



Analyzing the Transition of *Teiuka* in Japanese Daily Conversation

A corpus-based research

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ABSTRACT

Teiuka, the word that is frequently brought up as one of Japanese wonders, is a word that has various roles in Japanese spoken language. *Teiuka* was mainly used to rephrase things in the middle of utterances. However, nowadays *teiuka* could also be used at the beginning and at the end of an utterance. The functional use and the use of other forms of *teiuka* (such as *teka*, *tsuuka*) have also changed over time. Therefore, this study examines the usage of *teiuka* and the other form, *teka*, in actual conversations and how they shifted in 17 years. This study is corpus-based research on the use of *teiuka* in Japanese conversation by using diachronic perspective. Two corpora with about 17 years difference, “Nagoya University Conversation Corpus” (2001-2003) and “Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation” (2018-2020), were used to collect the conversation data. Using Hayashi’s (2007) five main functions of *teiuka*, the results showed that *teiuka* and *teka* were classified into five main functions of *teiuka* (1) rephrasing word, (2) rephrasing sentence, (3) omitting first or second clause, (4) topic shift, and (5) preface. Although there has been no significant change on the use of *teiuka* based on its functions in 17-20 years, the tendency on how to use the other forms of *teiuka* has changed.

Keywords: *Corpus linguistics, Diachronic, Language shift, Teiuka.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teiuka is a slang word or *wakamono kotoba* that has been used since 1990. According to Yonekawa (1994), the average *wakamono kotoba* will only last for 1-2 years. Judging from that perspective, *teiuka* lasts a lot longer than the average slang words. Now *teiuka* has become a part of the Japanese language in general, that it is not only used by young people, but used by all ages. Li (2001) also states that the word *teiuka* is used by Japanese people in general, regardless of age and gender of the speaker. Now *teiuka* has many functions and has different meanings based on how it is used.

According to prior research (Li, 2001; Hayashi, 2007; Tsuji, 1999), *teiuka* was basically used in the middle of a sentence to rephrase things that have been said to a more accurate way of saying things. For example, when someone states “*A teiuka B da*” means “A, or perhaps I should say B”. Suzuki (2007) also states that *teiuka* in conversations is used to rephrase or to correct things that have been said by the speaker themselves or by the other party.

However, over time, the meaning of *teiuka* has expanded to have more meanings and functions. Now *teiuka* can be found either at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. Using *teiuka* at the beginning or at the end of a sentence is actually not grammatically correct, but it can be seen a lot in daily conversations of Japanese native speakers. Even so, as Du Bois (in Suzuki, 2007) suggested, the best grammar is how the native speakers use it. In other words, the use of *teiuka* both at the beginning and at the end of a sentence is no longer considered as wrong grammar.

Moreover, *teiuka* is used widely among the native speakers, even by people who are involved in Japanese language education. For that reason, it is really important for Japanese learners to know how the word *teiuka* is actually used in order to avoid misunderstanding when communicating with native speakers.

Hayashi (2007) has analyzed the use of *teiuka* in Japanese spoken language using blogs as the data, considering the distinctive feature of blogs is that they are written in spoken language rather than the basic written

language. According to Hayashi (2007), *teiuka* could be classified into 5 groups based on its main functions, namely rephrasing word, rephrasing sentence, omitting the first or second clause, topic shift and preface. The result shows that *teiuka* is commonly used for rephrasing words or sentences (70%), while the other usages such as topic shift, omitting clauses and preface are not popular (30%).

However, blogs cannot be fully considered as spoken language in general. According to the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan (2018), text exchanges such as E-mails, SNS, blogs are considered as written language in terms of being expressed in letters, but many of them are similar to spoken language. This new form of communication is called “*uchi kotoba* (typed language)”.

Tanaka (2014) also states that these kinds of words that are neither “written language” nor “spoken language” are collectively referred to as “*uchi kotoba* (typed language)”. It is said that this way of communication is a new written language which contains many spoken language elements. In other words, “typed language” is not completely the same as spoken language. Therefore, the use of *teiuka* in actual conversations might be different from *teiuka* in blogs.

In previous studies about typed language in Japanese (Kanou, 2017; Kim, 2019), the use of punctuation marks, *emoji*, stickers, etc. were often mentioned. However, in this research, we would like to analyze the difference between spoken language and typed language from a linguistic perspective by the usage of *teiuka*. Moreover, blogs are a one-way communication, therefore the tendency of using *teiuka* might be different in actual conversations.

This paper also discusses the comparison of the use of *teiuka* in 2001-2003 to 2018-2020. Considering the average lifespan of slang words are only 1 to 2 years (Yonekawa, 1994), 17-20 years is a rather long period of time, hence there might be any shift in its meanings or functions.

