

Syntax of Proper Names in Japanese*

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1 Introduction

- While proper nouns in natural languages are commonly assumed to be primitive entities representing specific constants/individuals, the recent literature (e.g., Matushansky, 2008; Ghomeshi and Massam, 2009; Izumi, 2012, 2016) argues extensively that they are underlying predicative, and that their referential status is achieved compositionally.
- This talk provides further evidence from Japanese that supports the predicate analysis of proper nouns.
- But I also show that proper nouns do not form a uniform class, as Japanese exhibits a stark asymmetry between given names and family names.

Roadmap

Section 2 provides the data.

Section 3 reviews a feature-based account of proper nouns by Ghomeshi and Massam (2009).

Section 4 applies Ghomeshi and Massam's (2009) analysis to the Japanese data.

Section 5 concludes.

2 The data

The baseline: ProperN-*no* N

- (1) a. `tanaka-no ojisan`
`tanaka-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man`
'Tanaka's uncle / Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man'

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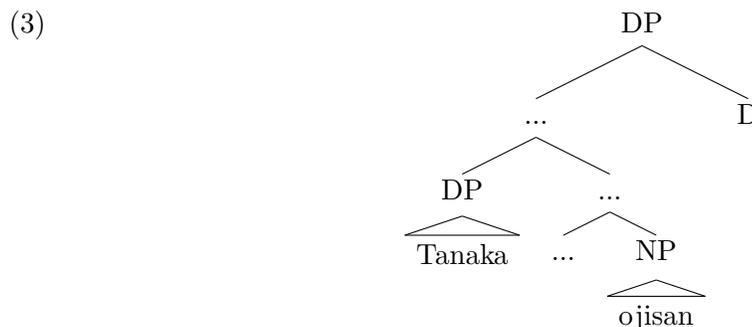
- b. zenigata-no tottsan
 Zenigata-GEN pop/old.fart
 ‘Zenigata, the Old Fart’

In argument positions:

- (2) a. In subject position
 [tanaka-no ojisan]-ga kita.
 tanaka-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man -NOM came
 ‘Tanaka’s uncle came. / Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man, came.’
- b. In object position
 watashi-wa kinoo [tanaka-no ojisan]-o mikaketa.
 I-TOP yesterday tanaka-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man -ACC saw
 ‘I saw Tanaka’s uncle yesterday. / I saw Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man, yesterday.’
- c. In P-object position
 Taroo-ga [tanaka-no ojisan]-to isshoni aruiteiru.
 Taroo-NOM tanaka-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man with together walking
 ‘Taroo is walking together with Tanaka’s uncle. / Taroo is walking together with Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man.’

Ambiguity and environment

- The ambiguity partially results from the lexical polysemy of the noun *ojisan* which means either ‘uncle’ or ‘middle-aged man’.
- But we need to note the structural distinction:
 - **Possessive Reading (PR)**: referring to two individuals; the person whose name is Tanaka, and his/her uncle.
 - * Proper names are underlyingly predicates, and that D is the the culmination of the nominal architecture and the source of referentiality.
 - * Then, we can assume that the DP referring to Tanaka is embedded in another DP.¹



¹In this work, I assume that the DP projection exists in Japanese only for the sake of convenience. See, however, Bošković (2008) for arguments against DP in determiner-less languages like Japanese. The work here can be readily translated to a D-less theory of the nominal domain in Japanese.

– **Quotative Reading (QR)**: referring to only one individual.

* Use of a family name without an honorific suffix *-san* usually displays a sense of contempt.
However, this reading does not sound contemptuous.

- The QR can be observed in a very restricted environment.
- Only a subset of “kinship” term can appear in the N2 position and yield the QR.

