

Developing a Better Understanding of Japanese Sentence Structure

National Symposium on Japanese Language Education 2016

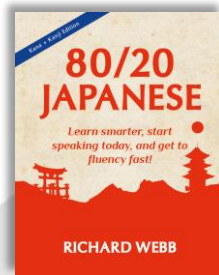
Visible and Valuable

Richard Webb

Author of 80/20 Japanese

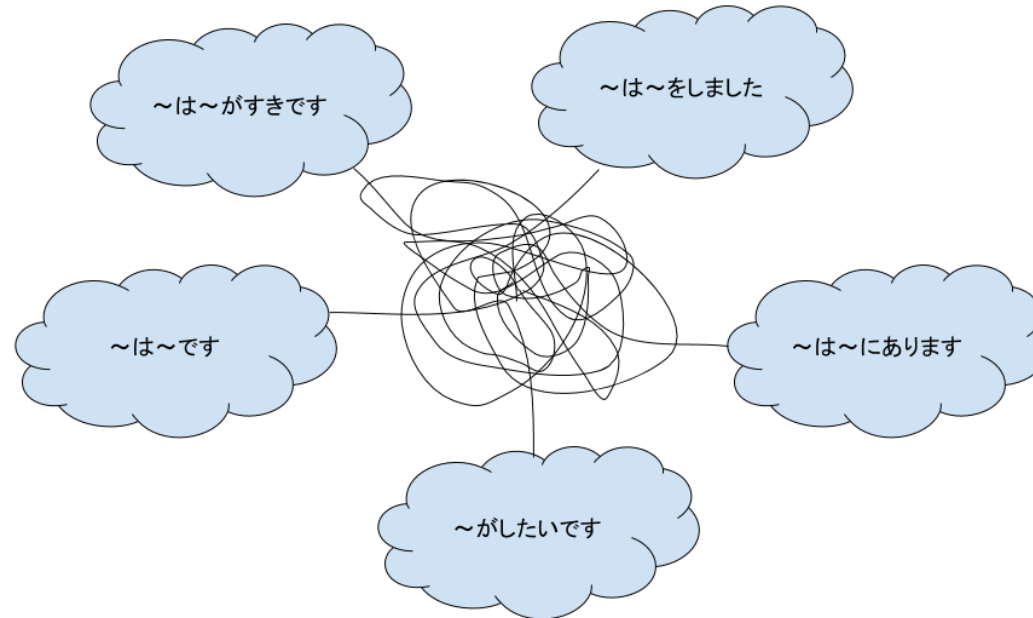
My Japanese Experience

- Started Japanese in year 7
- 6-month student exchange to Osaka in year 10
- Arts/Commerce at Monash University – Major in Japanese
- 12-month study abroad program at Saitama University
 - Passed 1級 of Japanese Language Proficiency Test
- Lived and worked in Tokyo for 4 years
- Wrote *80/20 Japanese*



The Problem I Wanted to Solve

No clear link between sentence patterns



- Can say many things, but can't easily tie them all together
- OK in the short term, but confusing and limiting in the long term

Leads to Incorrect Assumptions

When we don't fully understand something, our brains fill in the gaps based on the things we do understand (ie. English)

× Eg. 私**は**元気です → **は** means “am”

- Why? Intuitively **associate word order with meaning** - because that's how English works
 - What about 私**は**すしを食べました? Can't explain **は** – just accept it and move on

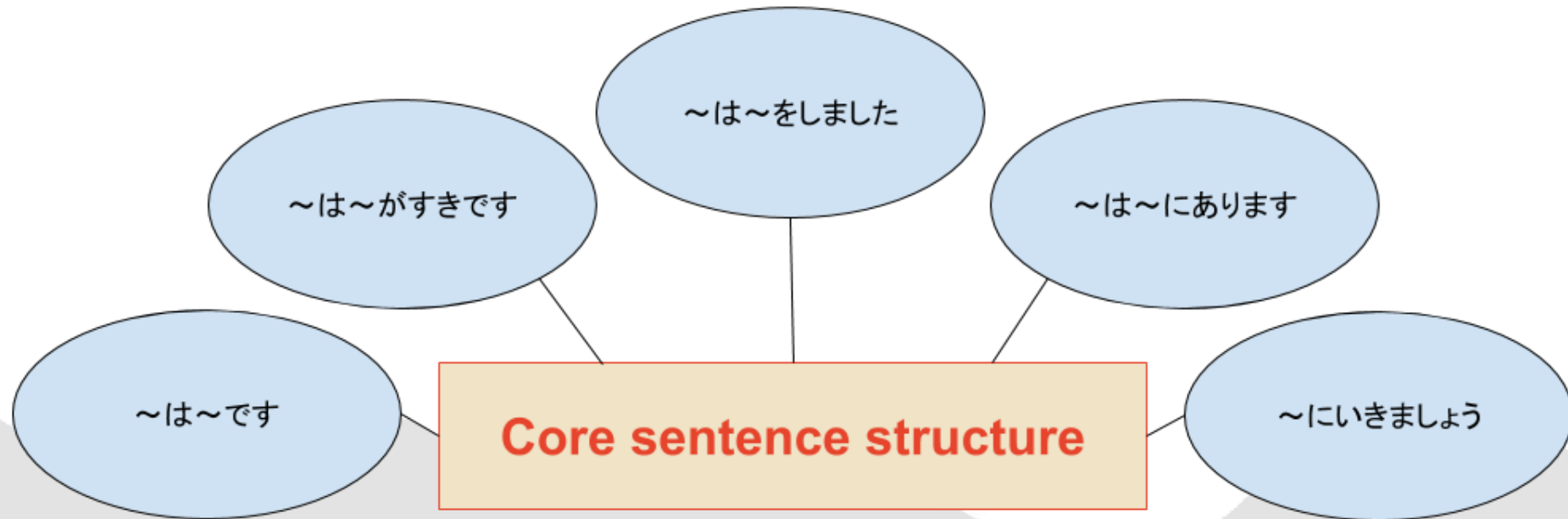
× Eg. Particles like **に** and **を** attach to the *verb*, not the noun

