When Nominative NPs Can(not) Occur in Interrogative Patterns in Japanese
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It has been known since Kuno (1973b) that in Japanese, the presence of a nominative NP makes *yes-no* questions less acceptable. The following generalization holds:

(1) **Direct yes-no** questions ending with *ka* are ill-formed when nominative NPs occur and/but *no (desu)* does not.


In Japanese *yes-no* questions are formed by adding the question marker *ka* with a sharply rising pitch (♯) to a corresponding declarative sentence. Or, if *ka* does not appear, the final syllable bears ♯. Here I focus on the *yes-no* question with *ka* only. (2a-c), with the associated readings, exemplify cases where an NP-ga accounts for ungrammaticality:

(2) a. *Taro-ga ano hon-o katta ka*  
-NOM that book-ACC bought Q

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Focus Reading</th>
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</table>
| S(ENTENCE) FOCUS READING | *Did [F(ocus) Taro buy that book]?*  
[The question asks whether an event happened where *Taro bought that book.*] |
| NP-GA FOCUS READING | *Is it [F(ocus) Taro] who bought that book?*  
[That *someone bought that book* is given. The question asks who the buyer is.] |

b. *Onishi-san-ga hashit-te-i-ru ka*  
-NOM is-running Q

(based on Adachi’s (1999:59) (27c))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S(ENTENCE) FOCUS READING</td>
<td><em>Is [F Onishi-san running]?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP-GA FOCUS READING</td>
<td><em>Is it [F Onishi-san] who is running?</em></td>
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</table>
Matrix sentences (and \([_s\ldots\ nobu]\) with an NP-\textit{ga} are generally two-way ambiguous in terms of focus placement: the S(entence)-focus reading and the NP-\textit{ga} focus reading (This distinction, at its core, is Kuno’s (1973a) neutral description and exhaustive listing).

Accordingly, two readings are given for each example.

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{S(ENTENCE) FOCUS READING} & \textbf{Has [\textit{F} a bus come]}? \\
\hline
\textbf{NP-GA FOCUS READING} & \textbf{Is it [\textit{F} a bus] that has come}? \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

Kuno (1973b:Ch. 5) and Noda (1996:93) argue in effect that the S-focus reading presupposes elaborate discourse situations, not met in a null context when sentences are presented for judgments; the marginality of (2a-c), K&N claim, is due to this pragmatic difficulty.

(X) *Mukashi, mukashi, arutokoro-ni ojisan-to obasan-ga i-mashita ka\textsuperscript{(Nitta (1991)'s 93):133)}

This account, however, is untenable. For one thing, situations can be found in which the S-focus reading is natural. And, more importantly, (2a-c) are unacceptable even in such contexts. So there must be something beyond pragmatics about (2a-c)’s low acceptability.

For illustration, let us consider a sample discourse for (2a)’s S-focus reading: The speaker (\textit{S}) was told by Taro that he would buy \textit{ano hon} ‘that book’. The addressee (\textit{A}) is a cashier of a bookstore. \textit{A} knows Taro and what \textit{ano hon} refers to. \textit{S} calls \textit{A} and asks (2a), repeated below:

(2a) *Taro-ga ano hon-o katta ka\textsuperscript{(}\textit{Is it that book that Taro bought?})

In the present situation, (2a) is ruled out.

K&N’s account is also problematic in that it is silent about why (2a-c) are excluded on their NP-\textit{ga} focus reading. Taking (2a), its NP-\textit{ga} focus interpretation presupposes that \textit{someone (probably, Taro) bought that book} and the questioner thinks the hearer knows the buyer. Appropriate contexts seem straightforward and easily available.

Informally, any discourse will do where \textit{Ano hon-o katta no wa Taro desu ka} (Is it that book that Taro bought?) can naturally be asked.
Since *ga* is the culprit, (2a-c) are improved by replacing *ga* with *wa* (topic marker), as in (2’a-c):

(2’)

a. Taro-wa (ano hon-o) katta ka
   -TOP
   ‘As for Taro, did he buy that book?’

b. Onishi-san-wa hashit-te-i-ru ka
   ‘As for Onishi-san, is (s)he running?’

c. Basu-wa kita ka
   ‘As for the bus, has it come?’