- (4) tanaka-no sensei/isha/asisutanto
tanaka-GEN teacher/doctor/assistant
✓PR: ‘Tanaka’s teacher/doctor/assistant’
*QR: ‘Tanaka, who is a teacher/doctor/assistant’
- (5) tanaka-no otouto/imouto/sofu/sobo/oji/oba
tanaka-GEN younger.brother/younger.sister/grandfather/grandmother/uncle/aunt
✓PR: ‘Tanaka’s younger.brother/younger.sister/grandfather/grandmother/uncle/aunt’
*QR: ‘Tanaka, who is a younger.brother/younger.sister/grandfather/grandmother/uncle/aunt’
- (6) Sample of the nouns that allow QR:²
- | | | | |
|------------------|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>ojisan</i> | ‘uncle, middle-aged man’ | <i>obasan</i> | ‘aunt, middle-aged woman’ |
| <i>ojiisan</i> | ‘grandfather, elderly man’ | <i>obaasan</i> | ‘grandmother, elderly woman’ |
| <i>danna</i> | ‘husband, master, patron’ | <i>okusan</i> | ‘wife, lady, mistress’ |
| <i>obocchan</i> | ‘son, ingenuous/wealthy boy’ | <i>ojoosan</i> | ‘daughter, young lady’ |
| <i>anisan</i> | ‘older brother, senior’ | <i>anesan</i> | ‘older sister, senior’ |
| <i>(o)niisan</i> | ‘older brother, senior’ | <i>(o)neesan</i> | ‘older sister, senior’ |
| <i>goinkyō</i> | ‘retired master’ | | |

- The QR becomes unavailable when the honorific suffix *-san* or a title, such as *-sensei* ‘Teacher’ or *-kyōōju* ‘Professor’, are attached to the proper name.

- (7) a. tanaka-**san**-no ojisan
Tanaka-HON-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man
✓PR: ‘Mr./Ms. Tanaka’s uncle’
*QR: ‘Mr. Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man’
- b. tanaka-**kyōōju**-no ojisan
Tanaka-professor-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man
✓PR: ‘Prof. Tanaka’s uncle’
*QR: ‘Prof. Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man’

²This list is not exhaustive. Interestingly, as far as I understand, these kinship terms can be used in a vocative expression, while most of the kinship terms that do not permit the QR seem not to permit to appear in a vocative expression.

- i Ooi! ojisan!
Hey! middle.aged.man/uncle
‘Hey, Uncle/Mister!’
- ii ?? Ooi! ototo!
Hey! younger.brother
‘Hey, Brother!’

- While family names induce the PR/QR ambiguity, native Japanese first names fail to bring about the QR:

- (8) a. Taroo-no ojisan
Taroo-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man
✓PR: ‘Taroo’s uncle’ *QR: ‘Taroo, who is a middle-aged man’
- b. Hanae-no obaasan
Hanae-GEN grandmother/elderly.woman
✓PR: ‘Hanae’s grandmother’ *QR: ‘Hanae, who is an elderly woman’
- cf. Yamada-no obaasan
Yamada-GEN grandmother/elderly.woman
✓PR: ‘Yamada’s grandmother’ ✓QR: ‘Yamada, who is an elderly woman’

- The PR and QR result from different structures.

- (9) a. okanemochino tanaka-no ojisan
rich Tanaka-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man
✓PR: ‘Tanaka’s rich uncle’
✓QR: ‘Tanaka, who is middle-aged, who is rich’
- b. tanaka-no okanemochino ojisan
Tanaka-GEN rich uncle/middle.aged.man
✓PR: ‘Tanaka’s rich uncle’
*QR: ‘Tanaka, who is middle-aged, who is rich’

- The construction with QR retains the “rigid designator”-like status of proper nouns.

