

Grammatical and Lexical Aspects of *Yasashii-Nihongo* (Easy Japanese)

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1. Introduction

The population of foreigners in Japan is currently increasing, and with the birthrate among locals declining and an aging population on the rise, it is inevitable that an increasing number of foreigners will be accepted into Japanese society. In this context, our research group is conducting studies on “Yasashii-Nihongo”¹ as a language policy that is required in a multilingual and multicultural Japan.²

2. *Yasashii-Nihongo* Initiatives

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995 affected a huge number of people among whom were many foreigners as well. However, most of the foreigners were unable to obtain information in Japanese or English regarding the arrangements for rehabilitation and were therefore excluded from the measures taken for recovery.

For example, the following posting is believed to have been actually used during the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake.

- (1) 容器をご持参の上、中央公園にご参集ください。

Please bring your container and gather at the Central Park.

(1) was an announcement for those who need water and food, but non-Kanji speaking foreigners, whose mother tongue does not contain Kanji, especially those who have beginner-level Japanese language skills, will probably not understand anything other than “中央公園(Chuo Park).” Even people from Kanji-speaking countries may not be able to understand it if the information is conveyed through audio announcement. The difficulty for non-Kanji speakers remains the same even with the following rubric.

- (2) 容器^{ようき}をご持参^{じさん}の上^{うえ}、中央公園^{ちゅうおうこうえん}にご参集^{さんしゅう}ください。

Please bring your own container and gather at the Central Park.

For non-Kanji speakers to understand, it is necessary to rephrase the phrase as follows, in accordance with the concept described below.

- (3) 入れるもの^いを持って^も、中央公園^{ちゅうおうこうえん}に来て^きください。

Please come to the Central Park with something you can enter.

¹ The Japanese word *Yasashii* has two meanings: Easy and Kind, Gentle.

² For an overview of *Yasashii-Nihongo* research, see Iori (2016a, 2016b), and others.

In response to the situation described, linguists and broadcasters have jointly conducted research on the use of a simplified form of Japanese as a means of providing information to foreigners in times of disaster. The Japanese language used for this purpose is called *Yasashii-Nihongo*. When *Yasashii-Nihongo* is used for providing information in times of disaster, it is called “*Yasashii-Nihongo* for disaster mitigation.” This was the first time *Yasashii-Nihongo* was used as a technical term.

As described earlier, relaying information in times of disaster is crucial, but the overwhelming majority of time spent by foreigners in trying to gather information is during normal times. With this in mind, our research group focused on the provision of information to foreigners during normal times. In this sense, the term *Yasashii-Nihongo* is used hereafter to refer to the subject of our research group's study.

3. Scope of *Yasashii-Nihongo* Research

Research on *Yasashii-Nihongo* began with a study on information provision for foreign residents in Japan and is now expanding its scope in several directions. The overall picture is as follows.

Yasashii-Nihongo

1) *Yasashii-Nihongo* for minorities (Easy Japanese)³

Yasashii-Nihongo for creating a place in which they can stay (for adults)

Yasashii-Nihongo as an object of public guarantee for initial Japanese language education

Yasashii-Nihongo as a common language for local communities

Yasashii-Nihongo as a local elementary school

Yasashii-Nihongo as a bypass (for children)

Japanese language education for children of foreign origin

Japanese language education for deaf children

2) *Yasashii-Nihongo* for the majority (Plain Japanese)

Yasashii-Nihongo as a mirror of Japanese expression

Meaning of *Yasashii-Nihongo* for Japanese language expression

Figure 1: Scope of *Yasashii-Nihongo* research

4. Rewriting using *Yasashii-Nihongo*

One of the main areas of *Yasashii Nihongo* research is the rewriting of official documents (See Iwata 2016).

³ *Yasashii-Nihongo* has two aspects: one is language security for minorities, and the other is related to Japanese language expression for the majority. When expressed in English, the former is Easy Japanese, and the latter is Plain Japanese. For the former, see Iori (2016a, 2016b), etc. For the latter, see Iori (2016a, 2021, 2022 forthcoming), etc.

4.1 Grammar Rules for Rewriting

The grammatical rules for rewriting are defined in relation to the most important principle of *Yasashii-Nihongo*, which is to be able to say in Japanese what can be said in one's native language. In relation to the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), it corresponds to Level 3 (N4 in the current test) (end of the elementary level) in the old test.

4.2 Vocabulary Principles for Rewriting

Since the main target of rewriting is non-Japanese native speakers from non-Kanji speaking countries, the rewriting should be done using Japanese origin words as a rule and using as few Chinese origin words as possible. *Yasashii-Nihongo*'s relationship with the JLPT is the same as that of grammar rules.

