

Japanese *te-no*-Clauses as Non-Finite Noun-Modifying Clauses

Keywords— Japanese, nominal modification, finiteness, relative clauses, *no*

1.: This paper focuses on a peculiar type of noun-modifying clauses in Japanese which I call **te-no clauses** since they consist of a verb to which the element *te* is added and which are connected to the head noun via *no*. I discuss the empirical peculiarities of this construction, specifically in comparison to ordinary relative clauses, and provide a theoretical explanation for the empirical differences between the two constructions, which arise from significantly different underlying structures. Whereas relative clauses always involve structural presence of the head noun, or some placeholder, inside the modifying clause itself, *te-no*-clauses are essentially verbal *te*-clauses that are licensed by a syntactic head as nominal modifiers. The head noun is at no stage of the derivation part of the modifying clause. I argue that the presence of this syntactic head, which is spelled out as *no*, is necessary since *te*-clauses are non-finite clauses that cannot act as nominal modifiers independently.

2. Introduction: An illustrative example of a *te-no*-clause looks as follows.

- (1) [Masuku-wo tsuke-te-no] jugyō-wa taihen-desu.
mask-ACC put.on-TE-NO class-TOP hard-COP.POL
‘A class/classes in which X is wearing a mask is/are hard.’

As visible in (1), the verb in such constructions is not inflected for past or non-past tense, but ends in *-te*, the element that appears among others in coordination or before certain auxiliary verbs (Nakatani, 2013). Importantly, ordinary relative clauses in Japanese always involve tense morphology and are simply juxtaposed to their head noun. They never co-occur with the element *no* (2), while *te*-clauses cannot serve as nominal modifiers without the presence of *no* (3).

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| (2) | [gakusei-ga yon-da] (*no) hon | (3) | *masuku-wo tsuke-te jugyō |
| | student-NOM read-PST MOD book | | mask-ACC put.on-TE class |
| | ‘the book that the student read’ | | (‘a class in which X is wearing a mask’) |

3. Restrictions: Semantically, *te-no*-clauses typically depict an event and modify (in most cases) an event noun which temporarily follows the event depicted in the modifying clause.

From a syntactic point of view, the most crucial feature of *te-no* clauses is that they do not allow argument relativization, contrary to ordinary relative clauses. In other words, the modified head noun cannot function as argument of the verb within the modifying clause.

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| (4) | *[<i>e</i> _i hon-wo yon-de-no] gakusei _i | (5) | *[gakusei-ga <i>e</i> _i yon-de-no] hon _i |
| | <i>e</i> book-ACC read-TE-NO student | | student-NOM <i>e</i> read-TE-NO book |
| | (‘a student (who is) reading/read a book’) | | (‘the book which the student reads/read’) |

Second, overt arguments can be realized within *te-no*-clauses, seemingly without restrictions, but many speakers disfavor overt subjects within the *te-no* clause, especially when they are specific, for instance personal pronouns.

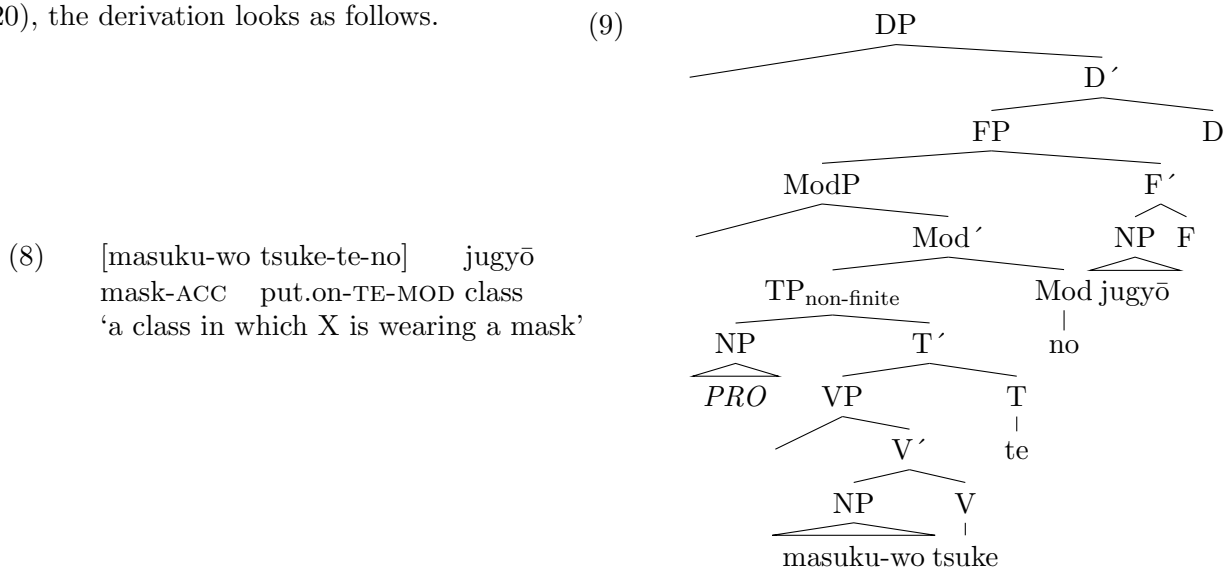
- (6) ??[watashi-ga rāmen-wo tabe-te-no] kansō
I-NOM ramen-ACC eat-TE-NO feeling
‘the feeling after I have eaten ramen’