- Why? Because why not?:
 - That's where they always are
 - **Word order *should* be enough** to define the relationships between words

... and more

My Solution to This Problem

Develop a proper understanding of sentence structure that gives students a **central point of reference** that ties everything together in a meaningful way

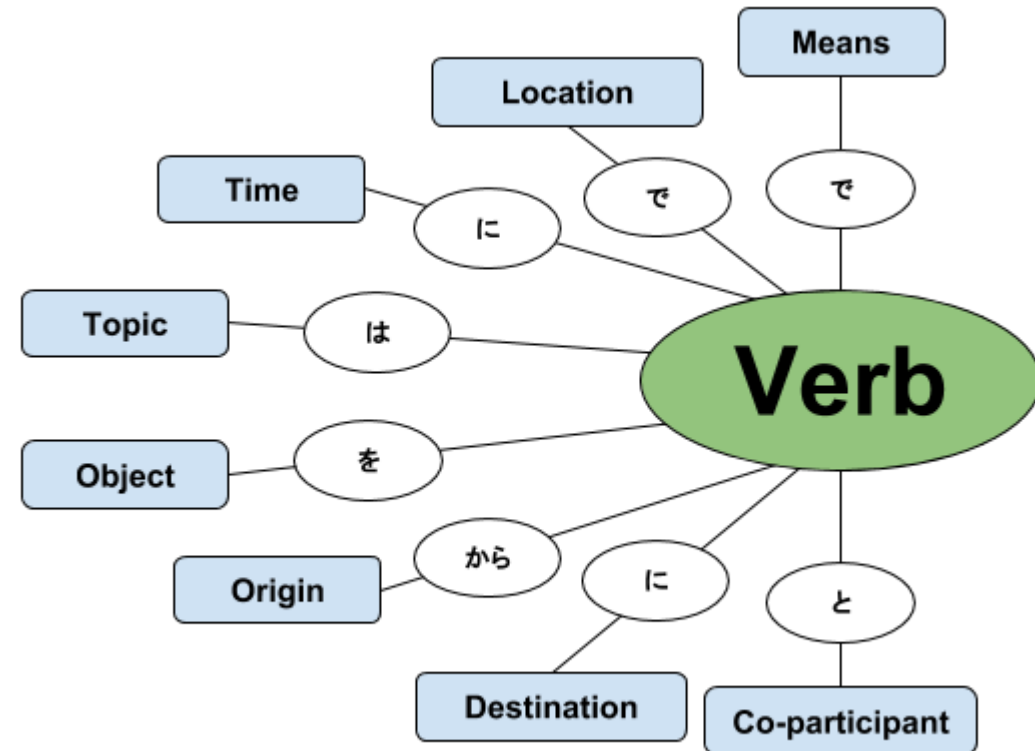


Basic Japanese Sentence Structure

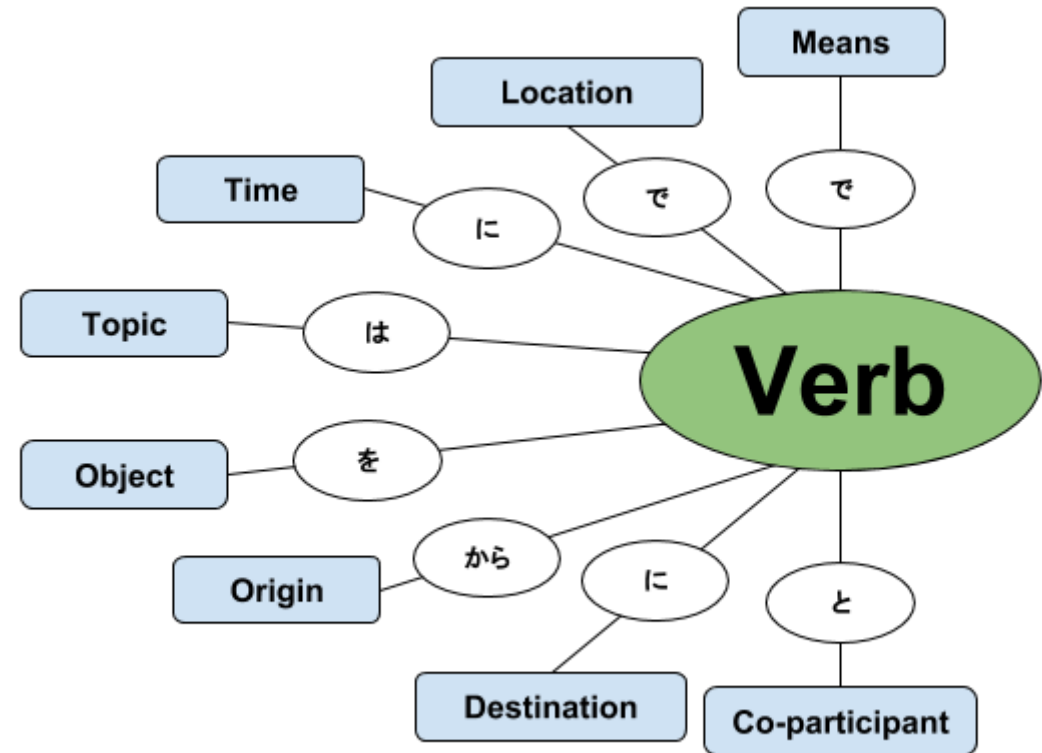
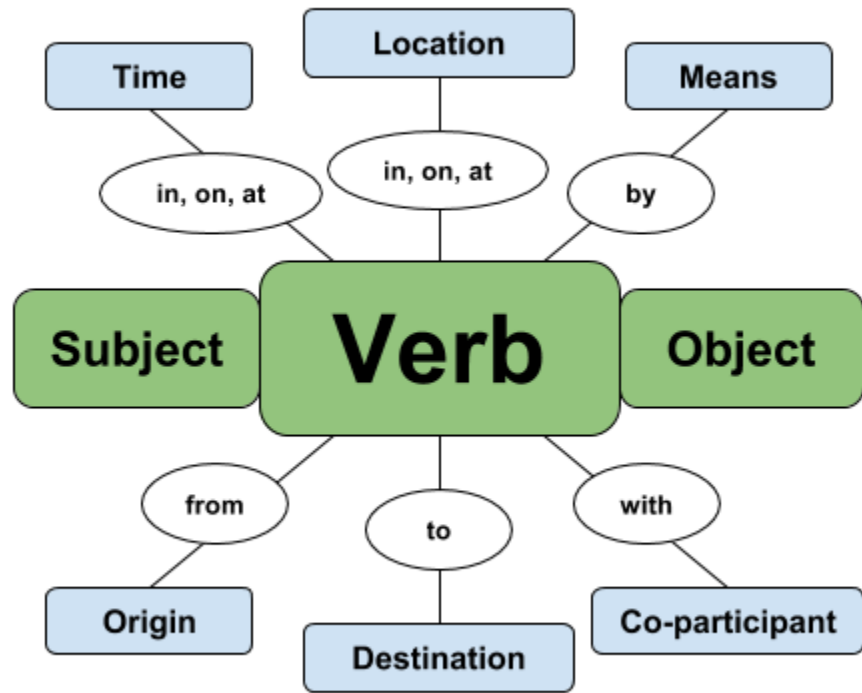
Two main rules for determining meaning:

1. The verb is the central piece
2. Particles define the role of all other pieces of information in relation to the verb

➤ NOT word order

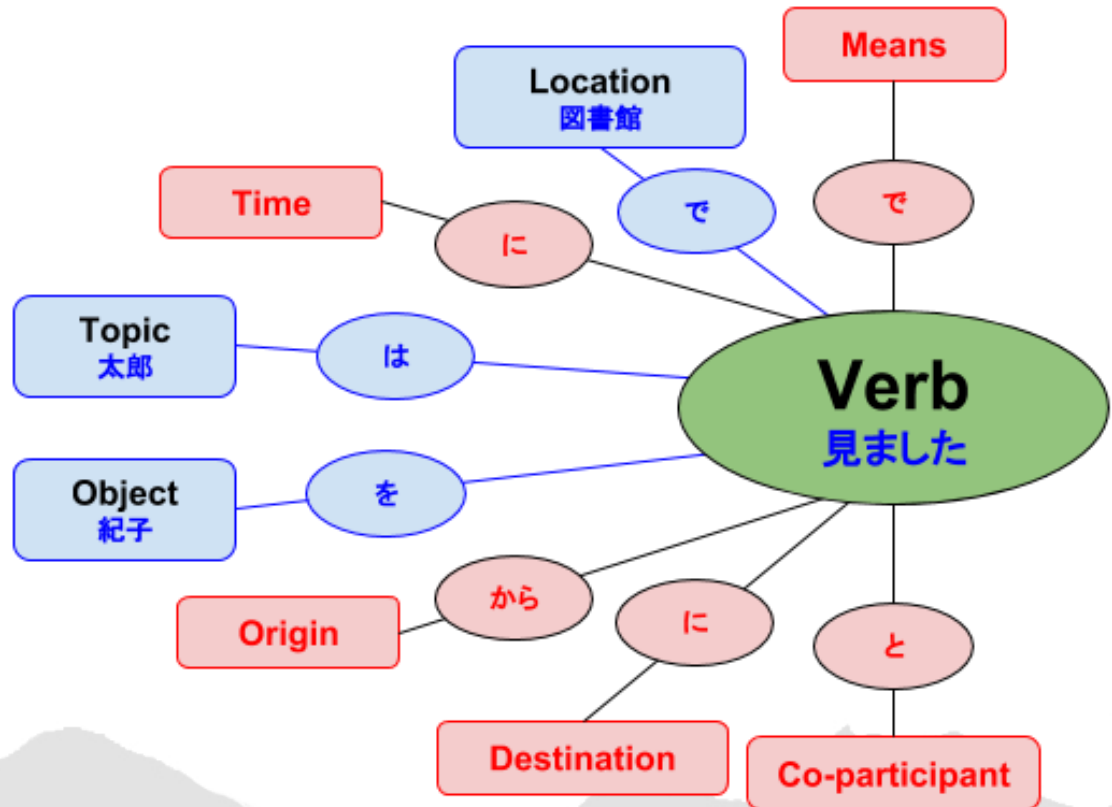
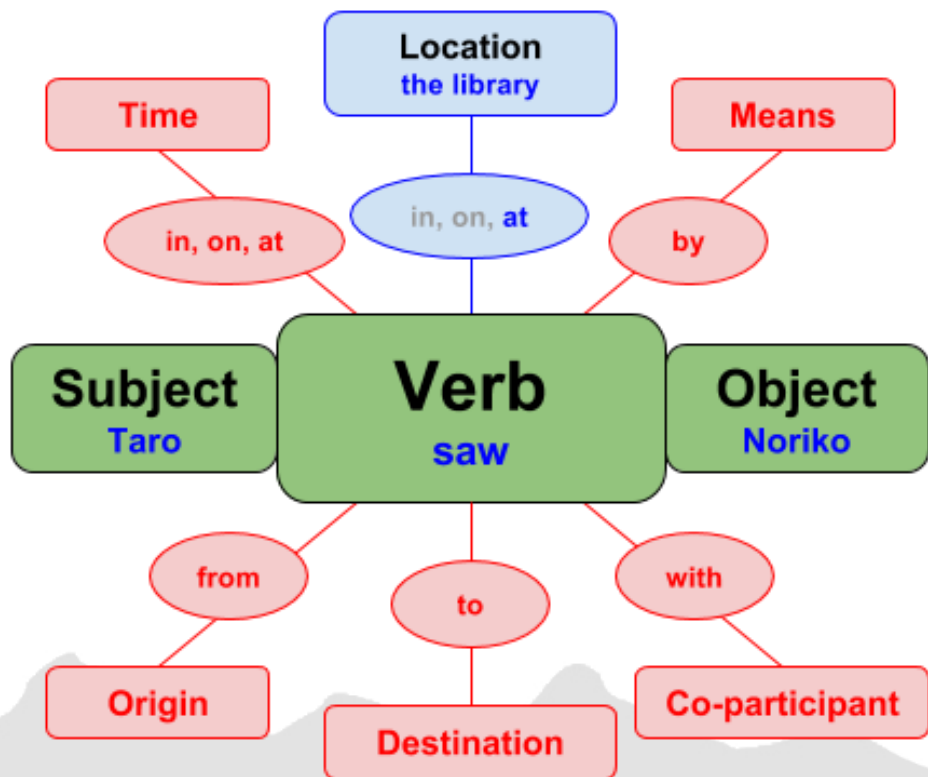


