# STATIVE SENTENCES IN JAPANESE

# AND THE ROLE OF THE NOMINATIVE MARKER *"GA"*

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## ABSTRACT

The Japanese nominative particle *ga* is normally associated with the marking of subjects. However, there are several constructions involving stative predicates, where it has been claimed, notably by those working within a generative framework, that a *ga*-marked NP can be an object and that such sentences are transitive. Such an analysis has particularly arisen in the case of sentences with more than one *ga*-marked NP, exhibiting so-called double *ga* marking.

The following study makes two claims. Firstly, that one of the functions of *ga* in such sentences is to provide a discourse frame akin to the topic marking function of the postpositional particle *wa*. Secondly it argues that stative sentences associated with double *ga*-marking are in fact intransitive and that the *ga*-marked NP's that have been claimed to be objects are in fact subjects.

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## A Note on Conventions

A few common linguistic conventions have been used

* marks non-occurring sequences
? indicates questionable sequences

Abbreviations or other symbols familiar in the linguistic literature are mostly assumed.

With the exception of the names of authors, books or publishers, where a differing transcription appears on the work concerned, all Japanese has been transcribed in Hepburn romanisation no matter what the original source.

Thus, long /o:/ is written with a doubling of the letter i.e. "kakimashoo" not "kakimashou" . But a long /e:/ is written according to the convention in Hiragana, "sensei" teacher, has been written not "sensee".

In accord with conventional practice, the object marker has been romanised as <*o*>, not <*wo*>, the directional marker as <*e*> not <*he*> and the topic particle <*wa*> not <*ha*>.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Japanese nominative particle *ga* is normally associated[1] with the marking of subjects. However, there are several constructions involving stative predicates, where it has been claimed, notably by those working within a generative framework[2], that a *ga*-marked NP is an object. Although this can be seen as the generally current view, other linguists[3], particularly structuralists, have taken the position that these NP's are in fact subjects of some kind. This also seems to be the position of Japanese grammarians working outside a generative paradigm[4]. Thus the role of *ga* in such constructions is a controversial one. Indeed even among generative grammarians of Japanese, there is no overall agreement on many major issues concerning case marking or the actual role of the postpositional particles that are said to mark case.

As the arguments advanced touch on many fundamental areas of grammatical analysis, there is a rather long preliminary section that has been labeled PART ONE. This deals particularly with various grammatical categories in general and sets Japanese within a broader framework, although discussion of transitivity is left until the end. The general thrust of this section can be seen from the list of contents. PART TWO deals in more detail with more specific arguments, which relate to the various stative sentence types. These can be seen as the core of the study and the role, that *ga* plays within them.

A mention must be made as to the theoretical position of this study. A great deal of the work done on Japanese in recent decades has been done within the framework of transformational grammar in one or other of its many guises. The fact that some of these shifts have been quite major makes a coherent exposition, which of necessity contains references to ideas presented over several decades, much more difficult. It is not possible either to provide a critique of this material without employing some of the terms that are associated with the various models and in fact assuming the validity of the concepts these represent. A deconstruction of these models is not possible

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[1] Makino, Seichi and Tsustui, Michio (1986) p.118 ff.
[2] Kuno, S 1973 p.79 ff. Tsujimura, Natsuko (1996) p. 211 Shibatani, M (1977) p.791.
[3] Jorden, Eleanor Harz, (1963) Makino, Seichi and Tsustui, Michio (1986) Alfonso, Anthony (1989) p.148.
[4] cf. Oono et al. (1975), Yuzawa (1977)

within the limited compass of this work but this study tries to adopt to the degree possible a theory neutral stance or at least one which is not to be closely identified with a particular model. This of course is never really possible, and the rather long preliminary section is an attempt to at least make the issues explicit within a wider framework. It also tries to keep the argument in simpler terms than much of the more technical literature, and as such tries to relate arguments closely to meaning.

# PART ONE

## PRELIMINARIES

In this section the concepts of subject, topic and focus will be considered. First the notion of subject will be examined from a traditional perspective and then from a more contemporary, mostly generative point of view. Brief mention is also included of theories of case in traditional grammar and case marking in generative grammar.

Then the various tests, which have been used in generative grammar to try to distinguish subjects in Japanese are described. The notion of topic is considered and contrasted with that of subject. A brief mention of the use of the term focus is made, as this is one of the functions that is frequently ascribed to *ga*.

The two particles *wa* and *ga* are briefly examined and it is asserted that one of the roles of *ga*, that of a focus particle, is similar to that of *wa*.

## THE NOTION OF SUBJECT

Although it would seem that the notion of subject is well-rooted in grammatical theory, there no longer appears to be complete correspondence between traditional and more recent schools of linguistic analysis in the use of the term. McCloskey[1] underlines the decline in the notion in generative grammar, while Kuroda (1976:5) dryly points out that the "logical concept of subject does not, at present, seem to a focus of active attention either for logicians of natural language or for linguistics." The issue has been complicated by significant changes in the generative paradigm especially relating to notions of agent and other thetic roles, and the existence of so-called ergative languages[2] in which the notion of subject is equivocal. Recently too, it has been suggested that all languages may not have a subject category separate from that of topic.

[1] McCloskey (1997) p.197 "..in the tradition that extends from the "Standard Theory"through the "Extended Standard Theory"to "Principles and Parameters Theory" and then to the "Minimalist Program", the notion of subject plays no formal role at all. Not only is subject not a primitive term in these theories, but in their most recent instantiations it is not even clear that there is any derived or defined notion which captures the traditional intuition of what a subject is..What we have seen, in a sense, is a progressive deconstuction of the traditional category "subject"so that the properties, which are supposed to define it are distributed across a range of distinct (but derivationally linked) syntactic entities and positions. This theoretical eccentricity may turn out to have been foolish or wise, but it is certainly grounded in some of the deeper methodological instincts of generative grammar."

