



## **The Use of Japanese Synonymous Verbs *GIVE*: A Corpus-based Study**



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### **Abstract**

The current paper presents the linguistics phenomena of the verb '*Give*', which in Japanese has at least five synonymous words, namely *ataeru*, *ageru*, *kureru*, *kizou suru*, and *kifu suru*. This paper applied a qualitative descriptive method that combined with corpus linguistics. Synonyms of these verbs were observed based on the frequency of their use in written and oral languages in two Japanese corpora. The collocation of each verb was also being observed. Based on observations on the frequency of use, it is known that these Japanese five verbs have differences in the variety of languages used, namely: *kizou suru* have the lowest frequency of use in written registers. Moreover, based on observations on the collocation, depending on the context in use, these synonymous verbs cannot be used interchangeably. It is, therefore, concluded that the five synonymous of verbs '*Give*' cannot wholly replace each other. There are some usage limitations in the presence of each of these verbs.

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### **1. Introduction**

The proper use of synonymous words is a problem that is often faced by foreign language learners. Native speakers of a language often experience difficulties when asked to explain the differences in synonymous words because, in most cases, they use their linguistic instincts to differentiate the use of these words or what in Japanese is called *kan* 勘 'intuitive feeling'. In general, it can be said that synonymy is the relationship between forms of language which have almost the

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same meaning. Sudaryanto (2015) explains that "synonym" means the same information, similar meaning, and different forms. In additions, Murphy (2006) states that synonymy can be found not only in lexical items, but also in sentences and propositions. Therefore, the study of synonymy is an important aspect in language acquisition process. However, as Biber, Conrad, & Reppen (2004) proposed, learners need to understand how words are actually used, in addition to simple meanings or lists of supposedly "synonymous" terms. Sutedi (2018) says that synonym is found in Japanese and this is one of the causes of difficulties in learning Japanese. Sutedi (2018) states that there are three ways that can be used in identifying forms of synonyms in Japanese, namely

- (i) Several words in Japanese when translated into Indonesian will become one word, for example the words *oriru*, *kudaru*, *sagaru*, and *furu* which in Indonesian can be paired with the word "go down".
- (ii) If two words can occupy the same position in a sentence with little difference in meaning, they can be considered as synonymous words. For example, in the phrase *kaidan o agaru*, the verb *agaru* can be replaced by the verb *noboru* being the *kaidan o noboru* and both verbs mean 'go up the stairs'.
- (iii) In asserting meaning, the form of synonyms can be used together at the same time. For example, the words *hikaru* and *kagayaku* which means 'shine' can be used in the sentence *hoshi ga hikari-kagayaite iru* 'shining bright stars'.

Previous studies in Japanese synonymy showed that many learners in Indonesia still cannot differentiate the use of these synonymous verbs. Gumbira (2013) analyzed the synonymous verb *kangaeru* and *omou* which both can be translated into *THINK*. The study conducted by Gumbira (2013) aims to determine the differences and similarities of the verbs *omou* and *kangaeru* in terms of structure, meaning, and whether they can replace each other in sentences. The method used by Gumbira (2013) is a descriptive analytic method. From the results of a survey conducted by Gumbira (2013), it is known that there are still many Japanese learners in Indonesia who do not correctly understand the difference in the use of these two synonymy verbs. This is in line with the findings of Zarifa, Herniwati, and Sutjiati (2017) in their research on students of the Indonesian University of Education. Zarifa, Herniwati, and Sutjiati (2017) use corpus linguistics to find similarities and differences in synonymy lingual forms, examining the misuse of Japanese adjectives *taisetsu* 大切, *juuyou* 重要, and *daiji* 大事 which mean 'important' by fourth semester students in Indonesian education university. Zarifa, Herniwati, and Sutjiati (2017) mention two factors that cause misuse of the three adjectives, namely first, students do not understand the differences in the use of the three adjectives; second, students do not understand the difference in the meaning of "importance" that exists in the context of the sentence. The use of corpus linguistics as a tool for analyzing synonymous words can be found across languages in this kind of studies. This suggested that it is a suitable approach to gain a deeper understanding in synonymous words regarding their usage. In Japan, Shiba and Cho (2017) conducted a study on three synonymous verbs in Japanese, namely *miotosu* 見落とす, *misugosu* 見過ごす, and *minogasu* 見逃す by utilizing data from Tsukuba Web Corpus. Shiba and Cho's study (2017) is mainly concerned with information on collocation and grammar patterns of these three synonymous verbs. The study of these three synonymy verbs, actually, has been carried out by Nagashima in 1981. However, at that time, Nagashima did not use corpus linguistics as the analysis tool. Shiba and Cho's study (2017) also shows that supported by an adequate corpus of data, the similarities and differences in synonymy verbs can be clearly demonstrated, resulting in a better understanding than relying solely on native speakers' intuition.

