

A Concealed Clause in the Japanese *no koto* Construction

Objects of Japanese transitive verbs are typically marked with the accusative *-o* (1). However Kinjo and Sasaguri (1999) observe that verbs of information transfer, such as *hanasu* (talk), *kaku* (write), *kiku* (hear), *oshieru* (teach), *tazuneru* (ask), require the element *no koto* in addition (2).

- (1) John-ga Mary-o tataita.
 John-nom Mary-acc hit
 'John hit Mary'
- (2) John-ga Mary *(-no koto)-o hanashita.
 John-nom Mary-no koto-acc talked
 'John talked about Mary'

Kinjo and Sasaguri suggest that *no koto* makes the object "abstract", referring to an event in which its referent participates. They, however, offer no analysis of how and why *no koto* changes the meaning of the object. In this paper, I argue that, despite surface appearances, *NP-no koto* phrase has a concealed clause. Specifically, I propose that the *NP-no koto* construction is derived with IP deletion and that the *NP-no koto* phrase is its remnant, as shown in (3).

- (3) [_{IP}John-ga [_{NP}Mary-no [_{IP}t-shita] koto]-o hanashita]
 John-nom Mary-no did koto-acc talked
 Roughly: 'John talked about what Mary did.'

I argue that nominative/genitive case conversion is the key element in making this construction possible.

Harada (1971) observes that Japanese allows nominative/genitive case conversion: nominative case *-ga* within the sentential complement of N (4a) optionally changes to genitive case *-no* (4b).

- (4) a. John-ga [_{NP}[_{IP}Mary-ga konyakushita] hanashi]-o kiita.
 John-nom Mary-nom engaged story-acc heard
 b. John-ga [_{NP}Mary-no konyakushita hanashi]-o kiita.
 John-nom Mary-gen engaged story-acc heard
 'John heard the story that Mary got engaged.'

According to Ochi (2001), the genitive phrase is optionally raised to DP spec in overt syntax (5a). When rich context is given, IP can be deleted, leaving the genitive marked phrase overt (5b).

- (5) a. [_{NP}Mary-no [_{IP}t konyakushita] hanashi]
 Mary-gen engaged story -top true be-Q
lit. 'Is Mary's story true?' = 'Is the story that Mary got engaged true?'
- b. (Context: One day, when John arrived at the office, he noticed that people are talking about Mary's engagement. He wanted to know whether it is true or not.)
 [_{NP}Mary-no [_{IP}t-konyakushita] hanashi]-wa hontou na-no?
 Mary-gen engaged story -top true be-Q

I argue that same operations are involved in the *no koto* construction. The formal noun *koto* usually takes a sentential complement, as (6a). When the nominative and genitive case conversion takes place, we get the structure in (6b). Given some context, IP part can be deleted like (5b), deriving the *no koto* construction (6c).

- (6) a. John-ga [_{NP}[_{IP}Mary-ga konyakushita] koto]-o hanashita.
 John-nom Mary-nom engaged koto-acc talked
 'John talked about the claim that Mary got engaged.'
- b. John-ga [_{NP}Mary-no [_{IP}t konyakushita] koto]-o hanashita.
 John-nom Mary-gen engaged koto-acc talked
- c. John-ga [_{NP}Mary-no [_{IP}t-konyakushita] koto]-o hanashita.
 John-nom Mary-gen engaged koto-acc talked

This analysis correctly predicts that the meaning of *NP-no koto* is sensitive to the context and refers to an event in which the NP participates.

The bi-clausal approach of the *NP-no koto* construction is supported by the presence of intensionality effects. First, while non-denoting object induces falsity in the simple transitive construction (7a), it does not induce falsity in the *no koto* construction (7b).

- (7) a. John-ga yunikon-o mita. False
 John-nom unicorn-acc saw
 'John saw a unicorn.'
 b. John-ga yunikon-no koto-o hanashita. True/False
 John-nom unicorn-*no koto*-acc talked
 'John talked about a unicorn.'

This property is argued to be associated with sentential complementation by den Dikken, Larson and Ludlow (1996). Endo et al. (1999) argue that ambiguity between referential and opaque readings also indicates the existence of clausal complementation. The *no koto* construction shows this ambiguity (8b).

- (8) a. John-ga yumeijin-o tataita.
 John-nom famous.people-acc hit
 i. 'John hit specific people, who are famous.' ii. '#John hit people whoever are famous.'
 b. John-ga [yumeijin-**no koto**]-o hanashita.
 John-nom famous.people-*no koto*-acc talked
 i. 'John talked about specific people, who are famous.' [referential]
 ii. 'John talked about people whoever are famous.' [opaque]

Finally, while a name cannot co-occur with a temporal modifier as the object of a non-intensional verb (9a), this is possible for names appearing in the *no koto* construction (9b).

- (9) a. *John-wa [_{NP} kinou-no Mary]-o tataiteiru.
 John-top yesterday-gen Mary-acc hit
 'John is hitting yesterday's Mary.'
 b. John-wa [_{NP} kinou-no Mary-**no koto**]-o hanashiteiru.
 John-top yesterday-gen Mary-*no koto*-acc talking
lit. 'John is talking about yesterday's Mary.' = 'John is talking about **what Mary did yesterday.**'

The grammaticality of (9b) indicates the existence of concealed predicates within the *NP-no koto* phrase with which the temporal modifier *kinou-no* is semantically associated.

The data and the analysis proposed above suggest that the Japanese *no koto* construction has a concealed clause. If this approach to *no koto* construction is on the right track, it provides further support for the sentential approach to intensional transitive predicates by Ross (1976), McCawley (1974) and den Dikken, Larson and Ludlow (1996).

References:

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