GRAMMATICALIZATION OF JAPANESE VERBS

— *IRU, MIRU, OKU, AND SIMAU* —

Yoshiho Shibuya

1.   Introduction

Grammaticalization is a type of language change, in which lexical items are developed to grammatical structure.   This can be described both diachronically and synchronically (Heine, Claudi, & Hünnemeyer 1991, Lehmann 1985).   Heine (1993) states that linguistic behavior is a process, not a fixed state or a product. When looking at languages in this kind of framework, we realize that it may not be sufficient to discuss linguistic behaviors only in terms of dichotomies.   Rather, it seems that we should recognize gradient or continua in discussing various linguistic behaviors, such as inflection and derivation, grammaticalization, and so on.   Thus, instead of stating that a certain item is "grammaticalized or not," it seems necessary to look at grammaticalization as a process, and to look into the continuum nature of the structures of each linguistic unit.

In this paper some Japanese "helping verbs[1]," which have undergone (or rather, are in the process of) grammaticalization will be examined, and in doing so some of the parameters of grammaticalization, which Lehmann (1985) proposed, will be employed as reference.

In section 2 of the paper, some Japanese verbs, which have developed grammatical function, will be introduced.   In section 3 those verbs, which seem to be in somewhat different stages of grammaticalization, will be examined, based on some of Lehmann's parameters.   In section 4 I will look at whether or not there is any correlation between grammaticalization and orthographic changes in Japanese. It seems that the Japanese verbs *iru* (to be), *miru* (to look), *oku* (to place), *and simau* (to put away) all demonstrate, to some extent, orthographical changes, as well as semantic and phonological changes.

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[1] The term "helping verbs" and "auxiliary" are used to refer to the same things in this paper, and what it is that these words refer to is not stated clearly in the present paper.   I used the term "helping verbs" because it is how they are called in Japanese dictionaries.

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2.　Japanese verbs, *iru, miru, oku, and simau*

Japanese verbs, *iru, miru, oku, and simau*, are lexical verbs that have their own particular meanings as full verbs.　*Iru*, for example, has meanings such as 'to be, to exist,' 'to live, to occupy, to stay,' and 'to be present, to be around,' as a verb. As a helping verb, it has meanings that show aspects of state and progressives (for example, 'keep -ing, be -ing').　In that sense, the verb *iru* may be similar to a "quasi-auxiliary" which Heine (1993) discusses.　It usually behaves like an ordinary verb, but when it is used with other verbs, it assumes a grammatical function - in this case, a marker of aspect.　Examples of sentences with two types of *iru* are shown below:

(1)　　*iru*

　　a.　　imooto-ga　　tomodati-no ie-ni　　　　i-ru
　　　　　sister- NOM friend-GEN　house-LOC be-PRES[2]
　　　　　'(My) sister is at a friend's house.'
　　b.　　John-wa　　toshokan-de benkyoo　si-te-i-ru
　　　　　John-TOP library-LOC　study　　DO-INF-PROG-PRES
　　　　　'John is studying in the library.'

In (1a), *iru* is used as a full verb by itself; in (1b), on the other hand, it is used as an auxiliary with another verb (*si* 'do,' which is a main verb of the sentence).

Another verb that may be considered "quasi-auxiliary" is *miru*.　As a full verb, it has meanings such as 'to see, to look (at), to watch, to stare, to witness,' 'to observe, to view, to inspect, to visit,' 'to read, to look through,' 'to examine, to refer to, to consult, to look up,' 'to judge, to estimate,' and 'to look after, to take charge of.' When used with other verbs, it has a meaning of 'to try or test.'　Examples are as follows:

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[2] I used the following terminology in the present paper:
NOM – Nominatives, GEN – Genitives, LOC – Locatives, PRES – Present tense, PAST – Past tense, PROG – Progressives, ACC – Accusatives, INF – Infinitives

(2)   *miru*

    a.   imooto-ga   e-o   mi-ta

        sister-NOM   picture-ACC see-PAST

        '(My) sister looked at the picture.'

    b.   John-ga   fuku-o   ki-te-mi-ta

        John-NOM clothes-ACC   wear-INF-try-PAST

        'John tried on the clothes.'

