

The Semantic Scope of *-aku* Nominalization in Early-Heian Japanese *Kundoku* Discourse

Nominalized sentences in Japanese—those ending with a nominal construction, rather than a finite predicate—often express a speaker’s attitude toward an event (Shin’ya 2009), may mark mirativity (Adachi 2002), and interact much more closely with modality when compared to Indo-European languages (Narrog 2009). This has been the case throughout the history of the language, although there have been shifts in the morphemes involved and how the nominalization process interacts with the predicate paradigm system.

There were three primary clause nominalization strategies in Old Japanese (ca. 8th century CE) texts—paradigmatic nominalization (using the adnominal form of the verb paradigm), following the adnominal verb form with the noun *koto*, and following the adnominal form with the suffix *-aku*. Although *-aku* lost its productivity by the 10th century (Kobayashi 1957, Vovin 2003, Majtcazak 2009), *-aku* was a productive morpheme in the agglutinating predicate paradigm in earlier Japanese (Vovin 2005). Omodaka et. al (1967: 251) suggest the original meaning of the morpheme may be indexing a “psychological place” and Mukai (2018) uses a possible-world model to argue *-aku* is a subjective modal that marks suppositions, convictions, and expressions of emotion in Old Japanese. Although Mukai does not take early-Heian glossed texts into account, following the long-standing convention that all material from the Heian period is Early Middle Japanese, scholars such as tsubo (1961), Tsukishima (1963), and Kobayashi (2012) have written extensively on the text, showing that the language of the

The method for reading Sinitic texts as Japanese, known as *kundoku* (‘vernacular-reading’), came to be known for being highly codified translationese, with each sentence rendered without regard to the surrounding discourse, but evidence from glossed 9th-century texts show rich use of predicate morphology reflecting the narrative context (Bundschuh 2021). In these texts, the nominalizer *-aku* could be used sentence-finally to express heightened emotion, as in (1), and to create quotative constructions, as in (2).

(1) *Kanasiki i 0 Td03 Td03. TP ≈on, aii 0 Tdo 34 (s)03 Td0 /10 Tcence*

This study examines the semantic scope of *-aku* nominalization in 9th-century Japanese *kundoku* narrative discourse and argues that, as it is used in 8th-century sources, *-aku* is primarily modal in nature, marking predicates as facts that can be targets of evaluation by characters in emotional scenes. Its pre-quotative use can be understood as an extension of its modal semantics by presenting a predicate as a fact to be the target qualification—rather than evaluation—by first noting the manner in which words are said before qualifying the contents of the speech act. By taking the discourse context into consideration, we can better understand the semantics and pragmatics of *-aku* beyond its surface function as a nominalizing morpheme.

Abbreviations:

ACC accusative; COM