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Naming methods of folk agricultural plot names in Japanese villages: a connection between geography and cognitive linguistics

*Satoshi Imazato**

1. *Introduction*

In Japan, scholarship on place names began in the 18th century by Hakuseki Arai and Norinaga Motoori (Senda, 1982, p. 171; Sekido, 2000, p. 9). On the minor place names within Japanese villages, Kunio Yanagita (1912), the founder of Japanese folklore studies, started systematic academic research (Sekido, 2000, pp. 10-13). In historical geography, such minor place names have been regarded as important clues in clarifying the past's landscapes and land indication systems (Kinda, 2010). Numerous geographers, folklorists, and social linguists have also studied minor place names within Japanese villages from various perspectives, such as etymology, distribution, vocabulary composition, and resident perceptions (Kagami, 1957; Chiba, 1994; Sekido, 2000; Ueno, 2004).

Rural Japanese people have recognized and used agricultural plot names, which are given to each patch of rice paddies and dry fields surrounded by ridges (Imazato, 2006, p. 261 and 2007, pp. 4-7). Within a Japanese village, these folk plot names are the smallest unit of place names. They are included within a larger area of minor place names that are shared among the villagers and that have often been formally registered in cadaster maps. Generally, such an area of a minor place name consists of more than ten or as many as 100 agricultural plots, usually integrated in a single irrigation system.

Actually, most scholars have concentrated on these minor place names. Such scholars, even the farmers themselves, fail to recognize folk plot names as place names; they consider them insignificant nicknames. In short, folk plot names have never been the object of toponymy. Although some geographers, folklorists, and social linguists have addressed such folk plot names within Japanese villages (Chiba, 1994; Muroyama, 1987, pp. 495-513; Kameoka, 1999), they have not systematically conducted detailed and abundant case studies from any theoretical perspectives.

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In Japan, precisely grasping the proper meanings of minor place names is often difficult. Their origins can generally be traced back as far as more than 1,000 years (Kinda, 1985, pp. 43-77). Moreover, over such a long history, their ideographic and phonetic aspects greatly change. In contrast, we relatively easily elucidated the proper meanings of folk plot names, which were mainly used by a single household, through interviews with the farmers themselves who use such names in their daily lives. We can, therefore, clarify the naming methods or the cognitive principles of the plot names.

Besides Japan, for example, the origins and meanings of English field-names registered in historical documents have been classified into various concrete matters, such as vegetation, animals, shape, ownership, and religion (Field, 1993; Rumble, 2011). In addition, it is difficult to hastily determine whether English agricultural fields directly correspond to Japanese agricultural plots, because the Japanese folk plot names are not recorded in any formal documents and they are much smaller than and functionally different from English agricultural fields.

In short, the universal principles of naming methods for such plot names within villages have not been researched either inside or outside of Japan. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, this paper focuses on abstract naming methods, not on concrete classifications. Although Ohira (2010) theoretically investigated Japanese place names using such cognitive linguistics concepts as metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche, he did not conduct detailed case studies of rural villages. We published case studies on this issue in Japanese (Imazato, 2010 and 2012). This English paper contains the essence of these papers.

2. *Study area and research method*

Our study areas are Shiga and Nagasaki Prefectures (Fig. 1). The Shiga villages are close to Kyoto City and are located on the Ohmi Basin near Lake Biwa. In Shiga Prefecture, we selected six households from three agglomerated villages, Kominami, Toba-kou, and Kibe, from Yasu City. They have 45 plots on a plain. The Nagasaki villages are on Hirado Island, which historically traded with Asian and European countries. In Nagasaki Prefecture, this study selected eight households of two dispersed villages, Houki and Koba. They have 139 plots, most of which are terraced. The areas of the paddies and the fields cultivated by each case household ranges from about 0.6 to 1.3 hectares.

We investigated each folk plot name, its meaning, size, and surrounding landscape elements. All plot names used by each case household and their meanings were clarified by interviews with the farmers. All plots were identified on cadastral maps and on the actual landscape. We calculated the sizes of each plot based on land registers, aerial photos, and interviews. Fieldwork was conducted from 2009 to 2011.



