

kansas  
working  
papers  
in  
linguistics

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volume 5  
1980  
no. 1

edited by

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Acknowledgements

The editors would like to express their thanks to the faculty and staff of the Linguistics Department for their invaluable assistance in the preparation of this volume. Funding for this journal is provided by the Graduate Student Council from the Student Activity Fee.

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## PREFACE

As far as is known, all languages have ways of expressing modality, i.e., notions of possibility, necessity, contingency, etc. But this pervasive phenomenon has so far been the object of little systematic linguistic analysis. In fact, investigators do not even agree on the scope of the term modality. Very roughly speaking, two kinds of modality have been distinguished, namely epistemic and deontic. The former involves the speaker's judgment as to the degree of certainty of an event or state of affairs being referred to. Deontic modality, on the other hand, has to do with such notions as obligation, permissibility and necessity. However, as useful as this distinction is, little is known so far concerning the linguistic patterns which express those ideas. It is clear that the modality systems of a great many languages will need to be thoroughly scrutinized and compared before any conclusions can be drawn as to their place in 'universal grammar.'

The papers included in this volume of the Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics were written by graduate students at the University of Kansas for a seminar on modality taught by Professor Choon-Kyu Oh in the spring of 1979. They deal with a variety of topics bearing on modality and with a variety of languages and language families. It is our hope that these papers will stimulate comments from colleagues at other institutions.

The Editors

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## WHAT COULD DEKIRU POSSIBLY MEAN?

W. L. Wight<sup>1</sup>

Abstract: DEKIRU is a Japanese verb with root and modal interpretations. The modal interpretations are dependent on the absence or presence of an agent and volition, with respect to an action, in a complement sentence predicated by DEKIRU.

### Root and Modal Sense

DEKIRU is a Japanese verb which in its root sense may be used to indicate the appearance or occurrence of some object or event, and which seems to be constrained to events or things which in some way occur naturally or spontaneously. In its modal sense DEKIRU may generally be interpreted as expressing a state of possibility or existence of a potential skill or capacity. Of the sentences below, the first is interpreted with a root sense of DEKIRU, while the second is interpreted with a modal sense:

1. hoho ni nikibi ga deki-ta<sup>2</sup>  
cheek pimple  
(Lit.: on cheek pimple appeared)  
(A pimple broke out on his cheek.)
2. kare wa piano o hik-u koto ga deki-ru  
he piano play nominalizer

It should be pointed out that what I refer to as the "root" and modal sense are not epistemic, in spite of the English glosses I will be giving. The root sense of DEKIRU is its interpretation as an independent verb which is not modal or dependent for its interpretation on a complement verb in a lower constituent. In its modal sense, DEKIRU may be interpreted as a nontransitive<sup>3</sup> equivalent of English CAN. For instance (3.a) may be interpreted with the root sense of CAN,<sup>4</sup> while in (3.b) it is interpreted with the epistemic sense of CAN.

- 3.a. He can do 50 one-handed pushups.
- b. He could have been sick.

(3.a) expresses some sort of capacity or ability, whereas (3.b) expresses an epistemic sense of possibility and does not refer to a capacity. I have translated the modal sense of DEKIRU in English in most of the sentences which follow as "It is/was possible for NP to VP." But the reader should keep in mind that this is not epistemic possibility, but some sort of a state of potential capacity or ability to do something.

Concerning the semantics of sentences with DEKIRU as a matrix verb, there seem to be several instances in which DEKIRU may be ambiguously interpreted with either a root or modal sense. Interpretations in its modal sense may also vary from sentence to sentence or be vague. To some extent, though, it is possible to discern which sense is intended by relying on syntactic structures and lexical categories.

#### Root Sense in Simple Expressions

The simplest cases in which DEKIRU may be interpreted in its root sense are in expressions concerning phenomena which would not normally be assumed to have a volitional agent. The Japanese sentences below have been paraphrased from Morita (1977: 309-310).

4. tuki wa tikyuu kara deki-ta  
moon earth from  
(The moon came from the earth.)
5. sato wa sato-kubi kara deki-ru  
sugar sugar-cane from  
(Sugar comes from sugar-cane.)
6. ringo wa aomoriken de deki-ru  
apple Aomori prefecture from  
(Apples come from Aomori prefecture.)
7. kaki wa uti de deki-ta  
persimmon house from  
((These) persimmons came from/were grown at home.)

