

Texts in Japanese Linguistics

Bjarke Frellesvig, Professor of Japanese Linguistics, Faculty of Oriental Studies

Michaelmas Term, 2 hours of tutorial per week.

The purpose of this option is for students to examine a particular set of issues in Japanese linguistics in some detail, while assimilating the necessary concepts and vocabulary in the process. Students will read, translate, and comment on two parts of the book *'Boku wa unagi da' no bunpō: da to no* by Okutsu Kei'ichirō (1979).

This is an important and oft-quoted work on Japanese grammar that takes as its starting point various possible uses and interpretations of the sentence *boku wa unagi da* sometimes literally (but usually mistakenly) translated 'I am an eel'. Depending on context, this sentence can be used in reply to questions such as "What did you order?", "What are you fishing for?", or "What is your favourite fish?" amongst many others. Okutsu examines the many sentences that can be formed on the same basic pattern from the perspectives of syntax and semantics.

The book addresses in particular the question of the status of the 'copula' within Japanese. The topic Okutsu treats here has been and is still controversial in the field of Japanese linguistics. It raises further questions about focus, presupposition, etc., thus covering some basic notions in pragmatics. As an introduction to Japanese linguistics, the book covers a broad range of issues using basic intuitions about meaning and grammaticality in a very accessible way.