

On the Roles of Complementizers in Japanese *

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss two syntactic roles of complementizers in Japanese, and show that these roles are deduced from the general properties of complementizers that they are force indicators and turn clauses into full-fledged propositions. One role of complementizers is to license embedded topicalization, and the other is to block Nominative Genitive Conversion. I argue that Nominative Genitive Conversion involves the optional I-to-D head movement, which is blocked by the intervening C. Finally, I introduce an analysis of Exceptional Case-marking in Japanese, which takes it as the non-*wa*-marked embedded topicalization.

2. Embedded Topicalization

Maki *et al.* (1999) claim that embedded topicalization in Japanese, which derives (1)b from (1)a, is licensed by LF I-to-C adjunction.¹ Based on Murasugi's (1990) claim that relative clauses in Japanese are IPs, Maki *et al.* (1999) claim that the inapplicability of topicalization in (2)b is due to the absence of the CP projection. I provide (3) to support their claim; namely, (3)a is ungrammatical because there is no C that licenses the

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¹ The claim made by Maki *et al.* (1999) is based on the similarities between English and Japanese embedded topicalization (cf. Authier 1992, Kayne 1994, Bošković 1997, etc).

2 On the Roles of Complementizers in Japanese

embedded topicalization, but (3)b is fine because *toiu*, the head of an optional CP projection, licenses it.

- (1) a. Taroo-wa Hanako-ga yuusyuu da to omou.
 Taroo-top Hanako-nom excellent that think
 ‘Taroo believes that Hanako is excellent.’
 b. Taroo-wa Hanako-wa yuusyuu da to omou.
 Taroo-top Hanako-top excellent that think
 (lit.) ‘Taroo believes that Hanako, is excellent.’
- (2) a. John-ga [kono hon-o yonda] hito-ni atta.
 John-nom this book-top read person-dat met
 ‘John met the person who read this book.’
 b. * John-ga [kono hon-wa yonda] hito-ni atta.
 John-nom this book-top read person-dat met
 (lit.) ‘John met the person who this book, read.’
- (3) a. kono hon-ga/*wa omosiroi kanoosee/syooko
 this book-nom/top interesting possibility/evidence
 (lit.) ‘the possibility/evidence this book(,) is interesting’
 b. kono hon-ga/wa omosiroi toiu kanoosee/syooko
 this book-nom/top interesting that possibility/evidence
 ‘the possibility/evidence that this book is interesting’

It should be noted that there are cases where a complementizer is overtly realized but embedded topicalization is disallowed, as shown in (4), (5), and (6). Taguchi (to appear) argues that this is because embedded topicalization has the structure like (7),² and *kadooka* ‘whether’, *nara* ‘if’, and *toki* ‘when’ in (4),³ (5), and (6), respectively, have an empty operator in SpecCP, where a topic should be hosted (cf. Kuroda 1987, Tonoike 1989, and Rizzi 1997, etc.).⁴

² In Section 6, I will provide an example that supports the assumption that topicalization in Japanese has the structure like (7).

³ As I argue in Section 3, *toki* is used as a complementizer or a noun which is translated as ‘time’.

⁴ Another reasoning might be to assume that complementizers such as *to* project up

- (4) a. Taroo-wa Hanako-ga yuusyuu kadooka handansita.
 Taroo-top Hanako-nom excellent whether judged
 b. ?? Taroo-wa Hanako-wa yuusyuu kadooka handansita.⁵
 Taroo-top Hanako-top excellent whether judged
 ‘Taroo knows whether Hanako is excellent.’
- (5) a. Hanako-ga yuusyuu nara Taroo-wa saiyoosuru-daroo.
 Hanako-nom excellent if Taroo-top employ-will
 b. * Hanako-wa yuusyuu nara Taroo-wa saiyoosuru-daroo.
 Hanako-top excellent if Taroo-top employ-will
 ‘If Hanako is excellent, Taroo will employ her.’
- (6) a. Taroo-wa Hanako-ga yuusyuu toki-ni atta.
 Taroo-top Hanako-nom excellent time-at met
 b. * Taroo-wa Hanako-wa yuusyuu toki-ni atta.
 Taroo-top Hanako-top excellent time-at met
 ‘Taroo met Hanako when she was excellent.’
- (7) [_{CP} topic_i [_C C [_{TP} ... pro_i ...]]]

