

# Nominative-Genitive Conversion Revisited\*

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## 1. Introduction

A long-standing analysis of Nominative-Genitive Conversion (NGC) in Japanese generative grammar and in Japanese linguistics has been to reduce the source of genitive Case to the presence of an external D head of relative clauses and nominal complements, which can check genitive Case (cf. Mikami 1953, Harada 1971, 1976, Bedell 1972, Saito 1982, Fukui and Nishigauchi 1992, Miyagawa 1993, Sakai 1994, and Ochi 1999 among many others; but cf. Watanabe 1996, Hiraiwa 2000a).

This article demonstrates that the generalization that NGC is dependent on the presence of an external D head is rejected on much empirical grounds. This immediately leads to a refutation of the ECM/Raising analysis of NGC (Miyagawa 1993, Ochi 1999), which is based on the generalization. Two further arguments against the ECM/Raising analysis are also presented. The main aim of this short article is to achieve a higher descriptive adequacy of NGC, restricting theoretical arguments to a minimum.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, full discussions of theoretical issues are far beyond this short paper. Interested readers are referred to Hiraiwa (2000a).

## 2. Nominative-Genitive Conversion Revisited

### 2.1. A New Generalization of NGC in Japanese

NGC has the following six notable properties that call for explanation. This article focuses on (1a), (1d), (1e) and (1f) and provides principled accounts.<sup>2</sup>

- (1)
  - a. A descriptive generalization. (Section 2.)
  - b. Optionality.
  - c. Lack of Accusative-Genitive conversion.
  - d. Complementizer blocking effect. (Section 3.1.)
  - e. Lack of defective intervention effects. (Section 3.2.)
  - f. Transitivity restriction. (Section 3.3.)

(2) has been the descriptive generalization to NGC, which has almost never been called into question in the literature with only a few exceptions (cf. Saito 1982, Miyagawa 1993, Sakai 1994, Ochi 1999; cf. Watanabe 1996, Hiraiwa 2000a).

- (2) NGC is restricted to only relative clauses and nominal complements (i.e. structure with an external D-head).

As (3) and (4) show, NGC is possible only in relative clauses and nominal complements but not in main clauses.

- (3) Kinoo John **ga/no** katta hon  
yesterday John-NOM/GEN buy-PST-ADN book  
'the book which John bought yesterday'
- (4) John wa [<sub>CP</sub> kinoo Mary-**ga/no** kita koto/no]  
John-TOP yesterday Mary-NOM/GEN come-PST-ADN FN/C  
-wo siranakatta  
-ACC know-NEG-PST  
'John didn't know that Mary came yesterday.'

Miyagawa (1993), building on the generalization (2), argues that in NGC genitive Case on the subject DP is checked by an external D head at LF (hereafter *the ECM/Raising analysis*).

However, very significantly, a close scrutiny reveals that the long-standing generalization in (2) is empirically quite inadequate. As shown in (5)-(11), NGC is allowed in the structures without any external D head.

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<sup>2</sup> Hiraiwa (2000a) shows that the properties (1a), (1c) and (1d) are cross-linguistically true in NGC. Explaining the properties (1b) and (1c) requires full development of theoretical discussions, which goes beyond the scope of this paper. See Hiraiwa (2000a) for a cross-linguistic study on NGC based on about twenty languages

- (5) John wa [ame **ga/no** yamu made] office ni ita.  
 John-TOP rain-NOM/GEN stop-PRES-ADN until office-at be-PST  
 ‘John was at his office until the rain stopped.’
- (6) [Boku **ga/no** omou ni] John wa Mary ga  
 I-NOM/GEN think-PRES-ADN -DAT John-TOP Mary-NOM  
 suki-ni-tigainai  
 like-must-PRES  
 ‘I think that John likes Mary.’
- (7) [Sengetsu ikkai denwa **ga/no** atta kiri] John kara  
 last month once call-NOM/GEN be-PST-ADN since John-from  
 nanimo renraku ga nai.  
 any call-NOM be-not-PST  
 ‘There has been no call from John since he called me up once last month.’
- (8) Kono atari-wa [hi **ga/no** kureru ni tsure(te)]  
 around-here-TOP sun-NOM/GEN go-down-PRES-ADN as  
 hiekondekuru.  
 colder-get-PRES  
 ‘It gets chillier as the sun goes down around here.’
- (9) John wa [toki **ga/no** tatsu to tomoni]  
 John-TOP time-NOM/GEN pass-PRES-ADN with as  
 Mary no koto wo wasurete-itta.  
 Mary-GEN FN-ACC forget-go-PST  
 ‘Mary slipped out of John’s memory as times went by.’
- (10) [John **ga/no** kuru to konai to]  
 John-NOM/GEN come-PRES-ADN and come-not-PRES-ADN and  
 de wa oochigai da.  
 -TOP great-difference CPL-PRES  
 ‘It makes a great difference whether John comes or not.’
- (11) John wa [Mary **ga/no** yonda yori] takusan-no  
 John-TOP Mary-NOM/GEN read-PST-ADN than many-GEN  
 hon wo yonda  
 books-ACC read-PST  
 ‘John read more books than Mary did.’  
 (Watanabe 1996:396)

