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On the So-Called Japanese Complementizer

Kenichi Namai

It has long been assumed in the field of Japanese syntax that *to* is a complementizer that subcategorizes for a tensed IP (e.g. Nakau, 1973). Hence, a sentence like (1a), which is from Kuno (1973, p.213), is usually analyzed along the lines of (1b) below.

(1)a. John-wa nihongo-ga muzukasii to itta.
   
   John said that Japanese is difficult.


However, this assumption becomes problematic when we encounter examples in which the subject of the embedded clause headed by *to* appears with accusative Case:

   
   I thought that Bill was a genius.


It has been suggested that this is an instance of ECM across IP and CP (e.g. Ueda, ibid.; Ura, 1993), but this seems to be a rather strange analysis, no matter what kind of mechanism one devises to explain it.

Recently, however, an interesting analysis has been suggested by Takezawa (1998), who informally entertains the idea that the accusative-marked subject in question may stand outside the phrase headed by *to* and that there holds a predication relation between this subject and the *to*-phrase. Consider (3a); the structural analysis of the bracketed phrase in this sentence is given in (3b).

(3) a. Taro-wa [Hanako-o 
   
   character-NOM bad-is COMP
   
   think-is (seems)
   
   (I hear) Taro thinks Hanako has a flaw in her character.
   
   (Takezawa, ibid., p.57)

b. [\(\alpha_c[\alpha_c[NP Hanako-o] \alpha_c[CP

   seikaku-ga warui to] \alpha_c]]\]

Since Takezawa, too, assumes that *to* is a complementizer, he is led to stipulate that the constituent which combines the accusative-marked subject and the *to*-phrase is headed by some category (his a) that takes CP as its complement, as shown in (3b). Moreover, to explain the ECM facts, he is
also forced to stipulate that this category is somehow "transparent" for Case assignment from outside, just like the infinitival IP in English.

In the present paper, although I follow Takezawa's insight in that the accusative-marked subject phrase is outside the to-phrase and that there is a predication relation holding between the two phrases, I reject to's status as complementizer and specifically argue that it is a postposition, drawing on empirical evidence that clearly suggests its postpositional nature. Hence, the constituent in question turns out to be an ordinary postpositional small clause, and if so, ECM ceases to be a problem; that is, the standard analysis of ECM (whatever it is) will apply to the Japanese PP small clause under consideration as well. (In the present paper, I follow Heycock (1994) in assuming that the internal structure of a small clause is that of an adjunction along the lines of (4) below.)

\[(4) \text{[PP [NP Hanako-o] [PP [CP seikaku-ga warui] to]]}\]

Furthermore, I will also show that being a postpositional phrase, a to-phrase can function as an adjunct even in the environment where it appears to be nothing but a sentential complement.

1 To as a Postposition

In this section, I give three arguments that directly suggest the postpositional status of to, drawing on facts about (I) to's c-selectional specification, (ii) its interaction with the wh-expression dou 'how,' and (iii) its coordination possibilities. I then present an argument that suggests the implausibility of treating to as a complementizer.

1.1 C-Selection

Ordinary postpositions like made 'till, up to' and yori 'than' in Japanese characteristically c-select NP and CP, as shown in (5) and (6) below, whereas a typical complementizer such as that in English does only tensed IP, as is clear from (7).

(5) a. Mark-wa susi-kara [NP sukiyaki] TOP from 
   -made nandemo taberu.
   till anything eat
Mark eats everything from susi to sukiyaki.

b. Boku-wa [CP Mark-ga natto-o taberu]
   I-TOP NOM ACC eat
   ka]-made sitteiru.\(^2\)
   COMP till know
I know up to whether or not Mark eats natto.

(6) a. Boku-wa [NP Ken]-yori odoroita.
   I-TOP than surprised
   I was more surprised than Ken.

b. Jordan-no intai-wa [CP GEN retirement-TOP
   asita ame-ga huru ka]-tomorrow rain-NOM fall COMP
   yori daizina mondai da.
   than important problem is
Jordan's retirement is more important a problem than if it will rain tomorrow.