3. Nominative Genitive Conversion

Nominative Genitive Conversion (NGC) is the alternation between the nominative and genitive case-markers on the subject of a clause that forms a relative clause or a complex NP, as shown in (8).

- (8) boku-ga/no yonda hon
 I-nom/gen read book
 ‘the book which I read’

Traditionally, it has been assumed that NGC is licensed by a nominal

to CP, but *kadooka*, *nara*, and *toki* do not.

⁵ Maki *et al.* (1999) judge this sentence as grammatical with a topic reading for *Hanako-wa*, but for me and the informants I consulted, it must be interpreted with a contrastive reading in order for the sentence to be grammatical. However, Hideki Maki (p.c.) pointed out that some modifications will improve the sentence with a topic reading for *Hanako-wa*. I do not discuss the issue here.

4 On the Roles of Complementizers in Japanese

element (cf. Harada 1971, 1976, Saito 1982, Miyagawa 1993, and Ochi 2001). However, Watanabe (1994, 1996) and Hiraiwa (2000, 2002) argue that NGC is triggered by a certain type of *C* that enters into a special Agree relation, and that a nominal element is totally irrelevant for the licensing of NGC. Let us call this the *C*-based approach. Their argument is based on the observation that there are cases where a nominal element appears to be optional, as shown in (9):

- (9) John-wa [ame-ga/no yamu (toki) made] heya-ni ita.
John-top rain-nom/gen stop (time) until room-at was
'John was in the room until the rain stopped.'

While the *C*-based approach is intriguing in itself, it is faced with at least two empirical problems. First, the argument-adjunct asymmetry regarding NGC pointed out by Fujita (1988) cannot be accounted for (cf. Miyagawa 1989, Takahashi 1994, and Maki *et al.* 1999, etc.). As exemplified in (10)a, NGC is possible when the noun *toki* 'time' heading a relative clause is an argument, but is impossible when *toki* is an adjunct, as shown in (10)b.⁶

- (10) a. [Oogoe-de Mary-ga/no waratta toki]-o oboeteiru.
loudly Mary-nom/gen laughed TOKI-acc remember
'I remember the time when Mary laughed loudly.'
b. [Oogoe-de Mary-ga/*no waratta toki] John-ga naiteita.
loudly Mary-nom/gen laughed TOKI John-nom crying
'John was crying when Mary laughed loudly'

Since the *C*-based approach assumes that genitive is licensed independently of a nominal element, whether or not the head noun is an argument should not matter, and it predicts that NGC should be well-formed in both (10)a and (10)b, contrary to fact.

Second, it is hard to explain why the complementizer of a relative

⁶ I gloss *toki* as TOKI in (10), since I have not made clear which syntactic category each belongs to at this point.

clause cannot always be realized as *no*, as shown in (11):⁷

- (11) boku-no yonda (*no) hon
 I-gen read (*NO) book
 ‘the book which I read’