English vs Japanese



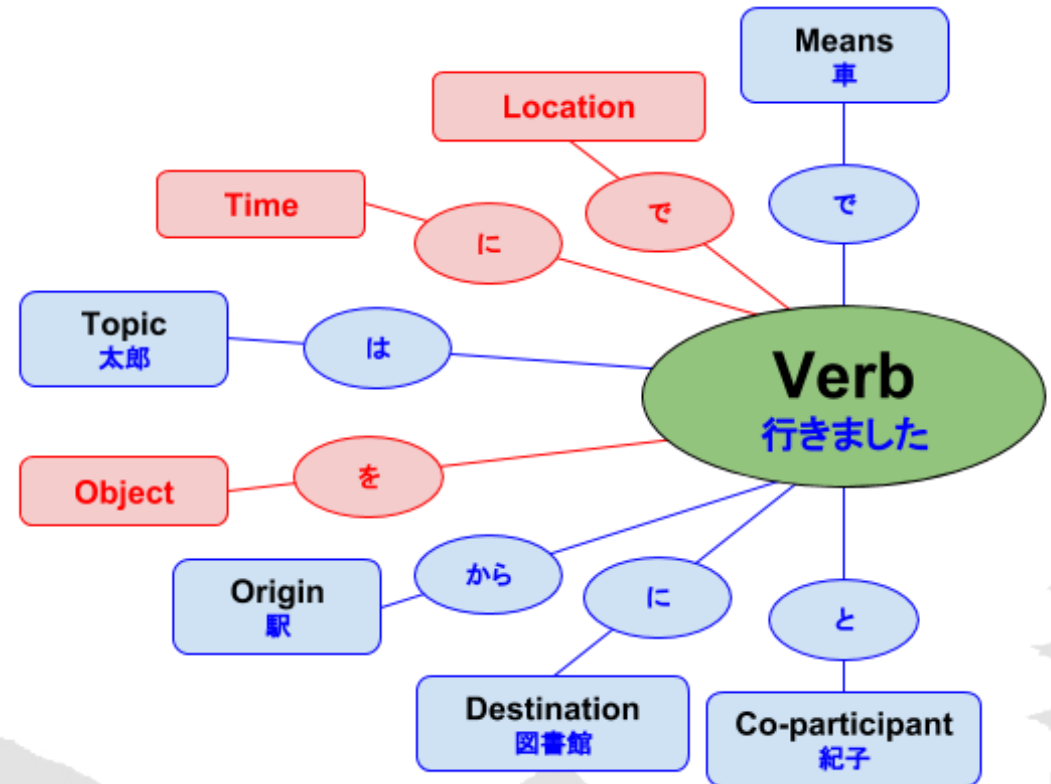
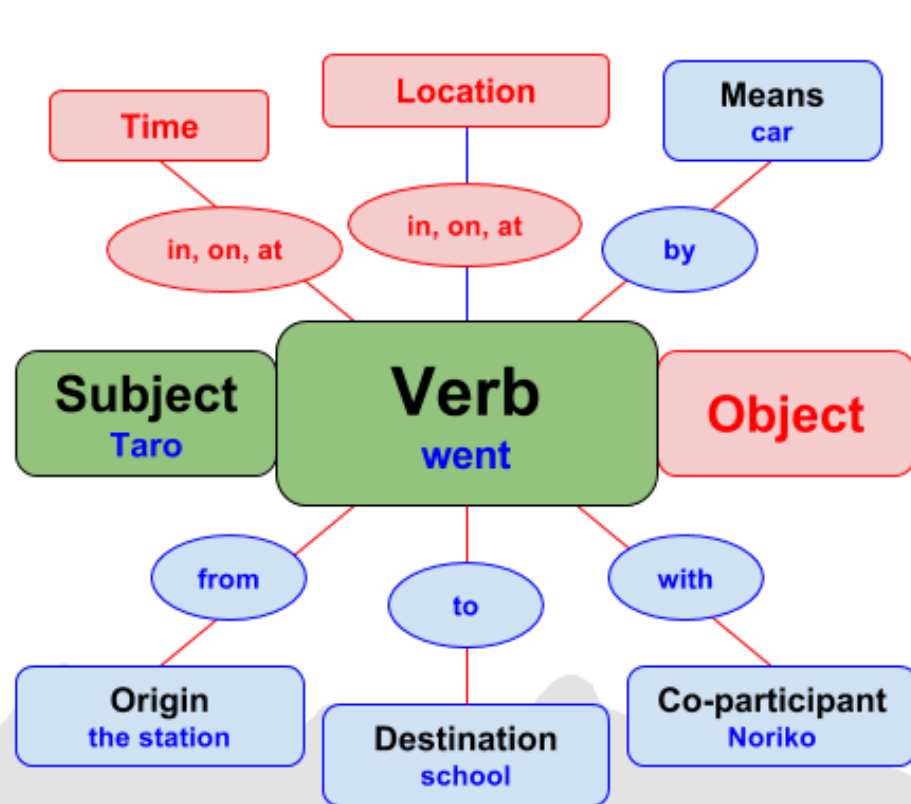
Example 1 – Basic action