In this study, the Japanese synonymous verbs *GIVE* was being observed. There are five Japanese verbs that can be translated into the verb *GIVE* in English. Therefore, these five Japanese verbs can

be said as synonymous (Backhouse, 2016). These five verbs are *ataeru* 与える, *ageru* あげる, *kureru* くれる, *kizou suru* 寄贈する, and *kifu suru* 寄付する. The problem raised in this paper is about the level of synonymy of the synonymous verbs observed through differences in the frequency of use in the corpora and the collocation. In other words, this paper observed and discussed the differences of these five verbs in the aspect of token frequency, collocation and semantic prosody.

## 2. Materials and Methods

In order to observe the differences in token frequency, the data used in this paper were taken from two Japanese corpora, namely the Balance Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ) and Corpus of Spoken Japanese (CSJ). The BCCWJ itself contains over one hundred million words and has been launched to the public since December 2011 (Maekawa, Yamazaki, Ogiso, & Al., 2014). However, CSJ contains around seven million and more words. The presentation of observations regarding differences in frequency of use is presented in the form of a bar chart. Explanations of the numbers in tables and diagrams are given using words or sentences to describe and elaborate the findings in detail, as well as to draw conclusions. Furthermore, the concordances are also being observed to gain understanding on the collocations of each verb. The collocation observed in this study is based on collocation-via-concordance. Collocation based on concordance (collocation-via-concordance) is a technique for determining significant collocates by manually identifying repeating elements and patterns around other words / language units that are being observed from a concordance collection (Yuliawati, 2018). The concordance itself is the display of each example of the use of words or other language elements that are sought in the corpus, accompanied by the context that precedes and follows it.

The BCCWJ and CSJ can be accessed via <https://chunagon.ninjal.ac.jp>. As of March 2019, the number of words in BCCWJ is 101,874,618 and in CSJ there are 7,605,602 words. The frequency of appearance is a number that is shown from the search results by entering the search / review keyword (the focus of analysis) on the corpus. The greater the token frequency, the more keywords are used / appear in the data corpus. The frequency of occurrence of a keyword can be compared in various genres to show differences in the use of these keywords (Biber, 2010). However, in comparing a keyword between genres, the number of occurrence frequency must be normalized first. This is due to the number of tokens between genres which, in general, differ from one another (Yuliawati, 2018). After normalization is carried out, the number of appearance frequencies per one million tokens will be obtained which can be compared between genres to see the variations in usage that occur. The formula for normalizing the frequency of occurrence of words to a word count / million is as follows.

Normalized word frequency (Normed per million words) = Raw counts / number of tokens.

## 3. Results and Discussions

Comparison of the frequency of usage of these verbs based on the variety of languages is as follows.

