Transitive Nominals in Japanese and the Syntax of Predication

SHIN FUKUDA
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

1 Introduction

Traditional feature-based approaches divide lexical categories into V and P (e.g. [-N]), and N and A (e.g. [+N]) (e.g. Chomsky 1970; Jackendoff 1977), and a key observation behind this division is that only V and P license accusative objects. Transitive Nominals (TNs), nouns that license accusative objects, pose a serious challenge to this view. The empirical goal of this study is to establish that (i) Japanese has three types of genuine TNs, Verbal Nouns (VNs), Deverbal Nouns (DNs), and Psych Adjectival Nouns (PANs), and (ii) while these TNs share the ability to license accusative objects, they also differ, as only PANs can mark their object with either accusative or nominative case, and only PANs are restricted to being predicative while VNs and DNs can be referential and modificational. The analytical goal of this study is to propose a unified analysis of the three types of TNs under the
hypothesis that accusative case is provided by Voice (e.g. Kratzer 1994, 1996; Pylkkänen 2008; Harley 2009, 2013; Legate 2014). I argue that the similarities and differences among the three types of TNs derive from how they interact with Voice, in terms of (i) whether they are combined with Voice obligatorily or optionally, and (ii) whether the Voice that they combine with has accusative case or not. Thus, the proposed analysis argues that Voice is an acategorial predicate-making head (contra Baker 2003; Mikkelsen 2005; Roy 2013) that provides structural case.

2 Three Types of Transitive Nouns in Japanese

This section introduces the three types of TNs – Verbal Nouns (VNs), Deverbal Nouns (DNs), and Psych Adjectival Nouns (PANs) – and critically examines their previous analyses.

2.1 Verbal Nouns (VNs) and Deverbal Nouns (DNs)

VNs are nouns that can be followed, as in (1), by the light verb suru ‘do’ to form a light verb construction (e.g. Martin 1975; Kageyama 1982, 1990, 1996; Miyagawa 1987; Grimshaw & Mester 1988; Miyamoto 2000).

(1) a. Taro-wa Ainugo-o kenkyuu shi-ta.  
   ‘Taro studied the Ainu language.’
   b. Taro-wa igirisu-o ryokoo shi-ta.
   ‘Taro traveled in the UK.’

DNs are nouns derived from verbs. DNs involve the nominalizing suffix -i if the verb root is consonant-ending, as in (2), while no overt suffix is involved if the verb root is vowel-ending, as in (3).

(2) a. [N [v torikom]-i] ‘taking in’  
    b. [N [v uketor]-i] ‘receipt’
(3) a. [N [v kangae]-Ø] ‘thought’  
    b. [N [v matome]-Ø] ‘summary’

Both VNs and DNs can appear in a verbless clause with an accusative object, as in (4) and (5) (e.g. Kageyama 1982; Iida 1987; Tsujimura 1992).

   ‘John came to Japan after obtaining his degree.’
   ‘While John was studying Japanese, Mary came to see him.’
Iida (1987) and Tsujimura (1992) argue that VNs/DNs themselves do not have the ability to accusative-mark their objects, which instead comes from a temporal suffix. Iida claims that DNs can license arguments with verbal case when they occur with a lexical item that has an aspectual feature (93). Tsujimura argues that VNs can license accusative objects only when they are suffixed by a morpheme that indicates some temporal/aspectual property (478–9). These studies cite unacceptable examples to support their claims:

J-NOM Ainu-ACC research-TOP famous COP.NPST
('That John is researching Ainu language is famous.' (Iida 1987: 104; (28))

J-NOM Japanese-ACC study
('John studies Japanese.') (Tsujimura 1992: 479; (5a))

Under this temporal suffix analysis, (6a) is unacceptable because the VN kenkyuu ‘research’ is followed by the topic marker -wa, not a temporal suffix, and (6b) is out because nothing follows the VN, benkyoo ‘study’.

