

# The constructionalization of double negatives in Japanese

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## Abstract

This paper deals with Japanese double negatives from a perspective of Constructionalization. By examining the data of BCCWJ and Aozora Bunko corpus, it seeks to answer an issue yet unsolved in the literature: what are the differences between distinct forms of double negatives, and why did such differences arise? The results of the synchronic corpus study show that *V-nai koto wa nai* (V-NEG thing TOP NEG) and *V-naku wa nai* (V-NEG.ADV TOP NEG) prefer verbs which express the achievability of an action. On the other hand, *V-nai koto mo nai* (V-NEG thing also NEG) and *V-naku mo nai* (V-NEG.ADV also NEG) prefer verbs which express subjective judgments and perceptions of the speaker. Based on the data of diachronic corpus, this paper shows *V-nai koto wa nai* initially possesses both strong affirmative and weak affirmative meanings, but through language use, the weak affirmative meaning is gradually fixed as *V-nai koto wa nai* gains prevalence as a construction. The results of this paper strongly support the perspective that language is a complex adaptive system that is shaped by dynamic usage events in speech communities (see Beckner et al. 2009).

## 1. Introduction

The present paper examines the structure and meaning of double negatives in Japanese. To clarify the differences among *V-nai koto wa nai* (V-NEG thing TOP NEG<sup>1</sup>), *V-nai koto mo nai* (V-NEG thing also NEG), *V-naku wa nai* (V-NEG.ADV TOP NEG), and *V-naku mo nai* (V-NEG.ADV also NEG), synchronic and diachronic corpus-based studies were conducted. Based on the results of corpus-based studies, I claim that Japanese double negatives can be best understood using the concept of constructionalization (Traugott and Trousdale 2014).

A double negative occurs when two negation forms are used in the same sentence as shown in (1).

- (1) a. *kimi no kimoti wa wakara-naku mo nai.*  
 you GEN feeling TOP understand-NEG.ADV also NEG  
 ‘I understand your feelings to some degree.’<sup>2</sup>
- b. *ganbare ba taberare-nai koto wa nai.*  
 try.hard if can.eat-NEG thing TOP NEG  
 ‘If I try hard, I may be able to eat it.’

Logically, a proposition with a double negative is considered to express the same thing as an affirmative.

### (2) Law of *Duplex negation affirmat*:

Two negatives in English grammar destroy one another, or are equivalent to an affirmative.

(Lowth 1762: 126)

However, according to Jespersen (1924), double negatives are the equivalent of weakly positive rather than positive expressions (see also Horn 1989).

The two negatives, however, do not exactly cancel one another in such a way that the result [of *not uncommon, not infrequent, not without some fear*] is identical with the simple *common, frequent, with some doubt*; the longer expression is always weaker: “this is not unknown to me” or “I am not ignorant of this” means ‘I am to some extent aware of it’, etc. The psychological reason for this is that the *detour* through the two mutually destructive negatives weakens the mental energy of the listener and implies . . . a hesitation which is absent from the blunt, outspoken *common* or *known*. (Jespersen 1924: 332)

The standard scalar diagnostics in (3) (see Horn 1991: 85) can confirm this.

- (3) a. *kimi no kimoti wa wakaru. sukunakutomo wakara-naku wa nai.*  
 you GEN feeling TOP understand at.least understand-NEG.ADV TOP NEG  
 ‘I understand your feeling. At least, I understand it to some degree.’
- b. *\*kimi no kimoti wa wakara-naku wa nai. sukunakutomo wakaru.*  
 you GEN feeling TOP understand-NEG.ADV TOP NEG at.least understand.  
 ‘\* I understand your feeling to some degree. At least, I understand it.’

The ungrammaticality in (3b) shows that a double negative expression is inevitably weaker than the corresponding simple affirmative.