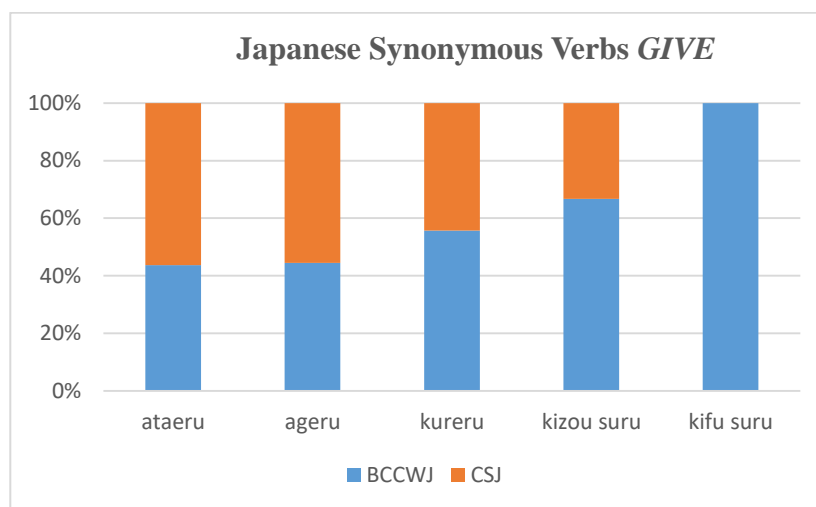
**Table 1 Token Frequency of Japanese Synonymous Verbs *GIVE***

Notion <i>GIVE</i>	Raw counts		Normed per million words	
	BCCWJ	CSJ	BCCWJ	CSJ

<i>ataeru</i>	20.769	1.640	167,36	215,79
<i>ageru</i>	38.103	2.925	307,03	384,89
<i>kureru</i>	20.143	978	162,31	128,68
<i>kizou suru</i>	243	6	1,96	0,79
<i>kifu suru</i>	569	-	4,59	-

Based on the frequency of occurrence of synonymous verbs *GIVE* in table 1, it is clear that there is a large variation in occurrence in the two types of languages.

For more details, a comparison chart can be made as follows.



**Figure 1 Comparison among Japanese Synonymous Verbs *GIVE***

As can be seen in table 1 and figure 1, the verb *ageru* is the verb that occurs most frequently in written and spoken languages. It is the most used verb to express the meaning of *GIVE* in Japanese. When compared between the two registers, written and spoken, the difference is not that wide (307 to 384). The least used verb *GIVE* is *kizou suru* in written register. Meanwhile the verb *kifu suru* is absent in the spoken register.

Comparing the vocabulary group of these five synonymous verb *GIVE*, three of these verbs, that is, *ataeru*, *ageru*, and *kureru* belong to *wago* (Japanese-origin words). On the other hand, *kizou suru* and *kifu suru* belong to *kango* (Sino-Japanese words) (Okamoto, 2018; Kageyana and Saito, 2016; Kano et.al., 2005). Because of its complexity, *kango* is mostly used in formal situations and *wago* is mostly used in everyday situations. The verb *kizou suru* 寄贈する and *kifu suru* 寄付する, as can be seen, consist of two *kanji* characters. *Kizou suru* consists of *ki* 寄 'send' and *zou* 贈 'give'. Meanwhile, *kifu suru* consists of *ki* 寄 'send' and *fu* 付 'attach'. On the other hand, the *wago* verbs only have one *kanji* character like *ataeru* 与える and mostly do not have *kanji* character but only *hiragana* like *ageru* あげる and *kureru* くれる. Because of this reason, it is simpler and easier to use the *wago* vocabulary rather than *kango* vocabulary. Therefore, the token frequency for *kizou suru* and *kifu suru* are much lower than *ataeru*, *ageru*, and *kureru*.

Based on the collocation and semantic prosody, these five synonymous verbs can be compared as follows.

### A. *Ataeru*

The verb *ataeru* can be used with both abstract noun and concrete noun as its direct object. The semantic prosody of this verb is mostly positive even though it can also be used with a negative noun as in example [1] below.

- [1] *CO<sub>2</sub> nado chikyū kankyō ni fuka o ataeru busshitsu.*  
 CO<sub>2</sub> etc earth environment dat load acc give substances  
 ‘Substances that place a load on the global environment, such as CO<sub>2</sub>.’

The noun *fuka* ‘load’ is a noun with negative meaning, therefore it affects the verb *ataeru* and give negative prosody to it. Besides, collocating with noun that have a negative prosody, *ataeru* also collocates with noun that have a positive prosody as can be seen in the example [2] below.

