

Compare the Word Order of English and Japanese

If we give a number to each meaningful bit of the English sentence according to its order in the sentence, and then put the same number with the equivalent word or phrase in the Japanese, we can show if there is some regular relationship between the word order of the two languages. The existence of a pattern will become apparent. This pattern provides the logical basis for the technique for translating Japanese into English.

Notice 2 things:

- 1) Some numbers are missing from the Japanese. These will usually be the nouns (and especially the pronouns) which in the English version are subject or object of a clause. They will be omitted because they are OLD INFORMATION.
- 2) A large part of the Japanese sentence is structured in the reverse order compared with the English. In the Japanese version, you will typically find an order like the following for each clause, whether main clause or subordinate:

1 5 4 3 2 which would occur if a "shudai" (typically at the beginning of a sentence) is going to turn into the English subject, or,

5 4 3 2, if the English subject has not been mentioned in the Japanese (on the grounds that it is OLD INFORMATION) or,

5 4 1 2, if the English subject had also been the Japanese subject (indicated by GA which is likely to be close to its verb) and the English object had been omitted from the Japanese because it was OLD INFORMATION.

On the following pages are some examples which show these patterns.

1 2 3 4
Japanese people love singing songs.

1 4 3 2
日本人は 歌を 歌うことが 大好きだ

This next example has been broken down more than you need to do in practice. However, by doing so I hoped to show with some clarity, the extent of the contrast in word order between the two languages.

1 2 3 4 5
Anyone at all can sing with the accompaniment
6 7 8 9 10
of an orchestra like a professional singer, thanks to
11 12 13
the progress of sound technology

You will notice that the elements which get out of order in the Japanese are typically the English subject and object, in this case, the subject #1.

13 12 11 10
音響技術 の 発達 のおかげで、
1 9 8
だれもが プロの歌手 のように
7 6 5 4
オーケストラ の 伴奏 で
3 2
歌うことが できる。

1 2 3 4 5
 What we call "yasegaman" is a word which
 6 7 8 9
 combines "gaman suru" and "yaseru."

2 1 9 8 7
 やせ我慢 とは 痩せる と 我慢すを
 6 5 * 4 3
 一緒にした relative pronoun 言葉 である。

*In English a relative pronoun such as "which" or "that" would be necessary here.

¹ It ² is (refers to) ³ the act of ⁴ perseverance (gaman)
⁵ to the extent that ⁶ one ⁷ becomes thin (yaseru), ⁸ if
⁹ we ¹⁰ translate (it) ¹¹ literally.

¹⁰ 直訳する ⁸ と、 ⁷ 痩せる

⁵ ほど ⁴ 我慢する ³ ということ ² である。

Notice that the numbers that are typically absent from the Japanese (1, 6, 9, 11) are those for the English pronouns, in this case, it/one/we/it. These pronouns are subject or object of an English verb. From this and preceding examples it can be seen that there is a potentially useful relationship between Japanese and English word order, but that:

- 1) the order of the “shudai” (主題) in a Japanese sentence has no obvious consistent implication for its order in English nor does it imply anything about the grammatical role of the words which will translate it.
- 2) The English subject and object may be found anywhere in a Japanese sentence.
- 3) The equivalent of English relative pronouns are always missing from the Japanese because they don't exist in Japanese. In addition, ordinary pronouns are mostly missing from the Japanese, and these are mostly going to be subject or object in English.