5. Document to be rewritten: MHLW's new corona vaccination guide

In this presentation, I report the results of a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the changes between the original and rewritten (Easy Japanese) versions of a document that I rewrote at the request of the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW), which provided information about a new vaccine for the coronavirus.

6. Results and Discussion

This section reports the results of the analysis and their interpretation. The original document is the vaccination guide for the new coronavirus vaccine published by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW),⁴ and the second document is the one rewritten by the presenter at the request of the MHLW,⁵

Morphological analysis was conducted using Web *Chamame*,⁶ and only the results of those with the parts of speech “記号,” “補助記号,” “空白,” and “名詞—数詞” were considered while the rest were excluded.

6.1 Number of words and total number of words

First, the number of different words and the total number of words between the original and the rewritten documents (hereafter, rewritten) are as follows.

⁴ https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/vaccine_yoshinhyouetc.html

⁵ <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000771222.pdf>

⁶ <https://chamame.ninjal.ac.jp/>

Table 1: Type and Tokens

	Original	Rewritten
Type Frequency	586	517
Token Frequency	2898	4597
Type-Token Ratio	4.95	8.89

There is no difference in the number of different words, but the total number of words is higher for the rewrites, indicating that rewrites have more diverse expressions.

6.2 By part of speech

Next, the results by part of speech are compared as follows.

Note that here, “*i*-adjectives” and “*na*-adjectives” were merged into “adjectives.”

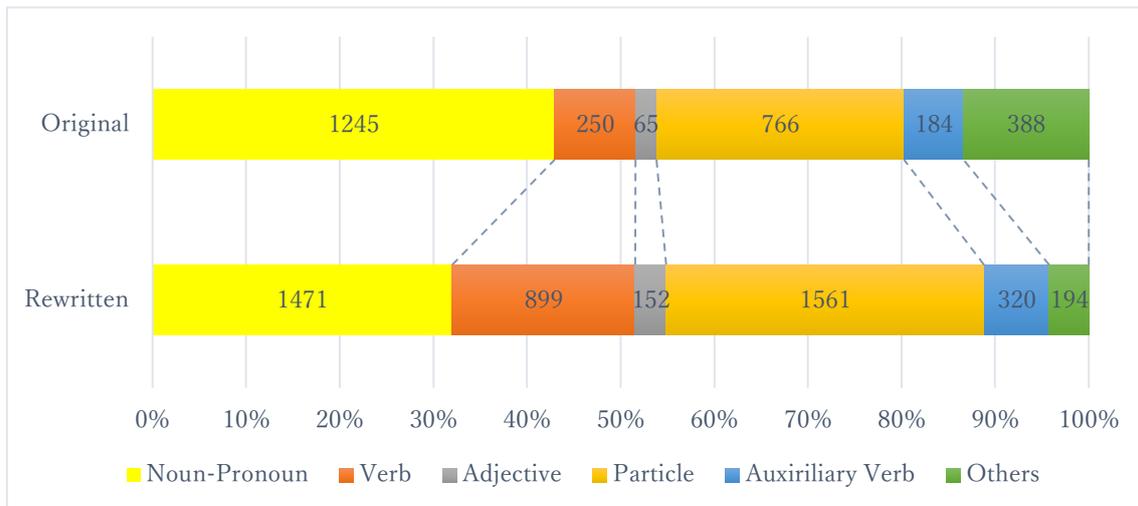


Figure 1 Distribution by part of speech (total number of words)

The results of the 6×2 chi-square test for part-of-speech \times text-type here were $\chi^2(5)=430.206$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V=0.240$, with significantly more original nouns and adjectives, other and rewritten verbs, adjectives, and particles, and significantly fewer original verbs; while adjectives and rewritten nouns and pronouns, and others were significantly less common, particles were not significantly different.⁷

As can be seen from Figure 1, the total ratio of nouns/pronouns and verbs in the original and rewritten texts is almost the same. This means that nouns/pronouns are rewritten as verbs in the original and the rewrite. Specific examples are as follows.

⁷ For the chi-square test, I used https://www.kisnet.or.jp/nappa/software/star/freq/chisq_ixj.htm.

- (4) 『新型コロナワクチンの説明書』を読んで、効果や副反応などについて理解しましたか。
(original)

Persons with underlying diseases such as heart, kidney, liver, blood diseases, or developmental disorders (original)

- (5) あなたは「新型コロナワクチンの説明書」を読んで、ワクチンが効くかどうかや、ワクチンを打ったときにどんな悪い影響が出るかもしれないかなどについて、わかりましたか？ (rewritten)

People with original (underlying) diseases such as heart, kidney, liver, or blood disease or failure of the body to grow sufficiently (rewritten)

6.3 By level of vocabulary

Next, we look at the results of the analysis by vocabulary level. Vocabulary levels were determined based on whether the vocabulary was of Levels 1-4 of the former JLPT⁸ or of other levels (out of Level 1). The correspondence of the levels is as follows.

