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## NOTES ON THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD IN MODERN JAPANESE

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### *Abstract*

In this paper, I closely investigated the *teiru* and *teita* forms in Japanese and showed how they can express the subjunctive mood (counterfactual meaning). The investigation shows that the two forms can express the subjunctive mood only when accompanied by a conditional subordinate clause, sharply contrasting them with their English counterparts.

*Keywords:* *teiru/teita* forms, mood, subjunctive, aspect-tense system, perfect

### I. *Introduction*

Although tense and aspect have been intensively discussed in Japanese linguistics, their examination remains incomplete. Specifically, sentences of the following type are rarely discussed.

- (1) Ano toki watasi-ga tasuke(-tei-)nakat-tara, kanozyo-wa sin-dei-ta.  
That time I-NOM save ASP not CON she-TOP die ASP-PST<sup>1</sup>  
If I had not saved her at that time, she would have died.

I refer to counterfactual sentences; i.e., *kanozyo* in (1) did not die in reality.

In this paper, I will discuss some reasons why counterfactual meanings can be expressed in the *teiru/teita* forms from functional perspectives.

### II. *Mood in Japanese*

First, I will briefly discuss the term “mood,” which is closely related to the idea of “modality.”

Modality is the grammatical category by which the recognition the speaker’s holds on the proposition of a sentence is expressed and the most important distinction about modality is the one between “realis” and “irrealis” (Palmer 2001). Mood is the inflectional system by which the distinction is expressed.

The most cross-linguistically important moods are “indicative” and “subjunctive”; the speaker presents an event as occurring in the real world in the former, whereas the event is

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations used in this paper are as follows:

ACC: accusative ASP: aspect CON: conditional NOM: nominative PRF: present/future PST: past  
TOP: topic

presented as occurring in the realm of thought in the latter.

In classic Japanese, the subjunctive mood is expressed by the auxiliaries<sup>2</sup> *mu*, *ramu*, *kemu*, *masi*, *zu*, and *besi* (O'noe 2004).

It is well-known that Japanese grammar has undergone a historical dynamic change, as a consequence of which the language lost most of its polysynthetic features and transitioned to a more analytic character. For example, classic auxiliaries having several meanings synthetically faded away, and the meanings that they had encoded have come to be expressed in several separate, modern auxiliaries (cf. Sakakura 1993). Consider the following:

- (2) *Asu ame huru-besi.*  
Tomorrow rain fall-must  
It must rain tomorrow.
- (3) *Nanzi asu kuru-besi.*  
You tomorrow come-must  
You must come tomorrow.
- (4) *Asu-wa ame-ga huru-nitigaina-i.*  
Tomorrow-TOP rain-NOM fall-must-PRF  
It must rain tomorrow.
- (5) *Kimi-wa asu ko-nakerebanarana-i.*  
You-TOP tomorrow come-must-PRF  
You must come tomorrow.

In (2) and (3), both of which are sentences in classical Japanese, *besi* (must, should) expresses an epistemic and a deontic meaning, respectively. In modern Japanese, the epistemic meaning of *besi* is expressed by modern auxiliaries such as *nitigainai*<sup>3</sup> (as seen in (4)) or *hazuda*, while its deontic meaning is expressed by such modern auxiliaries as *nakerebanaranai* (as seen in (5)) or *bekida*.

As we have seen, the modal auxiliaries that had been classically used to express subjunctive mood are no longer in use; as a consequence of their absence, less attention is paid to the subjunctive mood in the study of modern Japanese. There are, however, some systematic, or morphosyntactic, ways in which the subjunctive mood is expressed in modern Japanese. I will discuss in this paper one of the ways in which the *teiru* and *teita* forms<sup>4</sup> are used to express the subjunctive mood.