[2] Comrie (1981) p.98ff.

## TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF SUBJECT

The notion of subject in traditional grammar arose as a primitive term derived from classical Aristotelian logic in which a sentence is seen as a proposition asserted about an entity (subject). Thus a declaratory sentence would be analysed with a binary cut between subject and predicate. This was seen as representing the subject and the assertion made about it. Based as it is on Greek and Latin models, traditional grammar further closely associates the notion of subject with nominative case marking[3] typically of the first noun of the clause. This notion of subject may sometimes be further delimited as meaning the grammatical subject[4]. Such notions were easily transferred to other western European languages, which no longer mark cases with nominal inflection, by noting the correlation of subject and position in the clause. This analysis is, of course, in most western European languages shored up by residual case marking in pronouns. Thus in French, English and Gaelic, which have lost separate nominative/accusative marking in the noun, the subject NP is generally clause initial or at least the first NP in the clause in Gaelic. In the case of Gaelic, as opposed to the closely related Irish case, even the pronouns have lost a specifically nominative marking, but other criteria – in particular the rigid post-verbal position of the subject in main clauses - can be adduced to preserve the essential integrity of the notion of subject.

A psychological and logical subject are sometimes distinguished in traditional grammar and these mostly correspond to the concept of agent. The term, logical subject, is also well established in traditional grammar; for example to signal the agent in passive sentences in English[5] , but the grammatical subject is still recognised as the subject of the clause. For the most part, nevertheless, the psychological and logical subjects correspond[6] with the grammatical subject in European languages. Thus in traditional grammar, subjects are seen in both semantic, structural and morphological terms with no great cleavage between form and function.

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[3] This is still a major consideration according to Comrie (1981) and Keenan (1976) .
[4] McArthur Tom (ed.) (1992) p.996.
[5] Lyons (1968) p.343.
[6] McArthur Tom (ed.) (1992) p.996.

## THE ROLE OF CASE MARKING

The centrality of the notion of subject in Western grammatical tradition is of course underpinned by the morphological features of Indo-European languages and indeed of the Semitic languages which western scholars had come in contact with. These are case marking and the personal endings on verbs. This latter feature, together with marking of number, makes transparent the importance of the subject through the so-called agreement of subject and verb and adjectival case marking. This latter feature also includes gender marking which with case and number agreement in older European languages not only of attributive adjectives but also of predicative ones, serves to make obvious the central role of the subject noun. Traditionally called government, the subject also controls the specific marking of person, number and sometimes gender of the verb[7] in a way that no other functional part of the sentence does.

The role of inflectional case in classical languages, long familiar to educated westerners, has given rise to such distinctions as complement versus object according to whether the nominative or accusative case is used overriding purely semantic considerations. Thus in Latin and Ancient Greek the nominative case is used after the copula which is called a complement in contradistinction to the accusative marking that is found in the object of typical transitive verbs. The standard explanation for such facts is to point out indexical identity between subject and complement. Nevertheless, this is not necessarily always the case for, in English, the objective form of the pronoun is the most natural form – "It's me". In German on the other hand, verbs like *sein* "be", *werden* "become" or *bleiben* "remain" are said to take complements because they are followed by the nominative, while *geben* "give" which overlaps in existential sentences with sein is said to take an object, because of its accusative case following.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Letzte Woche war in Hamburg ein Streik.* | There was a strike in Hamburg last week.[8] |
| *Letzte Woche gab es einen Streik in Hamburg.* | |
| *In Mainz war ein Aufenthalt von fünf Minuten.* | There was a five minute stop in Mainz. |

[7] This is observed in the past tense of Russian verbs for example. Of course the subject frequently controls the form of a predicative (and attributive) adjective as well in many IE languages.
[8] Durrell, M. (1996) p.358

*In Mainz gab es einen Aufenthalt von fünf Minuten.*

Russian too deviates from the classical pattern with the nominative case if the copula is suppressed, the instrumental if it is present and typically the genitive with a negative copula[9].

Apart from such infelicities however, case marking and verbal agreement morphology have traditionally been seen to be the key to grammatical analysis and the location of the grammatical subject.

## SUBJECT IN GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

What McCloskey (1997) has termed the "deconstruction of the subject" in generative grammar has resulted from several features of the various models developed. Syntactic Structures, Chomsky's first significant work (1957), simply assumed the subject as the leftmost NP generated by the initial string: S → NP + VP. Early in the further development of generative grammar a distinction arose between surface and deep structure[10] which had as one consequence a shift away from notions of what became known as surface case. There was also a serious attempt to separate semantic and structural components in a grammar.

Within the Aspects[11] framework, as in its predecessor, the subject was identified as the NP immediately dominated by S and it was assumed that this was the position at which agent and experiencer occurred at deep structure for English transitives and verbs encoding perception. Various operations such as passivisation or subject raising might then be performed on this NP to shift its position in relation to the assumed daughter of S initial position[12].

Subject then was a notion derived from the initial NP, considered a primitive in the theory, through, what were deemed to be, formal operations on initial strings. In some ways this was not so far removed from traditional conceptions but it conflated logical and grammatical

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[9] cf. Borras, F.M. and Christian R.F. (1971) .

