

Japanese sentence-final particles and their effect on null subject person

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An increasing number of syntacticians argue that there is a place in syntactic representation for encoding contextual information, such as the identity of discourse participants (e.g., allocutive agreement) and Call on Addressee. In Japanese, some such information is overtly conveyed through discourse morphology known as sentence-final particles. In this study, I examine an under-discussed pattern in which these particles restrict the interpretation of the person of a null subject pronoun.

In a discourse null subject language like Japanese, the reference of a subject pronoun is considered as contextually dependent such that the pronoun can be interpreted as any person depending on the context of utterance (1).

(1) shiken-ni ochita.
exam-DAT failed

(2) *kitto* shiken-ni ochita.
surely exam-DAT failed

‘I/You/He failed the exam.’ (Neeleman & Szendői 2005) ‘?I/?You/He failed the exam for sure.’

The matter of how to determine the reference of a null subject pronoun in these languages remains controversial. In this talk I argue that insights from the literature on syntax and evidentiality (*inter alia*, Speas & Tenny 2003, Miyagawa 2012, Wiltschko & Heim 2016, Pancheva & Zubizarreta 2018) give us a novel perspective on this problem. Consider data like (2) which demonstrate that the determination of null subject reference interacts with evidentiality (which is here introduced by the adverb *kitto*).

Similarly, the flexibility observed in (1) does not seem to exist in the presence of sentence-final particles (henceforth, ‘SFPs’). When these particles are present in a non-past tense utterance, the interpretation of the subject pronoun is restricted, even though the utterance contains no overt evidential morphology like adverbs (cf.,(2)). This effect is shown in (3) where the 2nd person reading is unavailable in the presence of a SFP like *yo* and *ne*. Here the possibility of a 3rd person interpretation of the subject pronoun depends on the choice of the SFP.

(3) a. soto-de matte-iru. c. soto-de matte-iru *ne*.
outside-DAT wait-PROG.PRES outside-DAT wait-PROG.PRES SFP
‘[I/You/He] will be waiting outside.’ ‘[I/#You/??He] will be waiting outside.’
b. soto-de matte-iru.
outside-DAT wait-PROG.PRES
‘[I/You/He] will be waiting outside.’

The above person restriction is unexpected considering that Japanese SFPs are purely pragmatic in their function and never influence the truth of the utterance they are associated with (McCready 2005). A question thus arises as to how such restrictions on the pronoun emerge. While the pattern in (3) is understudied, Tenny (2006) looks into a related pattern in her observation of predicates of direct experience (e.g., *lonely*, *cold*). She observes that with such predicates the available subject person is restricted by clausal types; the pronoun must be 1st person in declaratives (4a) and 2nd in interrogatives (4b).

(4) a. [watashi-wa / #anata-wa / #kare-wa] samui desu.
I-TOP you-TOP he-TOP cold COP
‘I am / #You are / #He is cold.’

b. [#watashi-wa / anata-wa / #kare-wa] samui desu *ka*.
I-TOP you-TOP he-TOP cold COP Q
‘#Am I / Are you / #Is he cold?’

(Tenny 2006:247)

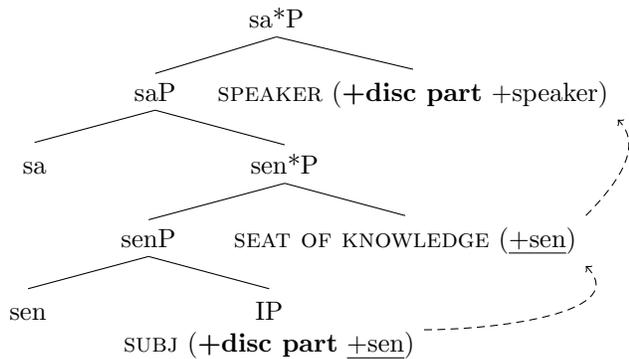
Tenny (2006) also reports that the above constraint may be lifted when the clause contains evidential morphology such as *ni-chigainai* ‘must be,’ allowing for the 3rd person subject in a declarative clause (5). Strikingly, this lifting works in a parallel manner with the SFP-based person constraint (3); when an adverb like *kitto* ‘surely’ is present, the set of available person interpretations for the null subject changes (6).

(5) Mary-wa sabishii *ni-chigainai*.
 Mary-TOP lonely must.be
 ‘Mary must be lonely.’

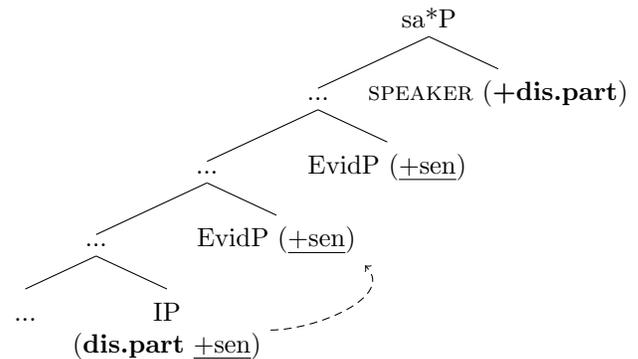
(6) *kitto* sugu kaisha yameru *ne*
 surely soon company quit SFP
 ‘[#I/#You/He] will quit the job for sure.’

Tenny (2006) accounts for the restriction (3) through a featural association between a subject NP and a sentience argument introduced in a speech act phrase (saP) in the periphery (7). She proposes that predicates of direct experience assign a set of features, [\pm discourse participant] and [\pm sentient], to their external argument. As the external argument undergoes feature-driven movement up to a position in saP, it becomes associated with the sentience role “speaker” (+speaker) in declaratives and “hearer” (-speaker) in interrogatives, which gives rise to the clause type-based person restrictions (see the simplified tree (4)). When this association is disrupted by an intervening Evidentiality phrase (EvidP), where evidential morphology is introduced, the same restrictions no longer emerge (cf., (8)).

(7)



(8)



Building on Tenny’s (2006) insights about the left periphery, I propose that restrictions (3) and (4) arise from the way the sentience role in saP (e.g., “speaker”) binds and specifies a point-of-view role (hence, POV) in another projection in the clausal spine, which I propose is a sen(tience)P. However, I depart from Tenny’s proposal in that I abandon her notion of predicate-based featural specification of the subject as the SFP-based patterns are not restricted by predicate type like Tenny’s. When the “speaker” role in saP binds the POV role found in senP in declaratives, the evaluator of the truth condition of an utterance (i.e., perspective) aligns with the speaker, inducing a 1st person interpretation. In contrast, the presence of evidential morphology introduces an EvidP that intervenes between the two projections, allowing for a possible 3rd person subject as now the sentience role may bind the role in EvidP instead of senP. I further argue that the difference between the two SFPs, *yo* and *ne*, derives from the fact that these particles are the realization of different syntactic heads: *yo* realises the sa head while *ne* realises a combination of the sa and sen heads.

In conclusion, the interaction between null subjects and discourse morphology reported here in Japanese offers a novel perspective on the way a subject referent is retrieved. The current proposal is a first step towards answering this long-lasting theoretical question from this novel perspective.

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