(7) a. I think that [IP it will rain tomorrow].

b. *I think that [IP it to rain tomorrow].

c. *I know that [CP if it will rain tomorrow].

d. *I know that [NP Jordan's retirement].

In this respect, to follows the postpositional pattern of (5) and (6), as is observed in (8).

(8) a. John-wa [NP Mary]-to TOP with

kaimono-ni itta.
shopping-to went

John went shopping with Mary.

(Fukui, 1986, p.222)

b. Kyou-no siken-ni tuite, Ken-wa today-GEN test-DAT about TOP

[CP daisippai]-to omotta.
big-failure thought

About today's test, Ken thought a disaster.

c. John-wa Ken-ni [CP asita-mo TOP DAT tomorrow-too

ame-ga huru ka]-to kiita.
rain-NOM fall COMP asked

John asked Ken if it would rain tomorrow, too.

Fukui (1986), who also argues for to's postpositional status, presents (8a), stating that "[t]he fact that to has an independent use as a postposition lends initial support for [our] hypothesis [that it is a postposition]" (p.222). In fact, to can take an NP complement even in the environment where the phrase that it heads seems to function as the complement of a verb of thinking, such as omou 'think, consider,' as in (8b), and it can further take a CP complement in the same kind of environment, as shown in (8c). These c-selectional facts thus indicate that to must be a postposition rather than a complementizer.

1.2 Dou 'How'

Ordinary PPs in Japanese can be used as answers to specific questions asked with the wh-phrase dou 'how,' as is illustrated in the following dialogues between two speakers A and B:

(9) A: Korerano e-wa these painting-TOP
dou atumemasita ka?
how collected COMP

As for these paintings, how did (you) collect them?

B: [pp [Kane]-de]
money-with

atumemasita.
collected

(I) collected (them) with money.

(10) A: Ano sakana-wa dou that fish-TOP how
As for that fish, how did (you) grill it?

become-till grilled

(I) grilled (it) until it was pitch-black.

Notice that \textit{dou} 'how' calls for as an answer the PP \textit{kane-de} 'with money' in (9) and the PP \textit{makkuro-ni naru-made} 'until it is pitch-black' in (10).

If, on the other hand, \textit{nani} 'what' is used instead, the answer obtained is either NP, as in (11B), or CP, as in (11B'):

\begin{enumerate}
\item A: Kimi-wa nani-o you-TOP what-ACC
\begin{enumerate}
\item kangaemasita ka?
\begin{enumerate}
\item thought COMP
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}
What did you think?

\begin{enumerate}
\item B: \[NP Nihon-no mirai]-o Japan-GEN
\begin{enumerate}
\item future-ACC
\end{enumerate}
\begin{enumerate}
\item kangaemasita.
\item thought
\end{enumerate}
(I) thought (of) the future of Japan.
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}

B': \[cp Nani-o kau what-ACC buy ka ]-o kangaemasita.
COMP-ACC thought

(I) thought (of) what (I) would buy.

With this much in mind, consider (12).

\begin{enumerate}
\item A: Jordan-no intai-GEN retirement-
i tuite, kimi-wa DAT about you-TOP
dou/*nani-o omoimasu ka?
how/what-ACC think COMP
About Jordan's retirement, what do you think?

\begin{enumerate}
\item B: \[pp [Mada hayasugiru]-to] omoimasu.
\begin{enumerate}
\item still early-too think
\end{enumerate}
(I) think that (it) is still too early.
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}

In order to get a \textit{to}-phrase as an answer, the \textit{wh}-expression in the question must be \textit{dou} 'how,' not \textit{nani} 'what,' which the asterisk in (12A) indicates. This fact again points to the PP status of \textit{to}-phrases.

