The Argument and Semantic Structures of Japanese Verb *Give*

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Abstract—This study examines four Japanese synonymous verbs that have the same equivalent in English, namely *GIVE*. These four Japanese synonymous verbs are *ageru, kureru, kizou suru,* and *kifu suru*. This study used a qualitative descriptive method. Example sentences for the data were taken from Balance Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese corpus data. The theories applied in this study are argument structure theory and Natural Semantic Metalanguage theory. Based on the analysis, there were selectional restrictions found in the argument structure of these synonymous verbs that can be used to distinguish one verb from another. In addition, these synonymous verbs, although there are some overlapping meaning components, have distinctive meaning components belonging to each verb. Therefore, it can be said that these synonymous verbs cannot fully replace each other in all contexts.

Index Terms—natural semantic metalanguage, explication, semantic roles, synonymy

I. INTRODUCTION

According to a press release from the Japan Foundation (2019), in 2018, Indonesia has the second largest number of Japanese learners in the world. This survey is conducted every three years. Typologically, these two languages belong to distinct groups. Indonesian is in the same group with English that has the SVO sentence structure, while Japanese has the SOV sentence structure (Horie, 2018). Not only the sentence structure but also the phrase structure is different in Indonesian and Japanese. In Indonesian, for example, the phrase *red car* is expressed by *mobil merah* (*mobil* 'car' and *merah* 'red') while in Japanese, it is expressed by *akai kuruma* (*akai* 'red' and *kuruma* 'car'). Besides these syntactical differences, Indonesian learners of Japanese also have difficulty in differentiating the right usage of synonymous verbs.

Previous studies on synonymous Japanese verbs have been conducted by several researchers such as Gumbira (2013), Zarifa, Herniwati, and Sutjiati (2017), Shiba and Cho (2017). These three studies on Japanese synonymous verbs used linguistic corpus as a tool for the analysis. By using linguistic corpus, the token frequency can be found, and the collocation of these verbs can be understood. However, it is difficult to grasp the meaning components without doing both the argument structure and semantic structure analysis. Semantic structure analysis can be done by applying the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory. Some studies on synonymous Japanese words that use NSM theory can be seen in Otomo and Torii (2005) as well as in Hasada (2008). Otomo and Torii (2005) analyzed Japanese verbs that have the meaning of *TEAR*. Three Japanese verbs, namely *saku, chigiru,* and *yaburu* were analyzed using Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory. The results showed that these three verbs can be differentiated by their objects, the way to do the activity, and the end result expected from the activity. Another study conducted on Japanese words using NSM is the study on two virtuous emotions in Japanese, namely *nasake* 'compassion' and *jihi* 'mercy' by Hasada (2008). She found that *nasake* and *jihi* have very complex meaning components and distinguishing features which are clearly expressed after paraphrasing using the MSA theory. The word *nasake* has seven components of meaning, while *jihi* has 18 components of meaning.

In this study, four Japanese synonymous verbs *GIVE* are discussed. These four verbs are *ageru, kureru, kizou suru,* and *kifu suru*. By looking at their argument and semantic structures, the proper usage of these four synonymous verbs based on their meaning components can be obtained. Therefore, Japanese learners can benefit the most from this study.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study applied the argument structure theory proposed by Suzuki (2015) and the semantic structure based on the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory proposed by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014).

A. Argument Structure

Argument structure is a representation of the number and type of role arguments associated with a particular predicate (Suzuki, 2015). Kroeger (2004) stated that even when an argument is grammatically optional, it may be semantically obligatory. Arguments are nouns born due to the semantic nature of a verb. In other words, the number and role type of noun of a verb is inherent. Based on the arguments that obligatorily accompany a verb, Japanese verbs can be classified into three categories, that is, monovalent verbs, divalent verbs, and trivalent verbs. The four Japanese synonymous verbs *GIVE* being discussed in this study belong to the trivalent verb category. There are three nouns that accompany these trivalent verbs. The roles of those nouns are agent (*dousashu* 動作主), beneficiary (*juekisha* 受益者), and theme (*shudai* 主題). In Japanese, there are case particles that follow nouns to determine the functions of those nouns in the sentence. The basic sentence structure for verb *GIVE* in Japanese can be seen as follows (Suzuki, 2015).

