

TOPICS IN JAPANESE LINGUISTICS
Spring, 2020

TIME

Tuesday 13:00–14:30 & Friday 14:40–16:10

CLASSROOM

(TBA)

INSTRUCTOR

Kentaro Nakatani <kentaron@konan-u.ac.jp>

TEXTBOOK

Tsujimura, N. (2014). *An introduction to Japanese linguistics, 3rd edition*.
Blackwell: Oxford.

COURSE WEBSITE

<https://www.konan-u.ac.jp/hp/nakatani/js/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The main goal for the course is to learn about basic concepts of linguistic theories and apply them to the analyses of the Japanese language. In doing so, the students will get to know some important linguistic features of Japanese.

Language is a mental matter. If you did not have an appropriate linguistic mechanism *in your mind* (i.e., in your brain), linguistic inputs would be just gibberish. Linguistics is thus about how our mental knowledge and mechanisms enable us to understand and use languages. Usually, people cannot explicitly explain to foreigners how their native tongue works, and yet they unconsciously *know* how it works. Then, what do they *know*, exactly? What do English native speakers know, and what do Japanese native speakers know, unconsciously? We will try to address some of these questions.

Obviously, English and Japanese are not historically related. However, one may also find it surprising that there have been numerous comparative studies of English and Japanese published in the field of linguistics. Comparing historically unrelated languages is actually very important, because, if we find similar properties between them, these similarities cannot be attributed to the historical relatedness; they should thus lead us to the explication of the biological, cognitive basis of human language.

We will start our discussion on what language is and what linguistics is about. We will then move on to the introduction of the basics of linguistic theories such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax. These technical devices will be applied to the analyses of the Japanese language. Through this course, the students will learn how to explicate various formal aspects of the Japanese language in terms of linguistic concepts.

NOTE: No background in linguistics is required. I will explain all the technical concepts from scratch. No proficiency in Japanese is required, either, because this is not a skill class. *All are welcome*. *BUT* be aware that this is not an “elementary linguistics” class or an “elementary Japanese” class, either. This is an introduction class to “Japanese linguistics”, which means that it is one step ahead of an elementary, 100-level linguistics class. Since we are going to deal with Japanese data using linguistic theories, those with limited Japanese proficiency or with no linguistics background may have to put more effort into this class than those with a higher degree of Japanese proficiency or with linguistics background.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Presentation assignments: We are using a textbook (Tsujimura's *Introduction to Japanese Linguistics*), but just listening to me lecturing the textbook would be boring, right? It would be boring to me, too. So, I'll let you lecture instead. I'll lecture the whole of the first chapter (which will be Ch.2 of the textbook), but I'll occasionally hand over the baton to you after that, letting you lecture some sections. This way, you'll clearly see (and I'll see) what aspect of Japanese linguistics is difficult and/or unclear to you. It is our objective to share the problems you may have with the textbook and to resolve them together.

Problem sets: Dealing with problem sets is also an excellent way for you to figure out what's unclear to you and to firmly grasp the ideas behind the theories. Because problem sets will be assigned for the purpose of having you familiarized with the often-technical course materials, they will not be given numerical scores toward your final grade calculation: you will be given full credits for submitted assignments *if* your submitted assignments clearly show your decent efforts *and if* they are submitted in a timely manner.

EXAMS:

There will be three exams during the course, each of which covers one or two chapters. This may sound like a lot of exams, but in actuality, this will make it easier for you to deal with the course materials, partly because the exams will be given while your memory is fresh, and partly because the amount of things covered by each exam will be relatively small.

GRADING

Grades in this course will be based on the assignments (45%), three exams (45%), and in-class participation (10%).

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance and timely completion of assignments in the Year in Japan Program at Konan, whether the Japanese language or Japan Studies courses, is mandatory for all students. Students will be permitted two free, unexcused absences per semester. *Additional unexcused absence will result in a lowering of the course grade for each day missed by three numerical points* (for example, from 90 to 87). Students with valid excuses such as approved medical reasons are expected to make up missing assignments and other classwork in a timely manner. *Legitimate excuses for absence are normally limited to illness or accidents that require medical attention.* Students must document all legitimate excuses.

A few final notes:

1. This syllabus is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class or via the class web page.
2. Please let me know as soon as possible if you need any special accommodations to help you do well in this class.
3. I do not give grades of "incomplete", so please plan on completing all work for the course during this semester.
4. All work you submit must be your own, and must be written for this class (i.e., not recycled from another class or turned in for another class this semester). If you include ideas or words from someone else, they must be properly cited. If you are unclear about what needs to be cited or how to cite it, come and talk to me about it. Work not your own will be given a failing grade and may result in a failing grade for the course.

Overview of the schedule

1st section: Phonetics

Exam 1 will be given in March

2nd section: Phonology

Exam 2 will be given in April

3rd section: Morphology

4th section: Syntax

Exam 3, which only covers 3rd and 4th sections, will be given in May

Lecture Schedule (TENTATIVE!!)

Introduction:

1. Jan 14 (T) What is language?

Section 1: Phonetics

2. Jan 17 (F) Anatomy of sounds Fromkin et al. pp. 229–249
3. Jan 21 (T) Consonants Tsujimura Ch.2, Sec. 1.1
4. Jan 24 (F) Vowels Tsujimura Ch.2, Sec. 1.2
5. Jan 28 (T) Acoustic phonetics and spectrogram
- Jan 31, Feb 4 No class
6. Feb 7 (F) Suprasegmental feature / Review Tsujimura Ch.2, Sec. 2
- Feb 11 No class
7. Feb 14 (F) 1st Exam

Section 2: Phonology

8. Feb 18 (T) Mental sounds vs. physical sounds Fromkin et al. pp. 266–277
9. Feb 21 (F) Assimilations in Japanese (1) Tsujimura Ch.3, Sec. 1.1–1.3
10. Feb 25 (T) Assimilations in Japanese (2) Tsujimura Ch.3, Sec. 1.4–1.6
11. Feb 28 (F) Rendaku / Mora Tsujimura Ch.3, Sec. 2, 3
12. Mar 3 (T) Loan words / Mimetics Tsujimura Ch.3, Sec. 5, 7
- Mar 6, 10, 13 No class
13. Mar 17 (T) Review
- Mar 20 No class
14. Mar 24 (T) 2nd Exam

Section 3: Morphology

15. Mar 27 (F) Parts of speech Tsujimura Ch.4, Sec. 1
16. Mar 31 (T) Morpheme types Tsujimura Ch.4, Sec. 2
17. Apr 3 (F) Word formation Tsujimura Ch.4, Sec. 3
18. Apr 7 (T) Issues in Japanese morphology Tsujimura Ch.4, Sec. 4–6.2
19. Apr 10 (F) Verbal compounds Tsujimura Ch.4, Sec. 6.3

Section 4: Syntax

20. Apr 14 (T) Syntactic structures Tsujimura Ch.5, Sec. 1
21. Apr 17 (F) Word order Tsujimura Ch.5, Sec. 2
22. Apr 21 (T) Reflexives Tsujimura Ch.5, Sec. 3
23. Apr 24 (F) Passives and causatives Tsujimura Ch.5, Sec. 4, 5
24. Apr 28 (T) Review
- May 1, 5 No class
25. May 8 (F) 3rd Exam