\subsection*{1.3 Coordination}
Since \textit{to} can head a clause that seemingly functions as the complement of a verb, it is widely regarded as a complementizer.\footnote{Consider (13), in which the \textit{to}-phrase appears to be the direct object of the matrix verb.}
On the So-Called Japanese Complementizer

(13) Ken-wa Taro-ni [hizyouni
 TOP to extremely
 onaka-ga suita]-to
 stomach-NOM empty.became
 ii-tuzuketa.
say-kept

Ken kept saying to Taro that (he) was extremely hungry.

However, (13) can additionally have an accusative-marked object:

(14) Ken-wa Taro-ni
 [hizyouni onaka-ga
 suita]-to monku-o
 complaint-ACC
 ii-tuzuketa.

Ken kept saying a complaint to Taro (with the remark) "I'm extremely hungry."

Notice that the to-phrase in (14) cannot be an argument of the matrix verb, whose three arguments (i.e. Ken-wa, Taro-ni, monku-o) are all present in the sentence. In fact, this to-phrase can be coordinated with another PP that clearly functions as an adjunct:

(15) a. Ken-wa Taro-ni [[hizyouni
 onaka-ga suita]-to sosite
 and
 [Taro-ga nanika-o
 NOM something-ACC
 kureru]-made] monku-o
give till

ii-tuzuketa.

Ken kept saying a complaint to Taro (with the remark) "I'm extremely hungry" and until Taro gave (him) something.

b. [[Hizyouni onaka-ga
 suita]-to sosite [Taro-ga
 nanika-o kureru]-made], Ken-wa Taro-ni
 monku-o ii-tuzuketa.

Notice that (15b), where the conjoined phrases in (15a) have been preposed, clearly shows the constituent status of the moved phrase.

Given the fact that only constituents of the same kind can be coordinated, we are led to conclude from (15) that to must be a postposition rather than a complementizer. Moreover, it should be noted that in the presence of (14), (13) too must contain a pro object with accusative Case and therefore, despite its first appearance, the clause headed by to in that example must be an adjunct as well.

In any case, coordination facts thus provide yet another direct evidence that to is a postposition, not a complementizer.

1.4 Force/Mood

According to Chomsky (1995, 1998), one of the core functional categories is C(OMP), and it expresses the force/mood of the clause that it heads. Thus, a clause headed by if, for example, is interrogative, since this complementizer has the interrogative feature Q, whereas the clause headed by that is [-interrogative] owing to its lack of Q. Hence, if a clause happens to have both if and that, it gives rise to contradiction in terms of force/mood, in addition to the syntactic problem of having two complementizers in a
single clause, which is not allowed in English.

Now consider (16), which has the same structure as (8c):

\[(16) \text{Ken-wa Taro-ni [Tokyo-e-wa} \text{TOP DAT}
\text{dou ikimasu ka]-to tazuneta.}\]

Ken asked Taro how he could get to Tokyo.

The question regarding the existence of a double COMP structure in Japanese aside, if to were a Japanese equivalent of that in English, the well-formedness of (16) would be surprising; that is, ka is a [+interrogative] complementizer, but to is [-interrogative], and if so, we would expect the kind of force/mood contradiction just described above, which is contrary to fact. Moreover, when the verb tazuneru 'ask' takes a clause as its complement, it requires a [+interrogative] clause, just as ask in English does:

\[(17) \text{a. I asked if he will come.}
\text{b. *I asked that he will come.}\]

Then the existence of [-interrogative] to as the head of the complement clause in (16) would be problematic in this respect, as well.

On the other hand, if to is an ordinary postposition, these problems disappear. First, being a postposition, to is not a force/mood indicator, and therefore the question of why there is no [+interrogative] contradiction between ka and to does not even arise. Second, with to being a postposition, the to-phrase in question may very well be an adjunct phrase, as was already pointed out in section 1.3. In fact, we can add an accusative-marked NP to (16), just as we did in (14) above, which in turn clearly points to the adjunct status of the to-phrase at issue:

\[(18) \text{Ken-wa Taro-ni [Tokyo-e-wa} \text{dou ikimasu ka]-to miti-o way-ACC}
\text{tazuneta.}\]

Ken asked Taro the way (with the remark) "How can I get to Tokyo."