Fig. 1 – Study area.

3. *Four types of naming methods*

Tab. I and Fig. 2 show examples of the folk plot names used by a single household in Houki village, Nagasaki Prefecture. This case household cultivates 29 plots within three separate areas. In some cases, two plots that were divided by a landslide still share the same plot name (plots 10-11, 19-20, and 24-25). This table also shows that the farmers reduced the amount of spatial information by frequent adaptation of such common nouns as large paddy and long paddy, while using the same names of such nouns within separate farm areas (plots 9 and 22 in Tab. I).

Note that folk plot names are not common nouns but proper nouns. Generally, geographic names as common nouns are often transformed to geographic names as proper names (Tanabe et al., 2010, pp. 3-6). These plot names have been passed from generation to generation within each household, when such plots existed in the same location and kept their original form.

Based on case studies, this section shows its key findings by referring to cognitive linguistics. Considering the proper meanings given by the farmers, we can derive abstract naming methods. Based on the unconscious logic of the farmers, all the naming methods fall under four types: a) simplified attributes, b) part-whole relationships, c) spatial adjacency, and d) temporal adjacency.

Tab. I – Folk plot names of a case household in Houki village, Nagasaki Prefecture.

No.	Plot name (English translation)	Meaning	Naming method	Area (m ²)
1	Front Paddy	Rice paddy in front of house	c	300
2	Front Field	Dry field in front of house	c	100
3	Constructed Paddy	Converted from dry field to rice paddy	d	400
4	Site of Cattle Shed	Former site of a cattle shed in summer	d	65
5	Field in Kyozaiki	Within minor place name, Kyozaiki	b	550
6	Constructed Paddy	Combined to one plot from five small plots	d	406
7	Sluice Paddy	Highest upper paddy in irrigation flow	b	95
8	Rice Nursery	Paddy used for rice seeding beds	a	190
9	Large Paddy	Largest plot within plots 6-15	a	820
10-11	Glutinous Rice Paddy	Cultivated with glutinous rice	a	315
12	Upper in Bamboo Grass	Upper plot next to bamboo grass	c and b	25
13	Lower in Bamboo Grass	Lower plot next to bamboo grass	c and b	25
14	Upper in Small Paddies	Upper plot within unit of small paddies	a and b	45
15	Lower in Small Paddies	Lower plot within unit of small paddies	a and b	40
16	Under Hume Pipe	Under a Hume concrete irrigation pipe	c	45
17	Persimmon Paddy	Plot next to persimmon trees	c	110
18	Middle Paddy	Middle plot within plots 17-20	b	100
19-20	Lower Paddy	Lowest plot within plots 17-20	b	210
21	Round Paddy	Approximately round paddy	a	350
22	Large Paddy	Largest plot within plots 16-29	a	500
23	Long Paddy	Longest plot within plots 16-29	a	200
24-25	Under Long Paddy	Under the longest plot 23	c	220
26	Wax Tree Paddy	Plot next to a wax tree	c	200
27	Third Small Paddy	Third plot within plots 27-29, small paddies	a and b	100
28	Second Small Paddy	Second plot within plots 27-29, small paddies	a and b	100
29	Bottom Small Paddy	Bottom plot of plots 27-29, small paddies	a and b	50

Note: Each plot number corresponds to numbers shown in Fig. 2. Naming methods a-d are shown in text.

Source: Imazato (2012, p. 111), originally in Japanese.

