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On the Nominative Phrase in Japanese Imperatives[†]

Yuya Noguchi

1. Introduction

One interesting fact regarding imperatives is that the existence of a nominative phrase is optional in many languages, including those that do not usually allow null subjects. The English and Japanese imperative in (1) exemplifies this point.

- (1) a. (You) Read this book!
b. (Omae-ga) kono hon-o yom-e!
you-Nom this book-Acc read-Imp
'Read this book!'

Here we refer to such a nominative phrase as in (1) as an “imperative nominative phrase” (INP, henceforth). It has been argued that English INPs, such as *you* in (1a), function as a genuine argument (Beukema & Coopmans 1989, Potsdam 1998, among others). Against this backdrop, this squib focuses on Japanese INPs, such as *omae-ga* ‘you-Nom’ in (1b) and, by observing argument ellipsis phenomena in imperatives, shows that, unlike English INPs, they function as an adjunct, rather than an argument. Furthermore, we consider the location of Japanese INPs by taking into consideration the nominative-genitive conversion in the Hichiku dialect, and claim that in Japanese an INP is located at Spec,Foc(us)P, which forces an exhaustive listing reading on that nominative phrase. We also present a possible account for the reason why Japanese INPs cannot be regarded as an argument, as are English INPs.

This squib is organized as follows: In Section 2, we first present an overview of the argument that INPs in English function as an argument (Section 2.1) and then provide our claim that Japanese INPs are regarded as adjuncts, through observing what property they show with respect to argument ellipsis (Section 2.2). In Section 3, we observe nominative-genitive conversion phenomena of the Hichiku dialect in imperatives and claim that an INP is located at Spec,FocP in Japanese, providing further support for the view that Japanese INPs function as an adjunct. Section 4 provides a possible explanation for why Japanese INPs cannot function as an argument, from the viewpoint of whether a language has agreement. Section 5 concludes the paper.

[†] This paper is based on the poster presentation at the 24th Japanese/Korean Linguistics Conference held at NINJAL in October 2016 and Fifty Years of Linguistics at UConn held at University of Connecticut in September 2018. I would like to thank the audience, especially Gen Fujita, Mineharu Nakayama, Takeshi Oguro, and Hiroaki Saito, for helpful comments. All remaining errors are, of course, my own.

2. Syntactic Status of INPs

This section shows that English and Japanese INPs differ in their syntactic status, or whether they are regarded as an argument or as an adjunct. Section 2.1 provides an argument in literature that English INPs function as an argument. In Section 2.2, we observe a novel data concerning Japanese imperatives and, based on the observation of that data, claim that Japanese INPs own different syntactic status from that of English ones. Specifically, we observe an argument ellipsis phenomenon (Oku 1998, Saito 2007, Takahashi 2008, among others) in imperatives and claim that Japanese INPs function as an adjunct.

2.1 English INPs

It has been argued in previous research that English INPs are overt realization of a genuine argument. For example, given that English imperatives do not require an overt subject, Beukema & Coopmans (1989) (B&C, henceforth) consider which structure in (2) is plausible for them.

- (2) a. [VP V_[+imp] NP]
b. [TP NP T [VP V_[+imp] NP]] (cf. Beukema & Coopmans 1989: 418)

In (2a), the theta role which should be assigned to a subject is not syntactically projected and may thus act as an implicit argument. If this structure is assumed, then an INP will be regarded as an “adjunct-type filler of the implicit argument” (cf. *ibid*: 420), as is a *by*-phrase in passive sentences. In (2b), on the other hand, the theta role to be assigned to a subject is syntactically projected and thus the subject in Spec,TP receives that theta role. In this case, the INP is the overt realization of the subject.¹ To determine which structure is correct, B&C observe the data shown below:

- (3) a. (You) Tell a story about yourself.
b. Leave London [without PRO going to the BM]. (cf. *ibid*: 419)

(3a) and (3b) show that in imperatives a (2nd person) reflexive can be successfully bound and PRO can be successfully controlled, respectively. Notice that an implicit argument, such as a suppressed agent phrase in passives which can be overtly realized as an adjunctive *by*-phrase, can neither bind a reflexive nor control PRO, as shown in (4).

¹ It is not relevant here what the empty category corresponding to an imperative subject is (e.g. *pro*, PRO, etc.). See Beukema & Coopmans (1989), Potsdam (1998), Bennis (2006), among others, for a relevant discussion.

- (4) a. *A story was written about themselves.
 b. *London was visited (by him) [without PRO going to the BM]. (cf. *ibid*: 419)

Based on the grammaticality difference between (3) and (4), B&C argue that English imperatives possess a subject as a syntactically realized argument, whether overtly or covertly. This argument thus indicates that INPs in English are regarded as an argument, rather than as an adjunct.