[10] The role of the level of deep structure in the current generative model seems to have a less secure footing. cf. Chomsky (1995) pp.186-191.

[11] Chomsky (1965).

[12] McCloskey (1997) p.202 points out the tendency in generative grammar to associate each relationship with a canonical position and that hence a unitary subject position - subjects specifying more than one relationship - is an anomaly in such models.

subjects, downgraded the latter and was tied to notions of English word order. Part of its legacy has been the repeated attempts to show that various languages have similar underlying word orders, which do not correspond with their so-called surface orders[13]. Subsequently, the notion, subject, has been partially displaced as one of central importance.

An IP model, which assumes that S itself is a projection of inflectional information such as person, number and tense, once more emphasising features prominent in English but not so important in a language such as Japanese was developed in the 80's. While in X-bar theory, the subject of a clause is the NP immediately dominated by the Sentence node or in more recent terminology is a specifier of a VP[14]. In such thinking INFL ( the bundle of inflectional categories) becomes far more important than the subject, an apparent reversal of the traditional position. In Government-Binding Theory[15] subject is a derivative term that can be defined in different ways. More recent work has seen the introduction of what can be seen as semantic primitives, referred to as θ-roles, but these too are seen as operating at deep structure and so do not always unequivocally detect subjects. In θ-theory, the subject is the element assigned the verb's external θ-role. Within case theory, the subject can be defined as the NP defined by the nominative case. These definitions of subject are not always compatible[16].

More recently an Internal Subject Model has been developed[17] in which the subject is thought to be generated inside the VP and then moved out of it. Such a model puts the subject NP on a par with other arguments of the verb.

## CASE MARKING IN GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

There has also been a radical shift in the treatment of case assignment rules between the two models. In the GB framework, the nominative was said to be licensed by the functional head, INFL while the accusative was licensed by a lexical head, the verb. In the minimalist model

[13] Cram (1984) is a typical example where it is suggested that Scottish Gaelic, which has very rigid VS order in main clauses, has underlying SVO order which is adjusted by a rule called verb-fronting.
[14] Fukui (1995) p.104ff. has argued that in fact Japanese lacks the category SPEC.
[15] Chomsky (1981, 1982).
[16] cf. Farrell et al. (1991) p.431f. cf. also Perlmutter (1979).
[17] Burton and Grimshaw (1992).

both are licensed when the DP's (Determiner phrases) are placed in the Specifier[18] position of the functional heads AgrS and AgrO.

There have been various theories developed within various models of generative grammar to account for case marking but it is not clear to what extent they are tenable within the current minimalist model.

The distinction between structural and inherent case has been maintained from the time of the Extended Standard Theory to the Minimalist Hypothesis to some degree. Kuroda's linear case marking (Kuroda 1965, 1978) marks the first unmarked NP with *ga* and the remaining unmarked NP with *o*. Sentences with complex verbs and adjectives are analyzed as involving embedded complement sentences with affixal predicates (verbs and adjectives) like *sase*, - Causatives, Passives, Desideratives - as matrix predicates. Linear case marking is proposed to apply cyclically following syntactic operations like Equi-NP Deletion (or Counter Equi- NP Deletion) and Verb Raising.

There have been alternative theories of case marking in Japanese, like the one applying case marking to S-structure on the basis of structural information (Inoue 1988, 1991), or the one using configurational case marking (Takezawa: 1987) or Morikawa's (1993) Parametric Approach. However, these are all based on the assumption that case marking involves the closely interrelated syntactic operations such as Equi- and Counter Equi-NP Deletion and Verb Raising.

Thus structural case marking is seen as a strictly syntactic operation that introduces case particles in syntax. This is certainly counter to the Minimalist Programme condition of inclusiveness as well as to the traditional notion of universal abstract Case.

In languages like English in which there is subject-tense agreement, nominative Case checking by the head of the Tense Phrase is well motivated. In languages like Japanese without agreement of this type, agreement based Case checking is less securely motivated. Kuroda (1988) claims that "the parametric difference between English and Japanese consists

[18] The fact that linguists are not in agreement as to whether Japanese even has SPEC( Fukui (1995) p.104ff.)

simply of the following: Agreement is forced in English; it is not in Japanese." Kuroda in addition argues that "there is little direct evidence of Case theory in Japanese," and claims, "In English, Case marking is forced, but in Japanese it is not. It can be left unenforced in Japanese since (or, since it is not forced,) there is another lower-case case marking mechanism to license Max(N)'s, which assigns *ga* and *o* to them." Thus it can be said that the whole issue of case marking in Japanese is far from settled even within the generative paradigm.

In Japanese, the grammatical subject is generally claimed to be marked by the particle, *ga*. Generative views of subject and the use of *ga* , as mentioned above, can be characterised as formal, in that *ga* marking is assigned to an NP on the basis that it is the first or left-most in the sentence at some chosen level of analysis. Thus the characteristics of generative grammar sketched above in relation to the notion of subject can be found in work on Japanese as well. This can be contrasted with the view that the notion subject is a primitive not derived from notions of formal structure. Kuroda (1965) who called this view the "substantial interpretation" rejected it on the grounds that subject and *ga* often seem incompatible as in the case of the potential, which can have a double *ga*:

*John ga nihongo ga/o hanaseru.*
John can speak Japanese.

The lack of agreement on the place of subject can be seen also in Kuroda's claim that the grammatical subject is marked by *wa*.

