

Root vs. n: A Study of Japanese Light Verb Construction and Its Implications for Nominal Architecture

Goal. It has been assumed that in Japanese, the nominal structures for NI (1a) and for non-NI (1b) are underlyingly the same: (Kageyama 1982, Terada 1990):

- (1) a. Nino-ga [VP [NP t_i] syokuji_i-sita]
Nino-NOM dining-did
'Nino had a meal.'
- b. Nino-ga [VP [NP syokuji-o] sita.]
Nino-NOM dining-ACC did
'Nino had a meal.'

The general assumption is that in (1a), an N head *syokuji* incorporates into a verb *su* (the verbal root of *sita* 'did'), creating an N + V complex, whereas in (1b), the noun stays in-situ, obtaining Case from *su*. Thus, an NI form and a non-NI form start off with the same underlying NP structure. I argue that this is incorrect, and provide different underlying structures for NI and non-NI sentences.

Counterevidence. The fact that only a non-NI form can co-occur with noun-modifying elements like (complex) numeral classifiers (2), or adjectives (3) suggest that an NI form is not derived from an NP:

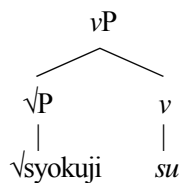
- (2) Nino-ga **hutu-ka-bun-no** ***syokuji**-sita/ **syokuji**-o sita.
Nino-NOM two-days-amount -GEN dining-did/ dining-ACC did
'Nino had two days worth of meals.'
- (3) Nino-ga **kantanna** * **syokuji**_i-sita/ **syokuji**-o sita.
Nino-NOM simple dining-did/ dining-ACC did
'Nino had a simple meal'

If an NI form contains an N on a par with a non-NI form, it should be able to host these noun-modifying elements, contrary to fact. In fact, in other NI languages like Mohawk, where both NI-forms and non-NI forms share the same underlying structure (i.e. NP), the NI form can host these elements (Baker 1996).

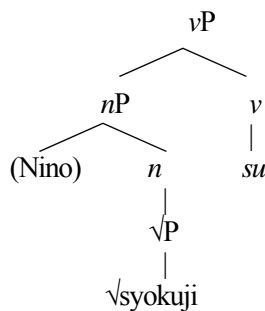
In fact, Sugimura (2008) argues that NI-forms and non-NI forms are not both NPs, and she posits a DP structure for a non-NI form. If this is the case, then at least the grammaticality fact in (2) follows: that is, genitive Case is only compatible with a non-NI form under the assumption that a D head licenses Genitive Case. However, there is no concrete evidence that a D assigns genitive Case in Japanese. Moreover, the genitive marker *no* could be a dissociated morpheme that is inserted post-syntactically. But most importantly, the DP/NP distinction cannot explain why an NP cannot host an adjective in (3). If an NI form is derived from an NP, it should be able to host these noun-modifying elements like other Mohawk-type NI languages.

Proposal. I propose that the NI form does not consist of N + V, but it instead consists of a category called root (Pesetsky 1995) and a light verb (Grimshaw & Mester 1988) *su* 'do', which is semantically vacuous (i.e. does not bear theta-roles). On the contrary, I assume that a non-NI form consists of a root and at least a category-defining head *n* (Halle & Marantz 1993) that discharges an external argument of the root, which eventually moves to a subject position:

(4) a. NI-form



b. Non-NI form



Thus, in (4a), $\sqrt{\text{syokuji}}$ ‘dining’ is never a noun at any derivational stage. The root combines with *su* ‘do’, and thereby *syokuji-sita* becomes a verb as a whole. In contrast, in (4b), $\sqrt{\text{syokuji}}$ is assigned a category of noun, before it merges with *su*. The grammaticality of (2) and (3) then follows since noun-modifying elements are incompatible with a verb *syokuji-sita*, while they can attach to a nominal *syokuji* for *syokuji-o sita*.

Supporting Evidence. (4a, b) imply that the subject in an NI sentence is base-generated, while that in a non-NI sentence the subject is derived. This is supported by Kuno’s (1973) observation that base-generated subjects force an exhaustive interpretation, while derived ones do not. Thus, the interpretation of (1a) and (1b) are not exactly the same: (1a) is interpreted as ‘It is Nino who had a meal’, while (1b) obtains a non-exhaustive interpretation, ‘Nino had a meal.’ (4a, b) also imply that unaccusative nouns can only have a bare-root option (4a) since they do not have an external argument that *n* can discharge. Thus, unaccusative nouns can only have an NI form:

- (5) Tokyuu-ga Uenoeki ni 5-dai tootyaku-sita/*tootyaku-o sita.
 limited express-NOM Ueno station to 5-CL arrival-did/arrival-ACC did
 ‘Five limited express trains arrived at Ueno station.’ (Miyagawa 1989)

Conclusion. Thus, the structural realization of roots is closely tied with the argument structure, which consequently supports the view that theta-grid information is somehow encoded in roots (Marantz 1997).

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