Taro saw Noriko at the library



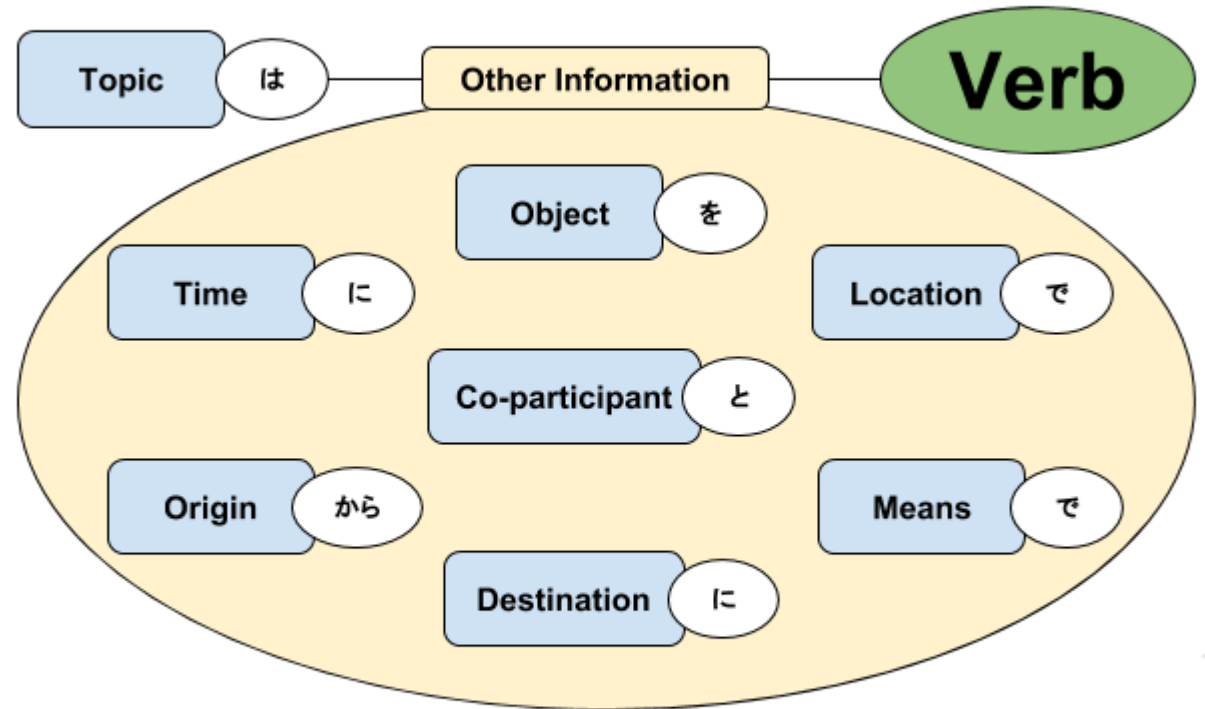
Example 2 - No object, more elements

Taro went from the station to school with Noriko by car



Initial Rules for Word Order

1. Topic (if used) goes at the beginning
2. Verb goes at the end
3. Everything else goes in between in any order