"...the grammatical concept of subject may now be formulated in Japanese. The sentence-initial *wa* phrase may be called "the subject of the sentence". The subject of the sentence represents the subject of the judgement that the sentence represents."[19]

He later goes on to state though that this is the L-subject (logical subject) which "has a concrete manifestation as the sentence-initial *wa* phrase." (p.9) No doubt Kuroda's views are based on the copula sentence in Greek, which played a prominent role in logic, and which

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makes these shifts in models all the more difficult.

corresponds to the *NP wa desu* pattern in Japanese. However, neither modern generative nor traditional Japanese grammarians regard *wa* as a case particles.

Kuroda then makes the important point that ultimately, what is regarded as a subject has to do with the grammatical model used.

"A constituent of a sentence satisfying some syntactic characterisation represents the subject of the judgement that this sentence represents, and, conversely, a judgement with a subject (categorical judgement) is represented by a sentence containing a constituent satisfying this syntactic characterisation....I leave the term SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISATION deliberately vague. Syntactic characterisation is a characterisation one can give in terms of one's syntactic theory"

[19] Kuroda (1976) p.8 in Shibatani (ed.) 1976.

## OTHER MODERN VIEWS

Two of the major modern attempts to define the concept of subject, those of Comrie (1981) and Keenan (1976), have followed a similar path to each other. Subject is basically seen as an intersection of topic and agent - the last feature being the link between the subject and predication. This claim that there is a special relationship between the subject NP and the verb is of course central to traditional thinking. However the usage equating agent with subject is very problematic, particularly from a cross-linguistic perspective.

Both Comrie and Keenan have further tried to define subject by means of a cluster of characteristics (Keenan lists 32) , with the possibility of a NP having degrees of subjecthood depending on the number of criteria fulfilled.

Keenan does not rank his features. He prefixes most of them by terms such as "usually" or "generally" and includes a mixture of features where both syntactic and semantic considerations and what those working within a generative framework would call surface structures have been taken into account. This approach owes something to the generative notion of atomistic decomposition and is also associated with the concept of prototypes; that there may be typical and less typical manifestations of various syntactic categories.

Such an approach has been widely applied in Japanese to try to solve some seemingly intractable problems in case marking. The primary problem with this approach is that it is not possible to say at what point an NP doesn't have enough features to be considered a subject, particularly as no one bundle of features is deemed to be diagnostic. Others might argue that grammar always will be to some degree fuzzy.

Givon[20] succinctly defines subject as a grammaticalised topic. Such a conception may have distinct advantages especially cross-linguistically where the existence of topics in some languages seems to be on a sounder footing than that of subject. However the problem with the notion of a grammaticalised subject in the case of Japanese is that the topic has itself been

[20] Introduction in Givon (1983) pp.5-31.

grammaticalised by various topic particles. We are then left with the issue of how to distinguish these two putative cases of grammaticalisation.

There is also the question of which way grammaticalisation is moving. It has tended to be assumed in works such as Givon that a topic (formally marked or not) may move towards becoming a case marker but the change need not be in this direction. Mihara (1994: 148) for example, suggests that what is below termed as topic *ga*, is grammaticalised away *from* being a structural case particle *to* being a postposition, and there is no doubt that this position reflects the historical situation. In Japanese presumably, grammaticalisation to subject could be expected to involve a greater degree of cohesion between a grammaticalised subject and one that is not i.e. a grammaticalised topic. To do this the question of working out the constituent structure of the Japanese sentence which is still not clear after several decades of persistent effort would need to be settled. Thus the question of grammaticalisation in the differentiation of topic and subject is more complex than it might appear.

## DIXON'S ANALYSIS OF SUBJECT

More recently Dixon[21] in his work on ergativity has broached the problem of finding a universal definition of subject. He points out that in so-called ergative languages, semantic and grammatical criteria for subject don't coincide and that this has led to linguists emphasising one aspect at the expense of the other. He then goes on to assert that although subject is a universal category, irrespective of the whether a language follows an accusative, ergative or mixed type pattern, it is not the most fundamental category[22], but simply links functions from transitive and intransitive clause types. He reserves S as the notation for subject of an intransitive clause only, while A designates the subject of a transitive clause - O is used for a transitive object, which Dixon equates with Comrie's P for patient (Comrie : 1978). Thus for Dixon, subject is the grouping of S and A as opposed to O. A is distinguished from O in having potential agency, while in an intransitive clause notions of agency are neutralised.

[21] Dixon 1994 Chapter 5.
[22] Dixon refers cites evidence from child language acquisition to support this contention cf. Schiefflin 1985.

Dixon's proposals are quite suggestive in relation to Japanese, in particular with regard to the role of *ga*. In actual Japanese spoken usage, it seems that *ga* is not particularly common in any but intransitive sentence types[23] and typically many of these are locative or ergative in nature. The suggestions that Japanese is a partly ergative language[24] also need consideration. However Dixon's general schema is open to criticism because it obscures the incommensurable ways in which participants may be related to events or states. As in most aspects of language involving meaning, there is often a cline, where one of the categories, set up a priori, seems to merge into another.

## DISCOURSE STRUCTURE VERSUS SUBJECT

Another major trend, important to Japanese, has been that of looking at language from a discourse perspective. There have been several drivers of these developments. One is the range of empirical studies that indicate that real Japanese, at least in its spoken form, does not correspond to the language that grammarians base their analysis on. As happened in English, the data that generative grammarians consider crucial for an argument in favour of this or that refinement of a model are frequently contentious to native speakers[25]. No less importance have been the attempts to discover universals that have led to the rediscovery of linguistic variation. Of relevance here for example is the claim that Chinese is a Topic Comment[26] language with no real subject, and the parallels that have been drawn with other East Asian languages. This raises a serious challenge to the generative enterprise of establishing the nature of Universal Grammar. Some of these issues are referred to below.