<sup>2</sup> In classic Japanese, auxiliaries were more tightly bounded to their verb than in modern Japanese. In other words, auxiliaries in classic Japanese are true bound morphemes, while those in modern Japanese are more self-independent. Auxiliaries in classic Japanese are sometimes called *hukugobi* (complex suffixes) (cf. Yamada 1908, O'noe 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Modern auxiliaries usually have an internal morphological construction. For example, *nitigainai* (must, should) is composed of four morphemes: *ni-*, *tigai-*, *na-*, and *-i*. They usually have past forms, which do not always express past events but sometimes express a counter-factual meaning (cf. Iori 2006, Takanashi 2010).

- (a) *Taro-wa isoi-deiru-yooda-tta.* (Past)  
Taro-TOP hurry-ASP seem-PAST  
Taro seemed to be in a hurry.
- (b) *Taro-wa paatii-ni kuru-bekida-tta.* (Counter-factual)  
party-to come should-PAST  
Taro should have come to the party.

### III. *Aspect-Tense System in Japanese*

I will now discuss how the *teiru/teita* forms express the subjunctive mood. To start, let us review briefly the aspect-tense system in modern Japanese.

Aspect has been one of the hottest issues in Japanese linguistics since Kinda'ichi (1950) first proposed a framework for describing the meaning of the *teiru* form of verbs.

As is well known, the *teiru* form of verbs has two meanings: progressive (*sinkootyuu*) and resultative (*kekkanzō*).

For example, the *teiru* form in (6) and (7) possesses the progressive meaning, while those in (8) and (9) reflect the resultative function.

- (6) Taro-ga koohii-o non-dei-ru.  
Taro-NOM coffee-ACC drink-ASP-PRF  
Taro is drinking coffee.
- (7) Ame-ga hut-tei-ru.  
Rain-NOM fall-ASP-PRF  
It is raining.
- (8) Doa-ga ai-tei-ru.  
Door-NOM open-ASP-PRF  
The door is open.
- (9) Madogarasu-ga ware-tei-ru.  
Window-NOM break-ASP-PRF  
The window is broken.

While there is an action perceivable by the five senses in (6) and (7), no such action is recognizable either in (8) or (9).

Kinda'ichi (1950) proposed to classify all verbs into four types: stative, durative, instantaneous, and “the fourth” verbs. He then insisted that if a verb is durative (*keizoku doosi*), the *teiru* form of the verb expresses the progressive aspect, while the *teiru* form expresses the resultative aspect if the verb is instantaneous (*syunkan doosi*)<sup>5</sup>. This classification is very close to that by Vendler (1967).

Kinda'ichi's article is said to have initiated the study of Japanese aspect. Although his work has greatly influenced researches on Japanese aspect, it has not been without dissenters. In particular, Okuda (1977) criticized Kinda'ichi's framework fundamentally.

Okuda (1977) argued that it is not the span of time but the existence of change (of state or position) that matters when interpreting the *teiru* form, and that the *teiru* form must be considered in contrast with the *ru* form: the *teiru* form is imperfective, while the *ru* form is perfective. (More strictly speaking, the *teiru* form is non-past imperfective (*mikanseisoo hikako*) and the *ru* form is non-past perfective (*kanseisoo hikako*)).

According to Okuda (1977), the *teiru* form of a verb expresses the resultative aspect if the

<sup>4</sup> *-Te* is the suffix of gerund of verb and *-iru* is the grammaticalized form of the existential verb *iru*. *-Ita* is the past form of *-iru*.

<sup>5</sup> Stative verbs do not have the *teiru* form, and “the fourth” verbs are always used in the *teiru* form (e.g., *sobieru* (stand high), *sugureru* (be excellent)).

