

A STUDY OF JAPANESE EPISTEMIC MODALITY: THE MEANING OF *NO DA*

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This paper discusses the meanings of *no da* (including its variant *n da*). Syntactically, *no da* consists of the nominalising particle *no* and the copulative *da*. It is often said that *no da* corresponds to *it is a fact that*, or *it is that* in English (Kuno 1973b; Noda 1997). There are, however, many examples where *no da* is not rendered in translated texts, and its function seems quite difficult to grasp. Although *no da* is often left unmarked in translations, the utterances would be quite unnatural without *no da* in Japanese. This suggests that *no da* has a distinctive meaning and function. In the field of teaching Japanese, several error analyses have been made regarding *no da*, indicating that *no da* is one of the most difficult forms for learners of Japanese (eg. McGloin 1984; Koganemaru 1990ab).

Many attempts have been made to provide an explanation for *no da*, and it has been occasionally argued that the functions of *no da* can be classified into several different categories (eg. Kuno 1973ab; Koganemaru 1990ab; Noda 1997). In some of the previous studies, *no da* is considered to have a function of 'explanation', but the term is problematic since there are various cases where it does not apply. This paper adopts the framework of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory developed by Anna Wierzbicka and others (see especially Wierzbicka 1996, 2006; Goddard 1998, 2006; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002). It addresses the issue of how to explain the meaning of *no da* in terms of semantic primes. The findings of the study indicate that *no da* has two slightly different meanings depending on when it is used in front of a hearer and when it is used without a hearer. The subtle difference between the two is explained in terms of whether or not *no da* includes the components 'to you' and 'now'.

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