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[23] In the data for adult use presented in Mayes and Ono (1993) the ratio of *ga* use in intransitive sentences is six times more than in transitive sentences.

[24] Miyagawa (1989) p.93ff.

[25] This is of course a contentious statement in itself and would need extensive documentation. The example of disagreement on the grammaticality of double *ga* sentences though is an apposite example here. cf. Tateishi (1994) p.23.

[26] cf. Huang, Yan (1994).

## SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES WITH JAPANESE

In the case of Japanese, the generative notion of subject presents several additional problems. Some linguists[27] have argued that Japanese does not in fact have any constituent structure (i.e. no VP node), while others claim it is not clear what the case is at present[28]. If this should prove to be the case, then because of scrambling, subjects could only be identified by overt nominative case marking[29] or by an appeal to some semantic model along the lines of Fillmorean case[30].

In addition, Japanese being a pro-drop language need not have any overt subject but does frequently have a formally marked topic. Considerations such as these have even lead some grammarians to argue against the existence of the category subject in Japanese[31].

Japanese also doesn't routinely mark number either in the verb or the NP and thus one of the overt syntactic links between subject and verbal, familiar in many European languages is missing[32]. However this does not mean that semantic linkage is not sometimes overt and this must be seen as a key criterion for defining the subject. A further complication is that *ga* is often dropped in speech and is perhaps rarer, outside formal written styles, than many of the standard treatments of Japanese grammar suggest.

Japanese moreover has another marker, *wa*, which is said to mark topics. These typically have a similar distribution to subjects. Indeed there are many sentences in which either *wa* and *ga* seem to be possible with little apparent difference in meaning. Kuroda[33] has asserted

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[27] Inoue (1978) Hale (1980) Farmer (1984) Miyagawa (1980) This notion to some degree continues to resurface even in the work of those who obviously believe in a configurational structure in general. Shibatani (1990) Chapter 11 is a case in point.

[28] Fukui (1995) "Japanese has a somewhat peculiar status in generative grammar in that while a tremendous amount of descriptive work has been accumulated, it is still not known what its configurational structure looks like."p.93.

[29] It can of course be claimed that the existence of scrambling implies a configurational structure, but this isn't necessarily the case. cf. Fukui (1995) p.100.

[30] Fillmore (1968).

[31] cf. Shibatani (1978) for his discussion on Mikami's work. This position has been argued vigorously for Chinese notably by Huang (1994) and it has been claimed that the same arguments apply to other East Asian languages including Japanese. cf. Chapter 6.

[32] Shibatani (1978) argues that Japanese like European languages does have phenomena controlled solely by the subject NP, but his examples, relying on *jibun* reflexivization and honorification are open to challenge.

[33] Kuroda (1976) p.6 "The sentence-initial *wa* phrase may be called the "subject of the sentence". The subject of the sentence represents the subject of the judgment that the sentence represents. This is a grammatical concept

for example that *wa* does mark a subject and that the distinction between *wa* and *ga* is that *wa* marks a judgement and so is akin to the subject of traditional logic while *ga* marks a thetic subject. A great deal of debate has involved the distinction between *wa* and *ga* and there is a broad consensus that one of the functions of *ga* is that of a focussing particle, which can be interpreted as a form of topicaliser[34].

Finally, Japanese tends to make rather careful distinctions between animate and non-animate arguments, and precludes non-animates from many constructions, in particular, those which are often advanced as tests for subject. This means that the distinction between agent and subject can be seen as problematic in some constructions.

There have been a number of attempts to deal with the problem of the subject in Japanese, in particular in those sentences where two nominatively marked NP's are found[35]. Such attempts have taken the line of either seeking to show that one of the NP's is not really a subject but a mutation of some other case marker, or to distinguish different categories of subjects. It must be added that double *ga* sentences are not at all common. Ono et al. found that in their corpus they are "extremely rare"[36] and some speakers reject them categorically[37].

There is another problem that affects Japanese linguistics carried out through the medium of English and that is the role of English translations. It is well known that over the last century or so written Japanese has been greatly influenced by translations of western works. This has led to the acceptance of English structures in Japanese, which are not natural to the language. Among these are the overuse of pronouns such as *kare* and *kanojo* in certain styles, and studies of Japanese in Japan itself have been heavily influenced by models of language more appropriate to European languages[38]. This problem is even more difficult to avoid in writing in English as in offering translations of Japanese sentences into English it is natural to present

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of subject with respect to Japanese".

[34] A recent study by Ono et al. (2000) based on a corpus of conversation in fact claims that *ga* is not primarily a case marker at all but a pragmatic marker and so closely resembles *wa*.

[35] The question is further complicated by the fact that for some speakers doubly marked nominatives are ungrammatical anyway. cf. Tateishi (1994) p.23 where he points out that some speakers entirely reject double *ga* sentences and that some even reject those with *no* (genitive) marking. It could be argued that this is evidence of the primacy of $NP_2$ as the prime subject.

[36] Ono et al. (2000) p.75.

[37] One of the informant group used here rejected them even in the face of other speakers assuring him the sentences were perfectly all right. There are also various references in the literature to this position.

the most normal English equivalent but this does necessarily reflect the structure of Japanese. It has been intimated above that there may be a tendency among generative grammarians too, to see English structures reflected in that of other languages and this problem is of particular relevance in the area under discussion here. In a sense the issue is whether the structures dealt with are really like their English equivalents or not.

[38] cf. Miller (1967) p.311ff. for a discussion of this question.