2. METHOD

This paper is corpus-based research using two corpora to collect the data of conversations containing *teiuka*, and the other form, *teka*, as well as pronunciation with geminate consonants (small *tsu*), *teiuka* and *teka*. Even so, *teiuka* as filler such as ‘*nan teiuka...*’ were not included in this study.

In this paper, we would only collect the data of *teiuka* and *teka* used by speakers in their 10s to 20s. The corpora used in this study are as follows:

- 1) Nagoya University Conversation Corpus / NUC (2001-2003)
<http://chunangon.ninjal.ac.jp/nuc/search>

- 2) Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation / CEJC (2018-2020)
<http://chunangon.ninjal.ac.jp/cejc/search>

The data that have been collected from both corpora reach 285 conversations in total. Various meanings and functions found in the data were described and classified into five main functions of *teiuka* proposed by Hayashi (2007), as follows; the data from both corpora then compared to reveal the shift of the usage of *teiuka* from 2001-2003 to 2018-2020.

- 1) Rephrasing word
- 2) Rephrasing sentence
- 3) Omitting the first or second clause
- 4) Topic shift
- 5) Preface.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the corpora mentioned above, it was discovered 262 data of *teiuka* in 2001-2003 and 62 data of *teiuka*, 100 data of *teka* and 23 data of *tsuuka* in 2018-2020, used by native speakers in their 10s to 20s. Note that the NUC has a larger database than the Monitoring ver. of CEJC. In this case, 100 data were randomly chosen out of 262 data to be analyzed for the 2001-2003. As for 2018-2020, the overall data that has been discovered were included to be analyzed.

3.1. Classification of *Teiuka* in Conversations Based on Function

In the preceding discussion, it was mentioned that the data were classified into five main functions of *teiuka* by Hayashi (2007), which are rephrasing word, rephrasing sentence, omitting the first or second clause, topic shift and preface. In this section, some of the data in each category are presented and discussed.

3.1.1. Rephrasing Word

- (1) A: “*Shokuhin tenkabutsu toka ni sugoi kibishii ndakedo, shoumikigen ni wa hontou ni mou, nanka, mukanshin tteiuka, mutonchaku nanone.*”
“He really cares about additives in food, but when it comes to expiration dates, he’s completely indifferent, or rather careless.”

From the data (1), speaker A rephrased the word ‘*mukanshin*’ to a word that she considered fit the context better, ‘*mutonchaku*’. In this classification, the speaker may rephrase a word to another words or sentences, or the speaker may also use the ‘*A teiuka B teiuka*’ pattern. The ‘*A teiuka B teiuka*’ pattern may be used to show that the speaker rephrased the word but was not sure if the rephrased word is the right word to describe what they want to convey. Hence adding the second *teiuka* to avoid assertion (Endou, 2018).

3.1.2. Rephrasing Sentence

- (2) A: “*Hada ga yoku areru tteiuuka, kansouhada.*”
“My skin is often getting dehydrated, or you could say it’s dry skin.”

In data (2), speaker A explains about her skin problems in a sentence, then rephrases it into a concrete term for it. From the overall data, this kind of pattern is used relatively few. Because when explaining something, sometimes the speaker just cannot come up with the right word, so they omit it instead and end the sentence with *teiuuka*.

3.1.3. Omitting First or Second Clause

Omitting clauses is the classification that shows the most significant difference between the use of *teiuuka* in blogs and in conversations. Since blogs are a one-way communication, omission of some parts of the sentence will be avoided so that the readers can understand what the author is trying to convey. Whereas in conversation, there will be a tacit understanding between the speakers, thus both speakers will understand the context of the conversation even if some part of it is omitted. The following is an explanation of the two types of omitting clauses.

3.1.3.1. Omitting the First Clause

- (3) A: “*Ite mo, mitsukete, jibun ga mite mo kowakunai?*”
“Even if (a ghost) exists, and you found it, you won’t be afraid even if you see it yourself?”
B: “*Tteiuuka, anata wa ikiteru toki nani shiteta ndesuka tte kikitai ne.*”
“Rather than (feeling afraid), I want to ask them: ‘what did you do when you were alive?’”.

In conversation (3), speaker B was ‘rephrasing’ what speaker A had said without repeating it, hence the first clause is omitted. From how the speaker B used *teiuuka*, we may know that *teiuuka* could also be used to deny what the other person has said in a very light way. This may be similar to “*iie* (no)” or “*sore yori* (other than that)”, that has been explained in prior research (Li, 2001; Hayashi, 2007; Wang, 2012). However, from a pragmatic perspective, using *teiuuka* in this case is considered softer and lighter than using “*iie, sore yori*”. This kind of *teiuuka* may also be used to lightly refuse what the other person had offered, similar to the word “*iya da* (no/ I don’t want to).