- [2] *Sainō afureru kata wa sekaijū no hito ni ai to kandō o ataeru*  
 talent full person top over the world gen person dat love and happiness acc give  
 ‘Talented people give love and happiness to people all over the world.’

The noun *ai to kando* ‘love and happiness’ is a noun with positive meaning, therefore it affects the verb *ataeru* and give a positive prosody to it.

### B. *Ageru*

The verb *ageru* can be used with both abstract noun and concrete noun as its direct object. The semantic prosody of this verb is positive. Example sentences can be seen in [3] and [4] as follows.

- [3] *Oya kara kodomo ni okane o ageru no ni ....*  
 parents from children dat money acc give eventhough  
 ‘Even though the parents give money to the children, ...’

The noun *okane* ‘money’ used as direct object in sentence [3] is a concret noun and it has a positive meaning. Therefore, it gives a positive prosody to the *ageru* verb.

- [4] *Kukkī wa agenai. Demo, arigatou o ageru yo*  
 cookies top give-neg but thank you acc give pcl  
 ‘I don’t give cookies. But, I’ll give you a thank you.’

The noun *arigatou* ‘thank you’ used as direct object in sentence [4] is an abstract noun and it has a positive meaning. Therefore, it also gives a positive prosody to the *ageru* verb.

### C. *Kureru*

The verb *kureru* can be used with both abstract noun and concret noun as its direct object. The semantic prosody of this verb is positive. Example sentences can be seen in [5] and [6] as follow.

- [5] *Mottekaeru koto ga dekiru yō ni kami no tore & tore-goto hairu*  
 bring home thing nom can so that paper gen tray and tray-whole enter

*binīru-bukuro o kureru no mo yoi kanji desu.*  
 plastic bag acc give nomi also good feeling cop

'It's also a good idea to give me a paper tray and a plastic bag holding a tray so I can take it home.'

The noun *binīru-bukuro* 'plastic bag' used as direct object in sentence [5] is a concret noun and it has a positive meaning. Therefore, it gives a positive prosody to the *kureru* verb.

[6] *ii koto o shiyō ka mayotte iru toki, mukou mizuna yūki o*  
 good thing acc do-desi q confuse-prog time over there courage acc

*kureru kotoba da to omoimasu.*  
 give words cop compl think-form

'When you wonder what to do, I think it's a word that gives you courage.'

The noun *yuuki* 'courage' used as direct object in sentence [6] is an abstract noun and it also has a positive meaning. Therefore, it also gives a positive prosody to the *kureru* verb.

#### D. *kizou suru*

The verb *kizou suru* can be used only with concret noun as its direct object. The semantic prosody of this verb is mostly positive eventhough it can also be used with a negative noun as in example [7] below.

[7] *Medejin karuteru ni yonjuuchō no raifuru o kizō shita to iu.*  
 Medellin Cartel dat 40-piece gen rifle acc give-pst comp say  
 'It is said that he gave 40 rifles to the Medellin Cartel.'

The noun *raifuru* 'rifle' used as direct object in sentence [7] is a concret noun and it has a negative meaning. Therefore, it gives a negative prosody to the *kizou suru* verb.

[8] *Dōhakubutsukan ni abura-e ni-ten o kizō shita shinai no gaka ...*  
 same museum dat oil paintings 2 pieces acc give-pst in the city gen painter  
 'A painter in the city who gave two oil paintings to the same museum.'

The noun *abura-e ni ten* 'two oil paintings' used as direct object in sentence [8] is also a concret noun and it has a positive meaning. Therefore, it gives a positive prosody to the *kizou suru* verb.

#### E. *Kifu suru*

The verb *kifu suru* can also be used only with concret noun as its direct object. The semantic prosody of this verb is positive. Example sentences can be seen in [9] and [10] as follow.

[9] *Maitoshi maitoshi takusan no okane o kifu o sare, ...*  
 every year many gen money acc give acc do-pass-cont

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'A lot of money is given every year,...'