## TESTS OF SUBJECTHOOD

The double *ga* construction in Japanese has been prominent in the search to find a syntactic test, which would identify the true grammatical subject in sentences, which exhibit it. The debate involving such identification has involved several key areas.

The more general issue in turn has two aspects – whether the notion of subject is useful in Japanese at all and the less controversial area of the delimitation of the boundary between subject and topics of various kinds.

Equally important is also the question of the claimed lack of fit between overt case marking and sentence roles. In particular there are the claims that the nominative marker *ga* may be used to mark objects and that the subject may also sometimes be marked by the particle *ni* – normally associated with indirect object.

It is normally assumed that the particle *ga* marks a subject and so it is routinely glossed as a nominative case marker:

*Taroo ga kita.*
NOM came[39]
Taro came.

According to Shibatani[40], there exists a "normal correspondence between the nominative *ga* and the syntactic subject" but that this correspondence is "disrupted" in certain environments.

To resolve the problems that have arisen in respect to these issues, there has been an attempt to establish a set of tests that would reliably distinguish subjects. The most frequent of these are called subject honorification and *jibun*-reflexivization.

Shibatani has claimed that there is a set of tests for subjecthood that cannot be applied to a certain class of *ga* marked NP's but can be applied to other NP's which are marked by *ni* or

[39] Shibatani (1990) p.306.

optionally by a second *ga*. To an extent the argument is tautological. This is a test for subjecthood, it doesn't apply to a given NP, therefore that NP is not a subject. Another criticism that can be levelled at such tests is that they are rather selective. According to Shibitani (1977), quantifiers may be floated off a nominatively marked subject NP but not off a dative or genitive marked subject NP. If quantifier float was asserted as a valid test of subject, the argument could be used as evidence that the dative or genitive marked NP's are not in fact subjects[41]. Thus Shibatani's notion of subject is an operational one based on syntactic tests (with an appeal to agency) other tests may give different results. If Shibatani's tests prove not sound then his model collapses.

**REFLEXIVIZATION**

Reflexives must have a subject antecedent in European languages and this idea has been carried over to Japanese. In many European languages reflexive pronouns as a class often overlap with normal accusatives particularly in the second and third person - French and German are obvious examples or with emphatics, as in English and Gaelic, and so must be defined using logical rather than morphological criteria.

In Japanese, *Jibun,* which is said to be a reflexive, is often advanced as a test for subjecthood. It differs from reflexive pronouns in European languages in two important ways however[42]. It may be used as the subject itself - thus it is often used where English would use a first person pronoun in particular[43] and, if used reflexively, it requires a higher animate antecedent[44]. Japanese has considerable restrictions on the use of inanimates as subjects with transitive verbs.

**Kaze ga mado o kowashita.*
The wind broke the window.

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[40] ibid.
[41] Shibatani's observation is not in fact adequate cf. Ono (1992) Chapter 1 for a discussion of the question.
[42] *Jibun* seems to have occasioned considerable debate as to how it can be c-commanded by its antecedent. Fukui (1995) has an interesting theoretical discussion of the issues p.20-23 and the impact *jibun* has had on views of binding theory.
[43] Kuroda (1979) p.155, Inoue (1976) p.119.
[44] Kuno (1973) p.291.

If *jibun* can never apply to an inanimate NP such as *Doa* in an intransitive sentence such as:

*Doa ga aku.*
The door opened.

then it is a test of limited application and cannot be claimed that it is a definitive if applied to sentences such as:

*Me ga ookii.*
Its eyes are big.
*Nihongo ga dekimasu ka.*
Can you speak Japanese?

It has been claimed that *jibun* must have a subject as an antecedent[45]. This claim however requires qualification for in a complex sentence any subject or topic may be referred to[46].

*Satoo$_i$ wa Tanaka$_j$ ga Nakamura ni Hara $_k$ ga jibun$_{i,j,k}$ no ie de korosareta koto o hanashite shimatta no o satotta.*
Sato$_i$ realised that Tanaka$_j$ had already told Nakamura that Hara was killed in self's house.[47]

Backward reflexivization is also possible.

However, *jibun* itself can occur in non-object positions, that is it does not need to appear in an object NP, unlike conventional reflexives:

*Taroo ga jibun no heya de benkyoo sita.*
Taro studied in his room.

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[45] Kuno (1973) p.292 where he adds "in the ordinary style."The Subject-Antecedent condition seems to have first been claimed by Kuroda (1965).
[46] Kuroda (1965) p.155 first points out the much wider application of *jibun* reflexivization in Japanese than English.
[47] sentence from McCawley (1976) p.53.

and can have an antecedent in a preceding sentence which is not itself a subject[48]

*Dareka John no kawarini sono party ni itta n desu ka.*
*Iie, jibun ga kita n desu*[49].
Did someone come to the party instead of John?
No, he came himself.

As already stated, a topic rather than a subject may be referred to, although there may be an underlying subject in the main matrix clause:

*Takashi$_i$ wa Yoshiko ga jibun$_i$ o tazunetekita node ureshigatta.*
Takashi was happy because Yoshiko came to visit him.

or an oblique NP in the same sentence may be the antecedent:

*Taroo wa Takashi$_i$ kara itoshii Yoshiko ga jibun$_i$ o nikunde iru koto o kiita.*
Taroo heard from Takashi that his beloved Yoshiko hated him.[50]

or an object in the same sentence[51]:

*Yoshiko ga jibun $_i$ o mushishita koto ga Taroo $_i$ o yuuutsunishita.* [52]
That Yoshiko ignored him distressed Taroo.

or *jibun* may be a genitive qualifying an object referring to an object in the matrix clause.