noun ① *ga* + noun ② *ni* + noun ③ *o* + verb

The first argument noun (noun ①) followed by case particle *ga* is the subject of the sentence. The second argument noun (noun ②) followed by case particle *ni* is the indirect object of the sentence. The third argument noun (noun ③) followed by case particle *o* is the direct object of the sentence. In Japanese, the case particles, besides showing the grammatical relations, also show the semantic roles of the nouns. The *ga* particle shows the nominative case or the subject playing a role as the **agent**. The *ni* particle shows the dative case or the indirect object playing a role as the **beneficiary**. The *o* particle shows the accusative case or the direct object playing a role as the **theme**.

B. Semantic Structure

Semantic structure is the configuration of the meaning of the word. Semantic structure can be understood due to the grammatical relationship between the verb and the argument owned by the verb (Beratha, 2000). The NSM theory used in this study is a mini-language that is formed by the lexicon and syntax of a natural language. The exponents used in the explication in this mini-language are called semantic primes. Up to now, there are 65 semantic primes that can be used to describe the meaning (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2014). A list of these 65 exponents is provided in table 1.

TABLE 1
THE LIST OF 65 EXPONENTS OF SEMANTIC PRIMES

I-ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING-THING, PEOPLE, BODY	substantives
KIND, PARTS	relational substantive
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER-ELSE	determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH-MANY, LITTLE-FEW	quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	evaluators
BIG, SMALL	descriptors
KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	actions, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE)'S, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)	location, existence, possession, specification
LIVE, DIE	life and death
WHEN-TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	time
WHERE-PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	logical concepts
VERY, MORE	intensifier, augmentor
LIKE-WAY-AS	similarity

III. METHODOLOGY

The collected data in this study were taken from Balance Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ). This corpus can be accessed at https://chunagon.ninjal.ac.jp. In the BCCWJ corpus, the verb which is being studied is entered in the KWIC (Key Word in Context) search box. KWIC is a format for displaying concordance lines with the words that are the focus of the search lined up in the middle column, while the right and left columns contain words that indicate the context before and after the observed word (Yuliawati, 2018). By entering the verb in the KWIC, the usage of the verb can be described, and the semantic components of each verb can be determined. The example sentences found as data are glossed per morpheme and followed by free translation.

IV. DISCUSSION

There are at least four verbs that have the equivalent for *GIVE* in Japanese, namely *ageru, kureru, kizou suru,* and *kifu suru.* Although these four verbs are synonymous, they can be differentiated by their argument structures and

semantic structures. The explication given for each Japanese verb *GIVE* above is based on their meaning components. The fact that these four verbs are synonymous can be seen from their overlapping meaning components. However, there are also distinctive features that differentiate these four synonymous verbs. Therefore, they cannot completely replace each other in every context. Table 2 below shows the meaning components of these four synonymous verbs.

TABLE 2
THE MEANING COMPONENTS' COMPARISON AMONG JAPANESE VERBS *GIVE*

No	Meaning Components	*ageru*	*kureru*	*Kifu suru*	*Kizou suru*
1	From people of high to low social positions	(+)	(−)	(+)	(+)
2	Equal social position / equal	(+)	(+)	(−)	(−)
3	Speech level	(−)	(−)	(−)	(−)
4	Formality	(−)	(−)	(+)	(+)
5	There must be a specific purpose	(−)	(−)	(+)	(+)
6	Gift in the form of money	(+)	(+)	(+)	(−)
7	Gift in the form of goods	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)
8	Transfer of ownership	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)

A. The Verb Ageru

Ageru is a trivalent verb that has the basic sentence structure noun ① *ga* + noun ② *ni* + noun ③ *o* + verb. However, based on the data analysis, there is another sentence structure that can be found using the verb *ageru*. That sentence structure is noun ① *kara* + noun ② *ni* + noun ③ *o* + verb. The particle accompanying the noun ① is *kara.* By using a different particle, the semantic role of noun ① is changed. Table 2 below shows the semantic roles and types of each noun that function as argument in the verb *ageru*.

