Remarks on Nominative-Genitive Conversion and Indeterminate Pronoun Binding[*]

Masao Ochi

1. Introduction

Nominative-Genitive Conversion (NGC) in Japanese has a number of intriguing syntactic and semantic properties. This short paper discusses how NGC interacts with the indeterminate pronoun binding in the sense of Kishimoto (2001), arguing that (i) covert movement need not be postulated for Japanese, and (ii) a dual source of genitive Case in the adnominal domain needs to be acknowledged along the lines of Miyagawa's (2012, 2013) analysis.

2. Indeterminate Pronoun Binding and Overt/Covert Movement

As discussed by Kishimoto (2001), an indeterminate pronoun in Japanese such as *dare* 'who,' *nani* 'what,' and *do-no* 'which-Gen' may function as a negative polarity item (NPI) when it is associated with the Q-particle *-mo* that appears in a negative clause. I will refer to this type of NPI as a *wh*-NPI. As we can see in (1b) and (1c) below, a *wh*-NPI and the particle *-mo* need not be adjacent: *-mo* can 'license' a *wh*-NPI at a distance, as long as the former c-commands the latter. In (1b), for instance, *-mo* is attached to the postposition *to* 'with' and licenses *dare* 'who' as the former c-commands the latter.

(1)   a.   Taro-wa   **nani-mo**   kaw-anakat-ta.
              Taro-TOP   **what-Q**   buy-NEG-PAST
              'Taro didn't buy anything.'
        b.   Taro-wa   **dare**-to-**mo**   aw-anakat-ta.
              Taro-TOP   **who**-with-**Q**   meet-NEG-PAST
              'Taro didn't meet with anyone.'
        c.   Taro-wa   **do**-no   hito   kara-**mo**   tegami-o   moraw-anakat-ta.
              Taro-TOP   **which**-GEN   person   from-**Q**   letter-ACC   receive-NEG-PAST
              'Taro didn't receive a letter from anyone.'

As noted by Kishimoto, an asymmetry arises between the *wh*-NPI subject and the *wh*-NPI object when the Q-particle *-mo* appears attached to a verb. While the indeterminate object can function as a *wh*-NPI, the

indeterminate subject cannot.

(2) a. ***dare**-ga   hon-o   kai-**mo**   si-nakat-ta   koto
         who-NOM   book-ACC   buy-**Q**   do-NEG-PAST   fact
         'the fact that no one bought a book.'
     b. Sono   hito-ga   **nani**-o   kai-**mo** si-nakat-ta   koto
         that   person-NOM **what**-ACC buy-**Q**   do-NEG-PAST   fact
         'the fact that that person didn't buy anything'

Essentially following Kishimoto, let us assume that the Q-particle *-mo* takes *v*P as its c-command domain in this type of configuration. (2b) is fine because the *wh*-NPI object, being located inside *v*P, is c-commanded (and hence bound) by *-mo* . On the other hand, (2a) is ruled out because the nominative subject is assumed to move to the spec of TP (in overt syntax), which is outside the c-command domain of *-mo*. Kishimoto further argues that this type of NPI is licensed at LF, not in overt syntax. His proposal is in part based on the observation that the *wh*-NPI object is not licensed in this type of construction even when the object is nominative. To see the significance of this point, let us first look at the following examples.

(3) a. Hanako-ga   migime-dake-o   tumur-e-ru   koto
         Hanako-NOM   right.eye-only-ACC   close-can-PRES   fact
         'the fact that Hanako can close only her right eye'   (can > only; ??only > can)
     b. Hanako-ga   migime-dake-ga   tumur-e-ru   koto
         Hanako-NOM   right.eye-only-NOM   close-can-PRES   fact
         'the fact that Hanako can close only her right eye'   (?can > only; only > can)

Japanese allows nominative marking or accusative marking on the object when the predicate is stative. As noted by Tada (1992) and others, the choice between the two case values has an effect on the scope of the object. (3a) has an accusative object, which takes narrow scope with respect to negation: This sentence has the reading according to which Hanako can close her right eye with her left eye open (Hanako can wink with her right eye), but it does not have the reading according to which it is only her right eye that Hanako can close (Hanako can close her right eye but she cannot close her left eye). As for (3b), where the object is nominative, the situation is reversed and the wide scope reading of the object is much more salient. A number of researchers, including Koizumi (1998) and Takahashi (2010), attribute this scope difference to the different syntactic positions occupied by the nominative object and the accusative object. Simply put, the accusative object remains within *v*P throughout the derivation, with its Case checked by *v*. The nominative object, on the other hand, moves to the domain of the T head that licenses nominative Case. As a result, the accusative object cannot take scope over the potential *(r)are* 'can' whereas the nominative

subject can. This is illustrated in (4).