Thus, we are led to assume that in (16) too, there must be a pro object, and then the problem associated with the verb's c-selection disappears also. That is, tazuneru 'ask' takes an accusative-marked NP object (which must be realized as pro in (16)), and this is in accordance with the verb's c-selectional specification of NP. (Notice that ask, too, c-selects NP as well as CP, as in I asked the time.)

The facts here thus point to the implausibility of to's status as a complementizer, and they in turn constitute indirect support to our proposal that to is a postposition.

2 Refutation

Whitman (1998) gives two arguments against to's postpositional status, maintaining that to is better viewed as a complementizer. In this section, I will review his arguments and show that they fail to achieve what they are intended to achieve.
2.1 Case
If *to* is a postposition, then it must have the ability to assign Case, but Whitman claims that *to* does not seem to have this ability. Consider (19).

(19) Eri-o tensai *(da) to omou
    ACC genius *(is) think
    hito mo iru.
    person too exist

There are also people who think of Eri as a genius (think Eri is a genius).

(Whitman, ibid., p.135)

The gist of Whitman's argument is as follows. If there is *da* 'is' in the relative clause of this example, what *to* takes as its complement is a finite IP [Eri-o tensai da], 'Eri is a genius'; then *to*, being a complementizer like English *that*, does not have to assign Case. On the other hand, if *to* is a postposition, it should be able to take an NP complement such as *tensai* 'genius' and must assign Case to it. Yet the resulting sentence is ungrammatical, as is indicated in (19), and this ungrammaticality must be due to *to*’s inability to assign Case. Thus, *to* cannot be a postposition.

However, this is an unfortunate misjudgment of grammaticality on the part of Whitman. (19) without *da* is indeed grammatical, just like (8b), which also has the sequence of NP-*to*. In fact, Morita (1989, pp.774-776) gives numerous examples of well-formed sentences with this NP-*to* sequence:

(20) a. Kyouiku-o [NP issyou-education-ACC one.life
    no sigoto]-to kangaeru.
    -GEN work think
    (I) think of education as (my) lifework.

b. Kare-o [NP titi]-to omou.
    he-ACC father think
    (I) think of him as (my) father.

c. Hanare-o [NP monooki]
    detached-building-ACC shed
    -to suru
    do
    (I) designate the detached building as a shed.

d. etc.

Thus, *to* must be able to assign Case to its complement NP, and this explains why even (19) without *da* sounds just fine. Hence, this "Case argument" against *to*’s postpositional status seems groundless.

2.2 Ellipsis
Whitman argues that the IP complement of the complementizer *to* can be elided in discourse, as is shown in (21).

(21) A: Eri-wa asita kuru
    TOP tomorrow come
    yone?
    TAG

Eri will come tomorrow, won't she?

B: [IP e]-to omoukedo.
    think
I think that [IP e = she will come].

However, Whitman points out that this kind of ellipsis is impossible with typical postpositions. Notice that the postposition *ni 'to' in (22B), unlike *to in (21), cannot be left behind when a similar ellipsis takes place:

(22) A: Eri-wa saikin
    TOP lately
dou-sita-ka-ne?
how-did-COMP-TAG

How has Eri been doing lately?

B: [NP e] (*ni) atteinai.
    to meet-not

I have not met (*to) [NP e = Eri].

Whitman thus concludes that *to cannot be a postposition.

However, this argument does not seem to go, either. The reason is that what can be elided before a postposition seems to be the whole utterance (or the proposition expressed by it) of the first speaker, but not a part of it. Notice that this is the case with (21), but not so with (22), where only the subject NP of A's utterance is intended for ellipsis. In fact, in the following example, where A's utterance contains only a noun phrase, the ellipsis before *ni is indeed possible:

(23) A: Amerika-kara
    from returned
kaetta America-


Eri...