In (2a), *miru* is used as a full verb (main verb), while in (2b) it is combined with another verb *ki-te* (*ki-ru,* 'to wear'), which is the main verb of the whole sentence.

    The verbs *oku* and *simau* are also used similarly, in two different ways. *Oku,* for example, when used as a full verb, has meanings such as 'to put, to place' (3a), 'to leave (behind), to leave (as it is),' 'to keep, to hold, to store,' 'to establish, to set up.' With other verbs, it is used to give an aspectual meaning 'to do (something) beforehand, to have (something) done before' as in (3b).

(3)   *oku*

    a.   imooto-ga   hon-o   tukue-ni   oi-ta

        sister-NOM   book-ACC   desk-LOC   put (on)-PAST

        '(My) sister put the book on the desk.'

    b.   John-ga   sore-o   moo   si-te-oi-ta

        John-NOM that-ACC   already   do-INF-finish-PAST

        'John has already done it.'

It seems clear that in (3b) *oku* has an aspectual meaning similar to that of English perfectives (have), as its translated sentence in English suggests.

(4)   *simau*

    a.   imooto-ga   fuku-o   simat-ta

        sister-NOM   clothes-ACC   put-away-PAST

        '(My) sister put away (her) clothes.'

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b.　　John-ga　　　fuku-o　　　　　moo　　　ki-te-simat-ta

　　　John-NOM clothes-ACC already　wear-INF-finish-PAST

　　　'John has already put on the clothes.'

As can be seen in (4), simau has meaning such as 'to finish, to conclude, to end' (4a), 'to put (something) away, to hide away,' and 'to close (e.g. one's business), to shut up.'　As an auxiliary it is used with other verbs as a perfective, similar to English *have (done (something))* (4b).

In some Japanese dictionaries, some of the above verbs (specifically, *iru, miru,* and *simau*) appear as "helping verbs," as well as regular, full verbs, when used with other verbs (main verbs).　*Oku,* however, is usually not listed as a helping verb.　To me, however, they all seem to show that they are in the process of grammaticalization, changing from having characteristics of only 'lexical items' to having characteristics of '(quasi-) auxiliaries' as well.

In fact, some of these verbs may be regarded as showing some characteristics of 'suffixes.'　Since they are so closely attached to the verb, some speakers see them as inseparable from verbs.　I informally asked several native speakers of Japanese if the sequences such as *yondesimau* ('to have read') and *tabetesimau* ('to have read') can be segmented into smaller parts or not.　Their answers varied: some speakers said yes, segmenting the sequence into two parts - *yonde* + *simau,* while others said that these sequences can never be further segmented.

Although native speakers' intuition may not serve as a strong piece of evidence to support the idea of these verbs being '(quasi-) auxiliaries,' it seems to suggest the need to examine these verbs more closely.　It is necessary to look at how these verbs (auxiliaries) and other inflectional suffixes such as passives (- *(r)are*) or causatives -*(s)ase* interact (for example, ordering and meaning relations in a sentence) in order to discuss how much these items are grammaticalized and how they have come to show characteristics similar to suffixes.

In section 3, each of the above verbs will be examined more precisely and their changes (both semantic and phonological) will be discussed.　It is not the purpose of the present paper, however, to "state clearly" or determine (conclude) the degrees of grammaticalization of each of the verbs *iru, miru, simau,* and *oku.*　With

my limited knowledge of, and the limited reference and resource on the Japanese language used to write this paper, it very difficult to determine to what degree a particular verb is grammaticalized. While I believe it is probably not an easy task even with full sources, I should make clear at this point that this paper will only present some evidence these verbs seem to show. Further research is called for in order to fully examine and determine the nature and the degrees of grammaticalization of these Japanese verbs.