Before explaining why the C-based approach cannot account for the obligatory absence of *no* in (11), let us briefly summarize Hiraiwa’s discussion regarding complementizers in Japanese. Hiraiwa classifies them into three types: a null complementizer C_{affix} which does not have any phonological realization (cf. (8) and (9)), an overt complementizer *toiu* (cf. (12)b), and a null complementizer C_{affix} which is phonologically spelled out as *no* as a result of Agree (cf. (13)). Hiraiwa explains the applicability and inapplicability of NGC in the clause headed by each complementizer as follows. The overt complementizer *toiu* in (12)b is free from Agree and thus blocks NGC, but it is absent in (12)a and thus NGC is applicable. On the other hand, C_{affix} in (8) and (13) are the types of complementizers that induce Agree relevant for the NGC licensing, and thus nothing prevents NGC from applying in these examples. However, putting technical details aside, it is predicted under Hiraiwa’s analysis that the spell-out of C_{affix} as *no* should be possible whenever NGC is applicable. (11) shows that this prediction is incorrect. Thus, it seems plausible that *no*, the NGC licenser in (13), is something other than a complementizer, which competes for the nominal head position in relative clauses, as shown by (11).

4. Proposal: The Syntactic Roles of Complementizers in Japanese

I have shown by the data above that the embedded clauses with *toiu* have a complementizer and those without do not; namely, whenever a clause has a complementizer, it must be overt.⁸ To deal with the data, I propose

⁷ I gloss *no* as NO in (11), since I argue below that there are two types of *no* but have not made clear which syntactic category each belongs to at this point.

⁸ See Maki *et al.* (1999) for the data showing that Kansai dialects have a null

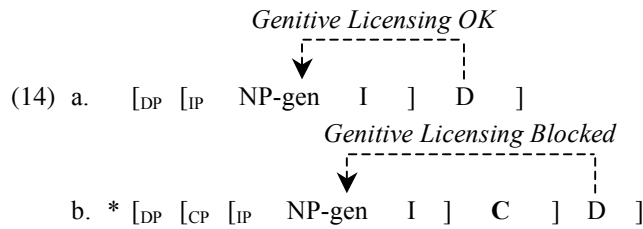
6 On the Roles of Complementizers in Japanese

that the syntactic roles of complementizers in Japanese are to license embedded topicalization and to block NGC. The data in (12), cited from Hiraiwa (2000), support my proposal:

- (12) a. syoorai daizisin-ga/no okiru kanoosee
in the future great earthquake-nom/gen occur possibility
b. syoorai daizisin-ga/*no okiru toiu kanoosee
in the future great earthquake-nom/gen occur that possibility
‘the possibility that a great earthquake will occur in the future’

It seems plausible that NGC is blocked in (12)b because the complementizer *toiu* is intervening between the subject and the nominal element, while NGC is not blocked because a complementizer is entirely absent in (12)a. Thus, I conclude that (i) NGC is licensed by an Agree relation between the embedded subject and a nominal element (or the [+N] feature, following Maki and Uchibori 2005), which may be phonologically unrealized as in (9), and (ii) *no* in (13) and *toki* in (10)a are instances of nominal elements, which license NGC, while *toiu* in (12)b and *toki* in (10)b are instances of complementizers, which blocks it. This is illustrated in (14), where D is the licenser of genitive:

- (13) John-wa [kinoo Mary-ga/no kita no]-o siranakatta.
John-top yesterday Mary-nom/gen came NO-acc didn’t know
‘John didn’t know that Mary came yesterday.’



complementizer which licenses embedded topicalization.

The contrast between (15)/(16) and (17) shows that there are two types of *no* in Japanese: *no* in (15) and (16) is a nominal element, which can be replaced by another nominal element (cf. Maki *et al.* 2003, Maki and Uchibori 2005), whereas *no* in (17) is a complementizer, which cannot be replaced by anything. Note that only the former group allows NGC.

- (15) John-wa [kinoo Mary-ga/no kita no/koto]-o siranakatta.
 John-top yesterday Mary-nom/gen came N/fact-acc didn't know
 'John didn't know that Mary came yesterday.'
- (16) John-ga/no katta no/hon-wa minimarisuto puroguramu da.
 John-nom/gen bought N/book-top *The Minimalist Program* is
 'It is *The Minimalist Program* that John bought.'
- (17) Tenki-ga/*no warui no/*koto-de, ...
 Weather-nom/gen bad C/fact-because
 'Because the weather is bad, ...'