- (10) a. hanako-wa [tanaka-no ojisan-to] kekkon shitagatteiru.
Hanako-TOP Tanaka-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man-with marry want.to.do
✓QR with *de re*: ‘Hanako wants to marry Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man.’
*QR with *de dicto*: ‘Hanako wants to marry someone or other whose name is Tanaka and who is a middle-aged man.’
✓PR with *de re*: ‘Hanako wants to marry Tanaka’s uncle.’
✓PR with *de dicto*: ‘Hanako wants to marry someone or other who is an uncle of Tanaka’s.’
- b. hanako-wa [tanaka-to] kekkon shitagatteiru.
Hanako-TOP Tanaka-with marry want.to.do
✓‘Hanako wants to marry Tanaka.’
*‘Hanako wants to marry someone or other whose name is Tanaka.’

- (11) Summary: Where PropN-*no* N2 ...

| | PR | QR |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|----|
| N2 = “ambiguous kinship term” AND PropN = family name: | ✓ | ✓ |
| N2 ≠ ambiguous kinship term: | ✓ | * |
| PropN is suffixed: | ✓ | * |
| PropN is a first name: | ✓ | * |
| Rigid designator status: | * | ✓ |

An excursus: apparent counterexamples

- The following examples seem to go against what I presented so far:

- (12) a. [oda-no baka]-ga kocchi-ni kita.
Oda-GEN idiot -NOM this.way-to came
'Idiot Oda came this way.'
- b. [oda-kyooju-no hentai]-ga mata kocchi-o miteru.
Oda-professor-GEN pervert -NOM again this.way-ACC is.looking.at
'Pervert Prof. Oda is looking at us.'
- c. [kenji-no kusottare]-ni-wa koreijoo kakawaru-na.
kenji-GEN shit.splatter -DAT-NOM any.more get.involved-NEG.IMP
'Don't get involved in Bastard Kenji any more.'

- The examples in (12) go against our findings:
 - The N2s are not “kinship” terms.
 - Given names or suffixed last names may appear in the proper name slot in (12).
- Examples in (12) are distinct from what we saw in (1) and (2).
 - N2s (12) have to be derogatory. If the N2 is not obviously derogatory, it will be negatively reinterpreted, as in (13).
 - The examples in (1) and (2) do not invoke any derogatory sense.
- Lastly, the derogatory expressions can be used exclamatorily, while the construction in (1) cannot:
(14)

- (13) [kenji-no sensei-sama]-ga mata nanika hennna koto-o itteru.
kenji-GEN teacher-HON -NOM again some strange thing-ACC is.saying
'The Great Teacher Kenji is saying something strange again.'
- (14) a. kenji-no kusottare!
kenji-GEN shit.splatter
'Kenji bastard!/What a bastard of Kenji!' (cf. *You bastard!*)
- b. ?? tanaka-no ojisan!
tanaka-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man

3 Ghomeshi and Massam (2009): A feature-based analysis

Ghomeshi and Massam (2009) (G&M) take the following stance:

- Proper names are syntactically complex, consisting of both N and D (Longobardi, 1994).
- Common nouns and proper names are distinct at N-level.
 - They are demarcated by the features [NAME] and [COMMON].

- Nouns with [NAME] “pick out sets of individuals bearing the same *name*”
- Nouns with [COMMON] “pick out sets of individuals sharing the same properties [...] other than having the same name.” (p. 74)
- Common nouns and proper names are also distinct at D-level.
- The phonologically null D (in English) that takes a proper name is a reflex of a specific feature set, assuming post-syntactic Vocabulary Insertion *à la* Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz, 1994).
 - The null determiner carries a special feature [PROPER] and specified for [SINGULAR].
 - Otherwise, it shares semantic properties with the definite D *the*.
 - Motivation: cross-linguistic considerations: (16) and (17)

- (15) a. $\langle \emptyset \Leftrightarrow [\text{PROPER}, \text{SINGULAR}, \text{DEFINITE}] \rangle$
 b. $\langle \textit{the} \Leftrightarrow [\text{DEFINITE}] \rangle$

G&M:(11)

- (16) Niuean

G&M:(2a,b)