3.   Grammaticalization of *iru, miru, simau,* and *oku*
       — A Semantic and Phonological Change --

In this section each of the verbs introduced above will be examined more closely, referring to some of the parameters of grammaticalization Lehmann (1985) presents. Lehmann regards grammaticalization as having two aspects – synchronic and diachronic, and introduces six factors which are assumed to "jointly identify the degree to which a sign is grammaticalized" (Lehmann 1985: 306). According to Lehmann, each of these parameters corresponds to a process, in which the weakness/strength of grammaticalization can be expressed. Lehmann's (1985) parameters of grammaticalization are shown below:

Parameters of grammaticalization (Lehmann 1985: 306)

	Paradigmatic	Syntagmatic
Weight	integrity	scope
Cohesion	paradigmaticity	bondedness
Variability	paradigmatic variability	syntagmatic variability

Based on these parameters (though not all of them will be discussed), the processes of grammaticalization of Japanese verbs *iru, miru, oku,* and *simau* will be examined in the following section.

From the paradigmatic point of view, the more an item is grammaticalized, the less semantic and phonetic "weight" such an item has (Lehmann 1985: 307). Let us first look at the semantic change of the above verbs. The verb *iru* generally

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means 'to be, to be present' when used as a full verb.　Used with another verb, that is, used as a helping verb, the meaning of iru changes to the one similar to English progressives, 'to keep -ing, to be -ing.'　Here, semantic bleaching, or desemanticization, seems to have occurred.　Examples are shown below.

(5)　　*iru*

　　a.　　imooto-ga　　ie-ni　　　　i-ru
　　　　　sister-NOM　home-LOC　be (present)-PRES
　　　　　'(My) sister is at home.'

　　b.　　John-ga　　　hon-o　　　yon-de-i-ru
　　　　　John-NOM　book-ACC　read-INF-PROG-PRES
　　　　　'John is reading a book.'

The verb to which *iru* is attached is with -*te/-de* suffix.[3]　This suffix has the same form as the one used for "clause chaining" (Hopper & Traugott 1993).　In Japanese the -*te* construction is used quite commonly to link clauses together. It is also common to have a construction similar to clause chaining with just verbs or verb phrases (not the whole clause).　This can be seen in the following example.

(6)　　Neko-ga　　sakana-o tebe-te ne-ta
　　　　cat-NOM　　fish-ACC eat-TE　sleep-PAST
　　　　'A cat ate fish and slept.'

In (6), as in the case with clause chaining, the first verb, which is with the suffix -*te/-de*, is interdependent (though not fully dependent).　In clause chaining, "only one of the clauses is a nucleus containing the full range of verbal markers for tense, aspect, mood, and so on" (Hopper & Traugott 1993: 174).　Notice that in the above sentence only the second verb has the past tense marker.　Also, notice that the meanings of both verbs are clear and are of semantically similar weight.　This kind of construction is very productive in Japanese, and almost any two verbs, if semantically appropriate, can be used in clause chaining similar to the one in (6).

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[3] The difference between −*te* and −*de* is　purely phonological, which will not be discussed in the present paper.

With *iru*, however, it seems difficult to have the same construction as above. That is, if we use *iru* as the second constituent (verb) in clause chaining, the meaning of *iru* as a full verb easily disappears, and as a result, it only functions as an aspectual (progressive) marker. (7b) is not ungrammatical, but is unnatural and awkward. In other words, although it may not be impossible, it is rather difficult to get the meaning of *iru* as a full verb ('to be, to be present') in (7b).

(7)   a.   Neko-ga   sakana-o tabe-te-i-ta

                cat-NOM   fish-ACC eat-TE-PROG-PAST

                'The cat was eating fish.'

         b.   ? Neko-ga   sakana-o   tabe-te   i-ta

                cat-NOM   fish-ACC   eat-TE (and) be (present)-PAST

                '?The cat ate fish and was there.'

         c.   Neko-ga   sakana-o tabe-te   mada soko-ni   i-ta

                cat-NOM   fish-ACC eat-TE   still   there-LOC be-PAST

                '?The cat ate fish and was still there.'

