

An Analysis of Similar Expressions: The Case of *Sugu* vs. *Moosugu*.

TORII Eiko
University of Wellesley

Abstract:

In this study, I will analyze two similar expressions in Japanese : *sugu* and *moosugu*. *Sugu* and *moosugu* roughly share the semantics of "soon"; and the similarity between the two words sometimes causes difficulty for learners of Japanese in their uses.

Makino and Tsutsui (1995) explain that when *moosugu* is used in a compound sentence, "a triggering event" must be something that has occurred already, whereas "a triggered event" needs to be something that will occur in the near future.

Similarly, Morita (1980) defines that *moosugu* can only be used in expressing a future event from the present perspective. In other words, it cannot be used in expressing a future event stemming from an action that took place in the past or may take place in the future.

Can these observations account for every *moosugu* sentence without exceptions? What about the constraints for a *sugu* sentence?

In this study, I hope to discover the semantic constraints on the uses of *sugu* and *moosugu*, which would make it easier for Japanese learners in their acquisition of these expressions.

1. Introduction

*Sugu*¹ and *moosugu* roughly share the semantics of "soon".

- (1).
 - a. Smith-san wa denwa sita kara, **sugu** kuru yo.
(Because we have called Mr. Smith, he will come soon.)
 - b. Smith-san wa denwa o sureba, **sugu** kuru yo.
(If we call Mr. Smith, he will come soon.)
 - c. Smith-san wa denwa o sitara, **sugu** kita.
(We called Mr. Smith and he came soon.)
 - d. **Sugu** kite kudasai.
(Please come soon.)
 - e. ***Sugu** Christmas desu ne.
(Soon it will be Christmas, right?.)
- (2).
 - a. Smith-san wa denwa sita kara **moosugu** kuru yo.
(Because we have called Mr. Smith, he will come pretty soon.)

¹ *Sugu* can refer to both temporal and spatial distances. I will be discussing the temporal reference only.

(Makino & Tsutsui 1995)

- b. *Smith-san wa denwa o sureba, **moosugu** kuru yo.
(If we call Mr. Smith, he will come pretty soon.)
(Makino & Tsutsui 1995)
- c. *Smith-san wa denwa o sitara, **moosugu** kita.
(Mr. Smith came pretty soon when we called him.)
(Makino & Tsutsui 1995)
- d. ***Moosugu** kite kudasai.
(Please come soon.)
- e. **Moosugu** Christmas desu ne.
(Soon it will be Christmas, right?)

Makino and Tsutsui (1995) explain the acceptability of (2a) and the unacceptability of (2b) & (2c) as follows:

"*Moosugu* in (2a) is used to mean 'something is going to take place very soon since a triggering event has already taken place'. Sentences (2b) & (2c) are unacceptable because in (2b) the triggering event (i.e., a telephone call) has not taken place and in (2c) the triggered event (Smith's coming) has already taken place."(441)²

In other words, an appropriate use of *moosugu* is when event A has taken place, therefore event B will take place very soon. Thus, event A needs to be something that has occurred already and event B needs to be something that will occur in the near future.

Similarly, Morita (1980) defines that *moosugu* can only be used in expressing a future event from the present perspective. In other words, it cannot be used in expressing a future event stemming from an action that took place in the past or may take place in the future. Therefore, (2b) is ungrammatical because the condition '*denwa o sureba* (if we call him)' has not yet met and (2c) is not grammatical because it is expressing an event in the past.

However, neither of these observations explains the unacceptability of simple sentences, such as (1e) and (2d). In this section, I will try to discover the semantic constraints on the uses of *sugu* and *moosugu*.

² In their text, (2a), (2b), (2c) are numbered as [1], [2], [3], respectively.

2. Difference between *Sugu* and *Moosugu*

Let us first examine Makino and Tsutsui's observation that explains the unacceptability of (2b). Consider the following sentences:

- (3). a. Tabetara, **sugu** ha o migakimasu.
(I brush my teeth as soon as I finish eating.)
- b. *Tabetara, **moosugu** ha o migakimasu.
(I brush my teeth as soon as I finish eating.)
- (4). a. Tosyokan ni yotte kara **sugu** sotira ni ukagaimasu.
(I will be there soon after stopping by the library.)
- b. *Tosyokan ni yotte kara **moosugu** sotira ni ukagaimasu.
(I will be there soon after stopping by the library.)
- (5). a. Tegami o kurete mo **sugu** henzi wa dasenai yo.
(Even if you write me, I cannot write back soon.)
- b. *Tegami o kurete mo **moosugu** henzi wa dasenai yo.
(Even if you write me, I cannot write back soon.)