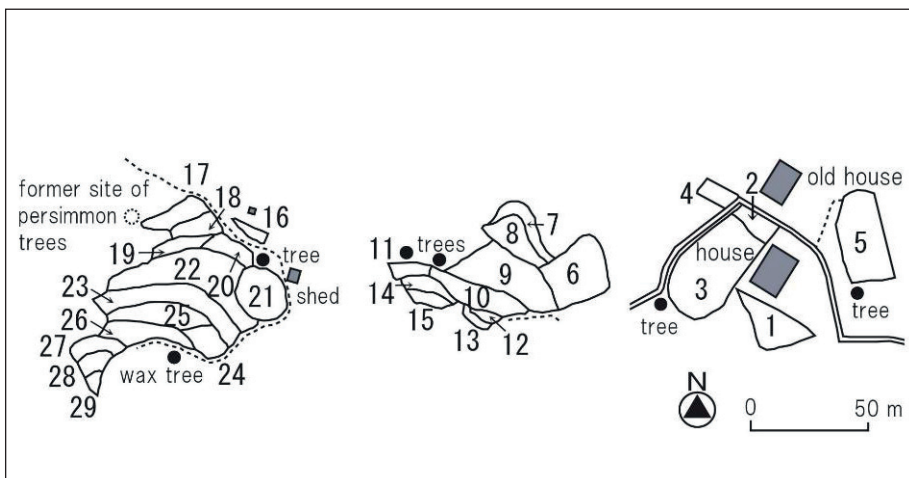


Fig. 2 – Plots cultivated by a case household in Houki village, Nagasaki Prefecture.

However, some single plot names combine two of these four naming methods. An example is Upper Small Paddy and Lower Small Paddy within a series of paddies cultivated by the same household. Both naming methods are composed of the part-whole relationships method (upper-lower) and the simplified attributes method (small). Such combined methods are also shown in Tab. I (plots 12-13, 14-15, and 27-29). Next, we explain these four naming methods in detail.

3.1. Simplified attribute method

First, the simplified attribute method is based on the selection and simplification of one of a plot's attributes. It resembles a portrait. Examples include Large Paddy and Round Paddy. In the left case of Fig. 3, although this plot named Large Paddy has many attributes, such as size, shape, nature of the soil, and its crops, the farmer focuses on the single attribute of size because it is larger than the surrounding plots he or she cultivates (plots 9 and 22 in Tab. I and Fig. 2). Such logic can be explained by the cognitive linguistic theory of affordance that illustrates how humans select information embedded in their environment (Fukada and Nakamoto, 2008, pp. 99-107).

On the right side of Fig. 3, when a plot is named Round Paddy, its exact form is not precisely round. In many cases, such plots simply resemble circles. From cognitive linguistic theory (Taylor, 2003, pp. 41-83), based on the ideal prototype of a circle, the farmer judged the plot's shape to be approximately round (plot 21 in Fig. 2). These affordance and prototype recognitions are important in both cases of Large Paddy and Round Paddy.

The following are other examples of plot names based on the simplified attributes method: Glutinous Rice Paddy (plots 10-11 in Tab. I) and Two *Tan* Paddy. Glutinous rice is mainly used for making rice cakes for New Year's rituals. *Tan* is a traditional Japanese unit of an agricultural field that equals about 1,000 square meters.

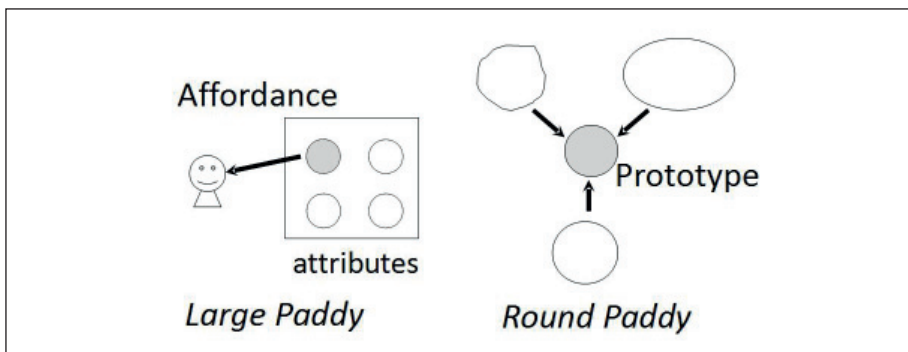


Fig. 3 – Simplified attributes method.

3.2. Part-whole relationships method

Second, the part-whole relationships method is based on the relationships in the conceptualization between parts and whole, as explained in cognitive linguistics (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996). This relationship corresponds to the connection between a plot and a larger area that includes the plot and that is represented by a minor place name (Fig. 4). An example is New Paddies, which originally meant a newly reclaimed paddy area. Also in the case of plot 5 in Tab. I, a minor place name that covers a larger area was directly applied to a smaller plot name. The farmers reduced the amount of spatial information by such direct adaptation of minor place names to household plot names.