4. Analysis: First, *te* is the head of a TP, evidenced by the fact that it is in complementary distribution with tense morphemes and follows the overt spell-outs of passive, causative and nega-

tion (Nakatani, 2013). Crucially, this TP is (not only morphologically, but also syntactically and semantically) non-finite judging from the fact that it is structurally and also temporally dependent as shown in the following classic example where arguably playing must precede studying.

- (7) Tarō-wa yoku ason-de yoku benkyō-su-ru.
 Taro-TOP often play-TE often study-do-PRS
 ‘Tarō often plays and (then) often studies.’ (Kuno, 1973, 195)

Only finite clauses can serve independently as nominal modifiers in Japanese, non-finite *te*-clauses need the help of *no*. From this, I conclude that this element is a syntactic licenser of modification, which I label MOD following Rubin (1994). Under a cartographic structure of the DP (Cinque, 2020), the derivation looks as follows.



The crucial point is that the head noun can never be part of the modifying clause, contrary to relative clauses, whatever derivation one assumes. The fact that *te-no*-clauses are not subject to the *Connectivity Problem* (Salzmann, 2017) correctly predicts the absence of argument relativization.

Finally, subjects can be expressed overtly within *te-no*-clauses, but only when a context is established that enforces a contrastive interpretation (10). I conclude from this that the subject has moved to a higher projection related to topic or focus. This casts doubt on the assumption that *te-no* clauses involve merely a TP-layer and suggests a larger CP structure, an assumption that is compatible with recent accounts on (the size of) non-finite clauses (Wurmbrand *et al.*, 2020).

- (10) [Akumade watashi-ga kono ronbun-wo yon-de-mi-te-no] kansō-desu ga, amari
 after.all I-NOM this essay-ACC read-TE-try-TE-MOD feeling-COP.POL but not.so
 omoshiro-ku-nai to omoi-mas-u.
 interesting-PRED-NEG COMP think-AUX.POL-PRS
 ‘This is, after all, the feeling after I have read this essay, but I think it is not very interesting.’

5. Summary In a nutshell, this paper provides novel insights for the Japanese DP by taking into account non-finite modifying clauses which are enabled as modifier by a syntactic modification licenser. These clauses involve a vastly different derivation from ordinary relative clauses and are expected to enhance our knowledge of the nominal modification system of Japanese and beyond.

Sel. Ref.: Cinque, Guglielmo (2020): *The Syntax of Relative Clauses. A Unified Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Kuno, Susumu (1973): *The Structure of the Japanese Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; Nakatani, Kentaō (2013): *Predicate Concatenation: A Study of the V-te V Predicate in Japanese*. Tokyo: Kuroshio; Rubin, Edward (1994): *Modification: A Syntactic Analysis and its Consequences*. Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University; Salzmann, Martin (2017): *Reconstruction and Resumption in Indirect A'-dependencies : On the Syntax of Prolepsis and Relativization in (Swiss) German and Beyond*. Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter; Wurmbrand, Susanne (et al.) (2020): “Finiteness in South Slavic Complement Clauses.” In: *Topics on the Morphology of South Slavic Languages*, 60(1):pp. 119–137