

Comments on 696A Lecture 3 (Fall 2026) by Rudy Troike and Sebastian Arana
Guest Lecture by Jason Ginsburg, Kyoto University.

[RT:...] Rudy Troike
[SF:...] Sandiway Fong's replies.
[SA:...] Sebastian Arana
[JG:...] Jason Ginsburg replies.

[RT: I should have thought to ask if the lexical two-word verbs usually are written with Chinese characters, as the pattern was probably borrowed from Chinese, where it is common (to the extent that there is a feeling (Sprachgefuehl) that new verbs should consist of two syllables), e.g., xi-huan ({EA, {v, {喜欢, IA}}}) 'like', zhi-dao ({EA, {v, {知道, IA/CP}}}) 'know', tiao-wu ({EA, {v, {跳舞}}}) 'dance', as well as the so-called "separable" verbs with incorporated customary dummy objects, like chi-fan ({EA, {v, {吃, 饭}}}) 'eat' and kan-shu ({EA, {v, {看, 书}}}) 'read'; kan-jian ({EA, {v, {看见, IA}}}) [SF: note 见 is not a dummy object]) 'see' is interesting historically as the probable source of English "look-see".]

[SF: Nice thought. (I am a Cantonese speaker, not Mandarin.) But in Chinese, there are both monosyllabic and bisyllabic verbs that we can choose from. Similarly, there are direct objects that are mono-/bi-syllabic. We can also often drop the 2nd syllable (without loss of meaning). Which combinations sound best? Phonology is not my area but apparently there are rules of stress etc. that determine which combinations go together well.]

[JG: Usually, the root verb is a chinese character, and inflection is written in the Japanese hiragana script.

For 食べ歩く *tabe-aruku* 'walk-eat', 食 'eat' and 歩 'walk' are characters, and べ 'be' and く 'ku' represent tense.]

[RT: It would be significant to compare the Japanese verbs with their Chinese counterparts to see if they are simply borrowed, since in borrowing (even in calques) there is usually no introspection as to the etymological meaning, except in "folk-etymology". Separable formations, if not directly borrowed, may reflect the emergence of a new productive pattern based on the model of the older holistic borrowings.]

[SF: Japanese, of course, borrows heavily from what counts as Chinese (at various times in history). So I'm sure some of the verb compounds are calques. Like Japanese, Chinese also has serial-verb constructions. But the ones Jason presented seem different. Also, not all Japanese accept all of the ones Jason presented. There is a lot of speaker variation.]

[RT: Your comment on variability in acceptance reminded me of the seminar Peter Cole had at U Illinois where he used James Huang's (my former student in Taiwan) dissertation as the text. The class was divided between Taiwan and Mainland speakers, and almost every meeting, there

would be a 50-50 split on acceptance of some example (to the point that it became a source of amusement). The split did not at all regularly correspond to students' origin, so it could not be predicted. The amount of variation was surprising to everyone, since they were accustomed to the high degree of agreement in English.]

[JG: The verbal roots are usually written in Chinese characters that have been borrowed, but these characters are often used to represent native Japanese words. I don't think there is much introspection regarding the etymology going on when using the V-V compounds. Kageyama (2016: 280) writes that "lexical compound verbs are strictly restricted to native verbs."

論じ合う *ronji-au* 'discuss-come.together' (debate) appears to be formed from the Chinese 論 *ron* 'discuss'. I think that this type of V-V compound formed with a borrowed root is uncommon.

Although 知り合う *shiri-au* 'know-come.together' (get to know) is written with characters, the verbs appear to be native Japanese.]

[SF: Maybe the fact that English has a more rigid word order has something to do with it, but I am not so sure about English sometimes. Certainly Jason and I sometimes disagree on judgments. In 696A Lecture 2, not everyone in class agreed with Chomsky's judgments. I'm referring here to:

- *As a speaker of English, everyone knows that there's something wrong with this sentence:*
 - **John's certainty to leave*
 - *John is certain to leave* (that Bill will leave)
- *In fact, people who've **never seen either of these things** will understand them instantaneously in just the right fashion if they know English.*
- **Linguist:** some condition on Nominalization? How is it acquired?
- [Bruening 2018: *I for one as a native speaker of English have always found [...] perfectly acceptable.*]

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[JG: There is definitely variability in acceptability of some less-commonly used compounds. I sometimes/often disagree with judgments about English examples in syntax papers.

Here are some supposedly uncommon V-V compounds. Some Japanese speakers might find them ill-formed.