TABLE 1. JAPANESE ASPECT-TENSE SYSTEM (cf. Kudo 1995)

		Aspect	
		Perfective ( <i>kanseisoo</i> )	Imperfective ( <i>mikanseisoo</i> )
Tense	Non-past ( <i>hikako</i> )	<i>Ru</i> form (- $\phi$ -(r)u)	<i>Teiru</i> form (-tei-ru)
	Past ( <i>kako</i> )	<i>Ta</i> form (- $\phi$ -ta)	<i>Teita</i> form (-tei-ta)

verb is a subject-changing verb (*syutaihenka doosi*) and, otherwise, it expresses the progressive aspect if it is not a stative verb, which has no *teiru* form and no real distinction of aspect<sup>6</sup>.

Okuda's paradigm shift of aspect was perfected by Kudo (1995). Kudo insists that the paradigm of the Japanese aspect-tense system accords to Table 1.

This paradigm is regarded as the standard one in modern Japanese linguistics (cf. Kinsui 2000)<sup>7</sup>.

I adopt this paradigm, but will discuss more closely the usage of the *teiru/teita* forms from a morphosyntactic point of view.

#### IV. Usage of *Teiru/Teita* Forms

As mentioned in section III, the *teiru/teita* forms usually have progressive and resultative usage, but in fact there are five more usages. We will see them in this section.

The usages are classified into two types: "primary" and "secondary." Let us look into them respectively.

##### 1. "Primary" Usage

The progressive and the resultative are called "primary" usages (*kihon yoohoo*). They are so called because the type of the verb determines which of the meanings is expressed by the *teiru/teita* forms, as we saw in section III.

##### 2. "Secondary" Usage

There are five more usages of the *teiru/teita* forms: repetition (*kurikaesi*), experience/record (*keiken kiroku*), perfect (*kanryoo*), counterfactual (*hanzizitu*), and adjectival (*keiyooiteki*). They are called "secondary" (*hasei*) usages because the verb type, which determines meaning in the "primary" usages of *teiru/teita* forms, is irrelevant.

I will examine three of the "secondary" usages—experience/record, perfect, and counterfactual—below<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Okuda (1977)'s stative verb category contains Kinda'ichi's stative and "the fourth" verbs. Okuda points out that although there appears to be aspectual distinction in some cases like *niru* (resemble) and *niteiru*, such distinction is not "real" aspectual, but is of a "fake" aspect (*nise-asupekuto*) in Okuda's words.

<sup>7</sup> Moriyama (1988) is the most important counter-argument to Kudo. Recent critical arguments to Kudo are found in Iori (2014) and Iwamoto (2014).

<sup>8</sup> I choose not to discuss repetition because subjects or predicates are plural not singular in this case; I exclude adjectival because this usage is usually realized in relative clauses rather than in main clauses.

### 3. The Two Functions of *Ru/Ta*

In this subsection, I will try to capture the essence of each usage by illustrating them with example sentences and diagrams.

To start, I would like to clarify that *ru/ta* in *teiru/teita* has two functions: observation time (*kansatuzi*) in “primary” usage and reference time (*kizyunzi*) in “secondary” usage.

#### (1) Progressive (*sinkootyuu*)

In progressive usage, the viewpoint (*siten*) of the speaker is at the observation point. First, let us see this in present progressive.

#### (10) Ame-ga hut-tei-ru.

Rain-NOM fall-ASP-PRF  
It is raining.

In (10), the viewpoint is at the speech time (*hatuwazi*): the speaker fixes their viewpoint at the speech time and looks at (or listens to, or in whatever ways they perceive with their senses) the event. This is illustrated as follows.

#### (11) Ame-ga hutteiru.



*Teita* forms are used to express past progressive. In past progressive, the viewpoint moves from the speech time to the time specified in the subordinate clause (or its equivalent). For example, the viewpoint in (12) is at the time specified in the subordinate clause “*watasi-ga kaisya-o deru toki*,” in other words, the speaker moves to the time when they were about to leave their company<sup>10</sup>.

#### (12) Watasi-ga kaisya-o deru toki, ame-ga hut-tei-ta.

I-NOM office-ACC leave time rain-NOM fall-ASP-PRF  
It was raining when I left my office.