- (6) Out of grade: Super level or specialized vocabulary

Grade 1 (N1 of the new test): Advanced

Grade 2 (N2, N3): Intermediate

Grade 3 (N4): Beginner-high level

Grade 4 (N5): Beginner-low level

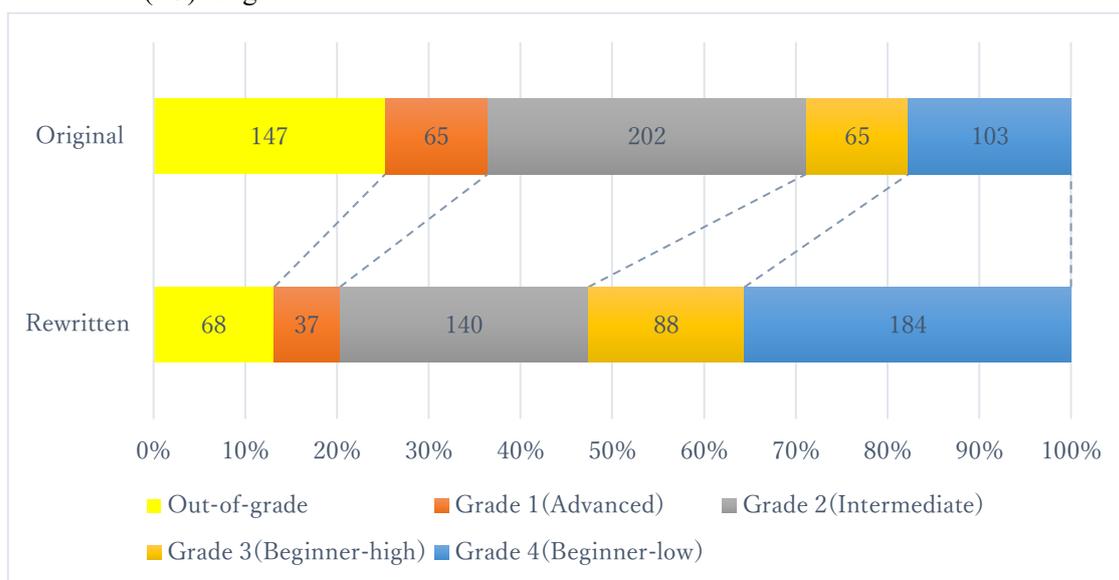


Figure 2: Number of words per level (different words)

⁸ Since the current JLPT (new test) does not publish a vocabulary list for each level, the vocabulary list of the old test is used as the standard. In addition, Reading *Chuta* (<https://chuta.cegloc.tsukuba.ac.jp/>) was used to determine the level.

The result of the chi-square test was $\chi^2(4)=70.675$, $p<.001$, Cramer's $V=0.254$. There were significantly more words in the out-of-grade, Levels 1 and 2 of the original text, and Levels 3 and 4 of the rewriting, and significantly fewer in the out-of-grade, Levels 1 and 2 of the rewriting and Levels 3 and 4 of the original text. In particular, there was a significant decrease in out-of-grade and an increase in grade 4 in the original text to rewrite.

This indicates that the rewrite is in line with the purpose that it had to serve. The out-of-grade words that remain after the rewriting are as follows.

Table 2: Out-of-class words (rewritten)

Rank	Words	Frequency
1	ワクチン(vaccine)	166
2	コロナ(Corona)	38
3	新型(new type)	31
4	ウイルス(virus)	16
5	免疫(immunity)	11
6	接種(vaccination)	9
7	アレルギー(allergy)	6
7	疾患(disease)	6
9	アナフィラキシー(anaphylaxis)	5
9	クーポン(coupon)	5
9	タンパク(protein)	5

Here, many of the out-of-class words that remain after rewriting are technical terms. Note that “disease” is one that is likely to be rewritten but remains descriptive as follows.⁹ Since the explained words are the parts that non-native speakers do not need to read, the number of out-of-grade words would be further reduced if they are excluded from the calculation.

- (7) 心臓、腎臓、肝臓、血液疾患や発育障害などの基礎疾患のある人 (original)

Persons with underlying diseases such as heart, kidney, liver, blood diseases or developmental disorders (original)

- (8) 心臓、腎臓、肝臓、血液の病気や、体が十分に大きくなるしないなどの元々の病気 (基礎疾患) がある人 (rewritten)

People with original (underlying) diseases such as heart, kidney, liver, or blood disease or failure of the body to grow sufficiently (rewritten)

⁹ Although “血液疾患” in (7) can be rewritten as “血液の病気 blood disease,” it was decided that “基礎疾患” should remain as the explained word since it sums all words from “心臓” to “発育障害などの.”