In the above four sentences NP's affixed with the particle GA have been avoided, because it is in structures with GA in which interpretations between a modal and root DEKIRU may be ambiguous. The following three sentences with GA, though, are not ambiguous and DEKIRU receives a root interpretation as they are clearly agentless.

8. mejiri ni siwa ga deki-ta  
outside corner of wrinkle  
the eye  
(He's got crows' feet.)
9. hasira kara eda ga deki-ta  
pillar from branch  
(A branch sprouted from the pillar.)
10. ame de tokorodokoro mizutamari ga deki-ta  
rain by here and there puddles  
(Puddles were formed here and there by the rain.)



context, could also be given a modal interpretation; and as they are, they are ambiguous.

#### Modal Sense of DEKIRU

The simplest form in which DEKIRU may be clearly inferred to take a modal reading is in a structure which I assume to be something such as:

W (NP) X NP Y VERB-Nonpast<sup>5</sup> KOTO GA Z DEKIRU  
 (agent) (nonstative)

KOTO is a nominalizer which for DEKIRU takes a nonstative (active) verb in the complement sentence. The following, which are possible modal interpretations of the (a) type sentences above, should make this clear.

- 11.c. (Taroo wa) syokuji o tuku-ru koto ga deki-ru  
 (Taroo) make  
 (It is possible (for Taroo) to make a meal.)
- 12.c. (Ueda-san wa) yokotyoo ni patinko-ya o tuku-ru koto ga deki-ru  
 (Mr. Ueda) build  
 (It is possible (for Mr. Ueda) to build a pachinko parlor in the alley.)
- 13.c. (kare wa) fusigi na koto ni tyoozoo o koori kara tuku-ru koto  
 (he) make  
 ga deki-ru  
 (It is possible (for him) to make carvings out of ice in a strange manner.)

It may be noticed that for the root readings of 11-13, I have given the past tense form of DEKIRU, while for the above modal interpretations, the nonpast forms were given. It seems easier to infer potential readings from the nonpast form than from the past tense form. The reason may be related to certain implications the past tense may carry (see section V). It should be kept in mind, though, that in the past tense similar modal readings for the above type of sentences are also possible.

With respect to the structural description and the above sentences, it may also be noted that the complement verbal suffix is nonpast. Only the nonpast form may occur before the nominalizer (KOTO) in sentences with DEKIRU as the matrix verb. This parallels the modal structure of English sentences with CAN:

- 14.a. He can/could play the piano.  
 b. \*He can/could played the piano.
- 15.a. He ?can/could have played the piano.  
 b. \*He can/could had played the piano.

In English it seems that a verb contingent to and following CAN is never in the past tense, but always in the nontensed form.

Other ways of expressing the potential in Japanese are with a potential verbal suffix or with a form of deletion in constructions with DEKIRU as the matrix verb. One exception to verbs which may take the potential suffix is SURU (to do). For the potential of SURU, DEKIRU is used (see Alphonso 1974: 913). In sentences (16-18), the (a) set illustrates the potential with DEKIRU and without deletion; the (b) set, DEKIRU with deletion; and the (c) set, the potential verbal suffix (-E- or -RE-) which is attached to what would be the complement verb in the (a) sentences. (16) and (18) are from Makino (1975-76: 118).

16.a. watasi wa piano o hik-u koto ga deki-ru  
I piano play

b. watasi wa piano ga deki-ru

c. watasi wa piano ga hik-e-ru  
play-pot.-nonpast  
(It is possible for me to play the piano.)

17.a. daiku wa nihon no uti o ki to kami de tuku-ru koto ga deki-ru  
carpenter Japan house wood and paper make

b. daiku wa nihon no uti ga ki to kami de deki-ru

c. daiku wa nihon no uti ga ki to kami de tuku-re-ru

(It is possible for a carpenter to build a Japanese house out of wood and paper.)

18.a. watasi wa gengogaku o kenkyuu su-ru koto ga deki-ru  
I linguistics study do

b. watasi wa gengogaku ga deki-ru

c. watasi wa gengogaku ga kenkyuu deki-ru

(It is possible for me to study linguistics.)