Thus, double negatives are “constructions,” in Goldberg’s (1995) sense of the term, as they are form-meaning pairings, the meanings of which are not strictly predictable from their components. Since the publication of the work by de Saussure ([1916] 2006: 65-70), the linguistic signs have been regarded as the arbitrary and conventional pairings of form (*signifiant*) and meaning (*signifié*). In the late 1980s, linguists began to work this notion out to all levels of grammatical description involving conventionalized form-meaning pairings (Fillmore 1985, 1988; Fillmore, Kay, and O’Connor 1988; Lakoff 1987; Wierzbicka 1988). This extended notion of the Saussurean sign became known as a “construction,” and it can be seen at varying levels of complexity or abstraction.

**Table 1.** Constructions at varying levels of complexity or abstraction (Booij 2010: 15)

	Example
Word	<i>tentacle, gangster, the</i>
Word (partially filled)	<i>post-N, V-ing</i>
Complex word	<i>textbook, drive-in</i>
Idiom (filled)	<i>like a bat out of hell</i>
Idiom (partially filled)	<i>believe &lt;one’s&gt; ears/eyes</i>
Ditransitive	Subj V Obj <sub>1</sub> Obj <sub>2</sub> (e.g. <i>he baked her a muffin</i> )

It is possible to argue that double negatives’ weak affirmative meanings are to be explained through a compositional account based on the meanings of constituent elements and pragmatic principles, without having to delve into construction concepts. However, as I show below, there are cases that cannot be explained when we

examine double negatives from a diachronic point of view, which here concerns the process of “constructionalization.”<sup>3</sup>

Constructionalization is the creation of form<sub>new</sub>-meaning<sub>new</sub> (combinations of) signs. It forms new type nodes, which have new syntax or morphology and new coded meaning, in the linguistic network of a population of speakers. It is accompanied by changes in degree of schematicity, productivity, and compositionality. The constructionalization of schemas always results from a succession of micro-steps and is therefore gradual.

(Traugott and Trousdale 2014: 22)

Here, I focus on double negatives in Japanese using the formal noun *koto* (*V-nai koto wa nai* and *V-nai koto mo nai*) and the adverbial form of *nai* (*V-naku wa nai* and *V-naku mo nai*). In Section 2, I discuss previous studies of these double negatives and note the outstanding problems. I examine the use of these expressions based on the data of synchronic corpus in Section 3, discussing why such usages occur. Furthermore, I will show you *V-nai koto wa nai* originally possessed both strong and weak affirmative meanings by the data of diachronic corpus, and I will explain why *V-nai koto wa nai* can only express the weak affirmative meaning now from a perspective of constructionalization in Section 4. In Section 5, I will demonstrate the necessity of adopting the concept of construction to examine double negatives. Finally, Section 6 concludes my discussion.

## 2. Previous studies

Previous studies of Japanese double negatives, such as those by Iori et al. (2001) and Palihawadana (2013), compare the meaning of several double negatives. Iori et al. (2001) takes up the perspective of Japanese language education to analyze Japanese double negatives, claiming that *V-naku wa nai* and *V-naku mo nai* can only be used with unconscious verbs and express a sense that the events expressed by the verbs are possible to occur. It is also claimed in their study that *V-nai koto wa nai*, *V-nai koto mo nai*, *V-naku wa nai*, and *V-naku mo nai* express almost the same meaning.

As I show, however, in Section 3, these expressions do not share a common meaning. Moreover, Iori et al. (2001) do not explain the evident difference between expressions with the particle *wa* and those with the particle *mo*.

Palihawadana (2013) examines *V-naku wa/mo nai*, *V-nai koto wa/mo nai*, *V-nai de wa/mo nai* (V-NEG LOC TOP/also NEG), and *V-nai mono de wa/mo nai* (V-NEG object LOC TOP/also NEG) to identify contexts in which these expressions appear, along with identifying their functions. Paying due attention to the contexts that occur when double negatives are used, Palihawadana (2013) shows that all four expressions examined share the function of 1) the avoidance of assertion and softening expressions; 2) the metalinguistic negation of a preceding statement or its triggered implication, indicating an exception or supplementary information; and 3) the denial that no probability remains for something.