Other examples are Upper Paddy and Entrance Paddy. The former is based on the vertical relational site of the plot within a series of plots (Fig. 4). The names of plot 18 and plots 19-20 in Tab. I are based on such relational sites. In the latter case of Entrance Paddy, which is based on a horizontal relational site, a farmer drives his tractor into this paddy from the end of a path for farm tasks.

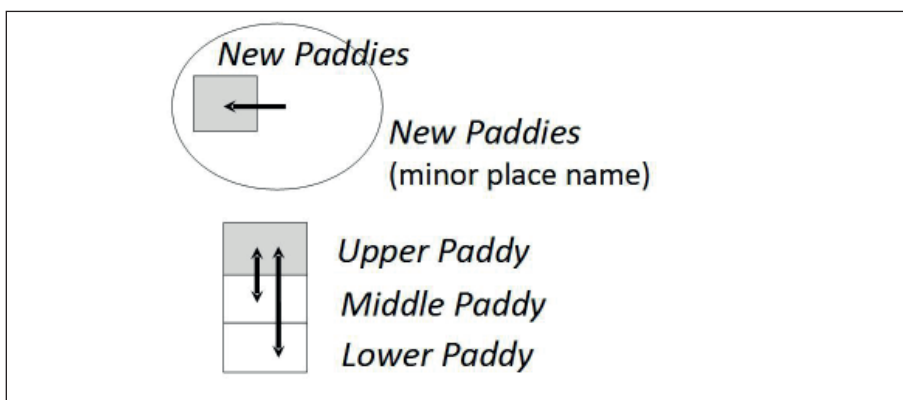


Fig. 4 – Part-whole relationships method.

3.3. Spatial adjacency method

Third, the spatial adjacency method is based on the relationship between a plot and a closed marked object; such landscape elements as a resident's house, a brook's bank, and a single tree in a wood function as reference points for recognition and naming. An example is Wax Tree Paddy (Fig. 5). Based on cognitive linguistic theory (Langacker, 2008, pp. 66-70; Taylor, 2002, pp. 192-194), the marked and selected object is called a profile, and the surrounding landscape that includes such an object is called a base. In this case, the wax tree in a wood is the profile, and the surrounding landscape that consists of wood and agricultural plots is the base (plot 26 in Fig. 2 and

Tab. I). Wax tree sap was traditionally used for making wax in Japan.

In addition to the above relationship between a plot and a landscape element outside the plots, note the relationships between a plot and adjacent plots. An example is the relationship between Long Paddy and Under Long Paddy (plot 23 and plots 24-25 in Tab. I). From cognitive linguistic theory (Langacker, 2008, pp. 70-73; Taylor, 2002, pp. 205-210), the primary focused plot of Under Long Paddy is called a trajector and the reference point, Long Paddy in this case, of such a focus is called a landmark (Fig. 5).

Other examples are Front Field (plot 2 in Tab. I), which means a field in front of the farmer's house, and West Paddy, which indicates that the plot is located west of the house. From the viewpoint of outsiders, the village farmers also selected various unmarked landscape elements, such as a very narrow path or a tiny water tank.

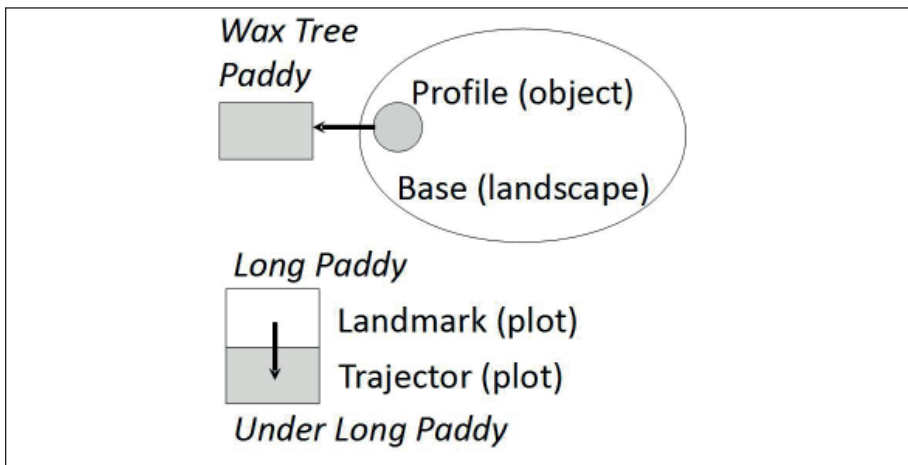


Fig. 5 – Spatial adjacency method.