(18.c) illustrates the use of DEKIRU as the potential for SURU, which does not take a suffixed potential form (\*SURERU). In this sentence, DEKIRU has replaced SURU but otherwise the pattern follows that of the other (c) sentences. In (18.a) SURU has not been deleted, while in (18.b) it has undergone deletion.

Concerning the (b) set of sentences, Makino states:

...the verb "dekiru" can take a single NP instead of an embedded sentence, if the verb is uniquely tied in with an NP as in [16.b], or if a verb is a Sino-Japanese compound verb as in [18.a] ... (118).



For the (b) type of sentences we might postulate that they are derived by some sort of deletion-transformation rule, from the (a) type of sentences, such as the one given below.

SD	X	NP-O	Y	VERB-NONPAST	KOTO	DEKIRU
				(nonstative)		
	1	2	3	4	6	6
SC	1	2	GA	4	Ø	6

It should be noted that when the complement verb has been deleted, if there is no other context than the sentence itself, it may be vague and difficult to interpret. For instance, if (16.b) were uttered by someone who made musical instruments, it might mean that it is possible for him "to make pianos" rather than "to play a piano." But it does seem as if some sort of idiomatic process is occurring which limits the set of possible interpretations. Expressions with a modal DEKIRU seem to be interpreted in terms of NP's which are conventionally associated with a set of specific actions or processes an agent may perform on those NP's. These include OBJECT-NP VERB relations such as given below:

OBJECT-NP's	VERB
SHIGOTO (work/job), KAIMONO (shopping), KEKKON (marriage), SOTUGYO (graduation)	SURU (do)
OTYA (tea)	IRERU (put into/serve)
TOMODATI (friend), TATEMONO (building), SYOKUJI (meal), PAN (bread)	TUKURU (build/make)
NIHONGO (Japanese, EIGO (English)	HANASU (speak)
PIANO (piano), GIITA (guitar)	HIKU (pluck/play)
TAIKO (drum)	UTU (beat/play)
SYAKUHATI (bamboo flute)	HUKU (blow/play)

It seems that underlying complement verbs which most readily are deleted are limited to those which are semantically redundant. The complement verb and NP together seem to create some set of semantic features which, with a presumed set of features for DEKIRU, makes the complement verb redundant. What these features might be, I cannot state formally, but that some such constraint exists on verbs which may be deleted can be seen clearly by examining the sentences below. (19.b) is derivable from (19.a), but neither (20.b) nor (21.b) is derivable from its corresponding (a) sentence.

- 19.a. Hanako wa otya o ire-ru koto ga deki-ru  
   serve  
           (It is possible for Hanako to serve tea.)

- b. Hanako wa otya ga deki-ru  
(same as for 19.a)
- 20.a. Hanako wa akatyan o koros-u koto ga deki-ru  
kill  
(It is possible for Hanako to kill babies.)
- b. \*Hanako wa akatyan ga deki-ru
- 21.a. kare wa piano o ka-u koto ga deki-ru  
he buy  
(It is possible for him to buy a piano.)
- b. \*kare wa piano ga deki-ru

(21.b), of course, could have a modal reading as given in (16.b) earlier, if it were not derived from a sentence such as (21.a); but in no easily understood sense would it have a root reading. (20.b), if we were to assume it to be derived from some other sentence, could have a modal reading such as

20.b.' (It is possible for Hanako to bear children.)

It is also possible to get a root reading from sentence (20.b):

20.b." (Hanako is pregnant; i.e., Hanako's womb is swollen with child.)

#### SURU In Contrast With DEKIRU

It was noted that for the potential form of SURU, DEKIRU is used (as in 18); but this may lead to ambiguity when a sentence is open to a root interpretation of DEKIRU, particularly with respect to the past tense form. For instance:

- 22.a. yooji o su-ru  
errand/business do-past  
((I) do/will do (some) errand.)
- b. (hiru-gohan no aida ni) yooji ga deki-ru  
noon meal during  
((During lunch) it is possible (for me) to do (an) errand.)
- c. (itumo hirugohan o tabe-hajime-ru to) yooji  
always eat-nonpast begin to  
ga deki-ru  
(Whenever I begin to eat lunch, an) errand (always) comes up.
- d. yooji o si-ta  
do-past  
((I) did (some) errand.)