This is illustrated as follows.

<sup>9</sup> ST: speech time OT: observation time.

<sup>10</sup> The time must be a point having no duration and *ta* in the main clause must be co-referential with it. This is shown by the fact that the sentence is less grammatical if the time is not a point. For example, sentence (a) below is less natural. If this sentence is interpreted as grammatical, the speaker imagines in their mind a point of time: that is, they interpret (a) as the equivalent of (b).

(a) ?Kinoo ame-ga hut-tei-ta.

Yesterday rain-NOM fall-ASP-PRF  
It was raining yesterday.

(b) Kinoo mado-o aketa toki, ame-ga hut-tei-ta.

window-ACC open time fall-ASP-PRF  
It was raining when I opened the door yesterday.

(13) *Watasi-ga kaisya-o deru toki, ame-ga hutteita.*



You can find that (13) is the “time-shifted equivalent” of (11).

Now we can see that in progressive usage, the viewpoint is at the time that is co-referential with *ru/ta* in the main clause: *ru/ta* in the main clause functions as the observation time.

(2) Resultative (*kekkanzon*)

A similar way of reasoning is applicable to the resultative usage.

In resultative usage, the visibly existing state is recognized as a result of change, so there must be a point of change when the state changes. I call this point “time of change” (*henkazi*). For example, in (14) the scattered glass seen at the speech time is recognized as the result of the window being broken at a time prior to the speech time: i.e., the time of change.

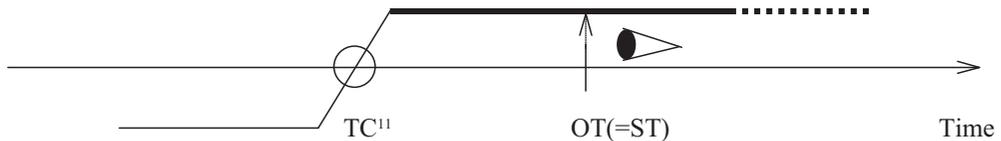
(14) *Madogarasu-ga ware-tei-ru.*

Window-NOM break-ASP-PRF

The window is broken.

This is illustrated as follows.

(15) *Madogarasu-ga wareteiru.*



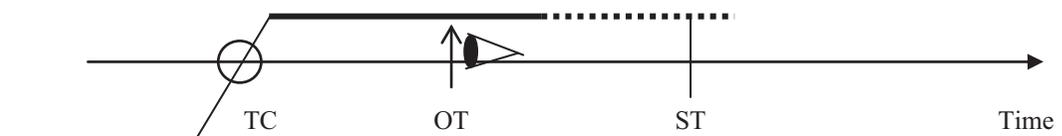
*Teita* forms are used to express the past resultative. In the past resultative, the viewpoint moves from the speech time to the time specified in the subordinate clause (or its equivalent). An example is (16), which is illustrated as (17).

(16) *Watasi-ga heya-ni haitta toki, madogarasu-wa ware-tei-ta.*

I-NOM room-into entered time window-TOP break-ASP-PST

The window was broken when I entered the room.

(17)



<sup>11</sup> TC: time of change

You can see that (17) is the “time-shifted equivalent” of (15).

Now we can see that in resultative usage, the viewpoint is at the time that is co-referential with *ru/ta* in the main clause: *ru/ta* in the main clause functions as the observation time.

### (3) Experience/record (*keiken kiroku*)

The third usage is experience/record<sup>12</sup>.

In this usage, an event that the subject of a sentence experienced or that occurred in the past is related to the reference time, which is equal to the speech time in most cases.

For example, the fact that Sooseki Natsume was born in 1867 is related to the speech time in (18), while what is related to the time is the fact that the city was struck by a big earthquake 70 years ago in (19).

(18) Natsume Sooseki-wa 1867nen-ni umare-tei-ru.

Sooseki Natsume-TOP 1867 year-in born-ASP-PRF

Sooseki Natsume was born in 1867.