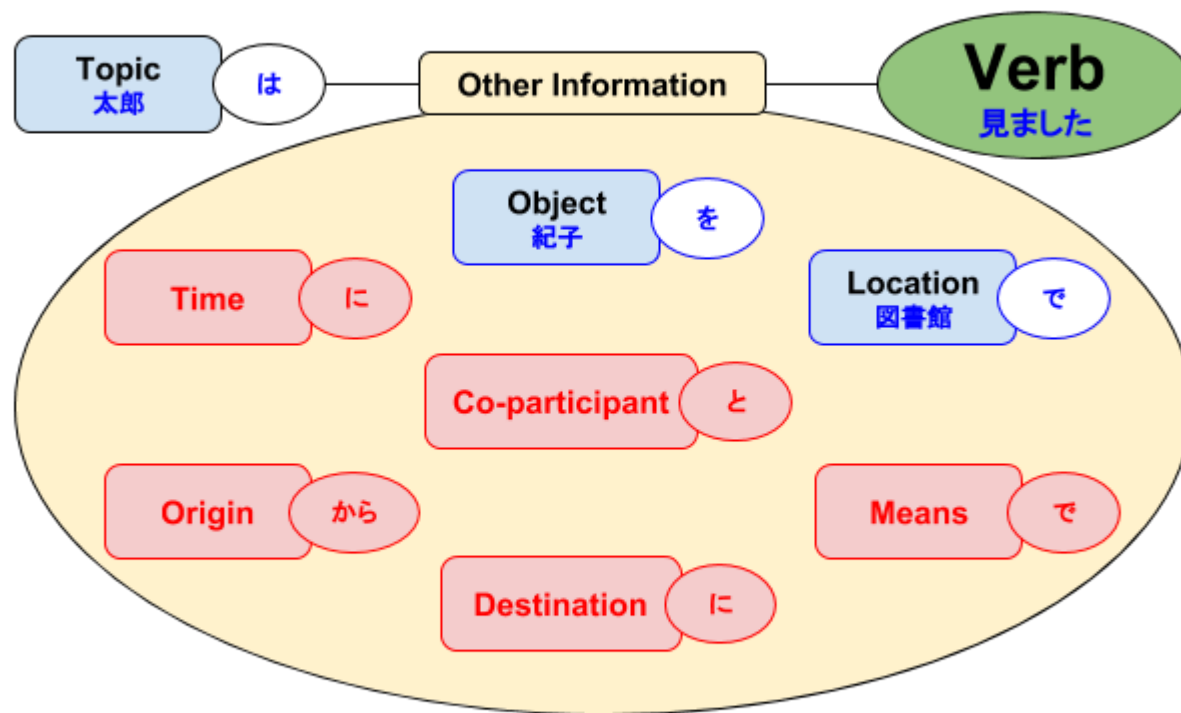
Word Order for Example 1

Taro saw Noriko at the library

たろうは...

- のりこを図書館で
- 図書館でのりこを

...見ました



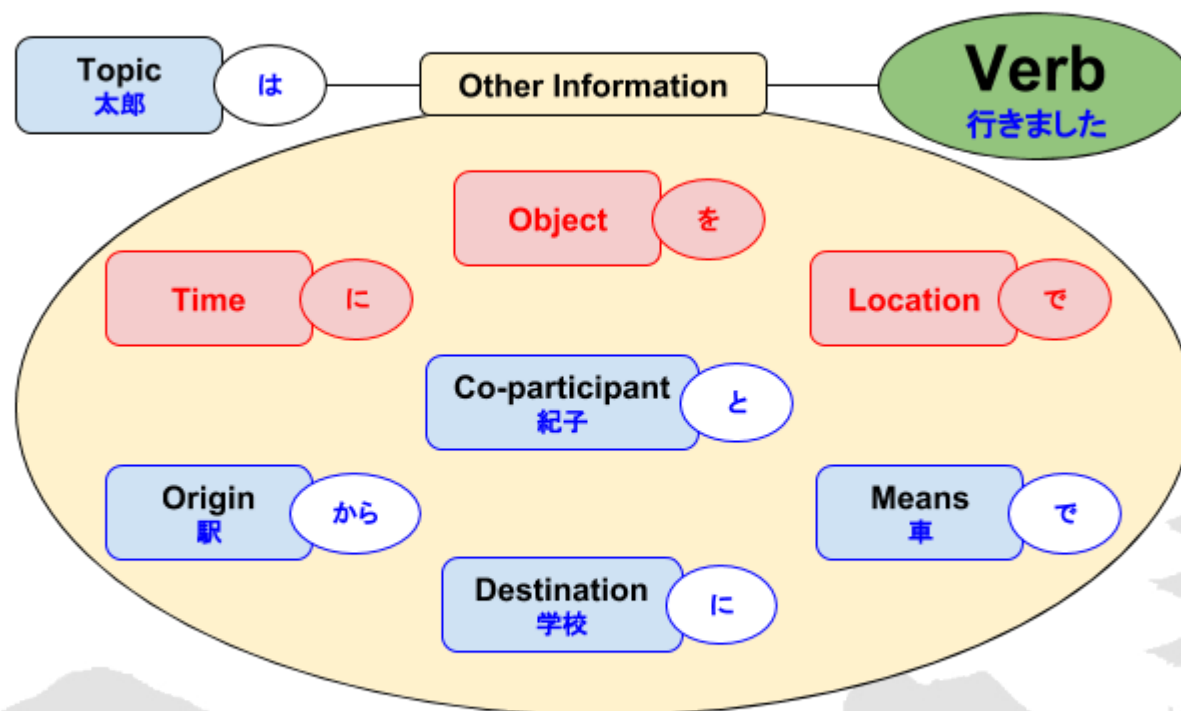
Word Order for Example 2

Taro went from the station to school with Noriko by car

たろうは...