When some appropriate words are inserted between *tabe-te* and *i-ta*, however, it is possible to keep the meaning of *iru* as a full verb, as shown in (7c). The above examples seem to show that *iru* has undergone some desemanticization process because it "is emptied of its lexical semantics and acquires a grammatical function" (Heine 1993: 54).

With the other verbs, *miru*, *oku*, and *simau*, it seems possible (though it may not be so natural in some cases) to have two readings more easily, depending on the way the sentence is pronounced. For example, if the sentences are pronounced with pauses (between -*te* and the second verbs), it is easy to get the second reading (with *miru*, *oku*, and *simau* having meanings of full verbs). Also, the ways these sentences are written (e.g. with Kanji - Chinese characters) seem to play an important role. This will be discussed briefly later. The fact that the verbs *miru*, *oku*, and *simau* can have two readings seems to suggest that they are less grammaticalized than *iru* is. Examples of these verbs in the -*te* construction are listed below. In (8a), (9a) and (10a), the second verbs (the one after the -*te* form) seem to have the meanings of helping verbs.

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(8) a.　　　John-ga　　　bideo-o　　　kari-te-mi-ta

　　　　　　John-NOM　video-ACC　rent-TE-try-PAST

　　　　　　'John tried renting a video.'

　　　b.　　　John-ga　　　bideo-o　　　kari-te　　mi-ta

　　　　　　John-NOM　video-ACC　rent-TE　watch-PAST

　　　　　　'John rented a video and watched (it).'

(9) a.　　　John-ga　　　bideo-o　　　kari-te-oi-ta

　　　　　　John-NOM　video-ACC rent-TE-'has done it'-PAST

　　　　　　'John rented a video beforehand.'

　　　b.　　　John-ga　　　bideo-o　　　kari-te　　oi-ta

　　　　　　John-NOM　video-ACC　rent-TE　put-PAST

　　　　　　'John rented a video and placed (it there).'

(10) a.　　　John-ga　　　bideo-o　　　kari-te-simat-ta

　　　　　　John-NOM　video-ACC　rent-TE-finish-PAST

　　　　　　'John has (already) rented a video.'

　　　b.　　　John-ga　　　bideo-o　　　kari-te　　simat-ta

　　　　　　John-NOM　video-ACC　rent-TE　put away-PAST

　　　　　　'John rented a video and put (it) away.'

All of the sentences in (8)-(10) have two meanings.　Notice that in (a) sentences, the second verbs have grammatical functions similar to those of English auxiliaries, rather than the semantic meanings of full, lexical verbs.

(10) seems to have an additional meaning, which may have derived from (10b).　The additional meaning of *simau* is "regret."[4]　So, (10b) can also mean, '(I) regret that I (or somebody) have rented the video.'　From this, I assume that *simau* is more grammaticalized than *miru* or *oku* semantically.

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[4] Dr. Haspelmath, a German morphologist, pointed out to me that it seems unlikely that the "regret" meaning should have developed from the "already" meaning, because it is more concrete.　He also added that "regret" is an unlikely meaning for an auxiliary.　I cannot conclude anything right now, so what I argue in the present paper is only my assumption based on my intuition.　Further study is necessary to determine how this "regret" meaning

Another important factor of grammaticalization associated with weight is phonological change. As grammaticalization process proceeds, an item will be reduced phonologically. Such phonological reduction is more obvious in fast, informal speech than in formal, slower speech. See the examples below.

(11)	a.	tabeteiru 'eating'	→	tabeteru (*i* elision)
	b.	kaitemiru 'try writing'	→	No change
	c.	yondeoku 'read beforehand'	→	yondoku (*e* elision)
	d.	sitesimatta 'have done'	→	sityatta (elision + palatalization)

As can be seen in (11) above, all except *miru* have undergone some phonological changes.[5]

It seems that just as phonological reduction can be caused by grammaticalization, phonological reduction also promotes the grammaticalization process. The closer the verb and auxiliaries become, it is more likely that some kind of phonological reduction will occur. In the same way, as a result of phonological reduction, the integrity of an item increases, and loss of semantic substance will be even greater. As the morphological bondedness (Lehmann 1985) increases, it becomes more difficult or unnatural to separate the verb from the auxiliary, as some native speakers of Japanese were unable to segment these sequences. In (11), for example, *tabeteru, yondoku,* and *sityatta* all show an increased degree of attachment. In these cases it seems that *iru, oku,* and *simau* are no longer auxiliaries. Rather, they seem to act as suffixes attached to verbs. Their semantic and phonological weight has decreased greatly and it has become more difficult to separate them from the main verb.