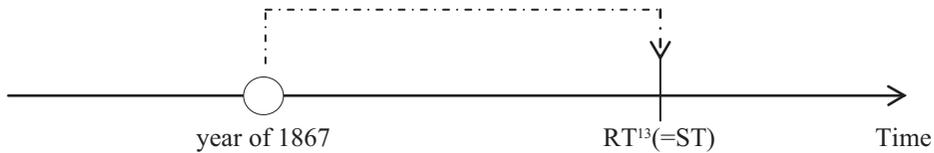
(19) Sono mati-wa 70nen mae-ni ookina zisin-ni osoware-te-iru.

The city-TOP 70 years ago-in big earthquake-by attack-ASP-PST

The city was struck by a big earthquake 70 years ago.

(18) is illustrated as follows.

(20) Natsume Soseki-wa 1867nen-ni umareteiru.



In this usage, the *teiru* form can be replaced by the *ta* form, with slight, inconsequential change of nuance (cf. Inoue 2001, 2011, Iori and Shimizu 2003).

### (4) Perfect

The fourth usage is the perfect. The perfect aspect is discussed in Kudo (1995) and her definition is largely accepted in Japanese linguistics. However, Kudo’s definition contains some problems for the description of the *teiru/teita* form, so I will use this term in a narrower sense in this paper. The differences between Kudo’s “perfect” and “perfect” in this paper will be discussed in subsection IV.4.

“Perfect” in this paper means that an event is expressed as having occurred prior to a point of time: the reference time.

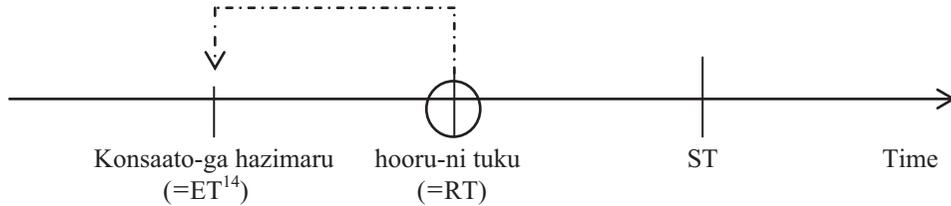
For example, (21) means that the concert had begun when the speaker arrived at the hall, that is, the time when the concert began is prior to the time when he/she arrived and the latter is the reference time. This is illustrated as (22).

<sup>12</sup> For more detailed discussions on this usage, see Inoue (2001, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> RT: reference time

- (21) Watasi-ga kaizyoo-ni tuita toki, konsaato-wa hazimat-tei-ta.  
 I-NOM hall-at arrived time concert-TOP begin-ASP-PST  
 The concert had begun when I arrived at the hall.

(22)



Note that the direction of the observational arrows in (20) (experience/record) and (22) (perfect) are the opposite.

#### (5) Counterfactual

The *teiru/teita* forms are also used to express a counterfactual meaning. For example, the speaker neither buys the camera in (23a) nor has bought it in (23b).

- (23) a. ima okane-ga at-tara, sono kamera-o kat-tei-ru.  
 Now money-NOM have-COD the camera-ACC buy-ASP-PRF  
 I would buy the camera if I had enough money.  
 b. ano toki okane-ga attara, sono kamera-o kat-tei-ta.  
 That time buy-ASP-PST  
 I would have bought the camera if I had had enough money.

This usage will be closely discussed in section V.

#### 4. On Perfect

Kudo (1989, 1995) was probably the first to discuss the perfect aspect in the field of Japanese linguistics<sup>15</sup>.

Kudo (1995) insists that the perfect must satisfy all of the properties below.