TABLE 3
THE SEMANTIC ROLES AND TYPES OF NOUNS AS THE VERB *AGERU*'S ARGUMENTS

Semantic Roles of the Arguments	Particle	Type of Noun
Noun ① agent	*ga* が	animate
source	*kara* から	animate
Noun ② beneficiary	*ni* に	animate, inanimate
Noun ③ theme	*o* を	concrete, abstract

As can be seen in table 3 above, the verb *ageru* follows the basic sentence pattern of trivalent verbs. The noun which has the case marker particle **ga** acts as an **agent.** In addition to the semantic role of an **agent**, noun ① can also have a source semantic role with the particle marking of **kara**. Noun ① can only be in the form of a living being (animate), for example, *occhan* 'uncle' and *oya* 'parent'. The noun ② which has the case particle marking **ni** acts as a **beneficiary** and can be in the form of living things (animate) or non-living objects (inanimate), for example, *karera* "they" and *Amerika* "America". Noun ③ that has the case marking particles **o** acts as **theme** and can be in the form of concrete or abstract objects, for example, *purezento* 'gift', *esa* 'pet food', *choko* 'chocolate', *hyouka* 'assessment', and *hitotsu no fukai inshou* 'a deep impression'.

The following are examples of sentences that can be found in the data.

(1)   親   から 子供   に   お金   を   あげる   の   に、...。
      Oya   **kara** kodomo **ni** okane   **o**   ageru   **no**   **ni**, ...
      parents **abl** children **dat** money **acc** give   **nomi** **purp** ....
      'To give money from parents to children, ...'

Example sentence (1) above shows the semantic role of the **ablative** which is marked by the particle *kara* in the form of an animate noun, namely *oya* 'parent'. The semantic role of **beneficiary,** which is indicated by the particle case **ni** is an animate noun, namely *kodomo* 'children'. Meanwhile, the semantic role of **theme,** which is indicated by the particle **o**, is a concrete noun, namely *okane* 'money'.

(2)   クッキー は   あげない。 でも、 ありがとう を   あげる よ。
      Kukkii   wa   agenai.   Demo, arigatou   o   ageru   yo.
      cookie   **top** give-neg. but   thank you   **acc** give   **pcl**
      '(I will) not give (you) cookies. But, give thank you.'

Example sentence (2) shows the semantic roles of **agent** and **beneficiary** that undergo a deletion process. Meanwhile, the semantic role of **theme** is marked with particle **o** together with an abstract noun, namely *arigatou* 'thank you'.

The verb *ageru* is the basic verb to express the meaning of *GIVE*. Therefore, it contains only five semantic components (a-e) as follows. In Japanese, the role of **agent** of *ageru* can be first person, second person, or third person. The role of **beneficiary** of *ageru* can be second person or third person (Tanaka et.al, 2018). Based on the usage found for the verb *ageru,* the semantic structure of *ageru* can be made as follows.

X-ga Y-ni Z-o ageru ('X gives Z to Y')

a) someone X does something to someone else Y
b) before this, something Z was X's
c) X wants other people Y to be able to say about Z, "this is mine."
d) something Z moves from X to Y
e) X wants this to happen.

B. Kureru

The verb *Kureru* is a trivalent verb that has the basic sentence structure noun ① ***ga*** + noun ② ***ni*** + noun ③ ***o*** + verb. Based on the data analysis, there is no other sentence structure that can be found using the verb *kureru*. Table 3 below shows the semantic roles and types of each noun that functions as argument in the verb *kureru*.