Semantically, when *simau* becomes *tyau* as in *sityatta,* the speaker's own feelings, "regret," seem to have been reflected. The more it is reduced phonologically, the less it is semantically related to the original meaning of the verb *simau* ('to put

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has developed.

[5] Though *miru* has not undergone any phonological changes, it does not necessarily mean that it is less grammaticalized compared to other verbs, since the phonological structures are different for each of them. Phonological changes will not be discussed in detail in this paper.

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away'). This is demonstrated in the following examples where *oku* and *simau* are used twice in the same sentence.

(12)　　a.　　?yon-doi-toi-te　　　　<　　yon-de-oi-te-oi-te
　　　　　　　'read (it) beforehand'

　　　　b.　　?tabe-te-sima-tyat-ta　　<　　tabe-te-simat-te-simat-ta
　　　　　　　'have (already) eaten (it)' (with the "regret" meaning)

Although (12a) and (12b) are considered very colloquial expressions, they are nevertheless quite common in daily conversations. If fact, I have encountered sentences such as the following: "Moo mise-ga simat-te simat-tyat-ta!" ('The store has already closed!') The examples like these show that phonological reduction and semantic bleaching influence one another in the grammaticalization process.

4.　　Orthographic Change

Although Lehmann does not mention this (1985), in discussing grammaticalization in Japanese, it seems interesting to examine the correlation between grammaticalization and orthographic change. First, let us look at the Japanese writing system.

Japanese has three types of orthography – *kanji* (logograms derived from Chinese which carry meanings), *hiragana* (a syllabary, in which each grapheme corresponds to a spoken syllable; usually a consonant-vowel pair), *katakana* (a syllabary used for foreign words except for Chinese-origin words, and for mimetics). The same word can be written in *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*, depending on the way that word is used. For example, the word 'dog' can be written in three different ways: "犬," "いぬ" or "イヌ." According to Kindaichi (1978), "this is a marked peculiarity of Japanese that cannot be found in any other language." A sentence is usually written in a combination of *kanji* and *hiragana*, *hiragana* and *katakana*, or all three. (14) is an example of how a Japanese sentence containing all three is written:

(14)　妹が　　　今　居間で　　　　テレビを 見る

　　　imooto-ga　ima　ima-de　　　terebi-o　mi-ru

　　　sister-NOM now　living room-LOC　TV-ACC watch-PRES

　　　'(My) sister is watching TV in the living room now.'

As the above example demonstrates, *kanji* is usually used for most content words (*imooto* 'sister,' *ima* 'living room,' *mi-* 'to see'). Notice in (14) 'living room' and 'now' are homonyms. In fact, it is one of the characteristics of Japanese to have a large number of homonyms. Some of them are distinguished in pronunciation by different pitch (accent) structure (e.g., *ame* 'rain' with HL tone vs. *ame* 'candy' with LH tone), but many others are pronounced exactly the same (e.g., *kumo* 'cloud' and *kumo* 'spider'). As for words which are of Chinese-origin (Sino-Japanese), there are even larger number of homonyms (e.g., *si* for 'poem,' 'death,' 'person,' history,' 'child,' 'paper,' 'thread,' among others). Not only separate lexical items but also a great number of compounds are homonyms. As long as they have separate meanings, they are written in different ways in *kanji*. In conversation (spoken language), having many homonyms may cause confusion, but in writing it almost never causes a problem because of *kanji*. Each *kanji* is associated with meaning, so by looking at *kanji* people can understand the meaning of a word. *Kanji* thus is essential in Japanese writing.