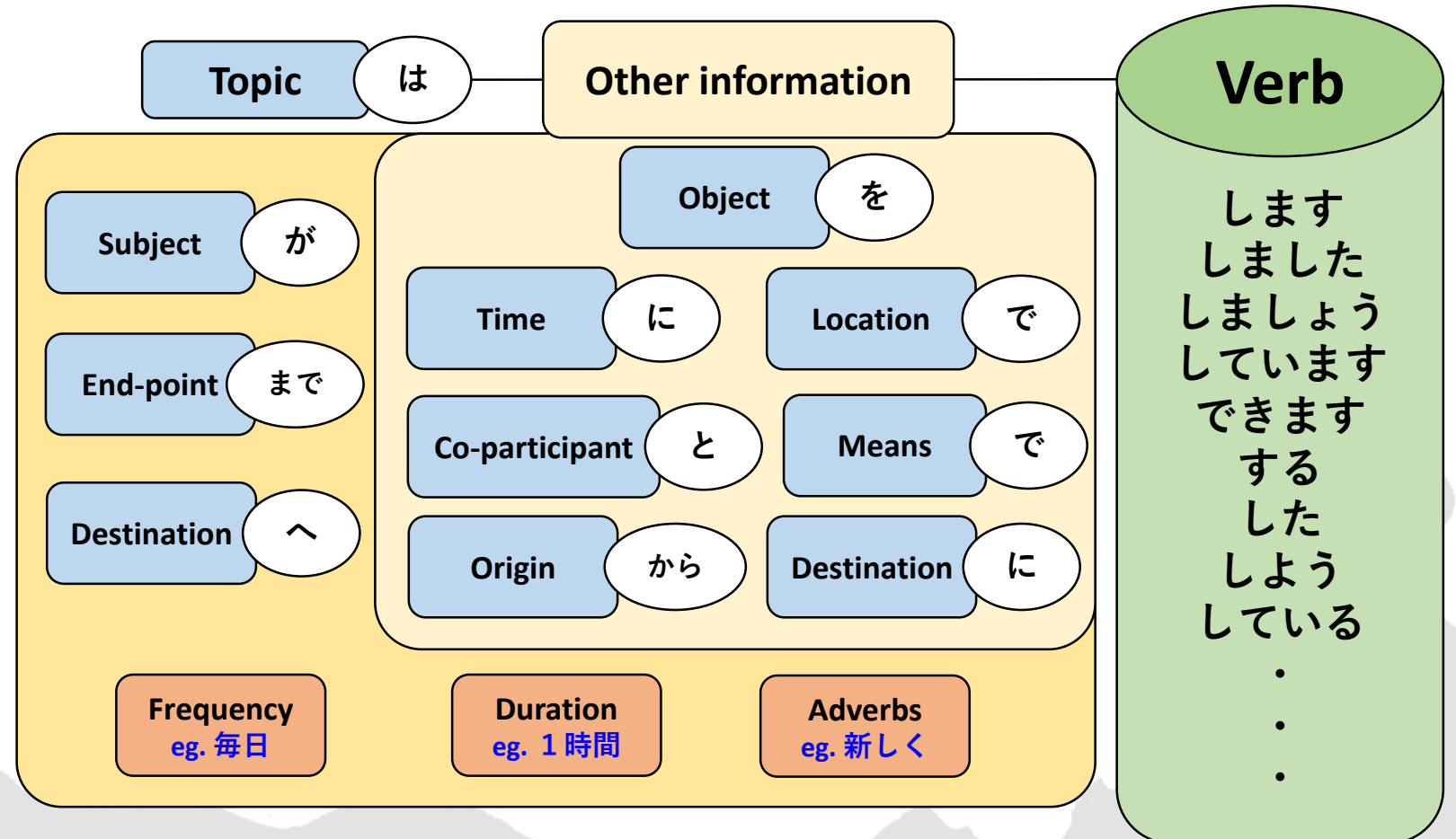
- 駅から学校に車でのこと
- 駅から学校にのりこと車で
- 車でのこと駅から学校に
- のりこと駅から車で学校に

...行きました



Next: Expand Each Part

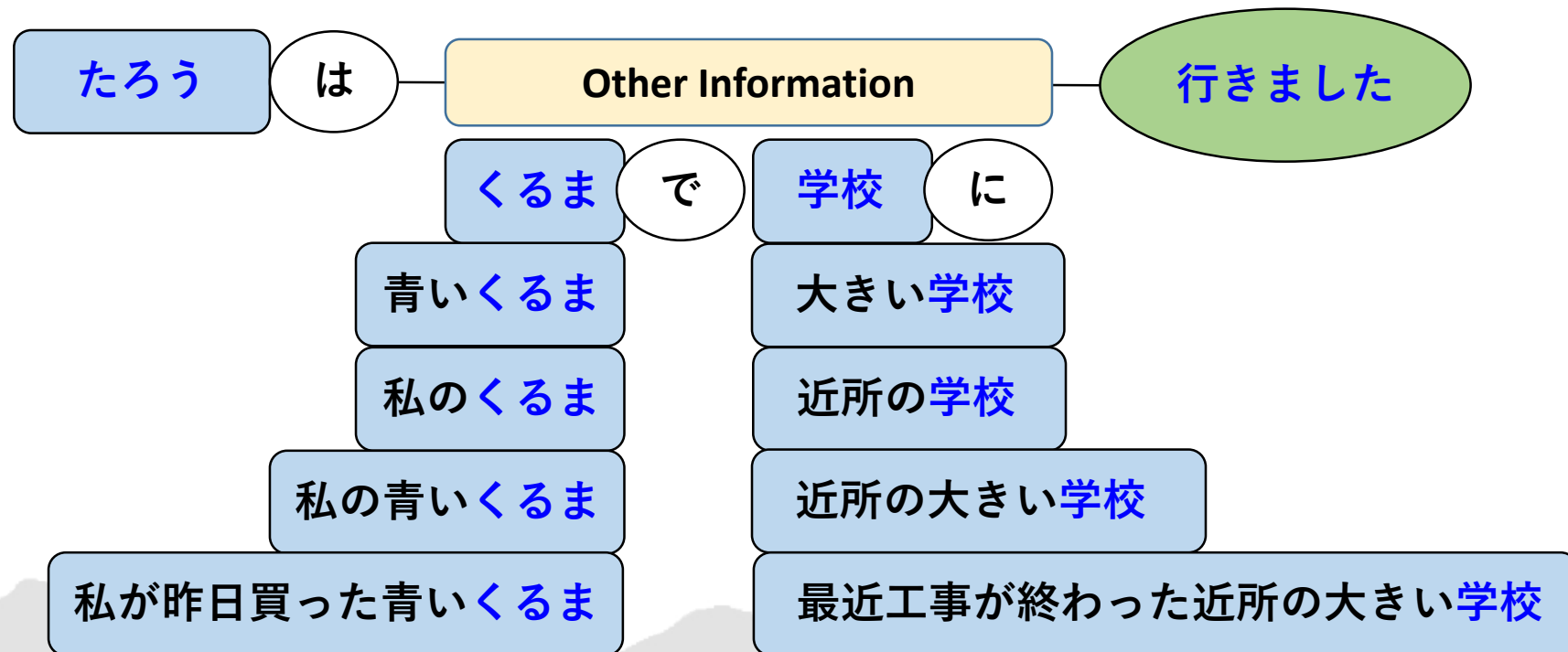
- Different verb tenses/forms
- More particles
- Other 'other information'
 - Frequency
 - Duration
 - Adverbs
- And then...