These examples illustrate that in a complex sentence, *moosugu* cannot be used when the triggering event has not already occurred. Therefore, they satisfy Morita's assumption as well.

Let us move to the sentences where the event took place in the past as we have seen in (1c) & (2c).

- (6). a. Uti ni kaeru to **sugu** neta.
(As soon as I returned home, I went to bed.)
- b. *Uti ni kaeru to **moosugu** neta.
(As soon as I returned home, I went to bed.)
- (7). a. Tegami o kaita kedo, **sugu** dasanakatta.
(I wrote a letter, but I did not send it immediately.)
- b. *Tegami o kaita kedo, **moosugu** dasanakatta.
(I wrote a letter, but I did not send it immediately.)
- (8). a. Okite **sugu** dekaketa.
(I woke up and left home immediately.)
- b. *Okite **moosugu** dekaketa.
(I woke up and left home immediately.)

The above sentences also support Makino & Tsutsui's, and Morita's observation that *moosugu* cannot be used when the triggered event (event B that comes after event A) has already occurred.

Now, let us observe the type (1a) & (2a) sentences:

- (9). a. Haha ga matte iru kara **sugu** kaeranakereba naranai.
(Because my Mom is waiting, I must go home soon.)
- b. Haha ga matte iru kara **moosugu** kaeranakereba naranai.
(Because my Mom is waiting, I must go home soon.)
- (10). a. Sigoto ga haitta node **sugu** kaerana kamosirenai.
(I may not go home soon since some work just came in.)
- b. *Sigoto ga haitta node **moosugu** kaerana kamosirenai.
(I may not go home soon since some work just came in.)
- (11). a. Tegami wa kaita kedo, **sugu** dasanai tumorida.
(I wrote the letter, but I am not going to mail it soon.)
- b. *Tegami wa kaita kedo, **moosugu** dasanai tumorida.
(I wrote the letter, but I am not going to mail it soon.)

The unacceptability of (10b) & (11b) cannot be explained by the discussed observations because in both sentences, the triggering event has already taken place and the triggered event has not, just as in (2a) and (9b). One may claim that (10) and (11) are negative in connotation (the events are NOT going to take place), whereas (2a) and (9b) are affirmative in connotation (the events are going to take place). If this is true, we would arrive at the following constraint:

- (12). **The Constraint on the use of Moosugu in a complex sentence**
(Tentative):

Moosugu can be used only when the triggering event has already taken place and the triggered event has not. The triggered event must be affirmative in connotation.

Now, let us observe the following simple sentences.

- (13). a. **Sugu** hazimemasita.
(I started immediately.)
- b. ***Moosugu** hazimemasita.
(I started immediately.)

- (14) a. **Sugu** hazimarimasita.
(It started immediately.)
- b. ***Moosugu** hazimarimasita.
(It started immediately.)

The above examples support the notion that *moosugu* cannot be used in modifying an event in the past, whether the following verb is (+stative) or (-stative).

However, *moosugu* still does not fit well with some of the sentences that express future events, such as (2d).

- (15) a. **Sugu** tabetakunai.
(I do not want to eat immediately.)
- b. ***Moosugu** tabetakunai.
(I do not want to eat soon immediately.)
- (16) a. **Sugu** dekakemasyoo.
(Let's go out soon.)
- b. */?**Moosugu** dekakemasyoo.
(Let's go out soon.)
- (17) a. **Sugu** katadukenasai.
(Clean it up soon.)
- b. ***Moosugu** katadukenasai.
(Clean it up soon.)
- (18) a. **Sugu** tukuttara doo?
(How about making it soon?)
- b. ***Moosugu** tukuttara doo?
(How about making it soon?)

The unacceptability of (2d), (15b), (16b), (17b), and (18b) shows that *moosugu* sentences cannot express a speaker's request, desire, invitation, command, or suggestion.

Now, observe the following:

- (19) For an answer to the question, "Smith-san wa?" (How about Smith-san?)
- a. **Sugu** kimasu yo. (He will come soon.)

b. **Moosugu** kimasu yo. (He will come soon.)

(20). For a reply to the call, "Doozo." (Come in.)

a. Hai, **sugu** ikimasu. (I will be there soon.)

b. *Hai, **moosugu** ikimasu." (I will be there soon.)