2.2 INPs in Japanese

Let us now turn our look to Japanese INPs, such as *omae-ga* in (1b). Below we observe what property an INP shows with respect to argument ellipsis (cf. Oku 1998, Saito 2007, Takahashi 2008). Oku (1998) argues that in Japanese an element in a sentence can be elided if there is a linguistic antecedent corresponding to it but that the elided element must be an argument. This point is exemplified in (5).

- (5) a. Taro_i-wa [zibun_i-no teian-ga saiyoos-are-ru to] omot-ta.
 Taro-Top self-Gen idea-Nom adopt-Pass-Pres that think-Past
 Hanako-mo [*e* saiyoos-are-ru to] omot-ta.
 Hanako-also adopt-Pass-Pres that think-Past
 ‘Taro thought that his idea would be adopted. Hanako also thought that his/her idea would be adopted.’
- b. Taro-wa sooyuu riyuu-de gakkoo-o yasun-da.
 Taro-Top such reason-for school-Acc be.absent-Past
 Hanako-mo *e* gakkoo-o yasun-da.
 Hanako-also school-Acc be.absent-Past
 ‘Taro was absent from school for such a reason. Hanako was also absent from school (*for that reason).’

In (5a), the subject of the complement clause is elided in the second sentence, and it is interpreted as what occupies the same position in the first sentence, namely *zibun-no teian* ‘one’s (own) idea’. Note also that the reflexive *zibun* interpreted in the second sentence refers either to *Taro* (i.e. the strict reading) or *Hanako* (i.e. the sloppy reading), which has been regarded as a hallmark of argument ellipsis, rather than that of *pro*. On the other hand, what is intended to be elided in (5b) (marked as *e*) is the reason adjunct in the first sentence, namely *sooyuu riyuu-de* ‘for such a reason’. This intention is not borne out, however, and the second sentence is merely translated as “Hanako was also absent from school.” This contrast between the two examples indicates that, as the term itself suggests, argument ellipsis can apply to arguments but cannot to adjuncts. This property can therefore be

employed to examine whether a certain element is regarded as an argument or an adjunct.

Before we present a crucial data, one property about INPs should be mentioned here. It is often claimed that in many languages, including English and Japanese, the subject of imperatives can refer only to an addressee (or (a subset of) addressees) and thus that INPs are typically realized as the 2nd person pronominal, such as *you* in (1a) and *omae* ‘you’ in (1b). This is not necessarily the case, however; Potsdam (1998) shows that in English the referent of an INP can be other than an addressee as long as it is in a “control relationship”, whose definition is shown in (6), with respect to an addressee, as exemplified in (7). In particular, notice that in (7) the referent of the INP *your guards* is in a control relationship with respect to the addressee of that sentence.

(6) *x* is in a control relationship with *y* if *x* has potential control over *y* in some domain *z* (where *z* may range over social, military, political, economic, discourse, or other situations).

(Potsdam 1998: 210)

(7) Your guards be the diversion while we sneak in! (ibid: 208)

The rough meaning of (7) is that “you must see to it that your guards are the diversion while we sneak in.”

Furthermore, Mihara (2015) notes that this point also holds true with Japanese, by showing the example in (8), where the INP *kimi-no buka* ‘your soldiers’ is in a control relationship (in terms of military, in this case) with respect to the addressee of that sentence.

(8) Lee-syoogun, kimi-no buka-ga hasi-o kake-ro.
 General.Lee you-Gen subordinate-Nom bridge-Acc build-Imp
 ‘General Lee, your soldiers build the bridge!’

(Mihara 2015: 28)

The sentence in (8) is interpreted as is that in (7); its rough interpretation of (8) is that “you (i.e. General Lee) must see to it that your soldiers build the bridge.”

Given this fact, let us now examine what property INPs in Japanese show with respect to argument ellipsis. Witness a relevant example shown below:

(9) [Context: Two high school students were caught shoplifting at a convenience store near their school. On behalf of the school, Mr. Tanaka, who is in charge of their class, went to the store to apologize for their misdeed. However, Mai and Asuka, who are the mothers of the shoplifters, thought that it was their daughters who were really responsible for the case and thus insisted that their daughters should apologize in person to the clerks at the store.]

Mai_i-wa Tanaka-sensei-ni [zibun_i-no musume-ga ayamari-ni ik-e to]
 Mai-Top Tanaka-teacher-to self-Gen daughter-Nom apologize-to go-Imp that
 it-ta.

say-Past

Asuka-mo Tanaka-sensei-ni [e ayamari-ni ik-e to] it-ta.

Asuka-also Tanaka-teacher-to apologize-to go-Imp that say-Past

‘*Lit.* Mai said to Mr. Tanaka that her daughter go to apologize. Asuka also said to Mr. Tanaka that {*her daughter / he} go to apologize.’