Different usages can also be found, such as those 1) showing understanding and sympathy towards an interlocutor, which is limited to *naku wa/mo nai* and *nai demo/wa nai* expressions; 2) negating a universal negative to express a partial negative reading, which is restricted to *nai demo/wa nai* and *nai koto wa/mo nai*; and 3) expressing total affirmation by canceling the negative assertion, which is limited to the *nai koto wa nai* expression.

Although Palihawadana (2013) extensively explored these different usages, some problems remain. For example,

Palihawadana claims that the verbs in *V-naku wa/mo nai* cannot be volitional. However, *omowa-naku mo nai* (think-NEG.ADV ALSO NEG) ‘think a little’ and *si-naku wa nai* (do-NEG.ADV TOP NEG) ‘do a little’ are commonly encountered and contradict this thesis. Further, in relation to the differences between the particles *wa* and *mo*, she claims that when a double negative co-occurs with *mo*, it means that the possibility is extremely low. In contrast, *wa* has a greater possibility of occurring with a double negative. However, Palihawadana does not support this claim with any data, and it is difficult to confirm that this difference exists through introspection.

Thus, although there have been previous studies of double negatives in Japanese, the differences among the distinct forms of double negatives remain to be explained. In addition, no previous study has accounted for why double negatives are divided into two types (strong and weak affirmatives).

This paper, to address these issues, examines data drawn from the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ) using the online reference application “Chunagon”. Further, it investigates the construction-alization process of Japanese double negatives, using the diachronic data of the internet library Aozora Bunko Corpus collected by the full-text retrieval software “Himawari”. Analyses in previous studies have been based on their authors’ introspection or arbitrarily collected data. By using objective corpus data, this paper explores double negatives to form an account that is closer to the actual state of language usage.

### 3. The synchronic corpus-based study

The synchronic study of BCCWJ shows that forms with the particle *wa* tend to appear with verbs such as *dekiru* (be.able.to.do), *ikeru* (can.go), and *yareru* (can.do) that express the achievability of an action. However, forms with the particle *mo* tend to be found with verbs such as *ieru* (be.able.to.say), *omou* (think), and *mieru* (be.seen) that express the subjective judgments and perceptions of the speaker.

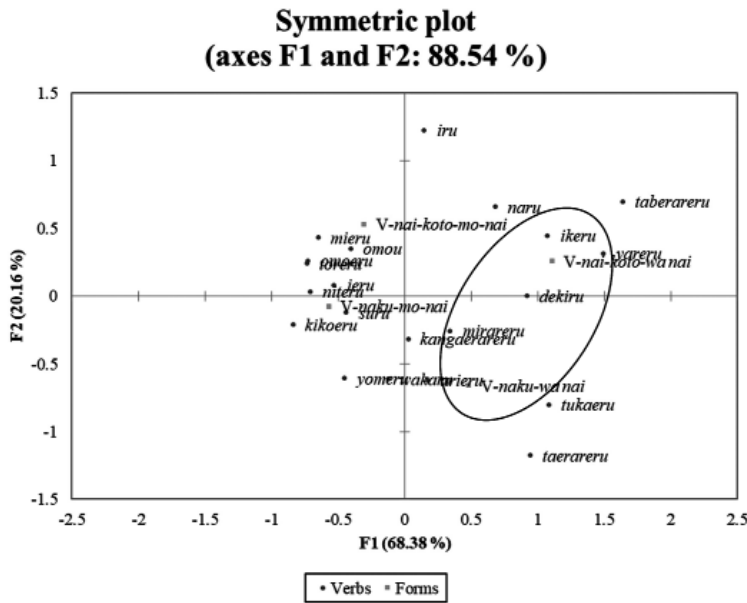
**Table 2.** The token frequency of verbs embedded in double negatives  
(verbs of low frequency are excluded)