(4)   a.   [TP Hanako [CANP [vP right eye-only-ACC close] can] T]
        b.   [TP Hanako [TP right eye-only-NOMi   [CANP [vP ti close] can] T]]

Further, authors such as Yatsushiro (1999), Kishimoto (2001), and Saito (2009) claim that the nominative object (as well as the accusative object) stays inside *v*P in overt syntax, based on the observation that the nominative (and accusative) object may be contained within the fronted *v*P: see (5b) below.

(5)   a.   Hanako-ga   migime-ga/-o   tumur-e-sae   su-ru   koto
               Hanako-NOM   right.eye-NOM/-ACC   close-can-even   do-PRES   fact
               'the fact that Hanako can even close her right eye'
        b.   Migime-ga/-o   tumur-e-sae   Hanako-ga   su-ru   koto
               right.eye-NOM/-ACC   close-can-even   Hanako-NOM   do-PRES   fact
               'the fact that even close her right eye, Hanako can'

Based on these observations, Kishimoto concludes that the wide scope reading of the nominative object in (3b) is due to the movement of the object in covert syntax (but see below).

Returning to the discussion of *wh*-NPIs in cases where the particle *-mo* is attached to a verb, the nominative *wh*-NPI object is degraded, as noted by Kishimoto (2001).

(6)   a.   Sono   hito-ga   **nani**-o   ka-e-**mo**   si-nakat-ta   koto
               that   person-NOM   **what**-ACC   buy-can-**Q**   do-NEG-PAST   fact
               'the fact that that person was not able to buy anything'
        b.   ??Sono hito-ga   **nani**-ga   ka-e-**mo**   si-nakat-ta   koto
               that   person-NOM   **what**-NOM   buy-can-**Q**   do-NEG-PAST   fact
               'the fact that that person was not able to buy any book'

Kishimoto thus argues that the *wh*-NPI is licensed at LF. Since the nominative object moves out of the *v*P domain in covert syntax, the nominative *wh*-NPI object is not licensed by the Q-particle *-mo* at LF.

However, Ochi and Saruwatari (in press) make an observation that raises an interesting problem for Kishimoto's otherwise solid analysis. Ochi and Saruwatari note that when the object remains inside *v*P in overt syntax, including the *v*P-fronting situation that we saw in (5), it does not take wide scope, whether it is nominative or accusative.

(7)   Migime-dake-ga/-o   tumur-e-sae   Hanako-ga   su-ru   koto

right.eye-only-NOM/-ACC close-can-even   Hanako-NOM   do-PRES   fact

'the fact that even close only her right eye, Hanako can'   (can > only; ??only > can)

On the basis of this, Ochi and Saruwatari propose that two derivational paths are available for the nominative object in Japanese.

(8)   a.   The nominative object may move to the domain of T in overt syntax, or it may stay in *v*P throughout the derivation. No covert movement is available in Japanese.

           b.   A derivation that involves movement of the nominative object gives rise to the wide scope reading of the object, and a derivation in which the nominative object stays inside the *v*P region yields only the narrow scope reading of the object.
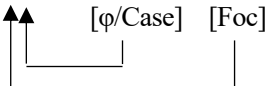
This line of analysis, if correct, raises an obvious issue for (6b). Why can't the nominative *wh*-NPI object be licensed at LF if the nominative object has the option of remaining inside the *v*P throughout the derivation? This is the central question of this paper. I will argue that implementing the essence of Kishimoto's analysis in a slightly different manner will resolve this issue.
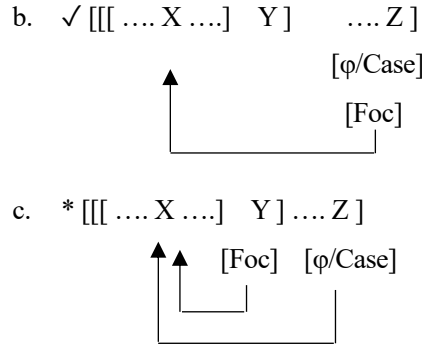
3. Proposal

Here is the gist of my proposal.

(9)   For any argument α, checking of an 'A-bar type' feature (such as focus and Q) of α cannot precede checking of an 'A-type' feature (such as Case/φ-feature) of α.

