

## Book Review

### *The Japanese Language through Time*

Martin, Samuel Elmo. 1987. Yale University Press.

Reviewer: Arnaud Fournet

#### 1. *Description*

The book was published some 25 years ago. It is a huge, thick book with 961 pages and an easily recognizable scarlet red cover. It can now be considered a classic masterpiece on the early stages of the Japanese language. This was the purpose of the author (p.VIII) and this purpose has been fulfilled to a large extent. It took about ten years to be written, as indicated in the acknowledgments (p.VII). It becomes rapidly obvious after some acquaintance with the book that a considerable wealth of information is contained in most pages. Unfortunately, the book got printed before computers and word-processors became standard appliances and that pre-computer-age (now archaic) feature is a disgrace and a handicap in comparison with the (highly valuable) contents. This probably explains that Japanese is not written in sinograms or hiragana/katakana in the book. An up-to-date reprint in modern typographic conditions would certainly be advisable and welcome.

The approach is near exclusively internal and limited to Japanese data, with significant extension to Ryūkyū "dialects", from the early written attestations to the present-day dialects. There is about no external comparison with non Japonic data. The book can be considered as a reconstruction and etymological study of (proto-)Japanese (or Japonic to a lesser extent) from the point of view of Japanese (or Japonic) alone. This internal approach is obviously necessary before any comparative work is done on Japanese. The etymological section of the book indicates the potential connections between the words that can be detected in the Japanese vocabulary.

The book is divided in seven chapters, plus a bibliography and an index. There is also a short list of Chinese phonograms at the end of book (3 pages), the interest of which is unclear. The book can be divided in two parts : the first four chapters describe the method and practical conclusions reached by the author, the next three chapters are a survey of Japanese nouns, verbs and adjectives, very modestly described as a 'succinct etymological dictionary' (p.VIII).

#### 2. *The first part (Chapters #1-4)*

The first chapter (p.1-83) deals with the phonological features and phonetic correspondences which are necessary to account for Japonic data. A huge number of examples are drawn from Ryūkyū dialects to bolster the analysis of Japanese proper.

The chapter #2 (p.84-120) deals with the issue of 'voice' (*sei* or *daku*) and the voicing of initial consonants in compounds (*rendaku*). At the same time, this chapter is an extensive survey of Japanese morphology and word-compounds.

The chapter #3 (p.121-137) is short and deals with some phonetic phenomena: consonant gradations occurring in the gerund form of verbs or the muting out (or suffixation ?) of -k- in adjectives.

The chapter #4 (p.138-363) deals with prosody and pitch patterns of Japanese words across the dialects. This chapter is very long and prosody is indeed one of the most tricky and important issues of (proto-)Japanese. This component of Japanese phonology amply deserves a major chapter. Unfortunately, several methodological flaws prevent the author from reaching satisfactory conclusions or a really satisfactory description. Rather inadequately, pitch is first dealt with within the phrase before it is dealt with within the word. The result of this situation is that it becomes fairly hard to understand what is being described in the first place, in the mixture of pitch patterns, word accents and phrase accents. The next point is that the author tries to make do with only five categories of two-syllable words (2.1; 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5), even though he mentions that other people have proposed more categories. Later on, the realization that more categories are necessary leads to the addition of sub-categories like 2.3a/b/c/d/e. Moreover, the falling tone of Kansai dialects on long vowels is dealt with as a “prosodic” feature, when external and sometimes internal documentation shows this falling tone is not at all a purely prosodic feature but the segmental result of the fusion of two syllables (p.157, p.180). On the whole, the approach of the author is seriously defective from a descriptive point of view, with the unfortunate result that a very important chapter of Japanese phonology becomes a bit obscure.

The conventions used in the etymological chapters for the notation of prosodic patterns of nouns are explained on p.179-182. The chapter #4 deals with the prosodic pattern of nouns, verbs and adjectives separately, of compounds words, describes the historical information available and the supposed development in the modern dialects. The author also mentions some unsolved problems with the prosody of the northern Okinawan Shuri dialect.

## 2. *The second part (Chapters #5-7)*

This part constitutes the 'succinct etymological dictionary', where nouns, verbs and adjectives are dealt with in separate chapters. There is a lot of information in these three chapters, presented in a nearly compressed format, which makes this information somewhat hard to handle. The conventions of the author must be perfectly understood in order to unzip the information. On the whole, this part is a great achievement.

In the chapter #5, the nouns are first listed alphabetically (p.376-599) then listed according to their pitch patterns ('accent classes') (p.600-653). 4 200 nouns are listed. A statistical survey of the different classes is provided (p.654-664) but the author indicates that the statistics are to some extent skewed because of the items of possible or proved Chinese origin.

The separation of nouns, verbs and adjectives may not have been the best choice. This breaks the connections and derivations between the different lexical items. A morphemic dictionary with all the derivatives under each entry would have been an interesting option to make the internal structure of the Japanese vocabulary even clearer. There are numerous cross-references to indicate the potential connections existing between Japanese words.

The chapter #6 (p.665-800) deals with about 2 200 verbs, which are listed only once in alphabetic order. There is a separate sub-chapter for the 'verb formants' (or suffixes) on p.790-796.

The chapter #7 (p.801-862) deals with the adjectives. The first pages are dedicated to describing the typical features of adjectives as a separate syntactical class of Japanese grammar with a survey of these features in the different Japanese dialects. The different 'formants' of adjectives are listed on p.816-822.

The bibliography (p.863-878) focuses on Japanese and Japonic, nearly exclusively.

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