

A Comparative Study of the Japanese Case Particle *から* and the English Preposition *From*

Zhen Lin*

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangdong, China

*Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

Copyright: © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: As an agglutinative language, Japanese relies on particles to connect sentence constituents. Though Japanese particles carry no lexical meaning and cannot be used independently, they constitute one of the core difficulties in Japanese learning. English, as an inflected language, realizes grammatical features through inflectional changes. English prepositions are also devoid of lexical meaning, yet they undertake the function of connecting nouns and verbs, which shares certain commonalities with Japanese particles. For most Chinese learners of Japanese who take English as their second foreign language, they tend to transfer the usage of the English preposition *from* to the acquisition of the Japanese case particle *から* at the initial learning stage. Such language transfer may exert a positive effect at the beginning. Nevertheless, the two differ greatly in syntactic position and semantic connotation. As learning deepens, negative transfer frequently occurs and hinders the improvement of Japanese proficiency. This paper compares the similarities and differences between the Japanese case particle *から* and the English preposition *from*, aiming to provide references for Japanese language learners.

Keywords: *から* ; From; Second foreign language acquisition; Japanese learning; Case particle

Online publication: June 16, 2026

1. Introduction

This paper conducts a comparative analysis between the Japanese case particle *から* and the English preposition *from*. For most Chinese students learning Japanese with English as their second foreign language, the two items are easily regarded as semantic equivalents due to their shared basic implication of “starting point.” Such intuitive association often leads learners to transfer the usage of *from* directly to the acquisition of *から* in the early learning stage.

Although *から* and *from* overlap considerably in core meaning and some extended functions, they belong to different linguistic systems and follow distinct syntactic rules. Japanese, as an agglutinative language, relies heavily on post-nominal particles to organize sentence structure, while English, an inflected language, places prepositions before nouns to express grammatical relations^[1-2]. Their differences in syntactic position,

semantic extension, and pragmatic usage are easily overlooked by foreign language learners, which may result in negative transfer and persistent grammatical errors.

Against this background, this paper first sorts out the major semantic and syntactic usages of *から* and *from* respectively, and then explores their similarities and differences. On this basis, it further puts forward feasible teaching suggestions, aiming to help learners distinguish the two expressions correctly, reduce mother-tongue transfer interference, and improve the efficiency of Japanese particle acquisition.

2. Meanings and usages of the Japanese case particle *から*

The *Great Japanese Dictionary* defines case particles as follows:

体言または体言に準ずるものに付いて、その体言が他の語とどんな関係で続くかを示す助詞。主語であることを示す「が」「の」... この語は山田孝雄の命名による。

To paraphrase the definition: case particles attach to nouns or noun-equivalent expressions, indicating the syntactic and semantic relations between the preceding noun and other words in a sentence. The particle *から* is closely related to predicates (verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.) in sentences. Apart from functioning as a case particle, *から* can also be placed at the end of a sentence as a conjunctive particle to express reason. Since this paper mainly makes a comparative study of the similarities and differences between Japanese case particles and English prepositions, the conjunctive particle *から* will not be discussed here. The meaning of the Japanese case particle *から* depends not only on the preceding noun or noun-equivalent element, but also on the subsequent sentence constituents. Only in this way can its specific meaning in a sentence be accurately determined. The major usages of the case particle *から* are summarized as follows^[3].

2.1. Indicating starting point

The case particle *から* attaches to time or place nouns to denote the temporal and spatial starting point^[4]. In addition, in some sentences, *から* can also indicate the starting point of the sequence of an action or conduct.

(1) 何時から質問、回答に「ブランク」を設けたのですか。

(From what time did you start leaving blanks in questions and answers?)

(2) 羽田からアメリカへ帰るんだ。

(I returned to the United States from Haneda.)

(3) 1組から順番に受けていきました。

(We proceeded in order starting from Group One.)

Although the specific nuances of *から* in the three sentences above differ slightly, all carry the core meaning of a starting point. In Sentence (1), *から* follows an interrogative word of time to mark a temporal starting point, inquiring about the time when the relevant behavior began. In Sentence (2), *から* is attached to the place noun Haneda (Haneda Airport in Japan) to indicate a spatial starting point, denoting that the journey departs from Haneda Airport heading for the United States.

When *から* expresses a starting point as in Sentences (1) and (2), it is often collocated with *まで* to indicate a temporal or spatial scope. When referring to a location, as in Sentence (2), the particle *まで* can sometimes be replaced by *へ*. In Sentence (3), *から* follows *1組* to mark the sequential starting point of an action, meaning “starting from Group One”, namely that Group One takes the lead to perform the action first.

