

“SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC DIFFERENTIATION IN JAPANESE CONDITIONAL
CLAUSES”

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the study of semantic and pragmatic differentiation of conditional complex sentences in the Japanese language. It analyzes the subtle semantic differences between conditional markers such as *〜と*, *〜ば*, *〜たら*, and *〜なら*. The study examines not only the grammatical aspects of these constructions but also their dependence on the speaker's subjective attitude, intentions, and the specific speech situation (pragmatics). Specifically, the distinction between hypothetical and real conditions is compared, as well as the use of conditional forms to convey advice, commands, or predictions. The aim of the article is to identify the patterns of usage for conditional forms—one of the most complex areas of Japanese grammar—and to reveal their synonymic and differential characteristics in various contexts.

Keywords

Japanese language, conditional clause, semantics, pragmatics, differentiation, conditional, connectors, subjectivity.

In Japanese, conditional-subjective relations are expressed in four different ways: through non-final predicate forms ending in *〜ば* or *〜たら*, and through the conjunctions *〜と* and *〜なら*. These are one of the basic elements of grammar and are explained in Japanese textbooks, making them familiar to anyone who is just starting to learn the language. However, understanding their differences and rules of use can be difficult even for those who know the language well.

Currently, three ways of describing the semantics of conditional forms can be distinguished. The first is most often found in textbooks and is intended for those who are just starting to learn Japanese. Typically, the author selects one form and explains its primary and secondary meanings, as well as the rules of use, comparing them and identifying similarities and differences. In this way, all four conditional forms are described in turn.

The second method involves an explanatory comparison of different forms with the same or very similar meanings. The number of forms compared can be different, but most often there are two, less often three. The number of values covered can also be different, but it is never complete, which is understandable, since there is simply no universally accepted list of these values. The authors of the textbooks describe the options that they consider the most important.

The third type of description, the most detailed and in-depth, is found mainly in the works of Japanese authors, aimed at specialists. They usually examine two conditional forms in only one or at most two closely related meanings. These are the options that are presented in practical textbooks as complete synonyms. In fact, their synonymy is not complete, a fact that goes unnoticed even by native Japanese speakers. The analysis of the deeply hidden nuances and differences between the meanings of these forms constitutes the content of works of this type.

Each of these methods has its advantages and disadvantages. The first, when used consistently, allows us to trace all the uses of the described form and their meanings, but does not allow us to compare the meanings of different forms. The second method gives this opportunity, but only for certain forms in certain meanings; its disadvantage is the incompleteness of the description. The third method allows us to see the most profound differences between the close uses of conditional forms, but suffers from the same drawback -



incompleteness - perhaps to a greater extent than the second. In addition, this method is probably not applicable to researchers whose native language is not Japanese, since it requires a perfect knowledge of the language and an understanding of the most subtle grammatical nuances. This can be easily verified by comparing these two sentences:

太郎が来たら、花子が帰った。

太郎が来ると、花子が帰った。

When Taro arrived (after his arrival), Hanako went back.

Not every Japanese speaker can explain the difference in the situations underlying these two sentences, even if they understand it. To do this, it is necessary to consider the details of the situation being described, such as the speaker's position in relation to one of the participants, the purposefulness of their actions, and some other contextual nuances [4].

The grammatical observations accumulated to date allow us to generalize and attempt a systematic semantic description of Japanese conditional forms. The first step in achieving such a description is to compile a list of all the types of conditional meaning that exist in Japanese. A simple analysis of the examples given in many textbooks allows us to identify seven types of conditional-consistent meaning, each of which corresponds to a specific type of sentence in real speech. Let us list them.

- I. The ordinary general case.
- II. The special hypothetical case.
- III. The repeated realized case.
- IV. Alternative state.
- V. Perfectly realized state.
- VI. Perfectly hypothetical state.
- VII. Occasional state.

I. Simple general conditional. "If A happens, then B will also happen." The sentence establishes a mandatory relationship between the condition and the result, regardless of whether they occur at the time of speaking. This relationship is universal in nature and describes regular, stable, habitual pairs of facts, processes, or properties that usually accompany each other. A simple general conditional can be expressed in three of the four conditional forms: ~ば, ~たら, ~と.

八に四を掛ければ、三十二になる。

八に四を掛けたら、三十二になる。

八に四を掛けると、三十二になる。

If you multiply eight by four, you get thirty-two.

A characteristic feature of this type of sentence is that the main clause cannot contain subjective-modal meanings addressed to the second person (for example, an order, a request, permission, etc.), since they contradict the objective-universal nature of a simple general conditional. The effect of the main clause cannot be intentional, that is, it depends on the speaker's will.

II. Concrete hypothetical conditional. "If A happens, then B will also happen (certainly, probably, probably)".

今晚私のところへ来れば、フランス料理を作ってあげるよ。

今晚私のところへ来たら、フランス料理を作ってあげるよ。

If you come to my house tonight, I will cook you a French dinner.

