

Diachronic Changes of Referential Density in Japanese: a Pilot Study

My research addresses the evolution of referential structure in Japanese. In this talk, I will focus on referential density as it is understood in Noonan (2003) and discuss some methodological challenges posed by language-specific data. Specifically, I will compare referential density indices (e.g., RD1 – overt arguments to possible arguments, RD2 – overt arguments to predicates, etc.) in five Old Japanese (8th–10th cc. AD) texts as well as their Modern Japanese translations to see if there is any synchronic and/or diachronic variation. The preliminary results indicate a higher density of explicit arguments to predicates (RD2) in modern Japanese texts. Meanwhile, the ratio of arguments expressed via honorific verb forms, which function similarly to person agreement, decreased significantly. In the talk, I will argue for a causal relation between these two trends.