Note that the involvement of the speaker's intent plays an important role in the acceptability of these sentences. The unacceptability of (2d, 15b, 16b, 17b, and 18b) can also be accounted for if we assume that *moosugu* cannot be used in sentences that involve the speaker's intent.

Now let us go back to (10) and (11). Earlier in the discussion, I assumed that the negative connotation of (10) and (11) might have something to do with the unacceptability of (10b) and (11b). However, we can also explain the unacceptability of these two sentences by claiming the involvement of the speaker's intent: 'kaeranai (not going home)' and 'dasanai tumorida (not intend to send)'.

Then, would it be correct to assume that a negative connotation (the event is NOT taking place) has nothing to do with the unacceptability of (10b) and (11b)? Let us apply this notion to (2e) and (19b) which represent the only acceptable *moosugu* sentences in this paper.

(2). e' ***Moosugu** Christmas de wa nai desu ne.
(It will not be Christmas soon.)

(19). For an answer to the question, "Smith san wa?" (How about Smith san?)

a'. **Sugu** ni wa kimasen yo. (He will not come soon.)

b'. ***Moosugu** (ni wa) kimasen yo. (He will not come soon.)

These examples demonstrate that a negative connotation does play a role in determining the acceptability of a *moosugu* sentence. Thus we can redefine (12):

(12)' **The Constraint on the use of Moosugu** (revised):

Moosugu can be used only in expressing a future event or action that does not involve the speaker's intent. The event or action must be expressed in an affirmative connotation.

Finally, let us consider the possible constraints for *sugu* by examining the similar sentence patterns as (1e) & (2e).

- (21). a. ***Sugu** kimatu test da. (Soon it will be the Final Exam.)
 b. **Moosugu** kimatu test da. (Soon it will be the Final Exam.)
- (22). a. ***Sugu** syakai-zin ni naru. (Soon, I will go out into the world.)
 b. **Moosugu** syakai-zin ni naru. (Soon, I will go out into the world.)
- (23). a. ***Sugu** samuku narimasu. (Soon, it will get cold.)
 b. **Moosugu** samuku narimasu. (Soon, it will get cold.)

From these examples, one might assume that *sugu* does not correspond with “Noun + *da*”, “Noun/Adj. + *ni naru*” sentences. Now, compare (21)-(23) with the following sentences:

- (21). a'. Kansya-sai ga owareba, **sugu** kimatu test da.
 (When Thanksgiving is over, the Final Exam will be soon.)
 b'. *Kansya-sai ga owareba, **moosugu** kimatu test da.
 (When Thanksgiving is over, the Final Exam will be soon.)
 a''. Kansya-sai ga owattara, **sugu** kimatu test datta.
 (There were Final Exams right after Thanksgiving was over.)
 b''. *Kansya-sai ga owattara, **moosugu** kimatu test datta.
 (There were Final Exams right after Thanksgiving was over.)
- (22). a'. Sotugyoo sureba, **sugu** syakai-zin ni naru.
 (I will go out into the world soon after I graduate.)
 b'. *Sotugyoo sureba, **moosugu** syakai-zin ni naru.
 (I will go out into the world soon after I graduate.)
 a''. Sotugyoo sitara, **sugu** syakai-zin ni natta.
 (I went out into the world soon after I graduated.)
 b''. *Sotugyoo sitara, **moosugu** syakai-zin ni natta.
 (I went out into the world soon after I graduated.)
- (23). a'. 11-gatu ni nareba, **sugu** samuku narimasu.
 (It will get cold soon after November arrives.)
 b'. *11-gatu ni nareba, **moosugu** samuku narimasu.

(It will get cold soon after November arrives.)

- a'': 11-gatu ni nattara, **sugu** samuku narimasita.
(It got cold soon after November arrived.)
- b'': *11-gatu ni nattara, **moosugu** samuku narimasita.
(It got cold soon after November arrived.)