In the two sentences in (9), an imperative sentence is realized as an embedded clause headed by a complementizer *to*. Given that it is widely assumed that imperatives cannot be embedded and that *to* is often referred to as a quotative marker and thus can introduce a direct quote, one might argue that the embedded clause in (9) is a direct quote and thus should not be regarded as a genuine embedded sentence. This is not the case, however, because it contains the reflexive *zibun* which refers to the matrix subject *Mai* and thus cannot be considered as an utterance which is literally quoted. We thus assume that the complementizer *to* in (9) is one which introduces an indirect quote (see Fujita 2000 and Saito 2012, among others, for the same view).² Notice also that an INP *zibun-no musume* ‘one’s own daughter’ in the first embedded clause refers not to the addressee (i.e. Mr. Tanaka) but to *Mai*’s daughter, who is in a control relationship with respect to the addressee of the indirect quote, namely Mr. Tanaka, in that he is in charge of the class to which *Mai*’s daughter belongs. Given those points, it is then expected that the empty slot in the second conjunct is interpreted as its counterpart in the first conjunct, namely *zibun-no musume*, as long as the INP is interpreted as an argument. Crucially, however, this expectation is not borne out; *e* in the second conjunct is interpreted only as referring to the addressee of the indirect quote, namely Mr. Tanaka. This observation hence suggests that INPs in Japanese are regarded not as an argument but rather as an adjunct, unlike those in English.

3. The Location of an INP in Japanese

In the previous section, we observed how INPs in Japanese act with respect to argument ellipsis, which suggests that those phrases function as an adjunct rather than as an argument. This section, then, aims to specify where an INP in Japanese is located by observing nominative-genitive conversion phenomena of the Hichiku dialect in imperatives, which in turn bolsters the view of regarding Japanese INPs as an adjunct. Specifically, we show that the nominative Case of INPs cannot be replaced with the genitive Case in the Hichiku dialect and, based on this observation, claim that an INP in Japanese is located in Spec,Foc(us)P.

The intuition about Japanese INPs is that they seem to function as some kind of focus. In fact, in

² The same consideration also holds true with the embedded clause headed by *to* in (5a).

the framework of the traditional Japanese linguistics (i.e. *nihongogaku*), Nitta (1991) contends that an INP is necessarily interpreted as a focus, or more specifically, receives an exhaustive listing reading (Kuno 1973), in that the phrase specifies a particular person to whom an order is directed. Against this backdrop, below we give empirical evidence for that descriptive view by observing data in the Hichiku dialect, which is spoken in certain areas of the Kyushu region (e.g. Kumamoto, Nagasaki, Saga).

The Hichiku dialect is remarkable in that it allows the nominative-genitive conversion in matrix clauses as exemplified in (10), unlike in Standard Japanese, where that conversion is possible only in certain relative clauses (see Kato 2005, Saruwatari 2016, among others).³

- (10) Taro{-ga / -no} ki-ta. [HD]
 Taro-Nom -Gen come-Past
 ‘Taro has come.’ (Saruwatari 2016: 48)

That dialect does not allow the nominative-genitive conversion in all the matrix clauses, however. One of the restrictions on that conversion has to do with types of predicates; it is permitted in a matrix clause with an unaccusative verb, such as *ki-* ‘come’ in (10), while it is not allowed in a matrix clause using an unergative verb, such as *hatarak-* ‘work’, as shown in (11).

- (11) Taro{-ga / *-no} issyookenmei hatarai-ta to tai. [HD]
 Taro-Nom -Gen hard work-Past Part Part
 ‘Taro worked hard.’ (Kato 2005: 31)

Another restriction is related to the interpretation of a nominative phrase; the Case alternation is prohibited when a nominative phrase is interpreted as focus (Saruwatari 2015). For example, Saruwatari (2015) observes that a *ga*-marked adjunct phrase in a multiple nominative construction, which receives an exhaustive listing reading (cf. Vermeulen 2005), cannot be marked as genitive, as shown below:^{4,5}

³ [HD] appended to each example indicates that that example is a sentence of the Hichiku dialect.

⁴ Saruwatari (2015) observes that the nominative-genitive conversion is permitted in a multiple nominative construction where the first nominative phrase is interpreted as a possessor of the second one, as shown in (i). See Vermeulen (2005) for the syntactic differences between two types of multiple nominative constructions (e.g. (i) vs. (12)).

(i) Usagi{-ga / -no} (kanari) mimi{-ga / -no} nagaka to yo. [HD]
 rabbit-Nom -Gen quite ear-Nom -Gen long Part Part
 ‘Rabbits have (quite) long ears.’ (cf. Saruwatari 2015: 3)

⁵ Saruwatari (2015) shows that the nominative Case in the multiple nominative construction in (i) can be replaced with the genitive Case and that if marked as genitive, the first NP does not have a focus reading.