	<i>V-nai koto wa nai</i>	<i>V-naku wa nai</i>	<i>V-nai koto mo nai</i>	<i>V-naku mo nai</i>
<i>dekiru</i> ‘can do’	66	30	8	17
<i>ikeru</i> ‘can go’	16	4	5	0
<i>yareru</i> ‘can do’	11	2	0	0
<i>ieru</i> ‘can say’	8	11	35	109
<i>naru</i> ‘become’	7	2	6	0
<i>wakaru</i> ‘understand’	5	24	3	39
<i>kangaerareru</i> ‘can think’	5	14	8	16
<i>taberareru</i> ‘can be’	4	0	0	0
<i>arieru</i> ‘be possible’	2	4	0	5
<i>tukaeru</i> ‘can use’	2	3	0	0

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<i>suru</i> 'do'	2	2	2	16
<i>omou</i> 'think'	2	0	4	9
<i>yomeru</i> 'quit'	2	0	0	0
<i>kureru</i> 'give'	2	0	0	0
<i>unazukeru</i> 'can be agreed'	2	0	0	0
<i>iru</i> 'exist'	2	0	5	0
<i>au</i> 'meet'	2	0	0	0
<i>yaru</i> 'do'	2	0	0	0
<i>tukau</i> 'use'	2	0	0	0
<i>tariru</i> 'suffice'	2	0	0	0
<i>kuru</i> 'come'	2	0	0	0
<i>mirareru</i> 'can see'	1	5	4	0
<i>taerareru</i> 'can endure'	1	3	0	0
<i>mieru</i> 'be seen'	1	0	22	35
<i>niteru</i> 'be like'	1	0	4	26
<i>mireru</i> 'can see'	1	0	0	2
<i>hairu</i> 'enter'	1	0	2	0
<i>yomeru</i> 'can read'	0	2	0	6
<i>aiseru</i> 'can love'	0	2	0	0
<i>toreru</i> 'can take'	0	0	3	8
<i>kikoeru</i> 'can hear'	0	0	0	7
<i>omoeru</i> 'can think'	0	0	2	5
<i>tukureru</i> 'can make'	0	0	2	0
<i>naoru</i> 'recover'	0	0	2	0
<i>atatteiru</i> 'be just'	0	0	2	0

I performed a correspondence analysis (see Greenacre 2007) based on the figures given in Table 2. Correspondence analysis is a method of exploratory data analysis that converts frequency table data into graphical displays, as Figures 1 and 2 show. The plots are called biplots. By simplifying complex data, graphical representation of rows and columns in two or three dimensions is useful for finding structural relationships between variables and between objects.



**Fig. 1.** The preference of *V-nai koto wa nai* and *V-naku wa nai*

As Figure 1 shows, forms with particle *wa* such as *V-nai koto wa nai* and *V-naku wa nai*, which are represented in grey squares, tend to cooccur with verbs like *ikeru*, *yareru*, *dekiru*, etc., which are represented in black dots (the ellipses in Figure 1 and 2 are added by the author for explanation purposes).

In Figure 2, it is evident that forms with particle *mo* such as *V-nai koto mo nai* and *V-naku mo nai*, which both prefer verbs like *ieru*, *omou*, *mieru*, etc., show a more obvious tendency to cooccur (they are located close to each other in the biplot).

What causes this tendency is that the particle *wa* marks a topic, while the particle *mo* has the function of softening the expression of one's opinion (Numada 1986, Nakanishi 1993). Therefore, *V-nai koto wa nai* and *V-naku wa nai* are used to deny a certain possibility existing in the context like being asked about the possibility of something, which is also the topic of the conversation. On the other hand, *V-nai koto mo nai* and *V-naku mo nai* are used to soften the subjective judgments and perceptions of the speaker. This difference is supported by the corpus data. Examples that a certain possibility can be found in the preceding context appear more often in *V-nai koto wa nai* (15.49%, 33/213) and *V-naku wa nai* (11.36%, 15/132) than in *V-nai koto mo nai* (3.08%, 5/162) and *V-naku mo nai* (1.54%, 5/324).