The unacceptability of (21b', b'', 22b', b'', 23b', b'') has already been discussed. What is interesting here is *sugu* sentences of (21a', a'', 22a', a'', 23a', a'') are completely acceptable, unlike (21a), (22a), and (23a). This means that the earlier assumption that *sugu* does not correspond well with “Noun + *da*”, “Noun/Adj. + *ni naru*” sentences is incorrect. Instead, these examples illustrate that *sugu* can be used in expressing a future event or an event in the past. However, the use of *sugu* is unacceptable when “*sugu*” means “immediately from the present time” (the moment that the speech is taking place). Consider the following sentences:

- (21). a''': *Kansya-sai ga owatta kara **sugu** kimatu test da.
(Because Thanksgiving is over, the Final Exam will be soon.)
- b''': Kansya-sai ga owatta kara **moosugu** kimatu test da.
(Because Thanksgiving is over, the Final Exam will be soon.)
- (22). a''': *Sotugyoo sita kara **sugu** syakai-zin ni naru.
(Because I graduated, I will go out into the world soon.)
- b''': Sotugyoo sita kara **moosugu** syakai-zin ni naru.
(Because I graduated, I will go out into the world soon.)
- (23). a''': */?11-gatu ni natta kara **sugu** samuku narimasu.
(Because November has arrived, it will get cold soon.)
- b''': 11-gatu ni natta kara **moosugu** samuku narimasu.
(Because November has arrived, it will get cold soon.)

Once again, *sugu* does not fit well with these sentences because in each sentence *sugu* is used to mean “immediately from now”. On the other hand, *moosugu* fits perfectly in this pattern as discussed. Then, how do we account for the acceptability of (1a, d) and other sentences whose “*sugu*”s are also used to mean “immediately from now”? One thing is clear is that when speaker’s intent is involved, such as (1d), (10a), (11a), (15a), (16a), (17a), (18a), and (20a), *moosugu* cannot be used; thus *sugu* must be chosen. In the cases of (1a), (9a), and (19a) however, *moosugu* can replace *sugu* as discussed because those sentences represent a state or situation, rather than the speaker’s intent.

Then, what would be the difference between (1a, 9a, 19a) and (1e, 21a, a''', 22a, a''', 23a, a''')? Before we consider an answer to this question, let us look at a semantic difference between (1a, 9a, 19a) and (2a, 9b, 19b), where the use of either *sugu* or *moosugu* can be appropriate. First, take a look at (1a) and (2a). Both sentences are acceptable and similar in their meanings; however, they are not exactly the same for a native speaker. It seems that Smith-san will arrive sooner in (1a) than in (2a), and it is not because *sugu* is faster than *moosugu*. I assume it is because *sugu* carries the notion of the speaker's intent, whereas *moosugu* is absolutely non-volitional as is discussed. In other words, in (1a) the speaker speaks for Smith-san's motives for arriving immediately, in contrast to (2a) which does not carry such a notion and simply states the facts objectively. Similarly, (9a) and (19a) seem to occur within a shorter temporal distance than (9b) and (19b). The resembling contrast can be seen in English words such as "right away" and "soon". Consider the following example:

- (24). a. Mr. Smith will be here **right away**.
 b. Mr. Smith will be here **soon**.

A native speaker of English would agree that (24a) seems to occur sooner than (24b) because (24a) sounds as if the speaker speaks for Mr. Smith and is representing Mr. Smith's intent to be here "right away", whereas (24b) is a totally objective statement.

Now, let us go back to our discussion, the difference between (1a, 9a, 19a) and (1e, 21a, a''', 22a, a''', 23a, a'''). If we take a close look at each sentence, we can say that (1a, 9a, 19a) carries the notion of "right away" which involves someone's intent, whereas (1e, 21a, a''', 22a, a''', 23a, a''') contains planned dates and predictable future events, so does not carry the notion of "right away". Thus, I present the following constraint for *sugu*:

- (25). **The Constraint on the use of Sugu:**
Sugu cannot be used to mean "immediately from now" unless the sentence involves the speaker's intent or someone else's intent as expressed by the speaker. When expressing set events or plans, *moosugu* must be used.

3. Summary

In this section, I examined the characterizations of two similar adverbs, *sugu* and *moosugu* by comparing contexts in which only one form or the other can be used. To summarize, each form has the following characteristics:

Sugu: It is used to express an idea of “without much temporal distance”.³ It can be used in a wide variety of constructions and tenses, such as request, command, desirative, invitation, past, present, and future. However, it does not fit well when *sugu* is used to mean “immediately from now” unless the main verb is volitional.

Moosugu: It is used to express an idea of “immediately from the present moment”. It cannot be used when the sentence involves the speaker’s intent, nor when the sentence has a negative connotation.

4. Conclusion

I have presented an analysis of a set of similar expressions. I hope this study is helpful for learners of Japanese in acquiring these expressions as well as for Japanese teachers in explaining the differences.

References

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³ Makino & Tsutsui (1995)