TABLE 4
THE SEMANTIC ROLES AND TYPES OF NOUNS AS THE VERB *KURERU*'S ARGUMENTS

Semantic Roles of the Arguments	Particle	Type of Noun
Noun ① agent	*ga* が	animate, inanimate
Noun ② beneficiary	*ni* に	animate
Noun ③ theme	*o* を	concrete, abstract

As can be seen in table 4 above, the verb *kureru* follows the basic sentence pattern of trivalent verbs. Noun ① which has the ***ga*** case marking particle, acts as **agent** and can be noun/s in the form of living things (animate) or non-living objects (inanimate), for example, *takusan no kata* 'many people' and *konbini* 'mini market'. The noun ② which has a particle marking ***ni***, acts as a **beneficiary** and can only be a noun in the form of a living being (animate). Observations on the corpus indicate the occurrence of this noun ② is deleted. This is understandable because the verb *kureru* 'to give' has selectional restrictions on its beneficiary argument, that is, it can only be in the first person. Nouns that have ***o*** case marking particle act as **theme** and can be nouns in the form of concrete or abstract objects, for example, *biniiru-bukuro* 'plastic bag', *sensu* 'fan', *okozukai* 'pocket money', *yuuki* 'courage', and *chikara* 'energy'.

The following are examples of sentences that can be found in the data.

(3) コンビニ　は　袋　を　くれる　し、...。
Konbini　**wa**　fukuro　**o**　kureru　shi, ...
Mini market　**top**　bag　**acc**　give　**cont** ....
'Mini market give (me) bag, ...'

Example sentence (3) shows that the semantic role of **agent** in the form of an inanimate noun is also a noun that functions as the **topic** of the sentence, namely mini market. In Japanese, when the topic of the sentence and the subject have the same noun, then the subject is deleted (Suzuki, 2015). The noun that has the semantic role of **beneficiary** also undergoes a deletion process in this example sentence. Meanwhile, the semantic role of **theme** which is indicated by the particle case ***o,*** is a concrete noun, namely bag.

(4) ...たくさん の　力　と　元気　と　笑顔　を　くれる・・・　ありがとう。
...takusan　no　chikara　to　genki　to　egao　**o**　kureru…　arigatou.
...many　**gen**　strength　and　energy　and　smile　**acc**　give (to me)　thank you
'...... thank you for the giving of strength, energy, and your smile (to me).'

Example sentence (4) shows that the nouns with semantic roles of **agent** and **beneficiary** undergo the deletion process. Meanwhile, the semantic role of **theme** noun which is indicated by the particle ***o,*** is an abstract noun, namely strength, energy, and smile.

The verb *kureru* is similar to the verb *ageru*. It also contains only five semantic components (a-e) as follows. However, the difference is in the noun that can fill the role of **beneficiary** of *kureru*. It can be first person while the role of **agent** can be second person or third person (Tanaka et al., 2018). Based on the usage found for the verb *kureru,* the semantic structure of *kureru* can be made as follows.

X-ga Y-ni Z-o kureru ('X gives Z to Y')
a) someone X doing something to someone else Y (me)
b) before this, something Z was X's
c) X wants other people Y (I) to be able to say about Z, "this is mine"
d) something Z moves from X to Y
e) X wants this to happen.

C. Kizou Suru

The verb *kizou suru* is a trivalent verb that has the basic sentence structure noun ① ***ga*** + noun ② ***ni*** + noun ③ ***o*** + verb. However, based on the data analysis, there are two other sentence structures that can be found using *kizou suru*. That sentence structure is noun ① ***kara*** + noun ② ***ni*** + noun ③ ***o*** + verb and noun ① ***kara*** + noun ② ***e*** + noun ③ ***o*** + verb. The particle accompanying the noun ① is ***kara***. By using a different particle, the semantic role of noun ① is changed. In the second new sentence structure, the particle accompanying the noun ② is ***e.*** In this new sentence

structure, the semantic role of noun ② is also changed. Table 4 below shows the semantic roles and types of each noun that functions as argument in *kureru*.