- e. yooji ga (zenbu) deki-ta  
       all/completely  
 (It was possible to finish (all of the) business.)
- f. (asita si-nakereba naranai) yooji ga deki-ta  
    tomorrow must do  
 (An errand (which must be done tomorrow) came up.)
- 23.a. jyunbi o su-ru  
       preparations do-nonpast  
 ((I) make/will make preparations.)
- b. (kare ga asita ku-ru mae ni) jyunbi ga deki-ru  
    he tomorrow come before  
 (It is possible to make preparations (before he comes tomorrow).)
- c. (none for the root interpretation of DEKIRU)
- d. jyunbi o si-ta  
       do-past  
 ((I) made preparations.)
- e. (tenrankai no) jyunbi ga deki-ta  
    exhibition  
 (It was possible to make preparations (for the exhibition).)
- f. (none for the root interpretation of DEKIRU)

For (22) given proper contexts (such as those in parenthesis), DEKIRU may receive either a modal (b and e) or root (c and f) interpretation with YOOJI. For (23), with respect to JYUNBI, the modal interpretation seems to be the only possible interpretation. For sentences like (23), such nominals as JUNBI, "preparation" (KESSIN, "resolution;" RYOKOO, "trip;" KAIMONO, "shopping;" etc.), DEKIRU can only signal the potential possibility. In the past tense with nominals such as these, a possible state of completion of an action or process is signaled. For nominals such as YOOJI (errand), on the other hand, DEKIRU in its root sense refers to a state of occurrence of the nominal, and in its modal sense a possibility of "doing something" with respect to the nominal. Simply put, one does not do an errand until an errand to do exists; but one must make preparations before the preparations exist. Consequently, nominals such as YOOJI, which can be acted on after they occur, are open to semantically ambiguous interpretations between a root or modal sense of DEKIRU.

#### Vacuous and Nonvacuous Interpretations

With respect to the two senses of DEKIRU, an inclusive relationship seems to hold. It appears that if the root sense is possible, the modal sense also is possible; but that if the modal sense is possible,

the root sense may or may not be possible. Thus, in the simplest of cases with the past tense form of DEKIRU (DEKI-TA), if a state has occurred or appeared, then it was possible for the state to appear or occur. But with respect to root interpretations of DEKIRU with nominals such as YOOJI, the inclusive relationship applies vacuously, i.e., if an errand occurs, then it was possible for an errand to occur (but this does not imply anything concerning the possibility of taking care of the errand). In these instances, (as in 18.c and 18.f, sentences 1 and 4-6), the modal sense would not seem to impart any "meaningful" nuance to an expression, whereas for sentences with NP's such as JYUNBI, the "modal" sense of DEKIRU would seem to carry some implicative nuance.

It seems then, that, only in those instances in which there is an embedded (possibly underlying) complement verb, does the modal sense apply nonvacuously. This might be made clear by contrasting the following two sentences.

24.     hoho ni nikibi ga deki-ta (sentence (2) repeated)  
           cheek   pimple  
           (a pimple broke out on his cheek (and it was possible for a  
           pimple to break out on his cheek).)
25.     kyonen huransu e ryokoo ga deki-ta  
           last year France to trip  
           (Last year it was possible to take a trip to France.)

In (24) the modal reading in parenthesis, under most contexts, would apply vacuously; but for (25) the modal interpretation seems to implicate that some volition by the speaker is being or has been exercised. When DEKIRU appears in such sentences as (25), it is implied that it is possible to do something and that something is done through some effort exerted by the agent. In the sentences below, possible implications have been bracketed in the English translations.

26.     kyonen huransu e ryokoo ga deki-ta.  
           (Last year it was possible to take a trip to France  
           [and (I) did take a trip to France].)
27.     syuumatu konsyuu no syukudai ga zenbu deki-ta  
           weekend this week homework    all  
           (It was possible to do all of this week's homework on  
           the weekend [and (I) did do all of it].)

If the speaker only intended to state that some activity is done, then the verb in the underlying complement would suffice by itself:

- 27'.     syuumatu konsyuu no syukudai o zenbu si-ta  
   do-past  
           ((I) did all of this week's homework on the weekend.)

