

Honoring Noriko Akatsuka and her scholarly contributions
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Noriko McCawley Akatsuka was a fine linguist, Japanese language educator, an original thinker, and a wonderful person. She was also one of the original organizers of the Japanese/Korean Linguistics Conference. As a tribute to her, I will present a trajectory of her body of work from early syntactic analyses of reflexivization (1972; 1976) and passives (1972) in Japanese to more cognitive-discourse oriented analyses of conditionals. Underlying all her work there is a quest for an answer to a basic question, ‘What makes language human?’ A basic tenet throughout her work is the centrality of the speaker (speaker subjectivity), be it speaker attitudes, perspectives, or consciousness as defined in Benveniste (1971). This can already be seen in her early work on English. In “What is the ‘emphatic root transformation’ phenomenon?” (1977), for example, Akatsuka examines inverted constructions such as ‘Playing tonight is Rubinstein’ and proposes that “the theoretical notion of ‘Expressions of EGO’ is indispensable in understanding the distributional properties of” this syntactic phenomenon.

Her most notable works relate to the domain of conditionals and epistemic modality. In her seminal paper in *Language*, entitled “Conditionals and the Epistemic Scale,” Akatsuka proposes that “the conceptual domains REALIS and IRREALIS form an epistemic scale representing a speaker’s subjective evaluation of the reality of a given situation.” Specifically, she shows that newly-learned information is not yet established as a fact in the speaker’s mind, and that is why such information can be expressed by a conditional form such as Japanese *nara*.

Another ground-breaking contribution of Akatsuka is the theory of desirability in conditional reasoning. She argues that natural language conditionals cannot be explained by a mathematical truth value approach; that speakers use conditionals to express their desirability stance—i.e., “desirable leads to desirable” and “undesirable leads to undesirable”. This insight forms the basis for a very interesting series of studies on the function of counterfactual conditionals in discourse, and also cross-linguistic studies (including Korean) of conditionals in caregivers’ as well as children’s speech.

As we honor her life and scholarly contributions, it is my hope that each of us will reflect upon the legacy of Noriko Akatsuka’s work.

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