In spite of the advantage of *kanji*, however, Japanese sentences are not written in *kanji* only. *Hiragana* is used for so-called 'particles' that are attached to nouns and pronouns to mark grammatical functions such as nominatives, genitives, accusatives, etc. Other grammatical components such as causative markers, passive markers, present and past tense markers, etc. are also written in *hiragana*. It seems that there is some distinction made in writing that is based on the role of words or items in a sentence. This leads to a prediction: the more grammaticalized an item is, the more likely that item will be written in *hiragana*, rather than in *kanji*. This seems to be a plausible prediction since *kanji* is almost always associated with the meaning of a word, and the more grammaticalized certain items are, the less their semantic weight or substance is (Lehmann 1985, Heine 1993). With this in mind, let us examine how verbs such as *iru*, *miru*, *oku*, and *simau* are written.

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When used as a full verb, all of these verbs can be written in *kanji* since they have meanings.　However, there are some differences among these four verbs. The verb *iru* is often written in *hiragana* even as a full verb.　Although it can be written in *kanji*, "居る," it is more natural to write it in *hiragana*, "いる."　When used as auxiliary (or suffix, as discussed above), *iru*, with the progressive meaning 'to be -ing,' is almost never written in *kanji*.

As a full, lexical verb, *miru* is almost always written in *kanji*, "見る." Since the number of syllables is the same for both *miru* and *iru*, this difference in writing (using *kanji* or not) cannot be derived phonologically.　This is one piece of evidence which shows that the purpose of using *kanji* is not just to decrease the number of letters.[6]　The most important role of *kanji* in Japanese writing is the way it conveys meaning clearly.　When used as an auxiliary, on the other hand, *miru* is written only in *hiragana*.[7]

The verb *oku* and *simau* can also be written in *kanji* as a full verb, while they are generally only written in *hiragana* when grammatical functions are assumed.　Also note that once phonological reduction occurs, it is impossible to write any of these items in *kanji*.

Generalization for the relationship between *kanji* and grammaticalization is, therefore, that lexical items can be (and often are) written in *kanji*, whereas grammaticalized items are almost always written in *hiragana* only, as in the case of other grammatical words.　In other words, though the correlation cannot be clearly made with the limited scope of the present paper, it seems to be true that if a certain verb is used both as a lexical item (i.e., as a full verb) and as a grammaticalized item, it is more likely that the verb will be written in *kanji* as a lexical item and in *hiragana* as a grammaticalized item, with the reverse never occurring.　It is quite likely that these characteristics derive from the fact that *kanji* almost always conveys meaning.　If, as Lehmann (1985) suggests, more grammaticalized items are more desemanticized, it seems natural that those which have undergone

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[6] As in the case of *imooto* ('sister'), however, it is often true that the number of letters decrease when *Kanji* is used instead of *Hiragana*.

[7] I did not make clear the stem of each of the verbs discussed in the present paper, since it is still controversial to some extent.　I should note, however, that when *Kanji* is used, only the first part (the part which is generally considered the stem of the verb) is written in *Kanji*, not the tense markers.　(e.g., *mi-ru* "見-る" (only the stem *mi-* (though it is controversial

grammaticalization to greater degrees should be written in *hiragana* than in *kanji* in Japanese.

5.   Conclusion

The present paper examined the grammaticalization of the Japanese verbs *iru*, *miru*, *oku*, and *simau*, focusing on their semantic, phonological, and orthographic changes.   As stated in Section 2, it is impossible to determine precisely the degrees of grammaticalization of each of these verbs.   What seems to be clear, though, is the fact that grammaticalization is not a fixed state, but is a process both synchronically and diachronically.   Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to draw any concrete conclusion based on the limited data and resources, I assume that it will be interesting to examine grammaticalization processes of these verbs more closely especially since semantic, phonological, and orthographic changes all seem to interact with one another in various ways in Japanese.

Acknowledgement:

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whether the stem is *mir-* or *mi-*, I will not discuss this any further here) is written in *kanji*).)