Negation and Volition

In simple negation where DEKIRU is suffixed with the negative non-past suffix NAI or the past negative form NAKATTA, the proposition asserted by DEKIRU is simply negated for either root or modal interpretations:

28. hoho ni wa nikibi ga deki-nai  
 cheek pimple  
 (a pimple does not appear on his cheek. root reading)
29. kyonen huransu e no ryokoo ga deki-nakatta  
 last year France trip  
 (Last year it was not possible (for me) to take a trip to France.)

If a clause with DEKIRU is conjoined with another which negates the DEKIRU clause, though, the interpretations for the resulting complex sentence are not as simple. For clauses in which a root reading is given for DEKIRU, the result may be a logical contradiction:

30. \*hoho ni nikibi ga deki-ta ga, si-nakatta  
 but do-neg past  
 (\*A pimple appeared on his cheek, but didn't.)

On the other hand, if a modal interpretation is possible, for the DEKIRU clause, any implication that the event predicated by DEKIRU occurred is cancelled:

31. watasi wa piano ga deki-ta ga, si-nakatta  
 I piano but  
 (It was possible for me to play the piano, but I didn't.)
32. Kyonen huransu e no ryokoo ga deki-ta ga, si-nakatta  
 last year France trip but  
 (Last year it was possible (for me) to take a trip to France, but I didn't.)

In (31) and (32) only the implication that the action occurred is cancelled. What remains is an assertion that the occurrence or non-occurrence of the action was under the volition of an agent.

With respect to instances when negation of a DEKIRU clause with a conjoined sentence does not result in a contradiction, these cases seem to involve generic statements such as are possible in English:

33. Elephants can swim.
34. Cactus can grow in the desert.

Similar statements in Japanese with DEKIRU can be made, but they seem controversial. Acceptance of nonvolitional modal DEKIRU statements varies from speaker to speaker, but all of my informants have stated that the sentences below are understandable. (36 is from McCawley 1976: 364)

35. zoo wa oyog-u koto ga deki-ru  
elephant swim  
(It is possible for elephants to swim.)

36.???saboten wa sabaku ni haer-u koto ga deki-ru  
cactus desert grow  
(It is possible for cactus to grow in the desert.)

(35) is not problematic as elephants are seen as capable of volition, but all of my informants had difficulty accepting (36), though McCawley (1976: 314) reports it as given to him as acceptable (364). If negated with a conjoined sentence, my informants seemed slightly more willing to accept it:

36'.???saboten wa sabaku ni haer-u koto ga deki-ru ga, sahara sabaku  
but Sahara desert  
ni wa soo si-nai.  
so do-neg nonpast  
(It is possible for cactus to grow in the desert, but in the Sahara, they don't.)

If the generic aspect of the statement is made more general and negated, it seems even more acceptable, but not completely:

37. ?seibutu de wa saboten sika, sabaku ni haer-u koto ga deki-nai  
plants cactus except desert grow  
(Except for cactus, it is not possible for plants to grow in the desert.)

Another sentence McCawley gives which seems somewhat acceptable is:

38. ?asagao wa asa sika sak-u koto ga deki-nai  
morning-glory morning except bloom  
(It is not possible for morning-glories to bloom except in the morning.)

I cannot offer a satisfactory explanation as to why there would be varying degrees of acceptance for sentences such as (35-37), except to point out that it seems to have something to do with the negative type of conjunctives such as SIKA (except) and the type of verb in the complement sentence.

Deontic Interpretation

In a footnote McCawley (1976:368) states that only the (-E- or -RE-) potential suffix (as in 16.c and 17.c above), ... "but not 'deki-', has the additional meaning of 'is permitted' ... (368)." In this case, I would not be certain how (40) would be interpreted. (In (38) below, the potential verbal suffix is used, while in (40) DEKIRU is used as a paraphrase (40) is from Morita (1977:310)).

39. kodomo wa hitori de eiga-kan ni hair-e-nai  
 child alone movie-house enter-pot. -neg nonpast
40. kodomo wa hitori de eiga-kan ni hair-u koto ga deki-nai  
 enter-nonpast  
 (It is not permitted for children to enter a movie-house alone.)

Other examples suggested to me by A. Yamamoto include:

41. kyositu de tabako o su-u koto ga deki-nai  
 classroom tobacco smoke  
 (It is not permitted to smoke in the classroom.)
42. gaku mae de kuruma o unten su-ru koto ga deki-nai  
 school front vehicle drive do  
 (It is not permitted to drive on the school grounds.)