6.4 By word type

Finally, we discuss the results of the analysis by word type.

Japanese words can be divided by type as follows¹⁰. Here, in principle, Japanese origin words are more often basic words than Chinese words.

(9) Japanese origin words: Words that have existed since ancient times and are unique to the Japanese language

Chinese origin words: words imported from China

Foreign origin words: words imported from other languages than Chinese

Mixed word: a word that is a combination of the above three.

The results of the analysis are as follows.

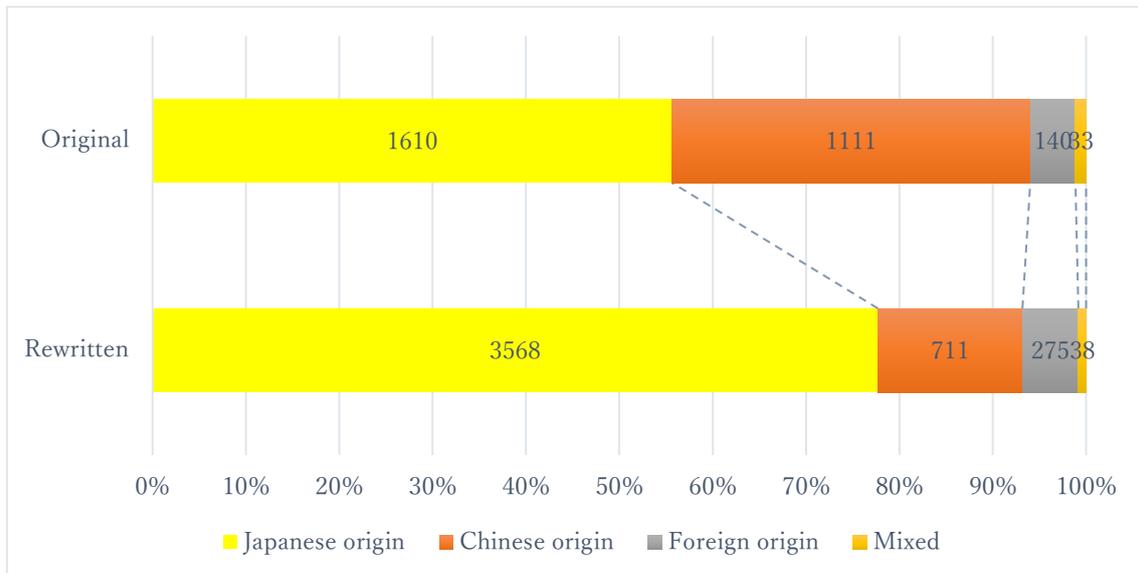


Figure 3: Word type and text type

The result of the chi-square test was $\chi^2(3)=513.765$, $p<.001$, Cramer's $V=0.262$. There were significantly more Chinese origin words and rewritten Japanese words and foreign words and significantly fewer original Japanese words, foreign words, and rewritten Chinese words. This indicates that there were many cases wherein the original Chinese words were rewritten with Japanese words.

(10) 少しお待ちいただく可能／性はありますが、接種を希望されるすべての方が接種できるように、ワクチンは順次／供給されます。安心してお待ちください。(original)

¹⁰ (6) is a basic principle, and some of the Chinese origin words were created in Japan.

It is possible/probable that you may have to wait a little, but the vaccine will be provided/supplied sequentially so that all those who wish to be vaccinated can be vaccinated. Please wait with peace of mind. (original)

- (11) あなたがワクチンを打ってもらえるまでには少し時間がかかるかもしれませんが、ワクチンを打ってほしいと思う人がみんなワクチンを打ってもらえるように、ワクチンを配りますので、少し待ってください。(rewritten)

It may/will take some time before you are able to receive the vaccine, but please be assured that the vaccine will be distributed so that everyone who wants to be vaccinated can be vaccinated. (rewritten)

In (10), there are eight Chinese words, whereas in (11), there is only one (/ indicates a break in morphology). Note that in Japanese, “I, you” (1st and 2nd person pronouns) usually do not appear on the surface, but since this is difficult for learners to understand, “I, you” is explicitly indicated in the rewriting.

7. Summary

In this presentation, after a brief introduction of *Yasashii-Nihongo*, I contrasted the rewriting about the vaccination guide for new coronavirus vaccine with the original to clarify the syntactic and lexical characteristics of *Yasashii-Nihongo* (Easy Japanese).

I hope that the contents of this presentation will lead to an understanding of the syntactic and lexical features of *Yasashii-Nihongo* as easy Japanese. Due to time constraints, I could not fully examine individual examples of rewriting in this presentation. This is an issue to be addressed in the future.

References

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