3.4. Temporal adjacency method

Fourth, the temporal adjacency method is based on the sequential relationship between actions explained by a cognitive linguistic perspective (Fukada and Nakamoto, 2008, p. 153): in other words, between a past episode and the present status. For Aunt's Paddy, the farmer inherited the plot some years ago from his aunt (Fig. 6). Another example is Feudal Lord's Field. It used to be the feudal lord's house. His family moved out of the village, and the housing site became a vegetable field owned by another household. Such a naming method is often based on the previous owner as well as the plot's former use (plot 4 in Tab. I).

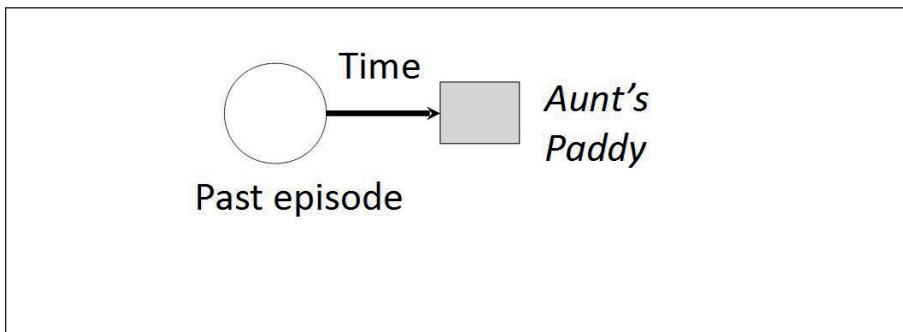


Fig. 6 – Temporal adjacency method.

4. Differences among villages

Next, this study highlights some differences among the case study villages. Fig. 7 shows an example of one household in Kibe village, Shiga Prefecture. In this village that is located on a plain, all the rice paddy plots were expanded to about 2,000 or 3,000 square meters by a land readjustment project during the 1970s and 1980s. This case household cultivates three rectangle plots (Tab. II and Fig. 7). The areas of the minor place names, all of which are formally recorded in cadastral maps and land registers, are surrounded by roads, and such names are directly applied to each plot. In the same way, many households in this village have one plot within each area of a minor place name.

As seen above, Fig. 2 shows an example of one household in Houki village, Nagasaki Prefecture. The plots, which are on steep slopes, are very small, sometimes as little as 50 or 100 square meters, and they were not readjusted. Many households have ten and more adjacent terraced plots within each area of a minor place name.

Tab. III shows that in the Shiga villages, farmers frequently use the part-whole relationships method (method b). An exception is Kominami village, which is located on somewhat complicated landforms and whose plots have various forms and sizes. The table also shows that in the Nagasaki villages, farmers use various methods (methods a-d) to make distinctions among concentrated many plots. In contrast to the Shiga villages that are on a plain, the part-whole relationships methods are frequently based on the vertical relational site of terraced plots, such as upper and lower.

Tab. II – Folk plot names of a case household in Kibe village, Shiga Prefecture.

No.	Plot name (Japanese reading)	Meaning	Naming method	Area (m ²)
1	Fujo	Within minor place name, Fujo	b	3630
2	Ido	Within minor place name, Ido	b	3540
3	Tenjin	Within minor place name, Tenjin	b	99

Note: Each plot number corresponds to numbers shown in Fig. 7. Naming methods a-d are shown in text.

Source: Imazato (2010, p. 223), originally in Japanese.



Fig. 7 – Plots cultivated by a case household in Kibe village, Shiga Prefecture.

Tab. III – Frequency of four naming methods in case study villages.