Of all the conditional types, the first and second are the closest to each other and therefore can be difficult to distinguish. The main difference between the second type is that the condition



and the result are singular, definite, and refer to the future. This type of connection is made through two of the four conditional forms.

III. The many-realized conditional. "Every time event A happened, event B also happened." The condition and the result are singular, definite, and have actually happened more than once at the time of speaking.

お金がなければ、ご飯だけ食べたのだった。

When there was no money, only rice was eaten.

若い時は、お金がないと、ご飯だけ食べた。

When I was young, when there was no money (every time there was none), I ate only rice.

In sentences of this type, the condition and the result belong to the same owner; the predicate of the main clause is always in the past tense and does not combine well with subjective-modal meanings. In terms of form, sentences of this type express a statement of facts in the past, implying their repetitive nature.

IV. Alternative conditional. "If event A really happened (happened, will happen), then..." A distinctive feature of this type of sentence is the subjective assumption that the condition has actually been fulfilled; therefore, the predicate of the main clause can take any tense and combine with any subjective-modal meanings directed to the second person.

そんなに行きたければ、行ってもいいよ。

そんなに行きたかったら、行ってもいいよ。

そんなに行きたいなら、行ってもいいよ。

As long as you are coming, you can go.

For the alternative conditional in the classical form (with the conjunction ～らなら), neither the semantic content of the condition nor the content of the result are important: they can be realized once or several times in the past, or only hypothetically possible in the future; accordingly, both predicates can have any tense.

V. Perfectly realized conditional. "Since event A has occurred, (probably, probably, certainly) event B has also occurred (has occurred, will occur)." The condition and the result are expressed by individual facts; at the time of speaking, the condition is realized, the result is possible, yes, possible or no.

VI. Perfectly hypothetical conditional. "If event A had occurred, then event B (probably, probably, certainly) would have also occurred."

前からそれを知っていれば、こんなミスをしなかっただろう。

前からそれを知っていたら、こんなミスをしなかっただろう。

前からそれを知ったなら、こんなミスをしなかっただろう。

If I had known this earlier, I probably would not have made such a mistake.

Both events belong to the past tense and do not actually occur during the speech. In sentences with the conjunction ～なら, the predicate of the subordinate clause can be in the continuous (～ている) or past (～た/～た) tense, while the predicate of the main clause can only be in the past tense, often combined with a probabilistic assessment of the event.

VII. Occasional state. Characterized by an ambivalence in the temporal relationship between the condition and the result. The first option: the condition precedes the result in time, but is not its cause. "After A (unexpected) happens." The second option: the result does not happen as a cause of the condition, but occurs simultaneously with its fulfillment. "When A (unexpected) happens." The content of sentences with an occasional state can only be facts, actions, or states that actually occur during the speech. The result is not logically consistent and does not depend on the will of the subject of the action. The speaker and the doer of the action may or may not coincide; this also applies to the doers of the action in the main and subordinate clauses. The



involuntaryness of the result B may reach such a level that the semantic connection with the condition A is almost completely lost and becomes only a temporary correlation.

家に帰ったら、両親から手紙があった。

家に帰ると、両親から手紙があった。

I returned home to find a letter from my parents.

These types of conditional meaning are not equivalent to each other. Some types are completely semantically independent, have their own specific features and grammatical requirements for syntactic design. They form stable constructions that are abundant in all types of communication, repeated according to certain rules. They are mainly included in Japanese textbooks and explained in grammar reference books. These "strong" types of conditional meaning include:

- The simple general conditional with a form ending in \sim ば and the conjunction \sim と;
- A specific hypothetical conditional with a form ending in \sim たら;
- An alternative conditional with a conjunction \sim なら;
- A perfect hypothetical conditional with a form ending in \sim は;
- A contingent conditional with a form ending in \sim たら and the conjunction \sim と.

On the other hand, there are the least semantically independent and least common types of conditional meaning, which can only be realized under additional conditions. For example, when the subordinate clause contains a state rather than an action. Or when the sentence lexically specifies the moment or time period in which the action occurred. As discussed above, there may be many other restrictions. Sentences with such "weak" types are located on the edge of the semantic field of conditional meanings, so Japanese learners will encounter them at a later stage. These types of meaning include:

- A simple general conditional with a form ending in \sim たら;
- A specific hypothetical conditional with a form ending in \sim ば and the conjunction \sim らな;
- A repeated conditional with a form ending in \sim ば and the conjunction \sim と;
- An alternative conditional with a form ending in \sim ば.

Semantically, the two least independent types of conditional meaning are the specific hypothetical and repeated conditional. The first, in its formal grammatical form, often coincides with the simple general conditional and can differ from it only in the presence of lexical time indicators in the sentence, which transform the subordinate clause from an indefinite present tense (usually, always) to a future tense tied to a specific moment (in the evening, in May). The second type of conditional cannot be realized without the use of additional grammatical means indicating that the content (consequence) of the main clause is plural.

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