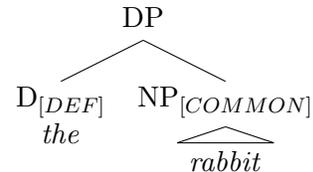
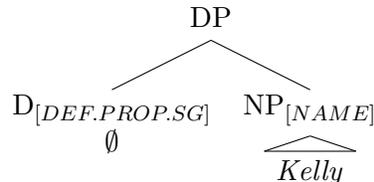
- a. Ne tohitohi a **Sione**.
 PST writing ABS.P Sione
 ‘Sione was writing.’
- b. Kua egaega e **kau kauvehe**.
 PERF rosy ABS.C PL cheek
 ‘The cheeks are rosy.’

- (17) Catalan

G&M:(4–6)

| | Masculine | Feminine |
|--------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Common | <i>el noi</i> ‘the boy’ | <i>la dona</i> ‘the girl’ |
| Proper | <i>En Joan</i> ‘John’ | <i>La Maria</i> ‘Mary’ |

- (18) a. DP b. DP



4 The analysis

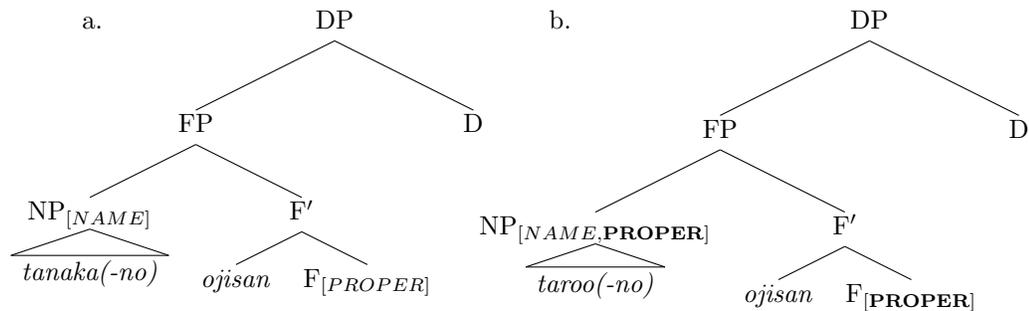
The claim: Proper names in Japanese are “somewhat” compositional, but not all proper names have the same status.

The distinction needs to be syntactically expressed in order to capture the descriptive findings discussed in the earlier section.

- Family name nouns in Japanese are associated with [NAME].

- [PROPER] is picked up syntactically/post-lexically.
- Given name nouns in Japanese are associated with both [NAME] and [PROPER].
- I assume that the location of [PROPER] is language-dependent.
 - In Japanese, it can appear in a nominal functional projection F located between N and D.
 - This accounts for the unavailability of the QR with given names:

(19) Taroo-no ojisan
 Taroo-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man
 ✓PR: ‘Taroo’s uncle’
 *QR: ‘Taroo, who is a middle-aged man’

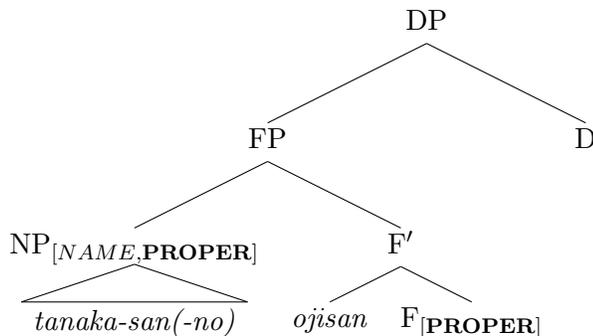


- Since given names lexically come with [PROPER], the structure will carry two [PROPER] features.

* Assuming that [PROPER] is linked to the referentiality of proper names, and no more than one [PROPER] can exist within an extended nominal projection, the QR with a given name is unavailable.

