



# Expanding to the peripheries: A corpus-based study of the development of the Japanese discourse marker *toiuka*



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- *Toiuka* originally expressed the speaker's difficulty in lexical choice.
- Subsequently, it shifted its position and gained new uses.
- In the left periphery, it serves the purposes of repair, upgrade, and disagreement.
- In the right periphery, it adds elaboration or weakens assertiveness.
- The left periphery shows more vigorous change.

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## ABSTRACT

Many languages have common or stock phrases that are used when the speaker is unsure about how to say a certain thing, as with such English expressions as *how should I put it?* and *something like X*. In conversation, one strategy to avoid turning into a silence is to give a tentative choice with the hope that the addressee will understand the speaker's meaning. The Japanese discourse marker *toiuka* started as such a parenthetical expression that appears in mid-sentence and indicates the speaker's difficulty in lexical choice. It subsequently shifted to the utterance-initial and -final positions and gained new uses. The present article examines the diachronic development of this expression, using data from the National Diet Minutes Corpus [1], the *Ninjobon* 'Love Story Books' Corpus [2], and the *Taiyo* 'Sun Magazine' Corpus [3]. We keep track of the pragmatic-semantic and syntactic patterns over time quantitatively and show from a usage-based approach how this gradual process occurred.

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## 1. Introduction

The discourse marker *toiuka* is one of the most commonly used discourse markers in contemporary Japanese. The marker, including such variant forms as *teyuuka* and *tsuka*, is particularly frequent among younger speakers [4], and, in some cases, even projects a negative image of the speaker, if overused [5]. Because the available studies on this marker mostly focus on contemporary Japanese usage [6,7], little is known about how the expression has emerged as a discourse marker. This study, thus, attempts to examine its diachronic development and fills the gap in our knowledge. In particular, the study will closely examine how it

expanded its position within an utterance to the peripheries, an actively discussed topic within the framework of grammaticalization in recent years [8,9].

Morphologically, *toiuka* 'rather' consists of the quotative particle *to*, the speech verb *iu* and the interrogative sentence-final particle *ka*. Makino and Tsutusi [10] explain *toiuka* as "a phrase used to restate what was just said in order to be more accurate or appropriate". They list three syntactic patterns. As shown in (1a), (1b), and (1c), *toiuka* may follow a noun, a phrase, or a sentence, respectively.

(1) Makino and Tsutusi's examples of *toiuka*

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- (1a) *Jibun-no kanchigai* **toiuka**, *huchuu* *deshita*.  
 self-GEN<sup>1</sup> misunderstanding **rather** carelessness  
 COP.POL.PST  
 ‘It was my misunderstanding ... or carelessness, rather.’
- (1b) *Kono jiken-ni tsuite-wa, watashitachi-mo odoroi*  
*teiru* **toiuka**, *konwaku shiteimasu*.  
 this incident-DAT regarding-TOP we-FOC surprise.R-  
 ST **rather** confusion  
 do.RST.POL  
 ‘We are also surprised by this incident, or perplexed, rather.’
- (1c) *Wagasha-no hanashi-wa nanimo dekimasen*.  
 our.company-GEN talk-TOP at.all cannot.POL  
**Toiuka**, *nanimo hanasu koto-wa arimasen*.  
**rather** at.all talk N-TOP exist.not.POL  
 ‘I cannot talk about our company. Or, I should say, I have nothing to say about it.’ [10].

In (1a), the noun phrase *jibun-no kanchigai* ‘my misunderstanding’ is followed by *toiuka*, which prefaces another noun phrase that expresses the speaker’s intended meaning more appropriately. In (1b), the clause *watashitachi-mo odoroi* ‘we are also surprised’ is followed by *toiuka*. The next clause *konwaku shiteimasu* ‘(are) perplexed’ restates the speaker’s intended meaning. In (1c), *toiuka* starts a new sentence after a sentence. The second sentence, serves as a restatement.

In addition, *toiuka*, as shown in (2), is not only used to restate or correct one’s prior utterance but also another person’s utterance [6,10].

- (2) Makino and Tsutsui’s example of turn-initial *toiuka*
- (2.1) A: *Ano hito-wa okusan desu-ka*.  
 that person-TOP wife COP-SFP  
 ‘Is that person your wife?’
- (2.2) B: U:n, **toiuka**, *koibito mitaina mon-desu-yo*.  
 well **rather** lover resemble N-COP-SFP  
 ‘Well, **actually**, (I’d say) she’s something like a lover.’ [10].