The following hypothesis is given to explain the tendencies outlined above.

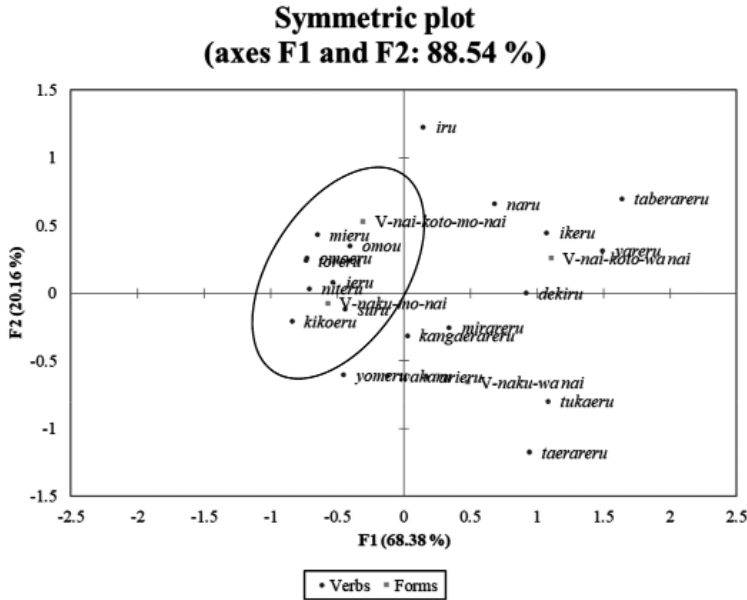


Fig. 2. The preference of *V-nai koto mo nai* and *V-naku mo nai*

(4) Constructional division hypothesis:

If there are multiple forms with semantic similarities, even if there is only a slight difference of meaning, over time, tendencies become as fixed as the meaning of the construction.

If the expressions of double negatives are considered in the light of this hypothesis, we can say that the tendency of co-appearance occurs because there are multiple expressions representing double negation, leading to the semantic usage of each construction differing based on slight differences in meaning.

Differences in the level of stylistic formality are also observed between *V-nai koto wa/mo nai* and *V-naku wa/mo nai* on the basis of the variation in register of BCCWJ as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The differences of stylistic formality

<i>V-nai koto wa nai</i>	Total 213		<i>V-naku wa nai</i>	Total 132	
Yahoo! Q & A and Yahoo! Blogs	Total	% <sup>4</sup>	Yahoo! Q & A and Yahoo! Blogs	Total	%
	50	23.47%		44	33.33%
<i>V-nai koto mo nai</i>	Total 162		<i>V-naku mo nai</i>	Total 324	
Yahoo! Q & A and Yahoo! Blogs	Total	%	Yahoo! Q & A and Yahoo! Blogs	Total	%
	22	13.58%		75	23.14%

In more casual contexts, such as Yahoo! Q & A and Yahoo! Blogs, double negatives prefer the form of *V-naku wa nai* to *V-nai koto wa nai* ( $\chi^2(1) = 3.514, .05 < p < .10$ ), and prefer *V-naku mo nai* to *V-nai koto mo nai* ( $\chi^2(1) = 5.604, p < .05$ ). This stylistic difference can be explained by an iconic correlation between an increased use of

grammatical forms ([V + *nai* + *koto* + *wa/mo* + *nai* = 5 grammatical forms] vs. [V + *naku* + *wa/mo* + *nai* = 4 grammatical forms]) and the greater formality of a text (see Haiman 1983).