- The unavailability of the QR with family names with a title or the honorific suffix *-san* can be accounted for in the same way:

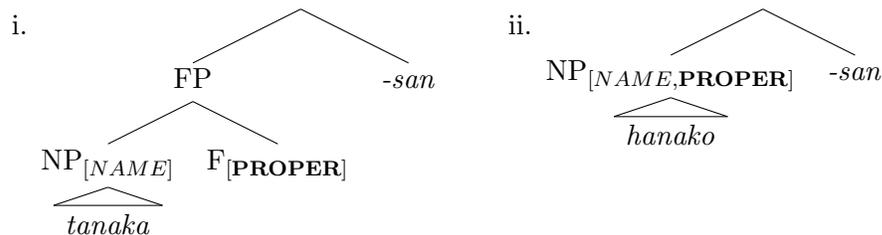
(20) tanaka-**san**-no ojisan
 Tanaka-HON-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man
 ✓PR: ‘Mr./Ms. Tanaka’s uncle’ *QR: ‘Mr. Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man’



- I argue that the honorific suffix *-san* or the title suffixes like *-sensei* ‘teacher’ (as in *tanaka-sensei*) target a nominal expression with [PROPER].
- Many of the suffixes can attach to given names.

(21) *Tanaka* = family name, *Hanako* = given name

- a. *tanaka-san* ‘Mr./Ms. Tanaka’, *tanaka-sensei* ‘Teacher Tanaka’, *tanaka-shichoo* ‘Mayor Tanaka’
- b. *hanako-san* ‘Ms. Hanako’, *hanako-sensei* ‘Teacher Hanako’, *hanako-shichoo* ‘Mayor Hanako’



- Notice that most of the N2s that allow QR are morphologically complex, suffixed with some sort of “affective” marker signalling the speaker’s attitude to the referent.

- *danna* ‘husband, master, patron’ and *goinkyō* ‘retired master’ are exceptions.³

(22) a. Possible N2s that allows QR:

| | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>ojisān</i> | ‘uncle, middle-aged man’ | <i>obasan</i> | ‘aunt, middle-aged woman’ |
| <i>ojiisan</i> | ‘grandfather, elderly man’ | <i>obaasan</i> | ‘grandmother, elderly woman’ |
| <i>danna</i> | ‘husband, master, patron’ | <i>okusan</i> | ‘wife, lady, mistress’ |
| <i>obocchan</i> | ‘son, ingenuous/wealthy boy’ | <i>ojoosan</i> | ‘daughter, young lady’ |
| <i>anisan</i> | ‘older brother, male senior person’ | <i>anesan</i> | ‘older sister, female senior person’ |
| <i>(o)niisan</i> | ‘older brother, male senior person’ | <i>(o)neesan</i> | ‘older sister, female senior person’ |
| <i>goinkyō</i> | ‘retired master’ | | |

b. *oji* ‘uncle’

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <i>oji-san</i> | <i>oji-chan</i> | <i>oji-sama</i> |
| -HON | -DEMUNITIVE | -POLITE |

c. *(o)baa-* ‘grandmother’

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| <i>obaa-san</i> | <i>obaa-chan</i> | <i>obaa-sama</i> |
| -HON | -DEMUNITIVE | -POLITE |

(23) *tanaka*-{*chan/sama*}-*no* *ojisān*
tanaka-{DEMUNITIVE/POLITE}-GEN *uncle/middle.aged.man*
 ✓PR: ‘Mr./Ms. Tanaka’s uncle’
 *QR: ‘Mr./Ms. Tanaka’s uncle’

(24) *tanaka-no* { *oji-chan* / *oji-sama* }
tanaka-GEN -DEMUNITIVE / -POLITE
 ‘Tanaka, who is a middle-aged man’

³Some speakers find *danna* ‘husband, master, patron’ is unacceptable as an N2. Also, the grammaticality with *goinkyō* ‘retired master’ improves when it is suffixed with *-san* for some speakers.