Although influential, the temporal suffix analysis suffers from theoretical and empirical problems. First, it is not clear why temporal suffixes should provide VNs/DNs with the ability to accusative-mark their objects. Under normal circumstances, the presence of a temporal suffix does not change a predicate’s ability to license its object with accusative case. Thus, a temporal suffix does not make intransitive DNs and VNs transitive:

patient-NOM (strange.death-ACC) death do-PST
'The patient {died/*died a strange death}.'

patient-NOM (strange.death-ACC) death-after autopsy-NOM be-PST
'There was an autopsy after the patient died/*died a strange death.'
Second, as Kageyama (1996) pointed out, temporal suffixes do not have to be suffixed to VNs/DNs for accusative objects to be licensed. In (8), the DN torikomi ‘taking in’ and the VN intai ‘retirement’ are directly suffixed by the genitive marker -no, not the temporal suffixes.

(8) a. Sentakumono-o torikomi-no sai-ni-mo ii-desu-yo-ne.
   laundry-ACC take.in-GEN when-at-also good-COP.NPST-SFP-SFP
   ‘It is convenient when taking in your laundry.’

   b. Erekuutoon kyooshi-o intai-no nochi,
   electronic.organ teacher-ACC retire-GEN after
   shippitsu katsudo-ni hai-ru.
   writing activity-to enter-NPST
   ‘After retiring as an electronic organ teacher, (she) started writing.’

In fact, VNs/DNs can license an accusative object in a copular sentence with no temporal suffix (9a–b), unlike regular nouns like tonari ‘adjacent’ (9c).

(9) a. N. R., konshun-de Dooto Daigaku-o sotsugyou da
   N. R. this-spring-in Dooto Univ.-ACC graduate COP.NPST
   ‘N. R. is graduating from Dooto University this spring.’

   b. Saiote-no meekaa-no shoohin-o toriatsukai desu.
   largest-GEN maker-GEN merchandise-ACC dealing COP.NPST
   ‘(We) carry merchandise of the largest brand.’

   c. Sono otokonoko-wa ano onnanko-no/*o tonari datta.
   that boy-TOP that girl-GEN/*ACC adjacent COP.PST
   ‘That boy was next to that girl.’

Copular sentences across languages have been analyzed as lacking accusative case (e.g. Rothstein 2001; Mikkelsen 2005); thus, examples such as those in (9a–b) suggest that DNs/VNs can license accusative case themselves.1

2.2 Psych Adjectival Nouns (PANs)
The nouns suki ‘like’ and kirai ‘dislike’ are DNs (10).

(10) a. [N [v suk]-i] ‘like’

   b. [N [v kirai]-w]-i] ‘dislike’

But unlike other DNs and VNs, which are followed by the genitive -no in a prenominal position (11a), these two require the adnominal copula -na (11b).

(11) a. Kotoshi [sotsugyou/intai]-no/*na gakusee-wa dare desu-ka?
   this.year [graduate/retire]-GEN/COP student-TOP who COP.NPST-Q
   ‘Who is the student graduating/retiring this year?’

---

1 Kageyama (1990, 1996) also argue that VN/DN themselves can accusative-mark their objects.
For this reason and others, nouns like *suki* ‘like’ and *kirai* ‘dislike’ are categorized differently, as Adjectival Nouns (ANs; Martin 1975). Among ANs, *suki* ‘like’ and *kirai* ‘dislike’ stand out as they can mark their object with either nominative or accusative case in a copular sentence:

(12) Sono otokonoko-wa ano onnankō ga/kō *sukikirai* datta.
That boy-TOP that girl-NOM/ACC like/dislike COP.PST

‘That boy liked/disliked that girl.’

Let us call these two ANs Psych Adjectival Nouns (PANs). To my best knowledge, the only prior proposal of a concrete analysis for PANs with accusative objects is Sugioka’s (1984). Sugioka argues that the suffix -i in PANs can be either a nominalizer affixed to a verb root (13a) or a phrasal suffix attached to a VP (13b).