Rare SVCs from the Compound Verb Lexicon (Kageyama and Kanzaki 2014)

- a. *ire-komeru* 'put inside (lit. put in-load)'
 - b. *uti-wasureru* 'forget completely (lit. strike-forget)'
 - c. *umari-komu* 'be buried into (lit. be buried-be crowded)'
 - d. *omoi-iru* 'think deep in one's heart (lit. think-enter)'
-]

[RT: P.S. I forgot to say that Jason should be advised to look at the much more extensive research on Chinese bisyllabic verbs, and not discuss the Japanese verbs in isolation. Given the always-puzzling similarities in structure between Japanese and Korean, he should look at work on Korean as well if he hasn't already.]

[JG: Yes, we should look Korean and Chinese V-V compounds (no necessarily bisyllabic). Japanese alone is a handfull, but it is important to look at other languages too.]

[SA: I have some comments on this lecture. I hope I can add something unique as a Japanese learner.

These kinds of verbs are not that common. Syntactically, I never thought of these V-V verbs as having multiple objects. Some I've heard are 受取る、引取る - Always with accusative を particle on a single direct object. But these are probably simple acc-acc combinations like he showed.]

[SF: Although the verb 受取 exists in Chinese (and could be the source) - and has essentially the same meaning as in Japanese - the two characters don't typically occur together.

引取 doesn't seem Chinese at all (so perhaps it's unlikely Chinese is the source).]

[SA: On their connection to Chinese, as a learner I was quickly introduced to the distinction between Chinese-sourced words and native Japanese words (specifically for Kanji/chinese writing characters).

With verbs, a pattern quickly emerges, where we clearly distinguish foreign-sourced verbs (Kanji + する or even english loanwords in katakana writing + する), different from native japanese verbs (always using the native japanese reading of the kanji character as the stem + some hiragana verb ending).]

[SF: As I understand it, the -suru (する) suffix turns something, e.g. a noun (is it always a nominal?) into a verb.

Japanese example *benkyou+suru*

I wonder how it acquired its arguments. I assume *benkyou+suru* is transitive, having both an **EA** and an **IA** (which can be dropped for the Activity reading).]

[SA: There are often pairs of these 'native' verbs and Chinese-based する verbs with the exact same meaning, distinguished only by formality level.

On a writing level it feels like a spectrum, where official signs and documents tend to be almost fully chinese characters, and super informal online chat drops almost all those characters. In turn, the chinese+する verbs tend to be more formal.]

[SF: Then is there a Japanese native verb corresponding to *study*?]

[SA (follow-up): I just saw your comments - I'll make some quick clarifications

Yes, -suru technically does turn nouns into verbs. But it's not universally applicable for all nouns.

Benkyou is actually a good counterexample to my formality argument - there is also native japanese "manabu" and "narau" meaning "to learn/be taught", but these are actually MORE formal and have slightly different meanings.]

[JG: I think that *manabu* and *narau* are similar to English 'learn'. I'm not sure if there is a clear politeness distinction among *narau*, *manabu*, and *benkyou*. Politeness in Japanese is complicated. *benkyou suru* 'study do' could be made more polite

with *shimasu* resulting in *benkyou shimasu* 'study do' or with the humble polite *itashimasu* 'do' resulting in *benkyo itashimasu* 'study do'.]

[SA: Interestingly, the V-V verbs I know are also more formal, despite being written and inflected more like native Japanese verbs.]

[SA (follow-up): I'm not sure I'd stand by my claim that Japanese sourced verbs skew more informal and Chinese skew formal, I'd have to do more research. But in written context I've definitely observed it, like my example with signage and online chat (different vocabulary, not just spelling out kanji).]

[SA (follow-up): One more V-V verb I've seen often is 知り合う (*shiriau*, *shiru+au*, know + meet, "to get to know/meet for the first time").

This one is a little more interesting, since 知る typically takes を-particle ending accusatives, while 会う takes に for people recipient (typically locative particle). I am not sure what particle 知り合う would technically take. In a lot of contexts, I've observed particles like this are dropped entirely, so maybe it doesn't make a difference.]

[JG: 知り合う *Shiri-au* 'know-come.together' (get to know) would most likely occur with to 'with' as in *kanojo-to shiri-at-ta* 'got to know her'. The dative *ni* might also marginally(?) (check with a native speaker) be used to as in *kanojo-ni shiri-at-ta* 'got to know her'.

Note that the second verb in *shiri-au* is 合う 'come together' and not 会う 'meet'. On top of looking similar, both words are pronounced 'au'.]