- I propose that the “kinship” terms that allow the QR behave like the affective suffixes, in that they target F.
 - I assume that these kinship terms are different from the suffixes in that these terms are independent words, and they can directly target F.
 - This explains why we cannot add an additional affective affix to the construction in question.

(25) * [tanaka-no ojisan] -san
 tanaka-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man -HON

- But why are they kinship terms?
 - There is no good theoretical answer for this question. However, kinship terms are cross-linguistically more likely to be treated like proper nouns.
 - * In Niuean kinship terms appear with proper case marking (G&M:(10)).
 - * Longobardi (1994: fn. 19) notes that a subset of kinship names act like proper names, in that they can undergo N-to-D movement.
- Finally, I claim that the “family name vs. given name” distinction is mildly lexical by showing that there are exceptions:
 - Performers of traditional Japanese performing arts, such as *rakugo* and *kabuki* have a stage name.
 - Traditional stage names consist of a *yagoo* or *teigoo* ‘stage title’, which acts like a family name, and a “name”, which is like a given name, pinpointing a specific rakugo storyteller.

(26) Sample of *rakugo* storyteller names:

| | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Sanyuutei Enraku | Sanyuutei Kooraku | Sanyuutei Koyuuzo | Sanyuutei Rakutaroo |
| Yanagiya Kosan | Yanagiya Kosanji | Yanagiya Sankyoo | Yanagiya Kyootaroo |

- While the given names of the stage names function like real given names, they do allow the QR:

(27) a. Enraku-no ojisan
 Enraku-GEN uncle/middle.aged.man
 ✓QR: ‘Enraku, who is a middle-aged man.’
 b. Utamaru-no ojiisan
 Utamaru-GEN grandfather/elderly.man
 ✓QR: ‘Utamaru, who is an elderly man.’

- Similarly, foreign given names can give rise to QR:

(28) a. (Looking at pictures of a man cosplaying as a T-800 Terminator at an event:)

ato, **aanorudo-no ojisan**-yori-wa zuutto otokomae-kamo.
 also Arnold-GEN middle.aged.man-than-TOP much.more handsome-maybe
 ‘Also, (he’s) maybe way more handsome than middle-aged Arnold (Schwarzenegger).’⁴

- b. santa-no ojisan
 Santa(.Claus)-GEN middle.aged.man
 ‘Old Santa (Claus)’
- c. kaaneru-no ojisan
 Colonel(.Sanders)-GEN middle.aged.man
 ‘Old Colonel (Sanders)’

– Lexical classes (Ito and Mester, 2003)?

- * Japanese words belong to one of three lexical subclasses, Yamato (native Japanese), Sino-Japanese, and Foreign, and certain phonological processes are applicable only to a certain lexical class.

5 Conclusion

- This talk provided a yet another piece of evidence that proper nouns are not atomic: They receive their referential status compositionally.
 - But it has also shown that we cannot treat all proper nouns equally, and the asymmetry should be given in the syntax.
 - But this is not a new insight:
 - Honorific titles such as *Mr.* and *Ms.* strongly prefer to attach to family names.
 - Family names are more salient than given names in sentences like (29). Elizabeth Cowper (p.c.) points out that (29a) doesn’t “refer to a house that’s occupied by a group of unrelated people who happen to be named Smith”.
- (29) a. We’re going over to **the Smiths** for dinner.
 b. All **the Jennifers** on the team were playing especially well. (Elizabeth Cowper p.c.)
- Also Irish Gaelic family names consist of a prefix which changes according to the referent’s gender and marital status. Also, often they can be substituted with the definite article *an* ‘the’.
 - There is no similar phenomena for given names.
- (30) a. Ó Domhnaill (O’Donnell) → An Dálach
 b. Mac Suibhne (Sweeney) → An Suibhneach (James McCloskey, p.c.)

⁴Found at <http://lুবbigal.blog80.fc2.com/blog-entry-2174.html> (retrieved on May 23, 2017)

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