(13) a. \[n [v sukikirai(w)]-i\]  
(13) b. \[vp(NP-o) sukikirai(w)]-i\]

In (13b), *suk/-kiraw* remain verbs and can license accusative objects. Sugioka further observes that a PAN prefixed with *dai* ‘big’, as in (14), cannot license an accusative object.

(14) Boku-wa Hanako-ga/??o *dai*-suki da.
I-TOP H-NOM/ACC big-like COP.PST

‘I like Hanako (a lot).’ (Sugioka 1984: 163; (28a–b))

According to Sugioka, this contrast obtains because *dai* is a nominal suffix and therefore *suki* in (14) is a noun. Accordingly, the acceptability of sentences like (14) with an accusative object should be significantly lower than that of similar sentences with a nominative-marked object, but only if the prefix *dai* is involved. Fukuda (2019) tested this prediction with acceptability judgment tasks, but found no significant interaction between the presence/absence of *dai* and the two object cases with either *suki* ‘like’ or *kirai* ‘dislike’. Therefore, I conclude that *suki* ‘like’, *kirai* ‘dislike’, and their variants with *dai* are also TNs.

2.3 Similarities and Differences among the Three Types of TNs

While the three types of TNs share the ability to accusative-mark their objects, there are important differences between VNs/DNs on one hand and PANs on the other. First, while the objects of PANs can be marked accusative
or nominative in copular sentences (12), the objects of VNs/DNs can only be marked as one or the other (15).

(15) a. Taro-wa yooroppa-ol/*ga hoomon da.
   T-TOP Europe-ACC/NOM visit COP.NPST
   ‘Taro will visit Europe.’
   b. Koko-de renta-kaa-o/*ga uketori des-u.
      here-at rent-a-car-ACC/*NOM receipt COP.POL.NPST
      ‘(You) receive a rent-a-car.’
   c. Taro-wa Hanako-ga/*o shimpai da.
      T-TOP H-NOM/*ACC worry COP.NPST
      ‘Taro is worried about Hanako.’

In these copular sentences, the objects of the VN hoomon ‘visit’ and the DN uketori ‘receipt’ must be accusative-marked (15a–b), while the object of the VN shimpai ‘worry’ must be nominative-marked (15c). Second, VNs/DNs can be referential (16a) and modificational (16b) in addition to being predicative, whereas PANs can only be predicative; they cannot be referential (17a) or modificational (17b).

(16) a. Taro-no sotsugyoo-ga chika-i.
      T-GEN graduation-NOM close-NPST
      ‘Taro’s graduation is near.’
   b. Sotsugyoo-no o-iwai-ga todosi-ta.
      graduation-GEN HON-gift-NOM arrive-PST
      ‘A graduation gift arrived.’

      T-GEN like/dislike-NOM understand-NPST
      (‘I know what Taro likes/dislikes.’)
   b. *Suki/kirai-no shooko-ga ar-u.
      like/dislike-GEN proof-NOM exist-PST
      (‘There is proof that (someone) likes/dislikes (something).’)

In what follows, I propose an analysis of the three types of TNs that accounts for these similarities and differences.

3 Proposal

Under the current assumptions of the Minimalist Program, a semifunctional head Voice (Kratzer 1994, 1996) or v (Chomsky 1995) provides accusative case, and previous studies argue or assume that Voice (or v) occurs only in a verbal predication (Baker 2003; Mikkelsen 2005; Roy 2013). I argue that the empirical observations of Japanese TNs discussed above motivate a different analysis of Voice, which consists of three main claims. First, the three types of Japanese TNs can be embedded under Voice. Second, the Voice can be of at least two types, one that provides accusative case (Voice_{ACC}) and another
that does not provide structural case (Voice\(_{[\emptyset]}\)). Third, whether and which type of Voice a root can combine with depends on its lexical semantics.