Village	Naming method				Cases per household
	a)	b)	c)	d)	
Shiga Prefecture					
Kominami	9	6	7	2	12
Toba-kou	1	5	0	2	4
Kibe	0	6	0	0	3
Nagasaki Prefecture					
Houki	29	36	20	7	23
Koba	22	26	15	1	16

Note: When single names are composed of two naming methods, such overlapped cases are included in the above numbers.

Source: Imazato (2010, p. 225 and 2012, p. 119).

5. Conclusions

Our study reached the following conclusions. First, based on case studies of Japanese villages, it identified four naming methods or cognitive principles of folk plot names: simplified attributes, part-whole relationships, spatial adjacency, and temporal adjacency. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, these four methods are based on metonymical recognition (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996; Seto, 1997, pp. 42-49), which can be related to the universal schemas of human spatial recognition. Such metonymical recognition resembles Lévi-Strauss's findings in human logical thinking (1962, pp. 178-323). From the viewpoint of international comparisons, it will be interesting to see what methods we can identify in other countries. Second, to find more differences among countries, regions, villages, and households, our research must focus on the cultural and geographical conditions that make such differences.

Acknowledgements

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(J): written in Japanese

(JE): written in Japanese with English abstract

Riassunto - I metodi di denominazione di piccoli appezzamenti nei villaggi rurali giapponesi: un collegamento tra la geografia e la linguistica cognitiva

Anche se alcuni geografi, studiosi di folklore e sociolinguisti hanno studiato toponimi riferiti a piccole parcelle all'interno dei villaggi rurali giapponesi, pochi di loro si sono concentrati sui toponimi delle singole aree caratterizzati dalla presenza di risaie e altre coltivazioni.

In particolare esiste una categoria di toponimi, i *plot names*, che possono essere considerati la più piccola unità di toponimi all'interno di un villaggio giapponese, utilizzati principalmente all'interno di una singola famiglia. Questo studio ricostruisce il processo popolare di denominazione attraverso il quale si arriva alla designazione dei *plot names*, sulla base dei casi di studio rappresentati dai villaggi giapponesi delle prefetture di Shiga e Nagasaki. In particolare, si sostiene che gli abitanti assegnino il nome al singolo appezzamento utilizzando quattro categorie della linguistica cognitiva: gli attributi semplificati, le relazioni parte/tutto, la contiguità spaziale e quella temporale. Inoltre, concetti chiave di linguistica cognitiva come *affordance*, *prototipo*, *profilo*, *base*, *trajector*, e *landmark* sono teoricamente in grado di spiegare i metodi con i quali si assegna un nome ai piccoli appezzamenti di terreno. Sulla base delle condizioni geografiche, le frequenze di utilizzo di tali processi di denominazione differiscono tra villaggi.

Résumé-Méthode de nommage des noms folkloriques des parcelles agricoles dans des villages japonais: connexion entre la géographie et la linguistique cognitive

Alors qu'un grand nombre de géographes, d'ethnologues et de linguistes sociaux ont étudié les noms des petites localités dans des villages ruraux japonais jusqu'à présent, peu de chercheurs se sont focalisés sur les noms des parcelles individuelles des zones caractérisées par des rizières et des champs secs entourés par des bordures. Ces noms de parcelles, qui représentent la plus petite unité de nom des localités dans une agglomération rurale japonaise, sont principalement utilisés dans un seul foyer. Cette étude présente des connaissances essentielles sur les méthodes de nommage de ces noms folkloriques des parcelles, basées sur des études de cas sur les villages ruraux des préfectures de Shiga et de Nagasaki. Elle démontre également que les villageois ruraux nomment chaque

parcelle en utilisant quatre méthodes cognitives linguistiques: attributs simplifiés, relations partielles-entières, contiguïté spatiale et contiguïté temporelle. En outre, les concepts clés de la linguistique cognitive tels que l'affordance, le prototype, le profil, la base, le trajecteur et le repère peuvent expliquer théoriquement les méthodes de nommage des parcelles. En fonction des conditions géographiques, les fréquences d'utilisation de ces méthodes diffèrent suivant les agglomérations rurales.