TABLE 5
THE SEMANTIC ROLES AND TYPES OF NOUNS AS THE VERB *KIZOU SURU*'S ARGUMENTS

Semantic Roles of the Arguments	Particle	Type of Noun
Noun ① agent	*ga* が	animate, inanimate
source	*kara* から	animate
Noun ② beneficiary	*ni* に	animate, inanimate
goal	*e* へ	inanimate
Noun ③ theme	*o* を	concrete

As can be seen in table 5 above, the verb *kizou suru* follows the basic sentence pattern of trivalent verbs. The noun ① which has the case marker particle **ga**, acts as an **agent** and can be nouns in the form of living things (animate) or non-living objects (inanimate). Apart from that, the particle marking for noun ① can also be **kara** with an animate noun filler, which acts as the source. Nouns that have particles marking this case, act as beneficiary and can be nouns in the form of living things (animate) or non-living objects (inanimate). In addition, the particle marking for the noun ② can also be the particle *e* with the inanimate noun filler which acts as a goal. Nouns that have case marking particles **o**, act as **themes** and can only be concrete nouns such as *kichou na shiryou* 'precious material', *sharin hitokumi* 'a pair of wheels', and *tochi* 'earth'.

The following are examples of sentences that can be found in the data.

(5)　本庄小学校　　　　　へ　　図書（五十万円分）　　　を　　寄贈。
　　　Honjō shōgakkō　　　**e**　*tosho (go juu man-en bun)*　**o**　*kizō*
　　　Honjo elementary school　**all**　books (worth 500,000 yen)　**acc**　give
　　　'Giving books (¥ 500.000) to Honjo elementary school.'

Example sentence (5) shows that the noun with a semantic role of **agent** has been deleted. The noun which has the role of semantic role of **goal** marked by particle **e** is an inanimate noun, namely Honjo Elementary School. Meanwhile, the noun with semantic role of **theme** marked with particle **o** is a concrete noun, namely a book.

(6)　茅野市　　　の　　方　　　から　車輪１組　　　　を　　寄贈していただきました。
　　　Chinoshi　**no**　*kata*　**kara**　*sharin hitokumi*　**o**　*kizō shite itadakimashita*
　　　Chino city　**gen**　person　**abl**　a pair of wheels　**acc**　give receive-pst
　　　'One person from the city of Chino donated a pair of wheels.'

The example sentence (6) shows that the noun ① is an animate noun, that is, the word 'person' is marked by the particle **kara** and acts as the **source**. The noun ② is deleted. Meanwhile, the noun with semantic role of **theme** marked with particle case **o** is a concrete noun, namely *sharin hitokumi* 'a pair of wheels'.

The verb *kizou suru* has three additional meaning components (f-h) compared to *ageru* and *kureru* verbs. The role of **theme** can only be a physical object (excluding money). The **agent** role is a person that has higher social status than the **beneficiary** role (meaning component g). Therefore, the verb *kizou suru* is chosen (meaning component h). Based on the usage found for the verb *kizou suru,* the semantic structure of *kizou suru* can be made as follows.

X-ga Y-ni Z-o kizou suru ('X gives Z to Y')
a) someone X does something to someone else Y
b) before this, something Z [physical thing excluding money] was X's
c) X wants other people Y to be able to say about Z, "this is mine"
d) something Z moves from X to Y
e) X wants this to happen.
f) this happens because someone X is thinking about something
g) X is not someone like Y, Y cannot think of anything bad about X
h) X says this way not any other way

D. Kifu Suru

The verb *kifu suru* is a trivalent verb that has the basic sentence structure noun ① **ga** + noun ② **ni** + noun ③ **o** + verb. Based on the data analysis, there is no other sentence structure that can be found using the verb *kifu suru*. Table 5 below shows the semantic roles and types of each noun that functions as argument in the verb *kifu suru*.