Very strikingly, in the examples above, NGC is allowed despite the fact that no external D is involved. Furthermore, (12) confirms the lack of D in the relevant embedded clauses in (5)-(11).

- (12) a. \***sono** yori / \***sono** made / \***sono** ni / \***sono** to / \***sono** kiri  
 it(GEN)-than / it (GEN)-until / it(GEN)-DAT / it(GEN)-with /  
 it(GEN)-since
- b. **sore** yori / **sore** made / **sore** ni / **sore** to / **sore** kiri  
 it-than / it-until / it-DAT / it-with / it-since

(12) demonstrates that none of the italicized P(reposition)-like elements that head CPs in (5)-(11) can select the genitive form of the pronoun ‘*sono*’ but rather they take the full DP form ‘*sore*’. This explicitly excludes the possibility that these elements check inherent genitive Case or they function as an external D-head to check structural genitive Case. Thus the data (5)-(11) are crucial empirical counterevidence against the long-standing generalization of NGC (2).

A further close examination, however, uncovers a very interesting new generalization that lies behind the distribution of NGC in Japanese. It should be noted that all the structures that allow NGC are headed by verbs with a special verbal inflection, predicate adnominal form (*P-A form*) (which has been termed *Rentai-kei* in the Traditional Japanese linguistics). This leads us to the following descriptive generalization.

- (13) *A New Descriptive Generalization of NGC*  
 NGC in Japanese is only licensed by the special verbal inflection  
 (the predicate adnominal form; *the P-A form*).

It is sometimes difficult to demonstrate the validity of (13) in modern Japanese due to the well-known morphophonological merger of the verbal End form into the P-A form, which took place around the 13th century (see Kin-sui 1995 among others). But fortunately, the so-called verbal adjective and copula, which still retain the relevant morphophonological distinction, confirm our claim. Note that the end form *da* is morphologically realized as *na* in relative clauses and nominal complements as illustrated in (14), whereas the end form *da* appears in the matrix clause.

- (14) a. John ga suki-**na** ongaku wa blues da  
 John-NOM like-PRES-ADN music-TOP blues be-PRES  
 ‘The music that John likes is the Blues.’ cf. (3)
- b. John ga Mary ga suki-**na** koto/no wa  
 John-NOM Mary-NOM like-PRES-AND FN/C -TOP  
 yuumei da.  
 well-known CPL-PRES  
 ‘It is well-known that John likes Mary.’ cf. (4)
- c. John ga Mary ga suki-**da**  
 John-NOM Mary-NOM like-PRES-END  
 ‘John likes Mary.’

This diagnostic test reveals that the verbal inflection in (5)-(11) is the P-A form.

- (15) a. John wa ijou-**na** made ni sinkeisitsu da  
 John-TOP extraordinary-ADN extent to nervous-PRES  
 ‘John was extraordinarily nervous.’ cf. (5)
- b. John no koto ga simpai-**na** yori mo  
 John-GEN thing-NOM worried-PRES-ADN than  
 Mary ga simpai da.  
 Mary-NOM worried-PRES.  
 ‘I am worried about Mary rather than about John.’ cf. (11)

This generalization is correctly borne out by the ungrammaticality of NGC in the clauses with other verbal inflectional forms. Consider the examples below.