Tsuji (1999) explained that people tend to use *teiuuka* to deny or to refuse, because using *iie* or such words would give the impression that the speaker immediately denies what the other person is saying, while using *teiuuka* would only give an impression that the speaker is only ‘correcting’ what the other person said, not denying them completely. Hence using *teiuuka* to deny what the other person said is considered lighter than using *iie* or such. In

addition, Tsuji (1999) also explained that Japanese people tend to not say yes or no clearly, and *teiuuka* is one of the words that has the function of disguising one’s stance.

3.1.3.2. Omitting the Second Clause

- (4) A: “*onaji hitogomi demo, yappari nanka, Shibuya toka ni kurabete, Ginza no hou ga ochitsuki ga aru tteiuuka.*”
“Even though they are both crowded, when compared to places like Shibuya, Ginza feels calmer.”
B: “*Un, suggoi kondete mo soko made ki ni naranai.*”
“Yeah, it doesn’t really bother me even if it’s very crowded.”

In conversation (4), speaker A did not continue her explanation with the assumption that speaker B had understood what she wanted to convey, thus ending the utterance with *teiuuka*. Seeing how speaker B responded, it can be seen that speaker B has indeed understood what speaker A said. As suggested by Kitahara (2005), *teiuuka* at the end of speech may also mean “*daitai konna kanji dakara, ato wa wakatte ne* (it’s somehow like this, please understand the rest)”. In other words, the speaker intentionally omitted words after *teiuuka*, while expecting the other person would understand the rest of the sentence.

Teiuuka at the end of an utterance is one of *bokashi kotoba* (ambiguous terms) and may be translated to “*daitai konna kanji* (somehow like this)” or not be translated at all. Nakayama (1989) remarked that *bokashi kotoba* is a series of words or expressions that show vagueness in speech so that the speaker could avoid assertion. These kinds of words do not actually have any real meaning but could give a different impression pragmatically.

3.1.4. Topic Shift

- (5) A: “*Jisho tte, kono denchi nanda, futsuu no.*”
“So, you use this battery for the dictionary, the normal one.”
B: “*Sou sou, shiranakatta.*”
“Right, I didn’t know.”
A: “*teiuuka, keshigomu ga nai.*”
“By the way, my eraser is gone.”

In conversation (5), we may see clearly that they were talking about batteries and suddenly changed to the fact that speaker A lost her eraser. Sunakawa (as cited in Hayashi, 2007), stated that this kind of *teiuuka* tends to be used to say what the speaker came up with in his/her mind, without considering the other person. Kawamura (2013) also explained that if someone suddenly changes the topic as they please using *teiuuka*, the other person will not feel angry and just talk along with the new topic. However, *teiuuka* as topic shifter may also be used to

create a new topic after the first topic has ended, in order that the conversation would not end there.

3.1.5. Preface

- (6) A: “**Teiuka** kono sa, tsukue ga kawaii yo ne.”
 “Hey, this table is cute.”
 B: “Honto ni? Arigatou.”
 “Really? Thank you.”

Conversation (6) shows how *teiuka* could also be used to call for people, similar to the word “*nee* (hey/listen)”. Li (2001) explained that *teiuka* that is used in the beginning of conversation is a word to call or to draw attention of the other party before saying something, similar to *nee*, *chotto* or such.

Considering *teiuka* in other classifications, we may know that even though the first clause doesn't exist, *teiuka* still has the ‘rephrasing’ function, whether it is rephrasing their own words or the other people’s words. Even so, what is being rephrased by *teiuka* as a preface is completely unknown, its function is to call out someone or to start a conversation, not rephrasing any word or sentence in particular.

3.2. Usage of Teiuka in 2001-2003

As mentioned before, the total data of *teiuka* by speakers in their 10s-20s amounted to about 262 data. In this study, 100 conversation data were randomly selected as samples and divided based on their classification by Hayashi (2007). Table 1 is a table of the frequency of the use of *teiuka* in 2001-2003.

From Table 1, we may know that omission is the most used among all, reaching 36%. In omission itself, there is 30 data for omitting the first clause, and 6 data for omitting the second clause. Followed by rephrasing word 25% and topic shift 22%. Judging from the position, *teiuka* is most used in the beginning of utterance, reaching 59%, while in the middle of utterance 35% and in the end of utterance only 6%.

