

The syntax of mood constructions in Old Japanese: A corpus based study

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Abstract

This paper investigates several mood constructions in Old Japanese (OJ), the language of 8th century Japan. We focus on imperative, prohibitive, and optative constructions, expressing the desire of the speaker for either the speaker or another entity to perform (or not) in an event or situation (cf. Aikhenvald 2010, Bybee et al. 1994). These forms have been discussed only briefly in previous literature on OJ (e.g., Frellesvig 2010, Vovin 2009), and their grammatical properties have not been investigated up to now.

The present study uses the Oxford Corpus of Old Japanese (OCOJ), a syntactically annotated corpus, to investigate the expression of the logical subject of mood constructions, i.e., the entity which the speaker desires to perform (or not) the event of the verb. This logical subject is never marked for case in any of the mood constructions, even though case-marking is found on subjects in all other OJ clause-types.