- (16) a. [Dare **ga**/\***no** yonde-mo] kamaimasen.  
 whoever-NOM/\*GEN read-COND-even care-NEG-PRES.  
 ‘I don’t care whoever will come.’
- b. [John **ga**/\***no** kureba] minna yorokobuyo  
 John-NOM/\*GEN come-COND everyone pleased-PRES  
 ‘Everyone will be delighted if John comes.’
- c. Omae **ga**/\***no** **koi!**  
 you-NOM/\*GEN come-IMP  
 ‘(You) Come here!’
- d. John ga Mary **ga**/\***no** **kita** to/ka  
 John-NOM Mary-NOM/\*GEN come-PST-END C/Q  
 itta/tazuneta  
 say/ask-PST  
 ‘John said/asked that/whether Mary came.’

Summarizing the discussions in this section, we have shown that the long-standing generalization of NGC (2) is empirically inadequate and demonstrated that NGC is crucially dependent on the presence of the P-A form, presenting the new generalization (13).

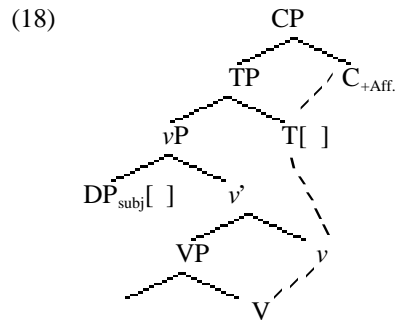
## 2.2. The Mechanism of NGC

Building on the new generalization in the previous section, I propose the following theory as a mechanism of NGC.

- (17) A syntactic C-T-*v*-V head amalgamate, which is formed via AGREE, corresponds to the special verbal inflection (*the P-A form*).

This head amalgamate has a  $\phi$ -feature that can check genitive Case as well as nominative Case.

(18) is the representation of the mechanism of NGC.



Adopting the insight of Kinsui (1995), I crucially propose that the P-A form in Japanese involves a zero C (cf. also Kaplan and Whitman 1995). It is further argued that this zero C is ‘affixal’ ([+Aff.]) and requires C-T- $\nu$ -V head amalgamation (‘head-movement’) via AGREE (cf. Lasnik 1999).

In (18) each head AGREES cyclicly;  $\nu$  AGREES with V, which T AGREES with. Now at the step of the derivation where  $C_{+Aff.}$  is merged with the TP,  $C_{+Aff.}$  requires AGREE with T- $\nu$ -V, spelling out the special verbal inflection *the P-A form*. If there is no C-T- $\nu$ -V head amalgamation due to the absence of  $C_{+Aff.}$ , the verb is realized as *the end form* as a result of T- $\nu$ -V AGREE). The claim here is that this C-T- $\nu$ -V head amalgamate has a  $\phi$ -feature that can check structural genitive Case as well as nominative Case.<sup>3</sup> Crucially, note that under the proposed theory, there is no structural difference in nominative Case-checking and genitive Case-checking in NGC; the same single  $\phi$ -feature is responsible for both nominative and genitive Case-checking in (18).<sup>4</sup>

Thus now the proposed mechanism of NGC (17) provides a natural explanation for our generalization (13).

<sup>3</sup> See Hiraiwa (2000a) for a precise theoretical implementation of the idea under the framework of Chomsky (2000) as well as much empirical justification, which space limitation disallows us to illustrate here.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the proposed theory gives theoretical basis for claims in Traditional Japanese linguistics that in classical Japanese *no* and *ga* were both nominative and genitive (cf. Konoshima 1966, Nomura 1993 among many others).

### 3. Nominative-Genitive Conversion Elucidated

#### 3.1. Defective Intervention Constraints: Against ECM/Raising

In this section I will demonstrate that data from locality/minimality in NGC presents crucial evidence against Miyagawa's (1993) and Ochi's (1999) ECM/Raising analysis.

Hiraiwa (2000b) shows that the ECM construction in Japanese the ECM construction gives empirical justification for Chomsky's (2000) *Defective Intervention Constraints*.

(19) *Defective Intervention Constraints* (cf. Chomsky 2000:123)

$$\begin{array}{c} > > \\ \boxed{\phantom{>}} \uparrow \\ (*\text{AGREE}(\phantom{>}, \phantom{>}), \phantom{>} \text{ is a probe and } \phantom{>} \text{ is a matching goal, and} \\ \phantom{>} \text{ is inactive due to a prior AGREE with some other probe)} \end{array}$$

(19) is a general locality condition on a syntactic operation which prohibits an establishment of checking relation between  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , in the presence of an intervening closer candidate  $\gamma$ . Now let us consider the following ECM examples.