Relative to the meaning of the construction, some examples of *V-nai koto wa nai* possess a strong affirmative meaning. However, all occurrences of *koto* in these examples are the arguments of their verbs as can be confirmed by the argument addition test shown in (5).

(5) a. *sira-nai koto wa nai.*

know-NEG thing TOP NEG

‘know everything/know a little.’

b. *roojin wa sanzyuunen izyoo kono boti o teire-site-ki-ta kara*

old.man TOP 30.years over this cemetery ACC maintenance-do-come-PST because

*sira-nai koto wa nai to zimusyo no otoko ga setumei-si-ta.*

know-NEG thing TOP NEG QUO office GEN man NOM explain-do-PST

‘The man in the office explained that because the old man has maintained the cemetery for over 30 years, he knows everything.’

c. *soodaisei no ooku wa koko o sira-nai koto wa nai deshou.*

Waseda. University. student GEN many TOP here ACC know-NEG thing TOP NEG would.be

‘Many of the students at Waseda University would probably know here.’

(5a) can mean either a strong or a weak affirmative, which is determined by whether *koto* is the argument of the verb *siru* ‘know’ or not. However, in (5b), from context, we know that *koto* is the argument of *siru*. Thus, (5b) has the strong affirmative meaning. However, if *koto* is not the argument of the verb, the verb takes an argument as shown in (5c) and can express the weak affirmative meaning only (*koko* ‘here’ is the argument).

Therefore, as suggested by construction grammar theory, we can assume that different inner structures (forms) correspond to different meanings in Japanese double negatives.

(6) [[[V-*nai*] *koto*] *wa*] *nai*] ↔ [affirmative]

[[V-*nai*] *koto wa nai*] ↔ [weak affirmative]

The pronominalization test can also confirm the structural differences between the two constructions as in (7).

(7) **affirmative** (context: Taro and Jiro are both railfans)

*Taroo wa Sinkansen no koto nara sira-nai koto wa nai. Ziroo mo sore wa nai.*

Taro TOP bullet.train GEN thing if know-NEG thing TOP NEG Jiro also that TOP NEG

There is nothing Taro doesn’t know about bullet trains. There is also nothing Jiro doesn’t know (about bullet trains).

**weak affirmative** (context: Taro and Jiro are both brilliant students)

*Taroo wa haabaado ni ike-nai koto wa nai. ??Ziroo mo sore wa nai.*

Taro TOP Harvard to can.go-NEG thing TOP NEG Jiro also that TOP NEG



Because *koto wa nai* in *V-nai koto wa nai* with the weak affirmative meaning forms a unit, *V-nai koto* cannot be replaced by the pronoun *sore*.

#### 4. The diachronic corpus-based study

Within the data of Aozora Bunko Corpus, this paper found 256 tokens of *V-nai koto wa nai* belonging to the period from the 1890s to the 1950s, 7.42% of which express strong affirmative meaning although *koto* is not the argument of the verb. In (8), *si-nai koto wa nai* expresses a strong affirmative meaning although the argument of *suru* ‘feel’ is *fujiyuu na omohi* ‘inconvenient thought,’ not *koto* ‘thing.’

- (8) *tyotto no ma mo hujiyuu na omohi o si-nai koto wa nai.*  
 for.a.minute GEN period also inconvenient COP thought ACC fell-NEG thing TOP NEG  
 ‘There is not a single moment that he doesn’t feel inconvenient.’ (Aozora [1926])

Similarly, in (9) and (10), *koto* is not the argument since the arguments of the verbs are expressed by the NPs with accusative particle *o*.