2.2. Indicating source or origin

The case particle *から* follows nouns referring to persons, organizations, and other entities to indicate the source or origin of goods and other things. In this usage, it is commonly followed by verbs conveying the meaning of “receiving” such as *もらう*, and is translated as “obtain from...”.

(4) 会社から賞をいただきました。

(I received an award from the company.)

Literally interpreted, this sentence means “I obtained an award from the company.” The subject *私* (I) is omitted and does not appear in the sentence. Here, *から* attaches to the organizational noun *会社*, indicating that the award originates from and is conferred by the company.

2.3. Indicating cause or reason

The case particle *から* can follow nouns such as *不注意*、*風邪*、*争い* to denote cause or reason. Different from *から* functioning as a conjunctive particle, the case particle *から* mostly takes objective facts, such as social and natural phenomena, as its rationale when expressing cause.

(5) ただ、不注意から交通事故を起こしてしまったのです。

(It was merely due to carelessness that the traffic accident occurred.)

In this sentence, *から* follows the noun *不注意*, indicating that the traffic accident, a kind of social phenomenon, is caused by the driver’s inadvertence.

2.4. Indicating raw materials

The case particle *から* attaches to nouns of materials and raw materials to denote the substances that constitute or manufacture a product. Compared with the case particle *で*, which can also indicate raw materials, *で* is used for materials that are visually recognizable in the finished product, while *から* is applied to materials that can no longer be identified from the final product ^[5].

(6) バターは牛乳から、マーガリンは植物油などからつくられる。

(Butter is made from milk, and margarine is made from vegetable oil.)

Sentence (6) illustrates the raw materials of butter and margarine. Both finished products are yellow solids, and their original raw materials—milk and vegetable oil—can no longer be visually distinguished.

2.5. Indicating judgment criteria

The case particle *から* can form fixed patterns with other verbs or particles to indicate the basis for judgment. Typical patterns include *からいうと*、*からいえば*、*からいって*、*からすると*、*からすれば*、*からして*、*からしても*、*から見ると*, all of which can be rendered as “judging from...; in terms of...”

(7) 討論の様相からすると、どうやらこの問題に精通している者も大勢いるようだった。

(Judging from the atmosphere of the discussion, there seemed to be quite a number of people well-versed in this issue.)

This sentence draws the conclusion that many people have a good command of the issue. The judgment is based on the observed situation of the discussion. Participants expressed their viewpoints actively during the discussion, and the above conclusion is drawn on this evidential basis.

2.6. Indicating quantitative standard

Collocated with the verbs *する* and *ある*, the case particle *から* forms the structures *～からする* and *～か*

らある , both implying the meaning of “exceeding a certain quantity.”

(8) それに歩合が今月だけでも八十万からはあるだろう。

(Besides, the commission alone for this month must be no less than 800,000 yen.)

In Sentence (8), から follows the quantifier 八十万 to emphasize a large quantity, conveying the implication of “at least.” The connotation suggests that the commission actually exceeds 800,000 yen.

2.7. Indicating the agent in passive sentences

In this usage, から is interchangeable with the particle に . It is frequently used in direct passive sentences to mark the agent who performs the action.

(9) 誰から教えられたのかは全く憶えていないが ……

(I cannot remember that I was taught by whom at all…)

Here, から follows the interrogative pronoun 誰 and marks the agent of the action 教える . The indirect object 私に is omitted in this sentence.

2.8. Indicating the initiator of an action

(10) それでは、私からお尋ねいたします。

(Now, I will ask the question.)

This sentence can be rephrased as それでは、私がお尋ねします . Both versions express the meaning of “I will ask the question.” Nevertheless, Sentence (10) carries a stronger sense of voluntariness and formality, implying the speaker takes the initiative to consult the other party respectfully.

2.9. Indicating the passage of a place

(11) わたしも思春期に病気になって、病院の窓から飛び降りようとしたことあるんだ〜

(I once fell ill during adolescence and even attempted to jump out of the hospital window.)

In Sentence (11), から precedes the location noun 病院の窓 . Different from the starting-point usage mentioned above, it here denotes a place of passage^[7]. The speaker intends to express a change of position: moving from the inside of the hospital building to the outside, with the hospital window serving as the transitional passage of this movement.

Apart from the usages of indicating quantitative standard and marking the passive agent, the Japanese particle から is mostly translated into Chinese as “从 ……” or “由 ……” It is evident that the core semantic meaning of から lies in denoting a starting point.