A consequence of the current proposal is that it is consistent with two generalizations made by Watanabe (1974), a work from the traditional Japanese grammar. I would like to reinterpret Watanabe's generalizations in a way compatible with the framework adopted here. One is that a topic must appear with the declarative force. The other is that NGC is only found in modifier clauses that do not function as propositions by themselves. We can straightforwardly account for Watanabe's generalizations in more general terms; namely, given Chomsky's (2000) definition of propositional objects, we can state that complementizers are force indicators and turn clauses into full-fledged propositions. Clausal modifiers including relative clauses and complex NPs are IPs unless an overt complementizer appears, and thus, embedded topicalization is unlicensed and NGC is not blocked. On the other hand, complement clauses, which are headed by an overt complementizer, are CPs, and thus embedded topicalization is licensed and NGC is blocked.

5. Problems: Agree, the PIC, and the Optionality of NGC

I have shown above that complementizers show an intervention effect on NGC, as illustrated in (14)b. Two questions arise. One is why C blocks Agree between the subject and a nominal element. More specifically, why the Agree relation is blocked, if Agree is free from the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC), which states that only the edge of a phase (Spec and head) is accessible from outside of the phase, as Bošković (in press a) claims. The other is why NGC is optional. More precisely, why NGC is even possible, given that I is the closest functional head that licenses Case in (14)a, in accordance with Agree Closest. Below, I discuss these two questions, and demonstrate that they are straightforwardly answered if it is assumed that NGC involves the optional I-to-D head movement.⁹

Bošković (in press a) claims that Agree is not constrained by the PIC. In his system, LF movement of the *wh*-phrase in (18) should be replaced by the long-distance Agree between the *wh*-phrase and the matrix C:

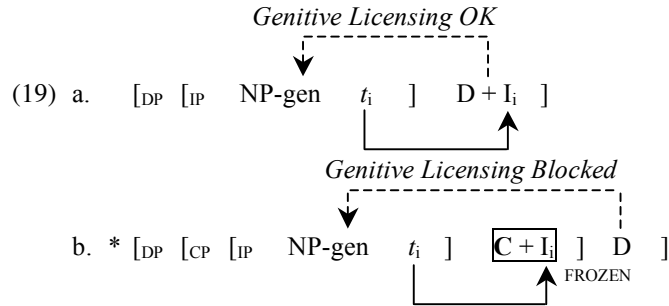
- (18) Taroo-wa [dare-ga kita to] omotteiru no.
 Taroo-top who-nom came that is thinking C_[+wh]
 (lit.) ‘Who is Taroo thinking that came?’

If Agree is free from the PIC, it follows that the C intervening between D and I in (14)b should not block the genitive licensing. Thus, I propose that NGC is a result of the optional I-to-D head movement, as illustrated in (19)a, in which D and I are equally close to the subject. Moreover, I propose that the optional I-to-D movement is blocked by the C intervening between them. More specifically, in order for I to move to D, it must move to C first. However, once I moves to C, the C + I complex is frozen in place, as shown

⁹ Željko Bošković (p.c.) pointed out to me that optional head movement is also observed in English. According to him, T undergoes optional head movement to AgrS in (ia):

- (i) a. I can probably go there.
 b. I probably can go there.

in (19)b. As a result, I is still closer to the subject than D, and Agree between the subject and D is blocked in accordance with Agree Closest.



In sum, one of the syntactic role of complementizers in Japanese that they block Agree between the subject and the nominal element, reduces to the property that head movement is frozen once I moves to C.

6. Exceptional Case-Marking in Japanese

In this section, I examine whether the proposed analysis can be extended to Exceptional Case-marking (ECM), another Case alternation phenomenon in Japanese. First of all, consider the contrast between (20)a and (20)b, which appears to be in parallel with NGC with respect to optionality:

- (20) a. Taroo-wa Hanako-ga yuusyuuuda to omou.
 Taroo-top Hanako-nom excellent that think
 ‘Taroo believes that Hanako is excellent.’
- b. Taroo-wa Hanako-o yuusyuuuda to omou.
 Taroo-top Hanako-acc excellent that think
 ‘Taroo believes Hanako to be excellent.’