Expand Each Individual Noun

Build more detailed **noun phrases** for any or all of the elements

- Noun phrase = A phrase that describes a single 'thing', acts like noun



Noun Phrases – Other expressions

～ことがある

私は 日本に行ったこと があります
私は ペン があります

～方がいい

あなたは 6時までに帰った方 がいいです
あなたは 頭 がいいです

～前に・～後に

ご飯を食べる前 に手を洗ってください
6時 に手を洗ってください

手を ご飯を食べる前 に洗ってください
手を 6時 に洗ってください

～ようになる

私は早く 日本語が話せるよう になりたい
私は早く 大人 になりたい

～ため（に）

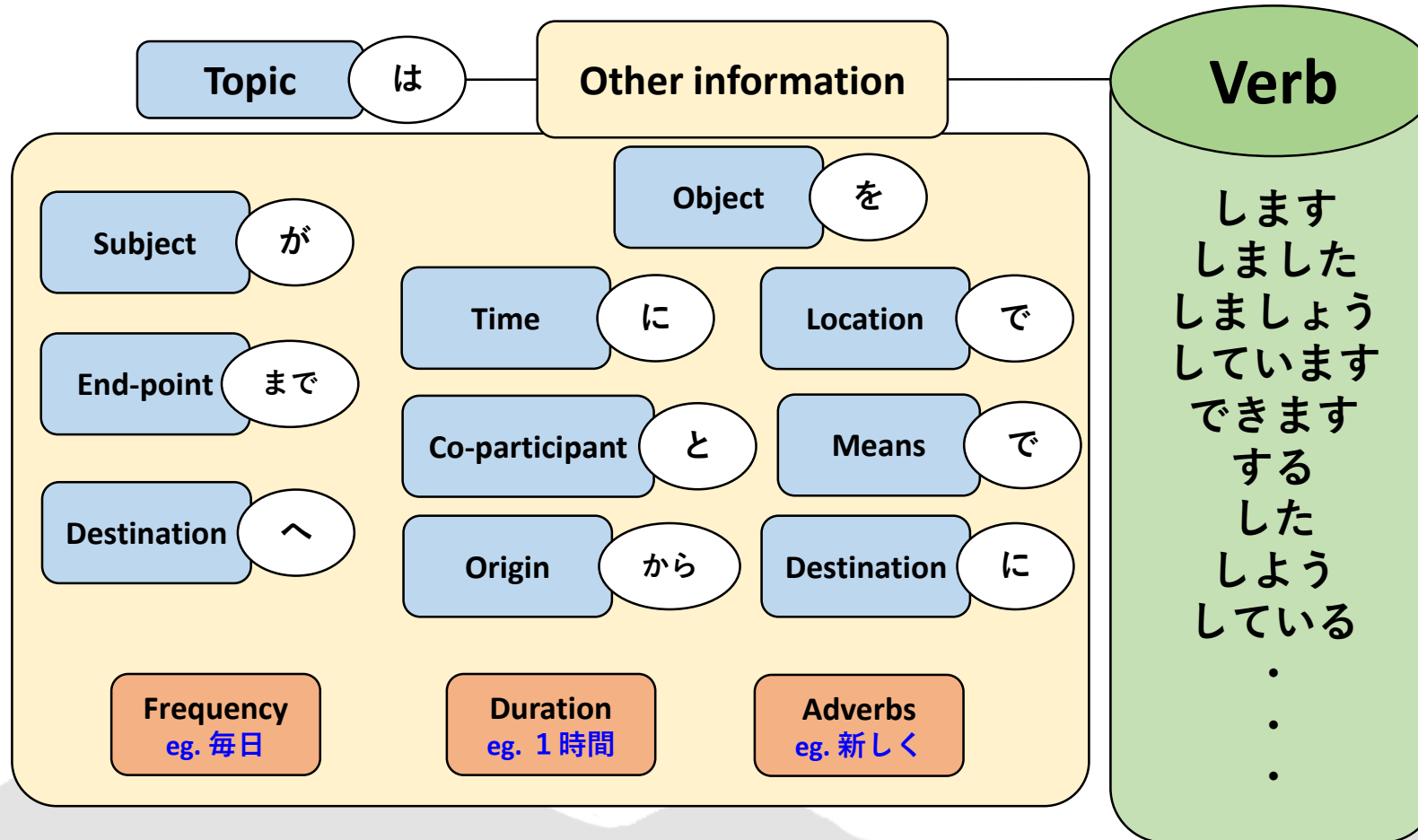
～おかげ

～はず

～べき

～気がする

Everything Relates Back to This



Main Goal of This Approach

Build a foundation early that can be used as a **reference point** throughout the entirety of a student's Japanese language education

- Make the differences between Japanese and English more **VISIBLE**
 - Understanding our own language better helps us learn new ones
- Avoid incorrect assumptions
 - Especially the association of meaning with word order
- Show that there is a clear link between every concept
 - Japanese really does make sense!

Thank you! If you want to learn more...

Japanese Sentence Structure: The Ultimate Guide

<https://8020japanese.com/japanese-sentence-structure>

80/20 JAPANESE

The book: <https://8020japanese.com>

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