Also note that (2a-c) can be improved by *no* (*desu*) ‘it is that…’ between the verbs and *ka*:

(2”)  

a. Taro-ga ano hon-o katta no (desu) ka
   ‘Is it that Taro bought that book?’

b. Onishi-san-ga hashit-te-i-ru no (desu) ka
   ‘Is it that Onishi-san is running?’

c. Basu-ga kita no (desu) ka
   ‘Is it that the bus has come?’

Kuno (1980, 1982, 1983) claims that the scope of the question marker *ka* is extremely limited, and that for yes-no questions this scope extends only to the immediately preceding verbal, and, more importantly here, *no*-clause. The constraint on question which Kuno advances is shown in (3) with a few revisions:

(3)

The scope of the question particle in Japanese does not extend beyond the verb, adjective, predicate nominal, or *no*-clause immediately preceding (*desu*) *ka* except when the sentence has a *wh*-word elsewhere.

The improvement in (2”) strongly suggests that the ungrammatical examples in (2) violate this constraint. Take (2a) for example. As mentioned earlier, the focus is either *Taro* or *Taro-ga ano hon-o katta*. *Taro*, obviously, is too far from *ka*. Though [*Taro-ga ano hon-o katta*] immediately precedes *ka*, this clause is neither a verb, an adjective, a predicate nominal, nor a *no*-clause.

In my past study (Watanabe (2004)), this informal explanation is couched in formal terms drawing on (4a-c):

(4)  

a. When a nominative NP occurs in a matrix S or [*S … ] no (*desu*), either the NP or the S is marked with \( F \) (*Focus*
The empirical basis for (4a) has already been discussed. (4b-c) are proposed by Takubo (1985) in order to reformulate Kuno’s precedence-based treatment as a hierarchy/structure-based analysis. I maintain that (4c) holds, because the question marker ka is a focus particle which must c-command a focus for establishing an association-with-focus relation (Rooth (1996)).

The syntactic representations in (4a-c) correspond to (2a), (2’a) and (2”a), respectively:

(5)  a. (the structure of (2a))

```
  SF
    VP
      NP
      V
    N_F
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b. (the structure of (2’a))