Here the phrase "A-type feature" refers to a feature that is checked by a syntactic head whose specifier position is an A-position in the traditional sense. Similarly, the phrase "A-bar type feature" refers to a feature that is checked by a head whose specifier is an A-bar position. The proposal allows derivational scenarios such as those shown in (10a), in which the head Y probes X for an A-type feature (φ/Case) before another head, Z, probes X for an A-bar type feature (such as Q and focus), and (10b), where a single probe Agrees with X for both types of features. Crucially, it disallows a configuration shown in (10c), where X is probed for an A-bar type feature before it is probed for an A-type feature such as φ/Case.

(10)   a.   ✓ [[[…. X ….]   Y]   Z]

                                          [φ/Case] [Foc]

b. ✓ [[[…. X ….]   Y]   …. Z]

[φ/Case]

[Foc]

c. * [[[…. X ….]   Y] …. Z]

[Foc]   [φ/Case]

The proposal echoes an old idea about improper movement: a phrase cannot participate in Case checking after it has undergone A'-movement. An example like the following is barred as *who* moves into the spec of the embedded CP, an A-bar position where *who*'s focus feature (an A-bar property) is checked, while its Case remains unchecked.

(11)   *I know who$_i$ it was told t_i that Mary would be coming.
           cf. I know who$_i$ was told t_i that Mary would be coming.

Note that *know* may act as an ECM verb as shown in (12a), which means that it can probe a DP located in the edge of the complement clause, as shown in (12b). In the above example, therefore, *know* should be able to probe *who* sitting in the embedded spec of CP, as illustrated in (13), and we would need a way to block such a derivation. If something like (9) is part of UG, such a derivation would be correctly excluded.

(12)   a.   We know him to be smart.
           b.   We [$_{vP}$ v+know [$_{VP}$ <know> [$_{TP}$ him to be smart]]]

(13)   I [$_{vP}$ v+know [$_{VP}$ <know> [$_{CP}$ who$_i$ C [$_{TP}$ it was told t_i [that ….]]]
           [φ]   [~~Foc~~]
                                                        *(9) violated

    With (9), let us return to (6b). I assume that the binding of a *wh*-NPI by the Q-particle *-mo* involves feature checking of a formal feature, say, the NPI-feature. I also assume that *-mo* as a probe participates in A-bar syntax, not A-syntax, given its well-known quantificational and focus-oriented nature. Assuming therefore that the feature checked by *-mo*, the NPI-feature, counts as an A-bar type feature, (9) dictates that satisfying/licensing the NPI-feature of α cannot take place before α's A-property (i.e., Case) is satisfied. Thus, we have the following specific proposal as an instantiation of (9).

(14)   For an argument NPI α, checking of the NPI-feature of α cannot precede checking of an 'A-type'

feature (such as Case/φ-feature) of α.[1]

As will be demonstrated below, this line of analysis preserves the essence of Kishimoto's (2001) analysis and implements it in a way that does not resort to covert movement.

Let us now see how this proposal accommodates (2) and, crucially, (6). Recall our assumption that the licensing/binding of a *wh*-NPI uniformly occurs at the level of *v*P in these examples.[2] Now (2b) is fine because the object is Case-licensed at the level of *v*P. (2a) is out, not because it moves out of *v*P, but because nominative is assigned by T. Given familiar cyclicity considerations, binding of the subject by *-mo*, which is an A-bar head by assumption, takes place before T is introduced into the structure. Consequently, (9) is violated. The same point holds of (6b). When the object is nominative, its Case cannot be assigned until T is introduced, but the binding by *-mo* is accomplished at the level of *v*P. Thus, the contrast in (6) is captured.

Let us now turn our attention to adnominal clauses and consider how nominative and genitive subjects behave. (15a) is the baseline data, in which *-mo* is directly merged with a *wh*-NPI. It is perfectly grammatical.

(15) a. **dare-mo**   hik-anai   kyoku
        who-Q   play-NEG   tune
        'a tune that nobody plays'

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[1] As discussed by Ochi (in press a, b), this line of analysis helps us accommodate another well-known observation in the literature about NGC: the genitive subject resists focus while the genitive object does not (see Akaso and Haraguchi 2013 and Miyagawa 2013).