- (24) a. There is always a “reference time (*setteizi*),” which is different from the speech time and the event time.  
 b. The event time is shown to occur prior to the reference time: that is, “priority (*senkoosei*),” which is a concept of tense, is implied.  
 c. The event is not merely regarded as “prior” to the reference time but as related to it. In other words, the “effect or influence (*kooryoku*)” caused by the event is implied to be conceivable at the reference time, as is the “completeness (*kanseisei*)” of the event; the former is an aspectual concept.

<sup>14</sup> ET: event time

<sup>15</sup> In fact, the usage “experience and record” and “perfect” had been noticed before Kudo (1989, 1995). See Yoshikawa (1976).

I agree with Kudo (1995) that the perfect must satisfy the requirements of (24a) and (24b). However, I do not think that perfect aspect must always satisfy (24c).

There are cases like (25) in which (24c), in addition to (24a) and (24b), is satisfied.

(25) Kono hasi-wa 10nen mae-ni koware-tei-ru.

This bridge-TOP 10 years ago-at be-damaged-ASP-PRF

This bridge was damaged 10 years ago.

This sentence is used to imply that the damaging of a bridge 10 years ago produces some effect or influence even at the speech time, which in this case is also the reference time<sup>16</sup>.

However, (24c) is too strong as a necessary condition for perfect aspect generally. Consider the following sentence.

(26) Watasi-ga sitta toki, kanozyo-wa nakunat-tei-ta.

I-TOP know time she-TOP past away-ASP-PST

She had passed away when I learned the news.

In (26), the sentence only asserts that her death was prior to the time when the speaker knew it, and it is reasonable to think that no effect or influence is perceivable at the reference time, the time of the speaker's notification of her death.

Based on these argumentation, I insist that Kudo's "perfect" should be divided into two usages: "experience and record (*keiken kiroku*)," in which all of the conditions shown in (24) are satisfied, and "perfect (*kanryoo*)," in which only the first two conditions in (24) are satisfied<sup>17</sup>.

## V. *Subjunctive Mood in Modern Japanese*

Let us now go back to the research question posed at the beginning of the paper, and I will show the reason why a sentence like (27) containing the *teiru/teita* forms can express a counterfactual meaning.

(27) Ano toki watasi-ga tasuke(-tei-)nakattara, kanozyo-wa sinde ita. (=1))

That time I-NOM save ASP not CON she-TOP die ASP-PST

If I had not saved her at that time, she would have died.

First, let us see briefly the tense-mood relationship in English, which is shown in Table 2.

We can see from Table 2 that the tense is "backshifted" once from a to c and from b to

<sup>16</sup> Note that in the experience/record usage, the effect or influence is psychological not physical, while the inverse is the case in the resultative. Compare the following sentence, in which the bridge is (in a state of being) damaged at the speech time, with (25), in which it is not damaged at the speech time.

(a) Konohasi-wa 10nen mae-kara koware-tei-ru.

This bridge-TOP 10 years ago-from be-damaged-ASP-PST

This bridge has been damaged for 10 years.

For that reason, the experience/record should be distinguished from the resultative (cf. Iwasaki 2000, Iori 2001, Iori and Shimizu 2003).

<sup>17</sup> This argument is supported by the fact that the relationship between the event time and the reference time is different between the two usages, a discrepancy shown by the direction of the arrows in (20) and (22).

TABLE 2. TENSE-MOOD RELATIONSHIP IN ENGLISH

		Tense	
		Present/Future	Past
Mood	Indicative	a. I will buy the camera.	b. I bought the camera.
	Subjunctive	c. I would buy the camera.	d. I would have bought the camera.

d<sup>18</sup>. This pattern is summarized as follows.

(28) The subjunctive tense in English is expressed by one backshift from the corresponding indicative tense.

Now let us examine *teiru/teita* forms while keeping (28) in mind: that is, let us compare (29a) and (30a) with (29b) and (30b), respectively.

(29) a. Watasi-wa sono kamera-o kau.

I-TOP the camera-ACC buy

I will buy the camera.

b. Ima okane-ga at-tara, sono kamera-o kat-tei-ru.