Eri who returned from America...

B: [NP e] ni atteinai.
    to meet-not

I have not met to [NP e = Eri who returned from America].

Notice that what is elided in B's utterance now corresponds to the whole utterance of A in this well-formed piece of discourse.

Now, it should be pointed out that (21) and (23) give us a strong impression that what we are observing here may not be cases of ellipsis at all, but rather instances of sentence composition by two speakers. Thus, in the case of (21), what is composed by the two speakers is a complex sentence, which is made possible by the fact that *to c-selects, among others, CP (see section 1.1). On the other hand, *ni 'to' in (23) requires NP, since what is "met" is typically an object expressed by NP (in fact, *ni may be just a realization of dative Case), but not a proposition. At any rate, in the presence of well-formed (23), the claimed difference between *to and *ni collapses, revealing the inconclusiveness of Whitman's argument.

Hence, it seems safe to conclude that Whitman's refutation does not pose a threat for our analysis of *to as a postposition.

3 PP Small Clause vs Movement

Having established the postpositional status of *to, I would now like to propose that the bracketed sequence in (2b), repeated here as (24a), is a PP small clause (see (4) above).
(24b) is the structural analysis of (24a) based on this proposal.

(24)

   thought
   I thought of Bill as is a genius.


Then, whatever the mechanism that explains the accusative-Case marking of small-clause subjects in languages like English will also explain the accusative-Case marking of Bill-o in (24). Moreover, this small-clause analysis seems compatible with the c-selectional specification of the verb omou 'think, consider,' as well; in fact, this verb independently takes an AP small clause as its complement, as shown in (25).

(25) Boku-wa [AP Hanako-o [AP I-TOP ACC kawaiku]] omotta.
    thought
    I considered Hanako cute.

Therefore, it is only plausible that it takes a PP small clause as its complement also.

As to the derivation of the PP small clause itself, it does not seem to involve any movement. In the current syntactic terms, we might say that after the PP [pp [cp tensai da]-to] is built, it is then merged with the NP [NP Bill-o], thus constructing the whole of the PP small clause.

However, there have been movement analyses for this particular clause structure and therefore, before concluding this paper, I would like to review them and point out serious problems that they face.

3.1 Subject Raising

As was pointed out in note 1, Kuno (1976) argues for a subject-raising analysis for the construction in question. (26a) is from Kuno (ibid., p.24), and (26b) illustrates its derivation, translated in the current framework.

(26)

a. Yamada-wa Tanaka-o [baka da]-to omotte ita.
   fool is that thinking was
   Yamada thought Tanaka to be a fool.


Presenting an analysis along the lines of (26b), Kuno specifically argues that Tanaka-o is a constituent of the matrix clause.

The problem of crossing a tensed IP and CP aside, the motivation for this movement is never clear. It may appear to be Case assignment by the matrix verb, but this cannot be the motivation, since the moved NP can receive nominative Case in the tensed IP; in fact, along with (26a), there exists fully grammatical (27).

(27) Yamada-wa [Tanaka-ga baka da]-to
    TOP    NOM fool is that
Yamada thought that Tanaka was a fool.
(Kuno, ibid., p.23)

Thus, in light of the "principle of economy of derivation" (Chomsky and Lasnik, 1993, p.514), Kuno's subject-raising analysis seems theoretically unmotivated.

3.2 Movement to [Spec,CP]
Kaneko (1988) also provides a movement analysis, but according to his proposal, the NP in question moves into the Spec of the CP headed by to:

(28) a. Yamada-wa Tanaka-o
     TOP    ACC
     syoziki da to omotte-iru.
     honest is COMP think is

Yamada thinks that Tanaka is honest.

     b. Yamada-wa [vP [[[CP
Tanaka-o [[[vP t_i [vP syoziki da] to]]]
omotte-iru]]]
      (Kaneko, ibid., pp.277-278)

Look at (28b), which illustrates Kaneko's movement analysis; Kaneko argues that Tanaka-o in the Spec of C can be exceptionally Case marked, since the embedded CP is q-marked by the matrix verb and therefore it is not a barrier for Case assignment from outside.