(i) a. Taro-dake-ga/*no   nihongo-ga   hanas-e-ru   koto
       Taro-only-NOM/GEN   Japanese-NOM   speak-can-PRES   fact
       'the fact that only Taro can speak Japanese'
    b. Taro-ga/no   nihongo-dake-ga/no   hanas-e-ru   koto
       Taro-NOM/GEN   Japanese-only-NOM/GEN speak-can-PRES   fact
       'the fact that Taro can speak only Japanese'

Suppose that (a) the focus feature is an A-bar type feature checked at the periphery of a clause (Rizzi 2001), and (b) adnominal clauses in Japanese are TPs (Murasugi 1991). Then here we have a situation in which the focus feature is checked at the TP-level, and the contrast between nominative (i-a) and genitive (i-b) follows: nominative Case in (ia) is checked by T, which also checks focus in this example. On the other hand, checking of genitive Case is done by D in (ib), which would have to follow the focus checking by T, given familiar cyclicity considerations.

[2] Since the Q-particle *-mo* is always c-commanded by the negative head, and since we are dealing here with an NPI, we might instead say that α is licensed as an NPI at the level of NegP, located above *v*P and below TP. Nothing in the discussion hinges on the choice between the two, as far as I can see.

b.   ***dare**-ga   hiki-**mo**   si-nai   kyoku

      who-NOM   play-**Q**   do-NEG   tune

      'a tune that no child plays'

c.   ??**dare**-no   hiki-**mo**   si-nai   kyoku

      who-GEN   play-**Q**   do-NEG   tune

      'a tune that no child plays'

Now let us examine the nominative *wh*-NPI subject (15b) and the genitive *wh*-NPI subject (15c). (15b) and (15c) are degraded, as expected: Both T and D are located higher than *v*P. (15c) sounds better than (15b), presumably because the genitive subject has the option of staying in a position lower (internal to *v*P) than the nominative subject in overt syntax (see Miyagawa 2011, Ochi 2017), although (14) is still violated even if the genitive *wh*-NPI subject remains inside the *v*P.

    I must admit that (14) faces a challenge when we examine data in which a *wh*-NPI is contained inside the subject phrase. In the following data, we have the *wh*-NPI *do* 'which' contained inside the subject DP. The acceptability pattern remains the same: both the nominative subject and the genitive subject sound degraded.

(16)   a.   **do**-no   ko-**mo** hik-anai   kyoku

        which-GEN child-**Q** play-NEG   tune

        'a tune that no child plays'

     b. ***do**-no   ko-ga   hiki-**mo**   si-nai   kyoku

        which-GEN child-NOM   play-**Q**   do-NEG tune

        'a tune that no child plays'

     c. ??**do**-no   ko-no   hiki-**mo**   si-nai   kyoku

        which-GEN   child-GEN   play-**Q**   do-NEG tune

        'a tune that no child plays'

But notice that the Case property of the *wh*-NPI *do* 'which' is satisfied internal to the subject domain if, as seems plausible, the genitive on *do* 'which' comes from the D head of the subject DP. When the subject DP is merged into the spec of *v*P, to which *-mo* is attached, binding of *do* 'which' by *-mo* should be possible without violating (14). We would therefore have to modify it as follows.

(17)   For an argument NPI α, checking of the NPI feature of α cannot "precede" checking of the Case/φ feature of α *and the Case/φ feature of β that immediately contains α.*

Admittedly, this is an ad hoc statement. Note that Kishimoto's (2001) original analysis fares better in this

respect, for if, as Kishimoto proposes, the subject DP undergoes phrasal movement at LF and if the NPI licensing takes place at that level, (16b) and (16c) are correctly ruled out: at LF, *do* 'which' would be outside the c-command domain of the Q-particle. Despite this drawback, I will continue to assume (14), or its variant in (17), because, as discussed earlier, once we assume the existence of covert movement in Japanese, something needs to be said about the absence of the wide scope reading of the object in (7).

Now let us turn to nominative/genitive objects that occur in adnominal clauses containing a stative predicate to which the Q-particle *-mo* is attached. First, the following data allow us to confirm that accusative, nominative, and genitive objects do occur in this type of construction.