(i) Kumamoto{-ga / -no} (kanari) baniku{-ga / -no} umaka to yo. [HD]
 Kumamoto-Nom -Gen quite horsemeat-Nom -Gen delicious Part Part
 ‘In Kumamoto, horsemeat is (very) delicious.’ (cf. Saruwatari 2015: 4)

- (12) An mise{-ga / *-no} gakusei-ga yoo hon-ba ka-u to tai. [HD]
 that store-Nom -Gen student-Nom often book-Acc buy-Pres Part Part
 ‘At that store, students often buy books.’ (cf. Saruwatari 2015: 3)

Bearing in mind those properties of the nominative-genitive conversion in the Hichiku dialect, let us observe the imperative data shown below:

- (13) a. Wai{-ga / *-no} ko-i sa. [HD]
 you-Nom -Gen come-Imp Part
 ‘You come!’
 b. Kyoo-wa wai{-ga / *-no} uchi-ni or-e sa. [HD]
 today-Top you-Nom -Gen home-at be-Imp Part
 ‘You be at home today!’

Crucially, the nominative-genitive conversion is prohibited in the imperatives in (13). Note first that this prohibition of the Case alternation in (13) cannot be accounted for in terms of predicate types (cf. (10) vs. (11)), because both the two imperatives in (13) use an unaccusative verb (*ko-* ‘come’ in (13a) and *or-* ‘be’ in (13b)). Given that, the impossibility of the Case conversion in (13) should be attributed to the interpretational property of INPs. That is, the fact that the nominative-genitive conversion cannot take place in (13) can be accounted for if we assume that INPs are interpreted as focus, or receive an exhaustive listing reading (cf. (12)). This observation therefore provides an empirical argument for the descriptive view that INPs in Japanese are interpreted as focus.

As for the location of a focus phrase, Saruwatari (2015) claims that a *ga*-marked focus phrase, such as *an mise* ‘that store’ in (12), is located in the specifier of Foc(us)P, which exists within the fine-grained CP structure (cf. Rizzi 1997) and forces an element in its specifier to be interpreted as focus (see also Yamada 2013 and Maeda 2014 for a similar view). Based on this view and the observation above, it can now be claimed that an INP in Japanese is located in Spec,FocP. Given that Spec,FocP can be seen as an A-bar position, this claim thus supports the view that INPs in Japanese are regarded as an adjunct.

4. A Possible Account for the Asymmetry

We observed in the previous sections that there is an asymmetry between INPs in English and those in Japanese with respect to their syntactic status. That is, English INPs function as an argument, while Japanese ones are rather viewed as an adjunct. The aim of this section, then, is to explore why such an asymmetry arises and to present a possible theoretical account for it. More specifically, we attempt to attribute that asymmetry to whether agreement exists in the two languages.

Let us now consider Japanese imperatives. Suppose that the INP in (1b), which is repeated in (16a), would appear in a subject position, namely Spec,vP. Then, the rough structure of (16a) would be as in (16b).

- (16) a. (Omae-ga) kono hon-o yom-e!
 you-Nom this book-Acc read-Imp
 ‘(You) Read this book!’
 b. [TP T_[i-2nd] [vP omae(-ga)_[i-2nd] kono hon(-o) yom(-e)]]

In order to circumvent the violation of Full Interpretation, the interpretable 2nd person feature on T and *omae* ‘you’ in Spec,vP must be identified via the Agree relation, according to our assumption. Note here, however, that it is argued in some literature (e.g. Kuroda 1998, Saito 2007) that agreement does not exist in Japanese. To the extent that this argument is correct, the Agree relation between T and Spec,vP cannot hold in (16b) and thus the two interpretable 2nd person features cannot be identified. As a result, one of the elements with that feature remains to be assigned any theta role, thus violating Full Interpretation and causing the derivation of (16b) not to converge. Therefore, Japanese lacking agreement explains why the structure of (16b) cannot be established, or more particularly, why an INP cannot appear in the subject position and thus cannot be regarded as an argument, under the assumptions described above.

5. Conclusion

This squib dealt with INPs in Japanese. Specifically, based on the observation of argument ellipsis phenomena in Japanese imperatives, we claimed that those phrases function as an adjunct rather than an argument. We further claimed that an INP in Japanese is located at Spec,Foc(us)P, through observing nominative-genitive conversion phenomena in the Hichiku dialect. Finally, we provided a possible account for the reason why Japanese INPs are regarded not as an argument but rather as an adjunct, unlike English counterparts, particularly by focusing on existence (or absence) of agreement.

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