Monday, 29 February 2016
“Understanding Japanese Through Its Invisible Structures:
   How Linguistics Can Contribute to Language Learning”
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Japanese shares with all human languages the property of having structure to it. Though the goal of learning Japanese is to internalize such structure in a way that you don’t have to think consciously about it, this goal is complicated by the fact that some of the most important kinds of structure don’t exist in a form that can be directly observed. One of the ways that linguistics can contribute to language learning is to make explicit these invisible structures so that attention can be paid to them both in the teaching and the learning of Japanese as a second language. This presentation will discuss three examples of such “invisible” structure as illustrations of how linguistics can contribute to language learning. They are (1) Argument Structure (differing patterns of nouns that must be present for verbs to make sense); (2) Information Structure (structures that mark the relationship between what’s being talked about now and what went before); and (3) Immediate Constituent Structure (structures that group different parts of a sentence into “chunks” of meaning). Along the way we will hopefully gain some practical insights into various aspects of Japanese grammar that can cause problems to second language learners, such as the particles wa and ga, relative clauses, transitive and intransitive verbs, causatives, passives, and other related topics.