*John ga jibun$_i$ no kuruma o kowashita koto ga Mary$_i$ o odorokaseta.*[53]

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[48] Tsujimura (1996) p 222 ff.
[49] One native speaker has pointed out that this sentence sounds unnatural and should be *Iie, John ga jibun de kita n desu.*. However presumably Tsujimura would accept this sentence.
[50] There is some disagreement as to the antecedent of *jibun* with some native speakers here.
[51] There are apparently additional complications here for speakers differ to the degree they allow various usages of *jibun*. Sakaguchi (1990) p.315 claims, "Some speakers do not allow *jibun* but do allow the pronoun in object control structures. For these speakers, the subject-orientation of *jibun* clashes with the object-control property of the predicate and neither of the properties wins."
[52] These last three sentences are taken from Iida and Sells (1988).
[53] Nemoto (1999) p.125.

The fact that John broke her car surprised Mary.

In causatives, *jibun* has ambiguous reference between object and subject, although it can be claimed that the object is an underlying subject in a clause it is derived from.

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Shibatani argues that what he considers a dative subject may be the antecedent of *jibun* and hence claims that this is evidence that such *ni*-marked NP's are therefore subjects. There are cases, however, where a *ni*-marked NP which is more clearly a dative also can be an antecedent for *jibun*.

*Sono keiken wa Mary$_i$ ni jibun$_i$ ga baka dearu koto oshieta.*
That experience taught Mary that she was a fool.[54]

This may suggest that it is a *ni*-marked NP itself that it is more likely to be one of the determining factors that allows the use of *jibun* rather than the NP's putative subjecthood. Or it may be that jibun can apply to any suitable NP if no ambiguity is involved[55].

Shibatani claims that in double nominative constructions the second nominative cannot be an antecedent of *Jibun*. Although this may be true, it may also be the case, as in some of the examples above, that *jibun* has as its role, reference to the most important topic in the sentence which must be animate whether that topic is marked or not. As was made clear above topic and subject do not always coincide.

Furthermore Iida and Sells (1988) provide examples that suggest that the grammaticality of *jibun* is controlled by additional factors such as verb aspect as well as any case considerations. Their conclusion is that discourse factors play an important role[56].

Thus *jibun* does not closely correspond to reflexives in European languages and because of its restriction to animate antecedents. It has a range of uses with differently marked NP's, it is

[54] Kuno (1972) ex.117a .
[55] See the reference below to the role of pragmatic factors operating with *jibun*.
[56] cf. also Inoue's remarks (1976) p.125 Inoue also produces several important arguments against the standard transformational cyclic analysis of *jibun*.

sensitive to various discourse factors and as its antecedent need not be a subject, it is not a robust test for distinguishing subjects from objects.

## HONORIFICATION

Japanese has a series of morphological changes to the verb known as honorification. In what is termed subject honorification, the verb complex becomes *o*-verb *ni naru*.

*Sensei wa hanasu.* → *Sensei wa o-hanashi ni naru.*
The teacher speaks → The teacher speaks

Here it is argued that honour is being paid to the subject, in this case identical to *sensei*, and that this test can be used to locate the subject. A similar role for animacy can be claimed in regard to non-subject honorification[57]. That is, the object of respect must be a person, usually of higher status.

[58]*Yamada sensei ga gakusei no hon o oyomini natte iru*
Prof. Yamada is reading the student's book.
**Furyoo shoonen ga Yamada sensei o onagurini natta.*
A juvenile delinquent hit Professor Yamada.

The fact too that the second example above is unacceptable - here as in Shibatani no serious attempt is being made to distinguish acceptability from grammaticality - shows that the controlling mechanism for honorification must be a pragmatic one rather than one of grammatical relationships. If all inanimate subjects cannot trigger subject honorification, it cannot be classed as a robust test for subject. Further, nominative marking is not necessary to trigger subject honorification.

*Yamada sensei ni gakusei no kimochi ga owakari ni naranai.*
Prof. Yamada doesn't understand the student's feelings.
*Yamada sensei ni shakkin ga takusan oari ni naru.*

[57] Ono (1992) p57f. discusses non-subject honorification.

Prof. Yamada has a lot of debt.

It can be of course be argued that in these cases *Yamada sensei* is the underlying subject, although the case is harder to make for the second sentence, where *shakkin* must be the selector of the verb *aru* rather than *iru* and so is more obviously the subject[59].

In fact it is easy to find additional examples where the honorification trigger is plainly a genitive:

*Anatagata no nenrei ga ochigai ni naru*
Your ages differ[60].

Kuno (1978) would claim that in this case *anatagata* is a subject of a matrix clause in which *nenrei ga ochigai* is embedded. Presumably then *ga/no* conversion applies to arrive at the sentence above. Such an interpretation seems implausible on several grounds. Firstly *Anatagata no nenrei ga ochigai ni naru* is derived from *Anatagata no nenrei ga ochigai.* This is clearly one clause. (It is actually debatable whether *ochigai ni naru* should be considered one or two verbal complexes anyway. A case can be made for it as being no more two verbs than *chigaimasu,* if a grammataicalisation of *ni naru* is asssumed.) In such a sentence *Anatagata* clearly stands in a genitive relationship with *nenrei.* Of course *Anatagata ga nenrei ga ochigai* is also possible but it will be argued below that this structure is different from the genitive one. Secondly the *no* in *ga/no* conversion is not the same as *no* of genitive marking, which always connects two nouns, while *ga/no* conversion involves a subject and its verb. *Ga/no* conversion as seen in relative clauses is in fact an historical relic, the last surviving trace of the former role of *no* as a marker of a subject with low agency in classical Japanese[61].