3. Meanings and usages of the English preposition *from*

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a preposition as follows: “In grammar, a word used before a noun, noun phrase, or pronoun, serving to connect it with another word in a sentence.” Prepositions are primarily placed before nouns, noun phrases, and pronouns. Their grammatical function is to link the subsequent noun, noun phrase, or pronoun with other sentence constituents. The specific semantic usages of the preposition *from* are summarized below.

3.1. Indicating starting point

Placed before nouns of time or place, the preposition *from* conveys the meaning of a starting point,

corresponding to the Chinese equivalent “从 ... / 离 ...”

(12) You are 9.2 miles from destination.

(13) Mexico had undergone its own revolution from 1910 to 1917 and was advancing on its own revolutionary road.

(14) A lot of guys in here take queues from me because I am very used to doing it.

In Sentence (12), *from* precedes the destination and indicates the distance to it, taking the destination as the reference point. In Sentence (13), *from* precedes the time marker *1910* to mark the starting time of the Mexican bourgeois revolution, collocating with *to 1917* to indicate the ending time. The paired structure *from...to...* is commonly used to express a scope. In Sentence (14), *from* precedes the personal pronoun *me* and denotes the sequential starting point of an action, indicating that the act of queuing begins with the speaker.

3.2. Indicating source or origin

In this usage, *from* is generally preceded by verbs such as the linking verb *be*, *come*, *quote*, and *borrow*, to indicate the source of materials, viewpoints, and other contents.

(15) The interpretations in my Partisan article were quoted from sages cited in the Frankfurter Zeitung.

In this sentence, *from* follows the passive form of the verb *quote* and is followed by the source of literature, indicating that the author's viewpoints are derived from the Frankfurter Zeitung.

3.3. Indicating raw materials

When *from* denotes raw materials, it is frequently used in passive constructions and collocated with production-related verbs such as *make*.

(16) The pod was made from Lucky's plastic sheeting.

This sentence describes the material of the simple pod, which is constructed of plastic sheeting. The noun following *from* serves as the raw material of the pod.

3.4. Indicating avoidance or prevention

When expressing avoidance or prevention, *from* is usually preceded by verbs with protective or preventive connotations such as *prevent*, *protect*, and *keep*. The noun or gerund following *from* refers to the situation to be avoided or prevented.

(17) But she's in a very serious situation which prevents her from being here.

Here *from* is followed by the gerund *being*, suggesting that the severe situation keeps her from arriving here.

3.5. Indicating difference and distinction

When preceded by adjectives or verbs expressing dissimilarity, *from* carries a comparative implication, meaning “different from...”

(18) His physiology may be totally different from ours.

The item following *from* is the object of comparison, where *ours* refers to “our physiological structure.” The fixed collocation is different from what is adopted to express distinction.

3.6. Indicating basis or grounds

Positioned at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence, *from* forms fixed phrases such as *from my point of view* and *from my perspective*, denoting the basis for judgment.

(19) From what I understand, they paid taxes.

Here *from* is followed by a nominal clause. The clause *what I understand* acts as the evidential basis for the judgment that “they paid taxes.”

3.7. Indicating separation or departure

(20) It’s best to keep the fish separated from the vegetables until you’re ready to serve.

In this usage, *from* often follows verbs such as *separate*, *remove*, and *escape*, conveying the meaning of “to separate one thing from another; to depart from...”

4. Similarities between the Japanese case particle *から* and the English preposition *from*

4.1. Identical basic meaning

Both the Japanese case particle *から* and the English preposition *from* take “starting point” as their core semantic meaning. In most cases, both can be translated into Chinese as “从 ... / 由 ...” On this basis, they share some extended identical usages: starting point of time, location and sequence, source and origin, raw materials whose original form cannot be identified, and basis for judgment.

4.2. Identical part-of-speech property

The case particle *から* cannot be used independently and must attach to nominal expressions to indicate their semantic relations with other sentence elements. Likewise, the preposition *from* cannot stand alone; it is placed after verbs and before nouns to express the relation between verbs and nouns. In other words, both the case particle *から* and the preposition *from* belong to function words.

To sum up, the Japanese case particle *から* and the English preposition *from* share numerous parallel usages. They both possess the core meaning of “starting point”, from which extended similar semantic senses are derived, including source, raw material, and judgment basis. At the syntactic level, neither *から* nor *from* can appear independently in a sentence; they must collocate with other linguistic elements to perform syntactic functions.

5. Differences between the Japanese case particle *から* and the English preposition *from*

Nevertheless, the case particle *から* is not completely equivalent to the English preposition *from*, and there exist noticeable differences between the two.