The noun *okane* 'money' used as direct object in sentence [9] is a concret noun and it has a positive meaning. Therefore, it gives a positive prosody to the *kifu suru* verb.

- [10] *Gojuu man-en ijou no genkin matawa gojuu man-en soutou ijou no*  
 500,000 yen more than gen cash or 500,000 yen worth more than gen
- bukken o kifu sareta kata*  
 property acc give-pass-pst person-hon

'They who give cash 500,000 yen or more or property worth 500,000 yen or more.'

The noun *bukken* 'property' used as direct object in sentence [6] is a concret noun and it also has a positive meaning. Therefore, it also gives a positive prosody to the *kifu suru* verb.

In summary, these five synonymous verbs *GIVE*, can be differentiate in their collocation and semantic prosody as can be seen in table 2.

<b>Table 2 Collocation and Semantic Prosody of Japanese Synonymous Verbs <i>GIVE</i></b>			
Notion <i>GIVE</i>	Collocation		Semantic prosody
	Concret noun	Abstract noun	
<i>ataeru</i>	<i>esa</i> '(animal) food', <i>shikyuu</i> 'four ball'	<i>fuka</i> 'burden', <i>zetsubou</i> 'dispair', <i>ai to kandou</i> 'love and happiness', <i>yasuragi</i> 'comfort', <i>eikyou</i> 'effect'	Positive and negative
<i>ageru</i>	<i>purezento</i> 'present', <i>esa</i> '(animal) food', <i>chokoreeto</i> 'chocolate', <i>minikaa</i> 'minicar', <i>okane</i> 'money'	<i>sankashou</i> 'participation appreciation', <i>zenryoku</i> 'full power', <i>arigatou</i> 'thank you', <i>rei</i> 'example', <i>gohoubi</i> 'rewarded'	Positive
<i>kureru</i>	<i>fukuro</i> 'bag', <i>bisuketto</i> 'biscuit', <i>biniiru bukuro</i> 'plastic bag', <i>sensu</i> 'folding fan'	<i>yuuki</i> 'courage', <i>messeji</i> 'message', <i>meeru</i> 'e-mail', <i>chikara to genki to egao</i> 'power, spirit, and smile', <i>shigeki</i> 'stimulus'	Positive
<i>kizou suru</i>	<i>raifuru</i> 'rifle', <i>shokuryou</i> 'food', <i>aburae</i> 'oil painting', <i>shiryuu</i> 'articles', <i>sakuhin</i> 'works'	-	Positive and negative
<i>kifu suru</i>	<i>okane</i> 'money', <i>anko</i> 'bean paste', <i>gojuu man doru</i> '500,000 dollar', <i>bukken</i> 'property'	-	Positive

From table 2, based on their collocation with nouns, it can be concluded that the *kango* verbs, namely *kizou suru* and *kifu suru* can only collocate with concrete nouns and be used in formal situation. However, these two verbs can still be differentiated one to another by looking at their

semantic prosody. Only the verb *kizou suru* can collocate with a negative semantic prosody noun. The *wago* verbs, namely *ataeru*, *ageru*, and *kureru* can collocate both with concrete nouns and abstract nouns and used in informal (everyday) situation. And as for their semantic prosody, the *ataeru* verb can be used with negative semantic prosody noun, while *ageru* and *kureru* cannot.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on observations on the token frequency, collocation and semantic prosody, the five synonymous verbs *GIVE* in Japanese have shown some subtle differences. It can be stated that these verbs cannot completely replace each other. There are limits to the usage that require the presence of each of these verbs. Therefore, Japanese language learners must be more careful in using these synonymous verbs so that they can convey their intended meaning correctly to their listeners.

#### Abbreviation

acc	accusative case
comp	complementizer
cont	continuative
cop	copula
dat	dative case
desi	desiderative
form	formal
gen	genitive case
hon	honorific
nom	nominative
nomi	nominalizer
pass	passive
pst	past tense
pcl	particle
prog	progressive
q	question

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