Meaning and Function of Deontic Modality "Beki"

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1 Background and purpose

The purpose of this paper is to describe the meaning of modality form "beki" at the end of sentences and its function.

The meaning of "beki" has been described as representing validity (datō) and necessity (tōzen). Previous studies have been focusing on the difference between "beki" and "nakerebanaranai". There are also studies that compare "beki" with the epistemic modality "hazu" which point out that non-intentional predicates are not used in this proposition (Morita 1989, Moriyama 1992, Nakahata 1999, et.al.)

(1) *Asu wa hareru beki desu/hazu desu. 明日は晴れるべきです／はずです。

(It should be fine tomorrow.)

However, in some cases, non-intentional predicates also become a propositional content of "beki". The "possible form" is not considered to have intentionality, but as we will see in the next example, it can be the propositional content of "beki".

(2) ?? Taro wa oyogeru beki da. 太郎は泳げるべきだ。

(Taro should be able to swim.)

(3) Kono kurai no eigo wa yomeru beki da. このくらいの英語は話せるべきだ。

(He should be able to read such English.)

The aim of this study is to describe the meaning of "beki" which can explain the difference in hearer’acceptance between (2) and (3). In addition, based on this description, describe the function of "beki".

2 Methods

First, use Corpus BONTEN to gather examples of "possible forms + beki" to induce the propositional condition of "beki". Next, describe the meaning of "beki" focusing on the features of the proposition. Then, describe the function of "beki", focusing on the person who is the subject in the proposition.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 The meaning of "beki"
The "possible form" can be the content of the "beki" proposition, when it represents "a situation that can be realized only by activating someone's intention. It is used, for example, when they represent low abilities that they can claim to anyone. This description covers the description of prior researches. Based on this propositional condition, the meaning of "beki" is described as "representing an ideal that can be realized if someone activates his / her will."

3.2 Functions of "beki"

The function of "beki" is derived from the meaning. When a speaker uses "beki", he/she states an ideal and demands that those who can realize that ideal trigger their will. Therefore, it is derived that "beki" has functions similar to those of imperative form such as "advice" and "force", and so on.

References