### 3.1 PANs

Under the proposed analysis, sentences with a PAN always involve Voice (Nishiyama 1999).\(^2\) The object of a PAN bears accusative case when it is embedded under Voice\([\text{ACC}]\) (18a). The object is licensed with nominative case from the finite T (e.g. Takezawa 1987) when it is embedded under Voice\(_{[\emptyset]}\) (18b). In either configuration, VoiceP is embedded under the copula verb *da*, which I assume to be an unaccusative/raising verb.

\[(18)\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a.} & & \text{TP} & \rightarrow & \text{VP} & \rightarrow & \text{T} \\
& & \text{VoiceP} & \rightarrow & \text{V} & \rightarrow & \text{da} \\
& & \text{NP} & \rightarrow & \text{Voice} & \rightarrow & \text{[ACC]} \\
& & \text{Taro} & \rightarrow & \text{NP} & \rightarrow & \text{PAN} \\
& & \text{like/dislike} & \rightarrow & \text{Hanako}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b.} & & \text{TP} & \rightarrow & \text{VP} & \rightarrow & \text{T} \\
& & \text{Voice} & \rightarrow & \text{V} & \rightarrow & \text{da} \\
& & \text{NP} & \rightarrow & \text{Voice} & \rightarrow & \text{[\emptyset]} \\
& & \text{Taro} & \rightarrow & \text{NP} & \rightarrow & \text{PAN} \\
& & \text{like/dislike} & \rightarrow & \text{Hanako}
\end{align*}
\]

The proposed analysis accounts for the observation that the case on objects of PANs alternates between accusative and nominative. It also accounts for the observation that PANs are always predicative; they must be, because PANs are always combined with Voice. An independent piece of evidence for this analysis of the predicative nature of PANs is a novel observation that PANs can be referential and modificational when their object is incorporated:

\[(19)\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a.} & & \text{Taro-no sake-zuki-wa mondai da.} \\
& & \text{T-GEN sake-like-TOP problem COP.NPST} \\
& & \text{‘Taro’s tendency to drink is a problem.’} \\
\text{b.} & & \text{Taro-wa [sake-zuki-no dooryoo]-to dekake-ta.} \\
& & \text{T-TOP [sake-like-GEN colleague]-with go.out.PST} \\
& & \text{‘Taro went out with a colleague who likes to drink.’}
\end{align*}
\]

In (19), the object of *suki* ‘like’, *sake* ‘sake’, has been incorporated to form *sake-zuki* ‘sake lover’, and the resulting complex word can be referential.

---

\(^2\) Nishiyama (1999) argues that both Adjectives and Adjectival Nouns involve Pred (Bowers 1993), which establishes predication but does not license structural case.
(19a) or modificational (19b). I argue that this is because the incorporation changes the semantics of PANs from predicative ($e < e, t >$) to property-denoting ($e, t >$), making them compatible with being referential or modificational (e.g. Heim & Kratzer 1998).

### 3.2 VNs and DNs

Unlike with PANs, the object case does not alternate with VNs and DNs (15). The majority of VNs/DNs mark their objects with accusative case whether in ‘verbal’ constructions or copular sentences (20).

(20) a. Taro-wa youroppa-o/*ga hoomon sur-u/da.
   T-TOP Europe-ACC/NOM visit do-NPST/COP.NPST
   ‘Taro will visit Europe.’

b. Koko-de renta-kaa-o/*ga uketot-ta/uketori dat-ta.
   here-at rent-a-car-ACC/NOM receive-PST/receipt COP-PST
   ‘(I) received a rent-a-car here.’

However, a small number of VNs must mark their object with nominative case when they are in copular sentences ((21a) and (22a)), while the same object is marked with either accusative case (21b) or dative case (22b) in a light verb construction.

(21) a. Taro-wa Hanako-ga/*o shimpai da.
   T-TOP H-NOM/ACC worry COP.NPST
   ‘Taro is worried about Hanako.’

b. Taro-wa Hanako-o/*ga shimpai shi-ta.
   T-TOP H-ACC/NOM worry do-PST
   ‘Taro worried about Hanako.’