```
  SF
    VP
      NP
        V
      V
  N_F
```

Taro-ga ano hon-o katta ka
First consider (5a). Both $S_F$ and $N_F$ have the subscript $F$. For the space limitation, let this notation represent that either $S$ or $N$ is the focus. $Ka$ forms a complex “interrogative predicate” with $katta$ by adjunction. This may look odd under the common view of $ka$ as a complementizer. I, however, see no problem. If Fukui (1986) is correct, Japanese does not have functional categories, including C’s. $Ka$ is incapable of c-commanding $Taro_F$ because of the higher segment of V. $Ka$ does not c-command $S_F$ either, because $S_F$ dominates $ka$. Hence (4c) is violated.

Second let us turn to (5b). The topic NP $Taro$-wa is directly
dominated by S" (Kuno and Takami (1993)) and co-indexed with the empty category (=e) in the subject position. (5b) represents a traditional topic-comment form; Taro is the topic (i.e., old and salient information) and the S is its predication. In the sentence with a topic phrase, any category in the S can be a focus in principle. This allows katta to be a focus in (5b). Since ka c-commands katta$_F$, (4c) is not violated, as desired.

Finally, in (5c), [NP ... no] and desu form a complex nominal predicate by adjunction. Ka is adjoined to this amalgam, hence ka c-commands [NP ... no] and everything therein including $Taro_F$ and $[F Taro-ga ano hon-o katta]$. (4c) obviously is not violated.

A word of caution is in order. One must not conclude, from the foregoing discussion, that the NP-ga never occurs in the ... ka sentence without no (desu). Consider Table 1:
Table 1: Interrogative patterns with nominative NPs

As in the right-hand column, the … ka sentence manifests a variety of semantic functions (see Moriyama (1992) for details), hence yes-no question is not an appropriate label for …ka. Instead, interrogative pattern is used for want of a better name. In Table 1, interrogative patterns are classified in terms of the intonations on ka and the verb forms immediately preceding ka. Four intonations are distinguished: rise (ⅰ), fall-rise (ⅱ), fall (ⅲ), and flat (→) (cf. Quirk and Greenbaum (1990)). (15) summarizes what one can observe here:

(15) a. The interrogative pattern with a rise may involve a nominative NP if either a polite masu-form (=7), a
negative (a)nai-form (=8)) or a volitional (y)oo-form (=9) appears.

b. The interrogative patterns without a rise can freely contain a nominative NP (=10)-(14)).

(6) is ruled out, because ka c-commands neither Taro F nor [F Taro-ga ano hon-o katta]. If the observations in (15) are correct, it will follow that the c-command restriction is not violated in (7)-(14). This result has important implications for the syntactic structures of these examples.

In my manuscript in progress (Watanabe (in preparation)), I propose, following Kuno (1980:164 1983:149), that the verb suffix -i (or its zero-form after the vocalic stem verb) “nominalizes” the S which it is a sister of. Thus (7) has a structure as in (16):

(16) [V [V[NP[S F Taro-ga ano hon-o ka(w)]i] V mashita]]ka

The NP headed by -i is adjoined to a polite V-head mashi-ta. Ka is adjoined to this “complex nominal predicate” to change it into interrogative. In this structure, ka c-commands a focus (the S or Taro), as required by (4c).

I distinguish two types of ka’s: a question marker and modals. The q-marker ka appears with a rise, is dominated by the V-node, and must c-command a focus. The ka’s without a rise (i.e., ka, ka and ka→), on the other hand, are a modal, hence they are a daughter of the S/S’/S”-node (cf. Masuoka (1991)). Not being a q-marker, it is not necessary for these ka’s to c-command a focus. This accounts for the acceptability of (10)-(12) and (14).

Furthermore, I maintain that (a)na-{i, katta }ka, (y)oo-ka and (a)-n(ai)-ka are a word, i.e., a piece of memorized information. The first and second ones are a modal, and the third one an imperative marker. The ka’s here are a morphological part of these compounds rather than a q-marker. Hence (4c) does not apply. This accounts for the acceptability of (8), (9) and (13).

Let us review. The direct yes-no question without no (desu) is marginal when the nominative NP occurs. This fact is characterized in terms of (4a)-(4c). There are acceptable interrogative patterns which contain a nominative NP. These cases, however, do not constitute counterevidence. Informally, the nominalization by−i (or its zero form) in the polite verb form puts the nominative NP within the c-command domain of ka. The following sentence-final items have been proposed:
Table 2: The proposed q-marker, modals and imperative marker with their functions and syntactic positions

The ka’s in ‡A-‡C are a modal rather than a q-marker. The ka’s in ‡D-‡F are a part of the compound words. Not being a q-marker, these ka’s do not have to c-command a focus. As a result, the nominative NP may occur in the sentence ending with them.

Appendix 1: Negative Questions and Their Expectations for Positive and/or Negative Answers [based on Ota (1980:623-626)]

When an Aux+n’t is inverted to the beginning, negative questions usually invite a positive answer. The positive question in (14a) is commonly neutral in its expectation for positive or negative answers. If it does have a preference, an anticipated response is negative. The negative question in (14b), on the other hand, usually elicits a positive reply:

(14) a. Are you going to George’s party? (You may or may not go to George’s party; You are not going to George’s party.)
   b. Aren’t you going to George’s party? (You are going to George’s party.)
   b’. Are you not going to George’s party?
Negative *yes-no* questions can support a negative answer. When polarity expressions occur, negative questions can be either positive or negative depending on whether the polarity items are positive or negative. (15-16) expect positive responses, since they contain positive polarity expressions; (17-19) are negative, since negative polarity expressions appear:

(15) Didn’t someone ring the bell?  (Someone rang the bell.)
(16) Haven’t I met you somewhere?  (I met you somewhere.)
(17) Oh, haven’t you finished it yet? (You have finished it yet.)
(18) Didn’t you have very much fun? (You didn’t have very much fun.)
(19) Doesn’t she ever talk? (She doesn’t ever talk.)

REFERENCES


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