

A Diachronic Study of Compound Verbs Expressing “Completion”

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This work has examined the historical process by which compound verbs expressing “completion” have acquired their current usage.

In modern Japanese, there are several compound verbs expressing the “completion” of an action or behavior, such as *yomitosu* [read through/read over] and *ikinuku* [live through/survive]. However, there are certain restrictions on the usage of these compound verbs. Words such as *kietosu* [completely disappear] and *tabenuku* [eat up] are not commonly used. There are verbs with the suffix *tosu* [pass through] or *nuku* [go through/pull out] added, such as *sashitosu* [run through/pierce] and *hikinuku* [pull out/extract], but they express physical movement, such as an object passing through another object or space or one object being removed from another object, instead of “completion.” Based on ancient to modern examples, the current study has revealed how the use of “completion” originated from uses expressing physical movement, such as *sashitosu* [run through/pierce].

In modern Japanese, multiple compound verbs expressing “completion” coexist and are used differently, but the historical rivalry that led to these modern usages is unclear. Therefore, this work focuses on the first verb in a compound verb (such as *yomu* [read] in *yomitosu* [read through/read over]) to examine the historical process by which compound verbs expressing “completion” (*-tosu*, *-nuku*, *-hatsu*, and *-owaru*) acquired that usage based on ancient to modern examples. This work also reveals how these compound verbs expressing “completion” historically competed with one another until today.

Chapter 2 examined *-nuku* [go through/pull out] diachronically. Results revealed that its usage developed along two paths: *kantsu* [penetrate/pierce] → *nukidashi* [draw out/select] → *senbatsu* [pick out/select] and *kantsu* [penetrate/pierce] → *nukegake* [act or move ahead (of something or someone)] → *kantetsu* [persist, carry through] “completion” → “culmination.” When *-nuku* is used in modern Japanese, it means a result or sense of completion in conjunction with “completion.” Results revealed that this characteristic of *-nuku* originated from the usage of *nukegake* [act or move ahead (of something or someone)], which expresses *dashinuku* [beat/outmaneuver], i.e., dominating over competitors with respect to an end point or goal.

Chapter 3 examined *-tosu*, and results revealed that it originated from *kantsu* [penetrate/pierce] → *tsuka* [pass over or by] → *ikken keizoku* [consistently continuing]. Results also indicated that many verbs without lexical limitations, such as *fuku* [blow] and *jusu* [read aloud], precede *-tosu*, reflecting the fact that “completion” expressed by *-tosu* continues uninterrupted in time.

Chapter 4 revealed that the usage of *-hatsu* to express “completed action (completion)” originated in the Heian Period. That usage evolved to mean “an ultimate state.” As its use to mean “an ultimate state” increased in the Edo Period, its use to mean “completed action (completion)” declined.

Chapter 5 revealed that *-owaru* [end/conclude] did not change diachronically, but its usage increased rapidly in the modern period. The chapter also describes how the increased use of *-owaru* was due to the declining use of *-hatsu* in the modern period, with *-owaru* replacing *-hatsu*.

Chapter 6 compared the historical findings for these individual compound verbs. Results revealed that compound

verbs with suffixes such as *-tosu* and *-nuku* that have a lexical meaning other than conclusion or termination retain the lexical meaning of the suffix even after acquiring the meaning of “completion,” and they are only used in special circumstances, such as expressing a sense of achievement. Therefore, *-tosu* and *-nuku* are used in limited situations and thus do not compete with other compound verbs, which is presumably why they are still used today.

The suffixes *-hatsu* and *-owaru* impart the meaning of conclusion or termination. These suffixes are used neutrally as compound verbs expressing “completion,” but results revealed that from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period *-hatsu* and *-owaru* competed with one another due to a clash of meanings, with *-owaru* taking the place of *-hatsu*. The switch from *-hatsu* to *-owaru* is due to two reasons. First, the use of *-hatsu* to mean “completion” declined, and it was often used to mean “an ultimate state.” Long used in the classical Chinese writing style, *-owaru* was often used in the mixed literary Japanese and Chinese writing style and the common writing style that succeeded it in the Meiji Period.

By presenting examples of the process by which compound verbs acquire the use to mean “completion,” the current study has identified 2 general trends. First, compound verbs with suffixes such as *-tosu* and *-nuku* that have a meaning other than conclusion or termination retain the lexical meaning of the suffix even after acquiring the usage to mean “completion” usage, and they are only used only in special circumstances. Second, compound verbs with suffixes such as *-hatsu* and *-owaru* that mean conclusion or termination compete with one another, and one of them may be eliminated over the course of history. This study was limited in the number of words that it examined, and other compound verbs such as *-oeru* and *-tsukusu* need to be examined as well. Nonetheless, generalizations about the diachronic changes in compound verbs can presumably be made based on an examination of historical trends.