Though not as easily derived as from sentences with the potential suffix, it seems possible to derive deontic expressions from these sentences. Yamamoto (personal communication) has suggested that it seems to be related to generic interpretations in contrast to specific interpretations. For instance for (40), were KODOMO to be replaced with a more specific NP, DEKIRU would not receive a deontic interpretation:

- 40'. ano hito wa hitori de eiga-kan ni hair-u koto ga deki-nai  
 that person  
 (It is not possible for that person to enter a movie-house alone.)

In (40) and (42) above, DEKIRU has been affixed with the negative nonpast marker. They may be uttered without a negative suffix, but it seems that contexts in which a non-negated sentence with a deontic reading occur less frequently than for negated sentences.

The negated sentences seem to carry a deontic interpretation as an euphemistic means of replacing more direct statements regarding permission, i.e., in English a deontic sense of CAN is often used in a similar manner:

43. Children cannot enter the movie house unaccompanied.

(43) could of course be interpreted as a statement with respect to some physical or mental capacity of children; but it would more probably be read with a deontic interpretation given to CAN in most instances. If

(42) were not negated, though, it seems that it would be more difficult to decide between the "capacity" and deontic interpretations.

43'. Children can enter the movie house unaccompanied.

If we would remove "unaccompanied", the sentence seems even more difficult to assign an interpretation.

43". Children can enter the movie house.

Similarly, in Japanese (40) would become more difficult to assign the intended reading were it not negated and if HITORI DE (alone) were removed.

40'. kodomo wa eiga-kan de hair-u koto ga deki-ru  
(It is possible/permissible for children to enter the movie house.)

In most instances, though, were a deontic reading intended, other more appropriate expressions would be used, such as:

40". kodomo wa eigakan ni hai-te-mo ii  
children movie-house enter- -even alright  
((Lit.) In children to enter movie-house even is alright.)  
(It is permissible for children to enter the movie-house.)

As more appropriate expressions, such as (40"), exist for non-negated deontic meanings, and as the potential verbal suffix would suffice for negated potential readings,<sup>6</sup> "it seems that when negated, DEKIRU would be used as in (40-41), ambiguously to imply politeness." It might be assumed that this is implied because it deliberately makes the statement ambiguous so that the hearer must infer that it is a denial of permission or some such thing. On the other hand, the nonnegated forms with DEKIRU would not be so apt to occur as there may be less reason to assert a positive deontic statement ambiguously.

#### Footnotes

1 I am grateful to A. Yamamoto for his intuitions, criticisms, and comments of which I have taken liberal advantage, and to C. K. Oh, whose comments, criticisms and encouragement have guided me in writing this paper.

2 Particles and affixes, unless otherwise noted in the text, may be roughly translated as below:

Affixes	
-(r)u	nonpast
-ta/da	past
-na-i	neg-nonpast
-na-ka tta	neg-past



Particles (postpositions)

wa	topic	o	accusative
ga	nominative	no	generative
ni	dative	de	locative/instrumental

3 In this paper I have followed Kuno's analysis of DEKIRU as a stative (nontransitive) verb (1973: 136-150, 330-339). But see McCawley for a transitive analysis (1976: 357-368). Makino follows Kuno's basic analysis, but suggests a slightly different one based on what he assumes is a spreading syntactic change (1975-76: 97-123).

4 The term "root" is used in the literature to indicate a non-epistemic sense, but I have used it in this paper to indicate the nonmodal sense from which it would seem the modal senses are etymologically derived. In this respect, the reader may find it easier to assume that the nonmodal and modal uses of DEKIRU constitute the use of two separate words. A third sentence with English CAN may help explicate this:

3.c. He canned 50 bushels of peas.

There would seem to be no etymological relationship between the verb in the above sentence and the modal CAN in (3.a) and (3.b). But if it were assumed there was such a relationship, and that the modal senses were derived from the sense of CAN in (3.c), then the use of CAN in (3.c) would correspond to its root sense.

5 In modern Japanese the form which occurs here, RENTAIKEI (substantive form), is identical with the nonpast SYUSIKEI form. (See Henderson, 1946: 11-16).

6 The negated potential suffix may still be so ambiguous as the form with DEKIRU that either a deontic or "capacity" interpretation could be given.

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