(18) a. Hanako-ga   gakufu-o   yom-e-**mo**   si-nai   koto
         Hanako-NOM   musical.score-ACC   read-can-**Q**   do-NEG   fact
         'the fact that Hanako cannot even read a musical score'

     b. Hanako-ga   gakufu-ga   yom-e-**mo**   si-nai   koto
         Hanako-NOM   musical.score-NOM   read-can-**Q**   do-NEG   fact
         'the fact that Hanako cannot even read a musical score'

     b. Hanako-ga   gakufu-no   yom-e-**mo**   si-nai   koto
         Hanako-NOM   musical.score-GEN   read-can-**Q**   do-NEG   fact
         'the fact that Hanako cannot even read a musical score'

Now let us see how *wh*-NPI objects behave in this environment. As for the accusative *wh*-NPI object (19a) and the nominative *wh*-NPI object (19b), the results are as expected: the former is good and the latter is degraded, a pattern that we also witnessed in (6). The crucial test case is the genitive *wh*-NPI object in (19c). Unlike the nominative *wh*-NPI subject, the genitive *wh*-NPI object is fine.[3]
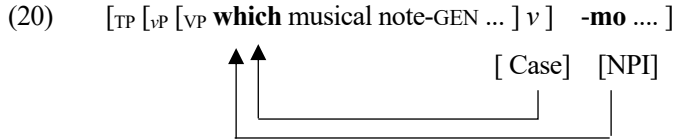
(19) a. Hanako-ga   **do**-no   gakufu-o   yom-e-**mo**   si-nai   koto
         Hanako-NOM   **which**-GEN   musical.score-ACC   read-can-**Q**   do-NEG   fact
         'the fact that Hanako cannot even read any musical score'

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[3] If we have a simplex form of the genitive *wh*-NPI object, *nan(i)-no* 'who-GEN,' the sentence sounds degraded, as shown in (i) below. But there seems to be an independent reason for this. Even if *nan(i)* 'what' appears as a *wh*-interrogative, and not as a *wh*-NPI, the genitive version is still degraded: see (ii).

    (i)   ??Hanako-ga   **nan(i)**-no   yom-e-**mo**   si-nai   koto
          Hanako-NOM   **which**-GEN   read-can-**Q**   do-NEG   fact
          'the fact that Hanako cannot even read any musical score'
    (ii) Hanako-ga   **nan(i)**-{o/ga/??no}   yom-e-**mo**   si-nai   koto-ga   mondai-na   no?
          Hanako-NOM **which**-ACC/NOM/GEN   read-can-**Q**   do-NEG   fact-NOM   problem-COP   Q
          'What is [the fact that Hanako cannot even read t] a problem?'

b. ??Hanako-ga   **do**-no   gakufu-ga   yom-e-**mo**   si-nai   koto

     Hanako-NOM   **which**-GEN   musical.score-NOM   Sread-can-**Q**   do-NEG   fact

     'the fact that Hanako cannot even read any musical score'

c. Hanako-ga   **do**-no   gakufu-no   yom-e-**mo**   si-nai   koto

     Hanako-NOM   **which**-GEN   musical.score-GEN   read-can-**Q**   do-NEG   fact

     'the fact that Hanako cannot even read any musical score'

Given (14) (or (17)), the well-formedness of (19c) would be unexpected if D was the sole licensor of genitive: D occurs higher than *v* to which *-mo* is attached. But the grammatical status of this example would be accounted for if the weak *v* head (in conjunction with dependent T) could also license genitive in the adnominal clause, as argued by Miyagawa (2012, 2013). As the following schematic representation shows, (17) is observed because both genitive Case and the NPI-feature are checked at the level of *v*P.

(20)   [TP [*v*P [VP **which** musical note-GEN ...] *v*]   **-mo** ....]

                                           [Case]   [NPI]

4. Concluding Remarks

Let me end this paper by briefly discussing an implication of the present proposal for the focused ECM subject in English. The standard view in the literature is that the ECM subject has its Case licensed by the *v* head of the immediately higher clause. In the following *make out* construction (see Lasnik (2001)), we can confirm on the basis of the word order that the focused ECM subject *Mary* is in the embedded clause (I thank Brian Agbayani (p.c.) for confirming the grammaticality of an example like this).

(21)   John made out only Mary to be a liar.

Now if identificational focus is syntactically licensed at the periphery of a clause, as assumed in this paper, this focus feature must be licensed by the T head of the embedded clause that lacks a CP layer. But this runs counter to (9): checking of the focus feature of *Mary* occurs at the embedded TP level and before *Mary* has its Case checked by the matrix *v* head.[4]

Interestingly, Lasnik (2018) proposes, by updating the analysis of Davis (1984), that the ECM subject may be Case-licensed by the infinitival T that inherits the Case-assigning property from the matrix *v* head via the operation called Feature Inheritance (see Chomsky (2008)). Lasnik's proposal would thus allow us to maintain (9).

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[4] I thank Masako Maeda (p.c.) for raising this issue.

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