(20) John *ga* Mary ***ga/wo*** totemo kawii to omotta.  
 John-NOM Mary-NOM/ACC very pretty-PRES C think-PST  
 'John considered Mary to be very pretty.'

(21) a. Mary *ga* [John ***ga*** me ***ga*** warui to] *sinjiteiru*  
 Mary-NOM John-NOM eye-NOM bad-PRES C believe-PRES  
 'Mary believes that John has a very bad eyesight.'

b. Mary *ga* [John ***wo*** me ***ga*** warui to] *sinjiteiru*  
 Mary-NOM John-ACC eye-NOM bad-PRES C believe-PRES

c. \*Mary *ga* [John ***ga*** me ***wo*** warui to] *sinjiteiru*  
 Mary-NOM John-NOM eye-ACC bad-PRES C believe-PRES

(20) is a typical ECM construction in Japanese, which shows that ECM is possible across a CP clause boundary. In (21) a multiple nominative construction is embedded under an ECM verb. (21b) show that it is possible to ECM the higher nominative DP, assigning accusative Case. However, it should be noted that as (21c) shows, ECM/Raising of the lower nominative DP over the higher nominative DP yields ungrammaticality.

Hiraiwa (2000b) argues that the illicit derivation (21c) is excluded exactly by Defective Intervention Constraints, since the AGREE between the probe matrix  $v$  and the goal  $\bar{A}$ -feature of the lower DP is blocked by the inactive goal  $\bar{A}$ -feature of the closer DP as a result of (19).





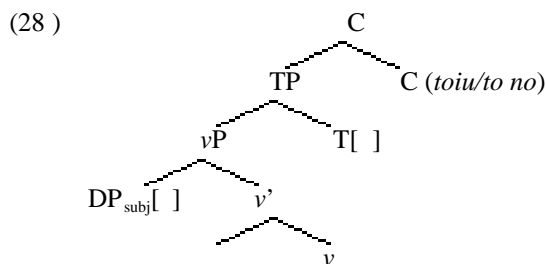
kanoosei]  
 possibility  
 ‘the possibility that a great earthquake will occur in the future’

b. [[syoorai daijisin **ga/\*no** okiru  
 in-the-future great-earthquake-NOM/\*GEN occur-PRES-END  
**toiu** kanoosei]  
 C possibility  
 ‘the possibility that a great earthquake will occur in the future’

(27) [[House of Blues de John **ga/\*no** ensoosuru **to no**]  
 House of Blues-at John-NOM/\*GEN play-PRES-END C-GEN  
 joohou]  
 information  
 ‘the information that John will play at the House of Blues’

As (26) indicates that the complementizer *toiu* is optional for the head noun ‘*kanoosei*’. The contrast between (26a) and (26b) as well as (27) show that NGC is disallowed when an overt complementizer appears in C.

Within the present theory, this phenomenon is explained quite straightforwardly. Consider the derivation (28) for the illicit sentence (26b) and (27).



Recall that under the proposed theory, the C-T-v-V AGREE is a crucial prerequisite for NGC. This is because the special verbal inflection P-A form is a realization of head amalgamation of C-T-v-V via AGREE. However, as (28) explicitly shows, the head amalgamate formation is syntactically blocked by the presence of the overt C, since an overt C, being non-affixal [-Aff.], bars the morphosyntactic head amalgamation and leaves the verb in the end form. This blocks genitive Case-checking, deriving surface complementizer blocking effects.

Note that under the ECM/Raising analysis, there is no good reason for NGC to be blocked by an overt C. Rather, as we have already seen in Section 3.1. above, Japanese does allow ECM/Raising despite the presence of an overt C in genuine ECM sentences. Thus complementizer blocking effect is another evidence against the ECM/Raising analysis of NGC.

### 3.3. Transitivity Restriction

Finally, I will briefly discuss Transitivity Restriction (TR) in NGC and propose a totally new perspective to the problem.