5.1. Differences in syntactic position

As mentioned in Section 4.2, neither the case particle *から* nor the preposition *from* can be used independently. Specifically, Japanese case particles attach after nominal expressions (including nouns, numerals, and pronouns) to indicate the relational meaning between the nominal element and other sentence constituents. Its basic structure follows the pattern: N + *から* + V.

In English, a preposition is placed after a verb and before a noun or gerund, with the basic structure: V + from + N. In addition, as reflected in the previous examples, the English preposition *from* can follow not only verbs but also adjectives, and can even be placed at the beginning of a sentence. Overall, the positional distribution of English prepositions is more flexible than that of Japanese particles.

5.2. The compound particle *からの* vs. non-compound feature of *from*

The Japanese case particle *から* can combine with the particle *の* to form the compound case particle *からの*, which can directly precede a nominal expression. By contrast, the English preposition *from* cannot form compound structures with other prepositions.

5.3. Differences in extended meanings

The case particle *から* possesses unique extended usages that *from* does not have: it can indicate cause or reason, quantitative standard, and the agent in passive sentences.

Meanwhile, the English preposition *from* has its exclusive usages, including denoting prevention and avoidance, distinction and difference, as well as separation and detachment — semantic functions with no direct counterparts in the usages of *から*.

6. Pedagogical implications

6.1. Clarifying the typical features of the two languages

In teaching, teachers should first clarify that Japanese and English belong to different linguistic systems^[7]. Japanese is an agglutinative language in which particles function as grammatical binders. Case particles follow nouns, connecting nominal elements with other sentence components and marking their syntactic and semantic relations.

By comparison, English is an inflected language. Prepositions generally precede nouns and likewise indicate the relational meaning between the subsequent noun and other sentence constituents. Clarifying the distinct sentence construction mechanisms of the two languages can deepen learners' understanding of *から* and *from*, and further improve learning efficiency.

6.2. Adopting inductive teaching and context-based instruction

In the teaching of the case particle *から*, it is insufficient to merely explain its meanings with simplistic descriptions such as “indicating starting point” or “expressing cause.” It is advisable for teachers to adopt an inductive teaching method rather than deductive instruction.

By providing abundant authentic examples, learners can classify and summarize the usages of *から* independently^[8]. This approach not only consolidates learners' mastery of Japanese syntactic structures but also cultivates their autonomous learning ability. Moreover, learning within specific contexts helps learners memorize collocations more effectively and reduce grammatical errors.

7. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Japanese case particle *から* and the English preposition *from* share similarities in their core meaning of starting point and their lexical property as function words. However, they differ

significantly in syntactic position and extended semantic usages.

Chinese learners of Japanese with English as their second foreign language should avoid equating the English preposition *from* directly with the Japanese case particle *から*. It is preferable to acquire the usages of *から* in authentic contextual environments.

Japanese language teachers are also suggested to adjust teaching arrangements. Instead of listing all usages at the initial stage for rote memorization, teachers may provide typical examples first, guide students to summarize the core meaning of *から* by themselves, and then elaborate on its specific extended usages on the basis of prior comprehension. Such a teaching method can achieve better learning outcomes.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Masuoka T, Takubo Y, 1993, Basic Japanese Grammar—Revised Edition. Kuroshio Shuppan, Tokyo.
- [2] Gui HJ, 2024, A Study on the Correspondence between Japanese Particle *ni* and English Prepositions. *Journal of Hubei University of Education*, 41(11): 42–46.
- [3] Li Y, 2020, A Corpus-based Investigation of Japanese Case Particle *kara*. *Youth Literati*, 2020(33): 194–196.
- [4] Piao XL, 2019, A Research on Japanese Case Particle *kara*, thesis, Shanghai International Studies University.
- [5] Ashino F, Ito T, 2022, 現代日本語における格助詞「から」の体系的記述に向けて [Pour une description systématique de la particule *kara* en japonais contemporain]. *Keio University Hiyoshi Review. Language, Culture and Communication*, 2022(54): 1–21.
- [6] Okutsu K, 1966, *Made, Made Ni, Kara: Junjo Joshi o Chushin to Shite*. *Nihongo Kyoiku*, 1966(6).
- [7] Jiao LZ, 2008, On the Similarities and differences between Japanese Particles and English Prepositions. *Journal of North University of China (Social Science Edition)*, 2008(3): 41–44.
- [8] Mueller CM, 2022, Second Language Acquisition of English Prepositions. *Fuji Women’s University*, 2022(59): 17–44.

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.