Masatomo Ukaji, former president of the English Linguistic Society of Japan (ELSJ, 1992–1996), passed away on October 22, 2011 at the age of eighty. He was one of the most eminent Japanese scholars in the field of English historical linguistics, and in particular, of Early Modern English syntax. At the time of his death, he was Professor Emeritus at Tokyo Gakugei University, where he had been a faculty member from 1975 until his retirement in 1995.

Professor Ukaji was born in Niigata Prefecture on July 10, 1931. After graduating from Niigata Prefectural Sanjo High School, he matriculated at Tokyo University of Education in 1950, where he became interested in English linguistics, with a focus on American structural linguistics and English historical syntax. From as early as the 1950s, he set about working on syntactic analysis of subject-verb inverted constructions in Early Modern English. After earning a B.A. degree from Tokyo University of Education in 1954, he went on to the Master’s and Doctor’s Program of the same university. After completing the latter program in 1958, he began his academic career as an instructor at Otaru University of Commerce, where he taught English from 1958 to 1963. During that period, he won Ford Foundation and Fulbright scholarships, and attended the University of Michigan (1961–1962), where he was inspired by the stimulating lectures of Albert H. Marckwardt, Sherman M. Kuhn, Kenneth L. Pike and others. He then developed his own ideas about the history and the structure of the English language. In 1965, he moved to the Liberal Arts Department of Tohoku University. After teaching English there for three years, he assumed a new post of Associate Professor at his alma mater, Tokyo University of Education, in 1968. There, he conducted seminars on Early Modern English and on English historical linguistics up to 1977, the year before Tokyo University of Education ceased to exist. Amidst the widespread disturbance on university campuses in the 1970s, he continued to diligently pursue his own agenda of research and publication, and completed his dissertation entitled Imperative Sentences in Early Modern English under the supervision of Professor Akira Ota, receiving the degree of D.Litt. in November 1976 from Tokyo University of Education. In April 1975, he was invited to join the English Department of
Tokyo Gakugei University as Associate Professor, and was promoted to full professorship in 1977. He continued his enthusiastic and diligent work there until his retirement in 1995. After his retirement, he was invited to join Tsurumi University, where he taught English Linguistics, and continued his research to the age of 70 (1995–2002), while serving as a university administrator, Dean of the School of Literature and Director of the University Library.

One of his outstanding academic achievements is his aforementioned D.litt dissertation, which was later published by Kaitakusha in 1978 as Imperative Sentences in Early Modern English. For this book, he was awarded the Ichikawa Prize in 1979. This research was the first attempt in Japan to explore the problem of diachronic English syntax within the framework of generative transformational theory. Based on his careful observation and analyses, he succeeded in offering valuable new information concerning imperative constructions in Early Modern English as well as providing new insights into grammatical change between the earlier stage of Early Modern English and that of Contemporary English.

Another one of his monumental books is Eigoshi IIIA (History of English IIIA, co-authored with Kazuo Araki, 1984), where he provided a detailed and comprehensive description of syntactic properties of Early Modern English. The real strength of this book lies in its clarity and preciseness, lending weight to its authority. Therefore, this book has helped many students and scholars of historical linguistics in Japan deepen their understanding of Early Modern English. It is also noteworthy that besides overviewing the familiar previous studies in this field, he also incorporated the fruits of long years of philological studies in Japan.

Professor Ukaji’s contributions to academic societies, particularly to the ELSJ, have been remarkable: a member of the Editorial Board (1983–1989); Vice President (1990–1992) and President (1992–1996); a member of the Board of Directors (three terms during 1988–2001); and Advisor (2002–2011). In addition, he served as the chair of the Editorial Board of the English Literary Society of Japan (1978–1979), and as a member of the Board of Directors of the Modern English Association (1983–2001) and as Advisor (2004–2011) of the same association.

In addition to his energetic service in Japan, his activity also extended overseas. In 1990, he read a paper “‘I not say’: Bridge Phenomenon in Linguistic Evolution” at the Sixth International Conference on English Historical Linguistics (ICEHL) held at Helsinki University, Finland. In 2000, he read a paper “An Aspect of the Development of Negative Sentences in Modern English” at the Eleventh ICEHL held at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

After his full retirement in March, 2002, he devoted himself to two works until his death. One of them was the compilation of Eigogaku Bunken-kaidai 4:
Bunpou I (The Kenkyusha Bibliographical Guide to English Linguistics and Philology, Volume 4: Grammar I) under the general supervision of Professor Yoshio Terasawa, which was published by Kenkyusha in 2010. His ultimate aim of this bibliographical book was to trace the detailed history of English grammars (including Traditional (School) Grammar and American Structuralist Grammar) back to the 16th century (Bullokar 1586). The main part of this book offers brief overviews of about eighty monumental grammar books published from 1586–2005, which will certainly be invaluable for younger language teachers and researchers.

After the publication of the above bibliography, his continuing interest in the history of grammar research led him to reach further back to the ancient Greek or Latin Grammars. It was astonishing to find that he had been preparing a preliminary draft of a new book during the half year before his death. This unpublished manuscript starts with an examination of Greek philosophers’ views on language or grammar such as Plato’s Cratylos (his dialogue about language), Aristotle’s Peri hermeneias (‘On Interpretation’), and Stoic philosophers. It then proceeds to Greek and Roman (Latin) grammarians such as Dionusios Thrax (a Hellenistic grammarian), Apollonius Dyscolus, Marcus Terentius Varro, Donatus, and Priscianus. Professor Ukaji’s keen interest in such bibliographical works might be attributed to his firm belief that the edifice of modern linguistics is nothing other than the product of long years of academic pursuits originating with Greek philosophers. Though we regret that completion of such a significant manuscript was halted by his untimely death, his unbending spirit of inquiry will surely encourage and stimulate the next generation to work in the field.

At first glance, Professor Ukaji had a somewhat serious persona, but he was actually a very warm and genial person. When I was his student, and later a colleague, I would often see him speaking amicably to faculty, staff, and students on and off campus. The topics of conversation ranged from his research topics to education, literature, sports, and the state of societal affairs.

When I was a student, he always said that whenever you are asked to do somebody a favor, you should readily accept it no matter how difficult the task. True to his character, his actions were in accordance with his beliefs. For example, in 1991, the Japan Sumo Association was planning a three-day exhibition in London. One of the highlights of the event was to show Yokozuna-dohyoiri (ceremonial entrance of the Grand Champion) in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. This entailed a presentation of the historical background and meaning of Dohyoiri in English. At the sudden, unexpected request of the Sumo Association, Professor Ukaji drew up an English version of its explanatory notes of Yokozuna-dohyoiri, and moreover, translated the entire Japanese script of the exhibition proceedings. I remember
him saying with a look of satisfaction that the Director of the Association personally came to his house to pick up the manuscript the day before their departure for London.

For his long-term efforts and invaluable contributions to education, research and management at universities and academic societies, Professor Ukaji posthumously received a prestigious cultural award from the Japanese government (Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon).

Professor Ukaji will be missed by all of us who admired him and had the privilege of associating with him.