For now it will simply be pointed out that it is the ages that differ not necessarily the possessors of the ages. This argument will be pursued below.

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[58] The following four sentences are from Tsujimura (1996) p. 232 ff.
[59] It was of course exactly this sort of inconsistency that led Kuno (1973) p.87 to assert that there must be two different verbs *aru*. This will be discussed below.
[60] Martin (1987) p.338.
[61] Takeuchi (1999) p.173.

Shibatani (1990 : 300) has pointed out that, in double *ga* sentences, the trigger of honorification must be the first NP in the following.

*Kakehi sensei ga seitotachi ga osuki da.*
Prof. Kakehi likes the students.
*Gakuseitachi ga Kekehi sensei ga suki da.*
The students like Prof. Kakehi.
**Gakuseitachi ga Kekehi sensei ga osuki da.*
The students like Prof. Kakehi.

A similar claim is made for *jibun* reflexivization. The essence of this argument is that as subject honorification is only triggered by the subject, and, as the first NP must be the trigger, the first NP must then be the subject. However the validity of this argument hinges on the claim that subject honorification is only triggered by the subject and it has been suggested above that a genitive may trigger subject honorification as well. If this is the case, Shibatani's claim is merely that the trigger must be sentence initial. If, as one would assume on pragmatic grounds, *sensei* is the only possible trigger here and if subject honorification is associated with only subjects, it is also curious that preposing is not allowed, giving a unitary interpretation of all three sentences. Kuno of course considers *Kekehi sensei* in the last sentence an object[62]. For according to Kuno[63] non-subject elements can be freely preposed as long as this is not out of the embedded clause left of the matrix subject, hence accounting for the non-grammaticality of the following transposition.

*Yamada wa [Tanaka ga tensai de aru] koto o shiranakatta. ==>*
**Tanaka ga, Yamada wa[ tensai de aru] koto o shiranakatta.*
Yamada didn't know that Tanaka was a genius.

But that the transposition in singular clauses

[62] The reason such a transposition is not possible is of course obvious. Both arguments have the same marker and *suki* has double polarity in that it may simultaneously apply to both the experiencer and the experienced.
[63] Kuno (1976) p.26.

*Boku wa Mary ga daikirai da.* →
*Mary ga boku wa daikirai da.*
I really dislike Mary.

is perfectly acceptable.

In sum we are left with a series of tests that are asserted to be tests of subjecthood and hence indicators of grammatical relationships, but which are controlled by both semantic considerations - animacy - and pragmatic considerations rather than grammatical ones. In short they are not reliable tests of subjecthood at all and are of course at variance with the explicit case marking system of the language.

## TRADITIONAL TESTS FOR SUBJECT

Within the mainstream of grammatical analysis the notion of subject can be used to devise some simple tests of subjecthood, which might have quite wide application.

Firstly of course is the overt case marking which might be present. If this is clear it will often override other considerations. Thus in German, where only nominals of masculine gender have separate subject and object then the case marking will override word order cues[64].

[64] Thus *Die Katze sieht den Hund* "The cat sees the dog", may be reordered as *Den Hund sieht die Katze*, while *Die Katze sieht das Kaninchen*. "The cat sees the rabbit "may not. That is *Das Kaninchen sieht die Katze* will be interpreted as "The rabbit sees the cat"given the lack of inflectional clues that suggest otherwise. The case is never this simple of course as there are pragmatic considerations and contrastive stress:- *Das Kaninchen isst die Katze* "The rabbit eats the cat"may well be ambiguous depending on stress and context.

## WH-QUESTIONS

Traditionally a well-known test of subject, that seems to have considerable cross-linguistic validity, is to form a Wh-question with the appropriate nominative marker. Often its validity rests on the morphological case marking system where present, as in the Japanese example below.

| | |
|---|---|
| The man sees the woman. | *Otoko ga onna o miru.* |
| Who sees (whom)? | *Dare ga miru?* |
| The man * the woman. | *Otoko * onna* |

This test has obvious limitations, as both Japanese and English distinguish person from things. The dog came. *Who came? What came?

*Otoko ni onna no kimochi ga wakaranai.*
*Nani ga wakarani? Onna no kimochi*
*Dare ga wakarani? ???*

## CLEFTING

Clefting is another test that may highlight the subject. This Japanese equivalent of the well-known English construction was pointed early out by Kuroda (1965) and is to be found in his republished thesis[65] where he notes that

| | |
|---|---|
| *John ga ano hon o katta.* | John bought the book. |

can be clefted to

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ano hon o katta no wa John da.* | The one who bought the book is John. |

[65] Kuroda (1979) p.75.

## PREDICATE ENCAPSULATION

As was claimed above, the subject and predicate have a particularly close relationship. This relationship can be exploited in devising another useful test of subjecthood. Many languages allow the predicate to be shifted into the subject NP by processes that vary considerably cross-linguistically. In Japanese this is associated with relativisation. The equivalent process in English is rarer but possible.

| | |
|---|---|
| The book is red. | *Hon wa akai.* |
| The red book | *Akai hon* |
| The man sees the woman. | *Otoko ga onna o miru.* |
| The (woman) seeing man | *(Onna o) miru otoko* |

These two tests have the advantage of wider applicability than the range of tests described in the preceding section that have been deployed by Shibatani, in particular they are suitable in intransitive sentences regardless of animacy.