Fukui		Fukui		Kohfukan	○
Matsuo		Matsuo		Yoshioka	
Matsudaira		Matsudaira		Hoshina	○
Mitsuchi		Mitsuchi	○		
Yamada		Yamada			
Yokochi		Yokochi			
Yoshida		Yoshida			

(As cited in Kammera 2015)

Why did the Group B textbooks implement such measures? According to Koichi Hoshina, once sentence component comprehension is acquired, using it to inductively explain and practice word class is an effective form of “practical application.”⁽¹³⁾ In fact, if any noun becomes “the subject of the sentence,”⁽¹⁴⁾ Hoshina creates a definition that includes sentence components. In this way, inductive instruction of word class by covering sentence components first was thought to be effective as a form of “practical use” in other subjects.

However, this period during which such measures were considered to be effective did not last long. A similar analysis of nine approved textbooks that were newly published from 1918 through the last year of the Taisho period (1926) found only one that covered sentence components before accident (Chuto *Kyokasho Kenkyukai*, 1926, “Kokubunpo Koyo”). According to the Fuzanbo Henshubu (1926), this is because it is difficult to teach sentence components first if you consider the learner’s attentiveness and their ease of comprehension.⁽¹⁵⁾ It is likely that instruction that covered sentence components first was, unlike Hoshina’s idea, not thought to lead to learner comprehension. Considerations of “practical use” during this period did not necessarily consider the actual situations faced by learners.

2.3. Shinkichi Hashimoto’s educational philosophy regarding the Showa 6 syllabus period (1931-1937)

With regard to the Showa 6 syllabus period, it is worth noting that Shinkichi Hashimoto’s (1931) “*Shinbunten Shonenkyuyo*” covered sentence components before accident once again. To re-adopt content that had once been withdrawn may mean more than simply a change in content. Moreover, it was only Hashimoto that had implemented such measures in the textbooks of the same era.⁽¹⁶⁾ From here, by referring to Hashimoto’s studies, we will discuss the factors that resulted in a re-emphasis on sentence components during the Showa 6 syllabus period.

The following two points can be described as factors that caused Hashimoto to teach sentence components first. The first point lies in Hashimoto’s perspective on grammar that is not limited to an educational context. Hashimoto defined “grammar” as “language structure principles” in his textbook commentary.⁽¹⁷⁾ From Hashimoto’s position, even for theories of vocabulary, it must facilitate the “description of language structure,” which falls under a higher ranking category of sentence components.⁽¹⁸⁾ This is thought to be a factor behind why Hashimoto covered sentence components first and included sentence components in word class definitions.

The second point lies in the significance of sentence components within an educational context. For Hashimoto, there were two points of educational significance in emphasizing sentence components.

(i) Scientific observation exercises

Observing a certain phenomenon and analyzing the principles within its context is an important activity in maintaining a scientific viewpoint. According to Hashimoto, in the case of grammar, the object

of observation differs from other subjects and falls under “mental phenomena” and “cultural phenomena”⁽¹⁹⁾ (the real meaning behind “mental phenomena” and “cultural phenomena” is not known, but in this context they are interpreted as knowledge in the humanities with regard to the natural sciences). According to such logic, grammar can, in addition to being a form of practice in analyzing principles through observation, place the object in a “mental phenomenon” or “cultural phenomenon” that is unique to grammar.

(ii) Education on the national spirit

According to Hashimoto, the “people’s way of thinking” emerges in grammar. Therefore, by basing it on the knowledge of Japanese linguistics, education on the national spirit can be completed through Japanese language education.⁽²⁰⁾ For Hashimoto, sentence components, which are the “principles of language formation,” are deemed effective even for learning the “people’s way of thinking.”

In this way, during the Showa 6 syllabus period, importance was placed on the “scientific observation exercises” and “education on the national spirit” from a grammar education point of view, in addition to the “principles of language formation,” in terms of grammatical theory. We see here that as the philosophy of grammar education was presented as an alternative to “practical use,” it is thought that opportunities to seek “practical use” further decreased.

3. Implications today

We have discussed, albeit very simply, linguistic activity in the context of prewar grammar instruction. The arguments laid out above suggest the following two points in order to direct grammar education so that it facilitates skills such as writing and reading.

(1) Analysis of grammatical faults developed by learners

Prewar grammar education tried to facilitate skills such as writing and reading by transforming written language style into spoken language and through innovations regarding the order in which sentence components were introduced. Looking at how the approved textbooks responded during the Taisho era, however, we see that they did not necessarily consider the circumstances of the learners. Firstly, there is a need to take into account the kind of grammatical faults learners develop by analyzing learners’ writing.

(2) Development of educational content that addresses actual linguistic activity

In addition to understanding the actual situations faced by learners, specific content must be developed to effectively support this. Prewar grammar education strove for “practical use” as a principle, but it was unable to develop content that was effective. There is a need to focus on learner activities of writing and reading and to develop specific content. Furthermore, although a discussion of the topic was

beyond the scope of this study, consideration must be given to grammar instruction regarding other subjects, such as how grammar instruction is positioned within writing.