Tanaka (2002) argues that the embedded subjects in (20)a and (20)b are

10 On the Roles of Complementizers in Japanese

base-generated in the same position, and only the accusative counterpart in (20)b undergoes Raising-to-Object, which moves an ECM subject to a higher clause via SpecCP. I show below that the analysis of NGC I am proposing here cannot account for the optionality in (20), summarizing Taguchi's (2007) claim that (20)b is not an instance of ECM in the traditional sense (cf. Kuno (1976), Saito (1982), Takezawa (1987), Kaneko (1988), Ueda (1988), Mihara (1994), Ura (1994), Takezawa and Whitman (1998), Hiraiwa (2001), Tanaka (2002), and Takano (2003), among others), but an instance of bare (i.e. non-*wa*-marked) embedded topicalization.

Before discussing ECM in Japanese, I would like to give an outline of bare topicalization in Japanese. Bare topicalization, given as (21)a, and ordinary topicalization, given as (21)b, pattern in the same way with respect to a number of properties.

- (21) a. Sono hito, kinoo-no ziken-no hannin da.
that person yesterday-gen incident-gen culprit is
b. Sono hito-wa kinoo-no ziken-no hannin da.
that person-top yesterday-gen incident-gen culprit is
(lit.) 'That person, is the culprit of yesterday's incident.'

However, one striking difference between these two types of topicalization is that bare topicalization does not apply in embedded clauses, but ordinary topicalization does, as shown by the contrast between (22)a and (22)b:

- (22) a. * Watasi-wa [sono hito, kinoo-no ziken-no hannin
 I-top that person yesterday-gen incident-gen culprit
 da to] omou.
 is that think
- b. Watasi-wa [sono hito-wa kinoo-no ziken-no
 I-top that person-top yesterday-gen incident-gen
 hannin da to] omou.
 culprit is that think
 (lit.) ‘I believe that that person, is the culprit of yesterday’s
 incident.’

Let us assume that topicalization in Japanese has the structure (7), which is repeated as (23):

- (23) [_{CP} topic_i [_{C'} C [_{TP} ... *pro*_i ...]]]

(23) is consistent with Hoji’s (1985) observation that topicalization in Japanese shows no reconstruction effects (i.e., it does not involve movement, as opposed to Kuroda’s 1987 claim). For example, let us compare (24)a, where the sentence-initial constituent undergoes scrambling, and (24)b, where the sentence-initial constituent is the bare/ordinary topic (note that non-vacuously scrambled NPs must bear a Case-marker, and hence the bare topic in (24)b cannot be a scrambled NP). In (24)a, *pro* can be interpreted as a variable bound by *dare-ga* ‘who’ because the scrambled constituent undergoes reconstruction, while in (24)b, this interpretation is not available because the bare/ordinary topic does not undergo reconstruction:

- (24) a. [*pro*_i kaita ronbun]-o_i dare-ga_i t_j happyoosita no.
 wrote article -acc who-nom presented C_[+wh]
- b. * [*pro*_i kaita ronbun](-wa), dare-ga_i happyoosita no.
 wrote article -top who-nom presented C_[+wh]
 ‘Who presented the article that s/he wrote?’

12 On the Roles of Complementizers in Japanese

Now, let us turn to ECM in Japanese. Interestingly, the ECM subject in (25) does not undergo reconstruction either; namely, *pro* cannot be interpreted as a variable bound by *daremo-ga* ‘everyone’. Note that the embedded predicate *suki* ‘like’ in (25) does not have the ability to Case-mark the object as accusative, and hence it is clear that the accusative NP is Case-marked by the matrix *v*.