However, Kaneko's analysis suffers exactly the same problem that Kuno's analysis does. That is, the motivation for the movement under consideration is never clear. Kaneko's argument goes as follows.
"Suppose that an embedded subject NP is not assigned nominative Case. ... The subject NP Yamada, as it stands, cannot pass the Case filter and is forced to move to the specifier position of the CP" (p.279).

In other words, Kaneko is claiming that the movement is for Case reasons. Now, look at (29a), which is from Kaneko (ibid., p.281); (29b) shows Kaneko's structural analysis of the embedded clause in (29a).

(29) a. Yamada-wa [Tanaka-o
     TOP    ACC
     kare-ga tensai da to]
     he-NOM genius is COMP
     omotte-iru.
     think is

Yamada thinks that Tanaka is a genius.

     b. [CP Tanaka-o [IP kare-ga
tensai da] to]

Kaneko claims that kare-ga in the embedded IP is a resumptive pronoun, but notice that this pronoun is indeed nominative-marked. This means that the nominative-Case assignment in the embedded clause does take place in (29) and if so, the movement cannot be for Case reasons. Moreover, Tanaka-o and kare-ga in this example must form a chain; otherwise, the moved argument NP Tanaka-o would violate the q-Criterion. But then, there arises a new problem; the chain thus formed is not a well-formed chain, since it receives two Cases -- accusative at the head and nominative at the
On the So-Called Japanese Complementizer

tail. For these reasons, we must conclude that Kaneko's proposal is too problematic to be adopted.

Our PP small-clause analysis, on the other hand, does not suffer these problems. Under our analysis, (28) and (29) will be analyzed as in (30a) and (30b), respectively.


In (30a), the subject of the clause headed by to is realized as pro, which is licensed by the nominative Case available within that clause. In (30b), the subject of the to-clause is realized as kare-ga 'he-NOM,' which is not surprising, since (30b) has exactly the same structure as (30a). Moreover, since there is no movement involved in (30a,b), the problem associated with Case pointed out just above does not arise, either. Furthermore, the q-Criterion is also fully satisfied; the subject of the to-clause receives its q-role from the predicate within the clause, and the accusative-marked subject of the small clause receives its q-role from the inner PP headed by to.

4 Conclusion
As we have just seen, there are several pieces of direct evidence for to's postpositional status. Therefore, phrases headed by this item are most likely to be postpositional phrases, which in turn enables us to analyze a sentence like (2b) (= (24a)), repeated here as (31a), as a sentence that contains a PP small clause as the complement of the matrix verb; this structural analysis is given in (31b).

     I thought of Bill as (he) is a genius.

The analysis along the lines of (31b) seems superior to the existing analyses in that it is free from all the problems that the others inevitably face. And in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is hence concluded here that the so-called Japanese complementizer to is actually a postposition and that sentences like (31a) contain a PP small clause headed by this postposition.

Works Cited


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**End Notes**

1 See Kuno (1976) for the subject-raising analysis in the pre-GB framework.

2 Fukui (1986) argues that *ka,* which is widely believed to be a [+wh] complementizer, is categorially a noun. However, following Whitman (1998), who gives convincing arguments against *ka*’s nominal status, I assume in the present study that it is a complementizer.

3 But see the discussion in section 1.3.

4 In fact, Trask (1993, p.51) defines complementizer as "[a] grammatical formative which serves to mark a complement clause, such as English *that* and *whether* in *Lisa said that she would come and I don't know whether she smokes.*" However, this definition is not fully accurate, since clauses headed by complementizers can be used adverbially, as in *For Lisa to be successful, she must work hard* and *I gave him some food so that he wouldn’t be hungry.*

5 The Case filter that Kaneko (ibid., p.276) assumes is as follows:

(I) Case filter: *NP if NP has phonetic content and has no Case.*