TABLE 6
THE SEMANTIC ROLES AND TYPES OF NOUNS AS THE VERB *KIFU SURU*'S ARGUMENTS

Semantic Roles of the Arguments	Particle	Type of Noun
Noun ① agent	*ga* が	animate
Noun ② beneficiary	*ni* に	animate
Noun ③ theme	*o* を	concrete

As can be seen in table 6 above, the verb *kifu suru* follows the basic sentence pattern of trivalent verbs. The noun ① which has the case marker particle **ga**, acts as an **agent** and is a noun in the form of a living being (animate). The noun ② which has a particle marking **ni**, acts as a **beneficiary** and is also a noun in the form of a living being (animate). The noun ③ which has the case marking particle **o**, acts as a **theme** and can only be nouns in the form of concrete objects, for example, *okane* 'money', *anko* 'bean paste', *ango fuku* 'clothes (coat) Ango', and *gojuu man doru* '500 thousand dollars '.

The following are examples of sentences that can be found in the data.

(8) 初午の日（二月）　　　　に　　は　　お稲荷さん に　　餡こ　　　を　　寄附して。
    *Hatsuuma no hi (2gatsu)　ni　**wa**　oinarisan　**ni**　anko　　**o**　kifu shite*
    "first horse day" (February)　pada　**top**　Inari god　**dat**　bean paste　**acc**　give-cont
    'On "first horse day" (February), giving bean paste to god Inari (god of harvest)'

Example sentence (8) shows that the noun with semantic role of **agent** was deleted. The semantic role of **beneficiary** which is indicated by particle **ni** is an animate noun, namely *oinarisan* 'Inari God'. Meanwhile, the noun with the semantic role of **theme** marked with particle **o** is a concrete noun, namely *anko* 'bean paste'.

(9) 僕　**が**　一つ　安吾服　**を**　寄附する　よ 。
    *Boku　**ga**　hitotsu　Ango fuku　**o**　kifu suru　yo.*
    I　**nom**　one　Ango coat　**acc**　give　pcl
    'I will give you one Ango coat.'

Example sentence (9) shows the noun with the semantic role of **agent** is indicated by the particle **ga** together with a singular first-person pronoun, namely *boku* 'I'. The noun with the semantic role of **beneficiary** has undergone a deletion process. Meanwhile, the noun with the semantic role of **theme** marked by particle case **o** is a concrete noun, namely *Ango* coat.

The verb *kifu suru* has similar meaning component with *kizou* suru. However, the difference is in the thing that has the role of **theme**. While the role of **theme** in *kizou suru* verb cannot be a physical thing such as money, the *kifu suru* can take any kind of physical things including money as its **theme**. Based on the usage found for the verb *kifu suru,* the semantic structure of *kifu suru* can be made as follows.

X-ga Y-ni Z-o kifu suru ('X gives Z to Y')
a) someone X does something to someone else Y
b) before this, something Z [physical thing including money] was X's
c) X wants other people Y to be able to say about Z, "this is mine"
d) something Z moves from X to Y
e) X wants this to happen.
f) this happens because someone X is thinking about something
g) X is not someone like Y, Y cannot think of anything bad about X
h) X says this way not any other way

V. CONCLUSION

By applying argument structure theory and NSM theory in the analysis of four Japanese synonymous verbs in this study, distinctive meaning components of these four Japanese verbs can be alerted. Although there are some overlapping meaning components, the existence of these distinctive meaning components causes these synonymous verbs not to be able to fully replace each other in all contexts. Therefore, Japanese learners should carefully decide their word of choice to express their intended meaning.

APPENDIX. ABBREVIATION

abl   ablative (source)
acc   accusative case
cont   continuative
dat   dative case
neg   negative
nom   nominative case
nomi   nominalizer

pcl   particle
pst   past
purp   purposive
top   topic

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