- (9) *musiro watasi wa donna toki ni demo zinsei o kangae-nai koto wa nai hoo no tati da.*  
 rather I TOP any time at DEMO life ACC think-NEG thing TOP NEG kind GEN personality COP  
 ‘Rather, I am a person who always thinks about life at all times.’ (Aozora [1927])

- (10) *Suezoo no kuru no wa oriori dokoro de wa nai. maiban kao o dasa nai koto wa nai.*  
 Suezoo GEN come GEN TOP sometimes situation be TOP NEG every.night face ACC show NEG thing TOP NEG  
 ‘Suezoo’s coming is not on occasion. He turns up every night.’ (Aozora [1911])

In these sentences, instances of *koto* are not arguments because the arguments of the verbs are expressed by an NP and a case marker *o*. In (8), a scene is being described, where the speaker presumes that a man called Ryu Rikyo endured a cramped feeling on an overnight boat. In (9), the speaker describes walking alone at night, and life comes clearly to his mind. Although the speaker has a thoughtful personality and a tendency to consider life, at the described times, he thinks about his life much more deeply than usual. In (10), a man named Suekichi comes to visit a woman named Otama every night. These are all examples expressing strong affirmative meaning. No examples of this strong affirmative meaning exist in the contemporary corpus BCCWJ.

As shown in the figures below, the occurrences in the corpus of *V-nai koto wa nai* with a strong affirmative meaning decrease over time.

Thus, we presume that *V-nai koto wa nai* initially possessed both strong and weak affirmative meanings; however, through language use and negative politeness strategies<sup>5</sup> (Brown and Levinson 1987), the weak affirmative meaning is gradually fixed as *V-nai koto wa nai* gains prevalence as a construction.

*V-nai koto mo nai* has no examples expressing this sort of strong affirmative because as mentioned above, the particle *mo* has the function of softening the expression of one’s opinion. Further, there are no examples of double negatives with the adverbial form of *nai* expressing a strong affirmative because *V-naku wa nai* and *V-naku mo nai* first began to appear in the 1910s in the Aozora Bunko Corpus (most of them appearing after the 1920s),

when the strong affirmative meaning began to be fixed in *V-nai koto wa nai* as Figure 3 and 4 show. Thus, we suppose that it was because of the influence of the use of *V-nai koto wa nai*, the forms *V-naku wa nai* and *V-naku mo nai* came to be used to express a weak affirmative meaning from their inception.

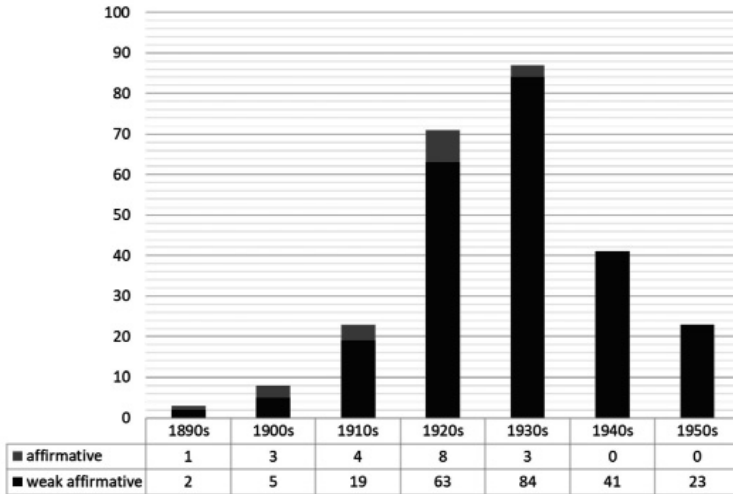


Fig. 3. Occurrences of *V-nai koto wa nai* in the Aozora Bunko Corpus

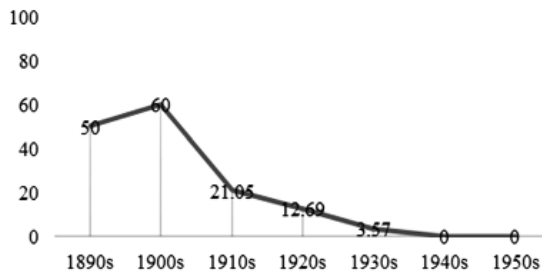


Fig. 4. Percentage of occurrences of *V-nai koto wa nai* with an affirmative meaning