- (25) * Watasi-wa [[*pro*_i kaita ronbun]-o daremo-ga_i suki
I-top wrote article -acc everyone-nom like
da to] omotteiru.
is that is thinking
(lit.) ‘I believe that the article s/he wrote, everyone likes.’

Let us consider two approaches. The first approach is to follow Tanaka (2002) and suppose that the accusative object undergoes Raising-to-Object, which moves an ECM subject to a higher clause via SpecCP, coupled with the assumption that A-movement does not reconstruct. In this case, the accusative NP should be base-generated inside the embedded VP, and then moved to the embedded Spec v P via the embedded SpecCP. However, an immediate question is how to enable the matrix *v* to Agree with the embedded subject, which is closer to the embedded I than to the matrix *v*,¹⁰ inducing an Agree Closest violation. If my analysis of NGC given above is correct, the matrix I optionally undergoes head movement to *v*, in order to get (25). However, under my analysis, this optional I-to-*v* head movement should be blocked, because the C headed by *to* intervenes between them.

The second approach is to assume that ECM is actually an instance of embedded bare topicalization in Japanese. However, I have shown above that bare topicalization is impossible. What is the difference between (22)a above and (26)b below, then? Let us suppose that the ungrammaticality of (22)a is not due to the inapplicability of embedded bare topicalization *per se*, but to a violation of Inverse Case Filter (27), which is a slightly modified version of Bošković’s (2002) original definition:

¹⁰ I ignore the embedded *v* here.

- (26) a. Watasi-wa [sono hito-ga kinoo-no ziken-no
 I-top that person-nom yesterday-gen incident-gen
 hannin da to] omotteiru.
 culprit is that is thinking
 ‘I believe that that person is the culprit of yesterday’s incident.’
- b. Watasi-wa [sono hito-o kinoo-no ziken-no
 I-top that person-acc yesterday-gen incident-gen
 hannin da to] omotteiru.
 culprit is that is thinking
 ‘I believe that person to be the culprit of yesterday’s incident.’
- (27) Traditional Case-assigners must assign their Case-feature *whenever possible*.

Given that the bare topic NP in (22)a and the accusative NP in (26)b are topics, they are base-generated in the embedded SpecCP, as illustrated in (23). Crucially, the embedded CP is a position where the matrix *v* can assign the Case-feature. In (22)a, *v* fails to assign the Case-feature to the bare topic, in violation of (27), while in (26)b, *v* assigns the Case-feature to the accusative NP, satisfying (27). Note also that the nominative NP in (26)a is base-generated in the embedded VP, a position c-commanded by the embedded I. Thus, in accordance with Agree Closest, it is impossible for the matrix *v* to Case-mark the embedded NP, and (27) is not violated even if the matrix *v* does not assign its accusative Case.

In sum, the second approach seems more plausible, not only because it accounts for the apparent matrix/embedded asymmetry in a principled way, but also because it is consistent with Bošković’s (in press b) recent observation that there may be a position which counts as a mixed A/A’-position.

7. Summary

In this paper, I discussed two syntactic roles of complementizers in

14 On the Roles of Complementizers in Japanese

Japanese: one is to license embedded topicalization, and the other is to block Nominative Genitive Conversion. I also claimed that these two syntactic roles are deduced from the general properties of C as a force indicator, which turns IPs into CPs (i.e. full-fledged propositions). I argued that NGC is derived via Agree between the subject and D, and that the Agree relation is blocked whenever C is intervening. Then, I raised a question why C blocks the Agree relation, given the assumption that Agree is free from the PIC. To answer this question, I proposed that Nominative Genitive Conversion involves the optional I-to-D head movement, and that the syntactic role of C reduces to the property that it freezes head movement once I moves to C. Finally, I demonstrated that the proposed analysis cannot explain the apparent optionality of ECM in Japanese, and hence introduced an analysis, which takes ECM in Japanese as the non-*wa*-marked embedded topicalization.

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16 On the Roles of Complementizers in Japanese

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