The expression’s discourse function varies, depending on where it appears within an utterance [6,7]. According to Laury and Okamoto [7], *toiuka* in utterance-internal position indicates the inadequacy of what the speaker has just said and introduces a remedy or a supplement that addresses this inadequacy. Maynard [6] similarly notes that utterance-internal *toiuka* is a marker of meta-language or meta-communication, indicating that the expression that the speaker has chosen is not perfect, thus, conveying the speaker’s hesitation or uncertainty. In contrast, the utterance-initial use, which occurs when a particular utterance reaches some type of completion point [7], appears to express more

subjectivity. Maynard [6] notes that it foretells that the speaker is about to reveal his/her true, or something close to true, thoughts or feelings. Most commonly, the speaker is fully aware that the addressee is not ready to accept what he/she is going to say so that the expression indicates the speaker’s resolve for ensuing negotiation with the addressee, as well as intimacy that arises due to revealing his/her true thoughts and feelings. Finally, *toiuka* in utterance-final position serves to change the pragmatic force of what has been said. Maynard [6] explains that sentence-final *toiuka* functions to mitigate what the speaker has said and convey the speaker’s sensitivity or consideration toward others. Similarly, Laury and Okamoto [7] note that the utterance-final use indicates the speaker’s dissatisfaction with the preceding utterance, and may serve to mitigate or modify it.

Examining how *toiuka* appears in novels in the Modern Japanese Period (1868–present), Kitano [11] similarly notes that two uses exhibited by his early tokens of *toiuka* largely correlate with different positions. In positions as shown in (1a) and (1b), *toiuka* functions to present a word, phrase, or clause tentatively and metacommunicatively convey the speaker’s difficulty in finding the right expression; while in the position as shown in (1c), *toiuka* serves to replace the preceding discourse segment with a more appropriate expression.

These findings suggest that the functional differences observed in contemporary Japanese are most likely to have their roots in how different positions within an utterance play different roles in discourse. Recent studies have suggested the importance of a peripheral position, such as the utterance-initial and the final positions, in the development of discourse markers [8,9], but it has not been clear how the emergence of discourse markers correlates with shifts to a peripheral position. The present study diachronically examines how *toiuka* emerged in the peripheries with the hope that our results will provide important insights into the mechanism(s) for positional shift in grammaticalization of discourse markers.

## 2. Methodology and data

The present study will employ a usage-based approach [e.g., 12,13] and show how pragmatic-semantic change occurred over time, both, qualitatively and quantitatively. The *Kokkai Kaigiroku* ‘National Diet Minutes’ Corpus [1] constitutes a primary data source for the present study. The corpus consists of the minutes taken at the National Diet from 1947 to 2012 with a total of 11,195 minutes, resulting in the text length of 433 million characters. The dominant register is formal institutional talk, in which turn-taking allocation is mostly determined by the rules and procedures of the National Diet. Nevertheless, this corpus is chosen because, unlike other available diachronic Japanese corpora, which collect only written texts, it allows one to examine spoken language over a relatively long time span. Additionally, two historical corpora, the *Ninjobon* Corpus [2] and the *Taiyo* Corpus [3], are used to examine the original structure of *toiuka* before the 1940s. The former corpus consists of six *Ninjobon* ‘Sentimental Story’ texts published in the late Edo period, one genre of *gesaku* ‘vulgar’ literature known to employ the colloquial language of the period in their dialogue segments [14], and commonly adopted as research data [e.g., 15,16]. The latter corpus consists of texts taken from the magazine *Taiyō* ‘Sun’, which contains a wide range of writings, including opinion articles, lectures, novels, essays, and reports, and had strong readership, including the young and middle-aged, in the Japanese middle class [17]. The corpus, one of the largest historical corpora available for the Japanese language, is based on a total of 60 issues published in 1895, 1901, 1909, 1917, and 1925.

This study examines the use of *toiuka* separately at different

<sup>1</sup> ACC = accusative, CL = noun classifier, CN = connective, COP = copula, DAT = dative, FOC = focus particle, SFP = sentence-final particle, GEN = genitive, GEP = general extender particle, IMP = imperative, HRT = hortative, HON = honorific, N = nominalizer, NOM = nominative, MIM = mimetic expression, POL = polite, POT = potential, PRG = progressive, PSS = passive, PST = past tense, QTP = quotative particle, RST = resultant, TOP = topic marker, VLT = volitional.

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