Now money have-CON buy-ASP-PRF

I would buy the camera if I had enough money.

c. Watasi-wa sono kamera-o kat-tei-ru.

I have bought the camera.

(30) a. Watasi-wa sono kamera-o kat-ta.

buy-PST

I bought the camera.

b. Ano toki okane-ga at-tara, sono kamera-o kat-tei-ta.

That time buy-ASP-PST

I would have bought the camera if I had enough money at that time.

c. Watasi-wa sono kamera-o kat-tei-ta.

I had bought the camera.

Note that according to the logic of subsection IV.3.(4), *teiru/teita* forms in (29b) and (30b) have no other rational interpretation than as perfect. So, the *teiru/teita* forms in (29b) and (30b) should express the perfect aspect and they should be “perfect forms (*kanryookei*).”

If this is the case, and if the mood of (29b) and (30b) is indicative, then the subordinate clauses in these sentences should express the reference time as we saw in subsection IV.3.(4). However, the clauses do *not* express the reference time, so the only rational interpretation is that these sentences have a subjunctive mood and they express a counterfactual meaning.

This argumentation is supported by the fact that the tenses in (29b) and (30b) are backshifted once from those in (29a) and (30a) respectively<sup>19</sup>.

Now I have given an answer to the research question of the paper: *teiru/teita* forms can express a counterfactual meaning when they are “perfect forms” and are accompanied by appropriate subordinate clauses.

<sup>18</sup> “Backshift” and its contribution to conditional sentences are discussed in Dancygier (1998). See also Iori (2001) and Arita (2007) for related discussions.

<sup>19</sup> Notice that the *teiru/teita* forms in (29b) and (30b) are “perfect forms.” See also Table 2.

Note that *teiru/teita* forms can express a counterfactual meaning only when they are accompanied by (appropriate) subordinate clauses. In other words, they cannot express counterfactual without accompanying subordinate clauses. For example, (29c) and (30c) lack subordinate clauses, and thus cannot express any counterfactual meaning objectively. This is the most important difference between Japanese *teiru/teita* forms and their English counterparts, in which the main clauses can express a counterfactual meaning regardless of the existence of subordinate clauses. Compare (31) and (32) with (33) and (34), respectively.

(31) *Watasi-wa sono kamera-o katteiru.*(=(28c))

(32) *Watasi-wa sono kamera-o katteita.*(=(29c))

(33) I would buy the camera.

(34) I would have bought the camera.

This is because there are modal auxiliaries in English, while the *teiru/teita* forms are not accompanied by any modal auxiliaries in Japanese<sup>20</sup>.

## VI. Summary

In this paper, I investigated the *teiru/teita* forms closely and showed how they can express the subjunctive mood (counterfactual meaning). As a result of the investigation, it was shown that the forms can express the subjunctive mood only when accompanied by a conditional subordinate clause, sharply contrasting them with their English counterparts.

In a future investigation, the result of this paper should be confirmed from a formal semantic point of view, such as in Arita 2007 and Takubo 2011, and we must progress toward a full understanding of the whole system of Japanese modal expressions through a dialogue with works in historical Japanese linguistics such as Takayama 2002 and Fukushima 2011. This paper is a first step toward this goal.

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<sup>20</sup> Note, however, that there are two forms which can be regarded as modal auxiliaries in modern Japanese: *nodatta* (*ndatta*) and *bekidatta*. See the following sentences.

(a) *Mousukosi hayaku dekakeru-ndat-ta.*

A little early leave should-PST

I should have left a little earlier.

(b) *Mousukosi hayaku dekakeru-bekidat-ta.*

should-PST

I should have left a little earlier.

Both of these sentences express the speaker's judgment at the speech time (despite the fact that they are the "past forms," they do not express the judgment at a past time) and are deontic modalities in the sense of Arita (2007). See Iori (2006) for a more detailed discussion.

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