### 5. The necessity of adopting the concept of construction

The fact that *V-nai koto wa nai* can in principle be used to possess both strong and weak affirmative meanings but now is only used to express a weak affirmative meaning cannot be explained by the compositional approach. Even if a pragmatic rule such as that of negative politeness strategies is provided, it is hard to think that speakers have knowledge of how long a time has passed since the expression was used and when the meaning was established although negative politeness strategies may provide an explanation for the establishment of a meaning after a certain period of time. Speakers merely remember the meanings of the double negatives used in a language community. Here, the meanings refer to the meanings of the double negative constructions.

The weak affirmative meaning represented by double negative constructions is formed through actual language use. That is, the existence of double negative constructions supports the usage-based model that cognitive linguistics tends to support (which considers that the structure of the language is formed by actual language usage

events; see Langacker 1987; Bybee 1985, 2006; Barlow and Kemmer 2000; Tomasello 2003) and the concepts of construction grammar (which considers language to be a structured inventory of conventionalized linguistic units).

This paper also sheds light on the construction theory, which is that the internal structure of grammar, such as the difference between [[[V-*nai*] *koto*] *wa*] *nai*] and [[V-*nai*] *koto wa nai*], can be thought of as a form of construction.

## 6. Conclusion

The constructional analysis performed in the present paper clarifies the structure and meaning of Japanese double negatives and strongly supports the perspective that language is a complex adaptive system that is shaped by dynamic usage events in speech communities (see Beckner et al. 2009).

Future work should analyze double negative expressions other than those mentioned here, such as those using adjectives and nouns. It is further necessary to analyze expressions such as *naku-naku-nai*?, where two or more negations occur.

## Notes

- 1 Abbreviations used are as follows: ACC (Accusative), ADV (Adverbial), COP (Copula), GEN (Genitive), LOC (Location), NEG (Negation), NOM (Nominative), PST (Past), QUO (Quotation), and TOP (Topic).
- 2 English translations of examples and quotes from Japanese sources are provided by the author.
- 3 On the other hand, grammaticalization, which refers to the coming into being of grammatical markers such as case, tense, aspect, and modality is the creation of grammatical categories (Lehmann 2004: 183). Thus, grammaticalization is a kind of constructionalization concerning grammatical change; however, there are numerous constructionalization processes that do not involve grammatical changes.
- 4 The probability that the tokens of each construction appear in Yahoo! Q & A and Yahoo! Blogs.
- 5 Negative politeness strategies are used to avoid giving offense by showing deference. These strategies include hedging, using indirect requests, and presenting disagreements as opinions (see Brown and Levinson 1987).

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# 日本語の二重否定表現の構文化について

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## 要 旨

本論文は日本語の二重否定表現について「構文化 (Constructionalization)」という観点から検討するものである。現代日本語書き言葉均衡コーパス (BCCWJ) 及び青空文庫コーパスで得られたデータに基づく分析によって、本論文は、1) 異なる形式の二重否定表現にどのような違いが見られるのか、2) そのような違いはなぜ生じるのか、という先行研究に残された2つの課題に答える。共時的なコーパス研究では、「V ないことはない」と「V なくはない」がある動作の達成可能性を表す動詞を好むのに対し、「V ないこともない」と「V なくもない」は主体的な判断または話者の感覚を表す動詞を好むことを示す。通時的なコーパス研究においては、「V ないことはない」が本来強い否定と弱い否定の両方の意味を表すことができたが、言語使用により、「V ないことはない」が構文として確立されるにつれて、弱い否定の意味が徐々に構文の意味として定着したことを示す。本論文の結果は、言語というものが言語共同体における実際の言語使用によって形作られた「複雑適応系 (complex adaptive system)」であるという観点 (Beckner et al. 2009 を参照) を強く支持するものである。