(22) a. Taro-wa Hanako-ga/*ni meewaku da.
   T-TOP H-NOM/DAT bothersome COP.NPST
   ‘Taro finds Hanako bothersome.’

b. Taro-wa Hanako-ni/*ga meewaku shi-ta.
   T-TOP H-DAT/NOM bothersome do-PST
   ‘Taro found Hanako bothersome.’

These contrasts suggest that the light verb (and its co-occurring Voice) is responsible for the object case in the light verb construction, while the object case differs in copular sentences depending on the ability of VNs and DNs themselves to case-license their objects. Thus, the VNs and DNs in (20) provide accusative case to the objects, while the VNs in (21) and (22) cannot license object case. These observations suggest that the first type of VN/DN is embedded under Voice$_{[ACC]}$ (23a), while the second type of VN is embedded under Voice$_{[Ø]}$ (23b).
These data motivate the generalization that Voice[$\emptyset$] combines with roots that denote a nonevent situation, such as suki ‘like’ and kirai ‘dislike’ with PANs and shimpai ‘worry’ and meewaku ‘bothersome’ with VNs (24). In fact, the correlation between stativity and nominative objects is a longstanding generalization in Japanese (e.g. Kuno 1973; Saito 1982; Takezawa 1987).

(24) Only a noneventive root may be embedded under Voice[$\emptyset$].

Another difference between PANs and VNs/DNs is that VNs/DNs can freely be referential or modificational (16), while PANs require object incorporation to be referential or modificational (19). I argue that this is because VNs/DNs can be simple NPs without Voice, as in (25a–b).

(25) a. Taro-no sotsugyoo b. sotsugyo-no o-iwai
    T-GEN graduation graduation-GEN HON-gift

The morphological forms of their modifiers offer an independent piece of evidence for the proposed analysis of VNs/DNs. A modifier like medeta ‘happy’ must be adjectival when the VN is referential (26a) or modificational (26b), but it must be adverbial when the VN is predicative (26c).

(26) a. Taro-no {medeta-i/*ku} sotsugyoo-ga chika-i.
    T-GEN {happy-ADV} graduation-NOM close-NPST
    ‘Taro’s happy graduation is near.’
b. \{medeta-ku/*i\} sotsugyou-no o-iwai-ga todoi-ta.  
\{happy-ADV\} graduation-GEN HON-gift-NOM arrive-PST  
‘A happy graduation gift arrived.’

c. Taro-wa daigaku-o \{medeta-ku/*i\} sotsugyou da.  
T-TOP college-ACC \{happy-ADV/*i\} graduation COP.NPST  
‘Taro is happily graduating university.’

Under the proposed analysis, Voice is present only in (26c), requiring adverbial modification by the modifier.

4 Concluding Remarks

I have argued that Japanese has three types of Transitive Nominals, Verbal Nouns, Deverbal Nouns, and Psych Adjectival Nouns, all of which can be embedded under Voice. I have also argued that there are at least two types of Voice, one that assigns accusative case (\text{Voice}_{\text{ACC}}) and another that does not assign case (\text{Voice}_{\text{Ø}}), and that whether and which Voice individual TNs are embedded under is primarily determined by their lexical semantics (whether they denote an event or not). While PANs must be embedded under Voice, VNs/DNs are only optionally so, and individual VNs/DNs differ in terms of which Voice they can be embedded under. In the emerging picture of the syntax of predication, Voice is an acategorial ‘predicate maker’, as Bowers’s (1993) Pred was intended to be, while also functioning as a structural case licensor, as Kratzer (1994, 1996) originally proposed. Thus, the ability to accusative-mark objects is not limited to verbal projections, as previously argued or assumed (Baker 2003; Mikkelsen 2005; Roy 2013). Future studies should address why the distribution of Voice is restricted with respect to nonverbal categories and what features of nonverbal categories make them (in)compatible with Voice.

References


Harley, H. 2009. The morphology of nominalization and the syntax of vP.