References (All published in Japanese)

- Etsutaro Iwabuchi (1944) *'Kokutei Bunpo Kyokasho Ni Tsuite'* "Kokubungaku Kaishaku to Kansho" 9 (4), Shibundo, pp.28–34
- Yuta Kammera (2015) *'Chugakko Kyoju Yomoku Kaisei (Meiji 44) Ni Yoru Bunpo Kyokasho no Henka — Sakubun Kyoiku He No 'Futai' Teki Shido Ni Chakumoku Shite —'* "Kokugoka Kyoiku" 77, Japanese Teaching Society of Japan, pp.22–29
- Yuta Kammera (2016) *'Meiji 35 Chugakko Kyoju Yomoku Ni Yoru Bunpo Kyoiku No Henka — Ryoiki 'Bunpo Oyobi Sakubun' No Settei Ni Chakumoku Shite —'* "Kokugoka Kyoiku" 80, Japanese Teaching Society of Japan, pp.15–22
- Yuta Kammera (2017) *'Taishoki Kara Showa Zenki Ni Kakete No Chugakko Bunpo Kyoiku No Henka — Fumi No Seibun No Toriatsukai Ni Chakumoku Shite —'* "Jinbunka Kyoiku Kenkyu" 44, Jinbunka Kyoiku Gakkai, pp.97–108
- Yuta Kammera (2018) *'Bunpo Kyoikushi Kosatsu No Hitsuyosei'* "Kotoba No Manabi Wo Kangaeru" 2, 'Kokugo No Tokushitsu' Kenkyukai, pp.38–47
- Isao Santo (2007) *'Gakko Kokubunpo Seiritsushi Kenkyu Josetsu'* "Gengo Bunkagaku Kenkyu Nihongo Nihonbungaku Hen" 2, Osaka Prefecture University, pp.17–44
- Kuwasaburo Takatsu (1895) *'Jinjo Shihan Gakko Oyobi Jinjo Chugakko Ni Okeru Kokugo Narabini Sono Kyojuho Ni Tsuite'* "Kokugakuin Journal" 1 (6), Kokugakuin University, pp.1–16
- Junior High School Attached to Tokyo Higher Normal School (1907) "Tokyo Koto Shihan Gakko Fuzoku Chugakko Kyoju Saimoku"
- Shinkichi Hashimoto (1936) *"Shinkoten Bekki Shonenkyuyo"* Fuzambo
- Shingo Morita (2013) *'Bunporon, Bunshoron, Danwaron No Gakushu Shido Ni Kansuru Kenkyu No Seika To Tenbo'* Compiled by the Japanese Teaching Society of Japan "Kokugoka Kyoikugaku Kenkyu No Seika To Tenbo II" Gakugeitosho, pp.333–340
- Makoto Yazawa (2009) *'Bunpo'* Edited by Junichi Tajika and Shobi Inoue "Kokugo Kyoiku Shido Yogo Jiten Dai Yon Ban" Kyoiku Shuppan, pp.38–39
- Kazuya Yamamuro (2012) "Sengo Bunpo Kyoiku Kenkyu No Seika To Kadai" Tokyo Gakugei University Doctoral Dissertation

- (1) Morita (2013), p. 339.
- (2) Yazawa (2009), p. 38.
- (3) Iwabuchi (1944), p. 31.

- (4) See Yamamuro (2012).
- (5) Junior High School attached to Tokyo Higher Normal School (1907), p. 153.
- (6) Santo (2007) similarly identified the need to re-examine the history of grammar education.
- (7) Masao Shioi (1898) “*Chugaku Nihon Bunten*” (Middle School Grammar in Japan), p. 32.
- (8) Masao Shioi (1902) “*Chugaku Kokubunten*” (Middle School Japanese Literature), p. 34.
- (9) Fumihiko Otsuki (1905) “*Shintai Nihon Bunpo Kyokasho*” (New Japanese Grammar Textbook) Volume 2, p. 51.
- (10) Masao Shioi (1902) “*Chugaku Kokubunten*” (Middle School Japanese Literature), pp. 170–171.
- (11) Takatsu (1895), p. 13.
- (12) As above, p. 15.
- (13) Hoshina (1919) “*Shusei Taisho Nihon Bunpo*” (Revised Taisho Japanese Grammar), pp. 36–37.
- (14) As above, p. 4.
- (15) Fuzanbo Henshubu (1926) “*Saishin Nihon Bunten*” (New Japanese Grammar), preface.
- (16) See Kammera (2017b).
- (17) Hashimoto (1936), pp. 7–8.
- (18) As above, p. 28.
- (19) As above, p. 338.
- (20) As above, p. 306.