As it has been noted in the literature (Harada 1971, 1976, Watanabe 1996 among others), accusative objects are prohibited in NGC.

- (29) Kinoo John **ga/\*no** hon **wo** katta mise  
yesterday John-NOM/\*GEN book-ACC buy-PST-ADN store  
'the store where John bought books yesterday'

As Watanabe (1996) correctly points out, the restriction is lifted if the accusative object is wh-extracted.

- (30) Kinoo John **ga/no** t<sub>i</sub> katta hon<sub>i</sub>  
yesterday John-NOM/-GEN buy-PST-ADN book  
'the book which John bought yesterday'

Furthermore, interestingly, the suspension of TR is also observed in the case of *pro-drop* of the accusative object, which demonstrates that what is wrong is morphological accusative case.

- (31) Kinoo John **no** (\*hon-**wo**) katta mise  
yesterday John-GEN book-ACC buy-AND-PST store  
'the store where John bought a book yesterday.'

Looking at the issue in a broader perspective, however, shows that this TR in NGC is an instance of a more general principle underlying the Japanese language. It should be noted that it is independently well-known that in Japanese, Dative Subject Construction (DSC) resists accusative Case-marking, allowing only the DAT-NOM Case pattern (Shibatani 1978, Ura 2000).

- (32) John **ni** nihongo **ga/\*wo** hanas-eru (koto)  
John-DAT Japanese-NOM speak-can-PRES (that)  
'John can speak Japanese'

These facts suggest that in Japanese morphological accusative Case-marking is prohibited when the subject DP is in non-nominative Case. Thus I propose the following principle in Japanese (cf. Hiraiwa 2000a).

- (33) Spell-out of morphological accusative case by *v* triggers nominative Case-checking on T in the next strong phase.

Putting aside the precise theoretical implementation for now, (33) captures an interdependence between morphological accusative case and abstract nominative Case-checking; more descriptively speaking,

As it is already obvious, the ungrammaticality of the NGC sentence (29) and the DSC sentence (32) is naturally expected under the single principle (33); in these examples, the spell-out of the accusative Case fails

to trigger nominative Case checking on T. Instead, the subject is assigned structural genitive Case in (29) or inherent dative Case in (32) (cf. Ura 2000). Thus our principle (33) brings to light the significant nature underlying the Case system in Japanese, and gives a unified explanation for the ostensibly unrelated phenomena (TR in NGC and the ungrammaticality of the DAT-ACC case pattern in DSC).

The following data combining DSC and NGC shows the point more clearly.

- (34) a. John **ga** nihongo **ga/wo/no** hanas-eru koto  
 John-NOM Japanese-NOM/ACC/GEN speak-can-PRES-ADN FN  
 ‘the fact that John can speak Japanese.’
- b. John **no** nihongo **ga/\*wo/no** hanas-eru koto  
 John-GEN Japanese-NOM/\*ACC/GEN speak-can-PRES-ADN FN
- c. John **ni** nihongo **ga/\*wo/no** hanas-eru koto  
 John-DAT Japanese-NOM/\*ACC/GEN speak-can-PRES-ADN FN

(34) shows that among 9 possible Case patterns in Japanese, the two ungrammatical patterns are both with accusative case without nominative Case, conforming to the principle (33).

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, in this paper, it has been shown that the new set of data presented above is a crucial empirical counterevidence against the long-standing generalization of NGC and hence the ECM/Raising analysis. A new descriptive generalization has been proposed that NGC is crucially licensed by the special verbal inflection (the P-A form) in Japanese and argued that genitive Case in NGC is checked via AGREE with the probe *-* feature on the C-T-*v*-V head amalgamate, which is realized as the P-A form. Two further arguments against the ECM/Raising analysis from defective intervention effects and complementizer blocking effects have been presented.<sup>6</sup> The end result is an achievement of higher descriptive adequacy with a principled explanatory mechanism.

#### Appendix: Apparent Counterexamples to the Generalization?

There are a small set of apparent counterexamples to our generalization (13); As Mikami (1953) already notes, NGC is prohibited in ‘*noda*’ focus construction in ‘*node*’ (*since*) and ‘*noni*’ (*although*) conjunction construc-

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<sup>6</sup> Miyagawa (1993) presents scope evidence for his ECM/Raising analysis. But see Hiraiwa (2000a) for arguments against it.



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