Compared to that, based on Hayashi (2007), *teiuka* in blog is most used for rephrasing word and sentence. Both of the categories reach 70%, while the other three categories only reach 30%. As mentioned above, *teiuka* for rephrasing is used in the middle of utterance. Hence,

Table 1. Frequency of the use of *teiuka* in 2001-2003

Classifications	Frequency of Usage
Rephrasing word	25
Rephrasing sentence	10
Omitting clauses	36
Topic shift	22
Preface	6
Total	100

70% of *teiuka* in blogs are mostly used as how it's originally used, to rephrase things in the middle of utterance.

Thus, this result shows a significant difference in the usage of *teiuka* in conversations and blogs. Although Hayashi stated that blogs are all written in spoken language, we may conclude that the use of *teiuka* in conversations is different from the blog. This result also proved that spoken language in written forms are different from the actual spoken words. As Tanaka (2014) explained, this kind of written-spoken language is called *uchi kotoba* (typed-language), and *uchi kotoba* is not completely the same with general spoken language.

3.3. Usage of Teiuka in 2018-2020

The data of *teiuka* in 2018-2020 is taken from CEJC. However, the way it is written in CEJC is *teyuuka*, not *teiuka*. In this corpus, the word *iu* is written as how it is pronounced, not how it is originally written. Even so, as Endou (2018) remarked, *iu* and *yuu* on *teiuka* and *teyuuka* do not have any difference. They are basically the same words.

The conversation data of *teiuka* by speakers in their 10s-20s in CEJC only reached 62 data. Table 2 is the table showing the frequency of *teiuka* based on the classifications. From Table 2, we may know that the results really contrast with the use of *teiuka* in the early 2000s. In 2018-2020, *teiuka* that are used in the beginning of speech, such as omitting clauses, topic shift and preface have reduced drastically. Furthermore, the most used ones are rephrasing, this is similar to how *teiuka* is used on blogs based on study by Hayashi (2007).

However, these differences on the frequency of the use of *teiuka* based on its classifications do not mean that the tendency of which function is used most has changed. Presently, other forms (*ikeitai*) of *teiuka* have been spread widely. Thus, the cause of this significant change may be the tendency of using the morphemes of *teiuka*. Harada (2015) explained that *teka* is the most used variation of *teiuka* (52,6%), followed by *teyuuka* (37,2%), *tsuuka* (6,4%), *toyuuuka* (3,6%).

Table 2. Frequency of the use of *teyuuka* in 2018-2020

Classifications	Frequency of Usage	
Rephrasing word	24	38.7%
Rephrasing sentence	16	25.8%
Omitting clauses	10	16.1%
Topic shift	9	14.5%
Preface	3	4.8%
Total	62	100%

Table 3. Frequency of the use of *teka* in 2018-2020

Classifications	Frequency of Usage
Rephrasing word	19
Rephrasing sentence	15
Omitting clauses	42
Topic shift	19
Preface	5
Total	100

Teka is one of the shortened forms (*tanshukukei*) of *teiuka*. The word *iu* here is omitted, but still acts as the same word as *teiuka*. Table 3 shows the results of *teka* based on its classifications.

From Table 3, we know that omitting the first clause, topic shift and preface that are used in the beginning of utterance reaches 66%, used much more than rephrasing function. Thus, based on the classifications above, there have been no significant changes in 17 years. However, as mentioned above, the tendency of using the other forms has changed. In NUC, *teiuka* is used 3 times more than *teka*. Total data of *teiuka* by speakers in their 10-20s reach 262 data, while *teka* is only 70 data. On the other hand, in CEJC, as seen in table 3 and 4, *teka* is used almost twice more than *teiuka*.

From this result, we can conclude that the use of the form *teka* has increased and now *teka* is used more than the original form *teiuka*, especially at the beginning of utterance.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results above, there are three points we can conclude here. First, the difference between the use of *teiuka* in blogs that are written in spoken language and *teiuka* in actual conversations is significant. *Teiuka* in conversations is often used to lightly deny or refuse what the other person had said by omitting the first clause, while *teiuka* in blogs are mainly used in the basic form, [A *teiuka* B]. Secondly, there has been no significant change on the use of *teiuka* based on its classifications in 18 years. Both in the 2000-2003 and in 2018-2020, *teiuka* was mainly used in *shoryaku* classification, mainly used to deny what the other party said in a very light way. Even so, the tendency on how to use the other forms of *teiuka* has changed. In 2018-2020, *teka* is used much more than the original form *teiuka*, especially at the beginning of utterance. Third, judging from the gender of the speakers who use *tsuuka*, and the way they use the masculine language clearly, we may consider that *tsuuka* is a rather masculine language in Japanese.

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CORPORA

Nagoya University Conversation Corpus:
<https://www2.ninjal.ac.jp/conversation/nuc.html>

Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation:
<https://www2.ninjal.ac.jp/conversation/cejc.html>

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