Embedded Topicalization and the Structure of Adverbial Clauses in Japanese

Since Emonds’s (1970) pioneering work, a distinction has been made between transformations that apply virtually in any type of clause and those that apply mainly in root clauses. The latter are called root transformations, and topicalization counts as one of them. The focus of investigation in this domain of research has been placed on identifying factors that serve to draw a line between subordinate clauses that tolerate this type of operation and those that do not.

There are two influential approaches to this issue. One is the so-called truncation approach, according to which a clause that resists root transformations has a reduced structure and lacks syntactic positions for constituents affected by the relevant operations. On the other hand, Haegeman (2010a, b) advocates an analysis that associates inapplicability of embedded topicalization with an intervention effect. She argues that an adverbial clause resisting topicalization contains an operator moving to its left periphery and that this movement is blocked by an intervening topicalized constituent.

(1) * [ OP, If these exams you don’t pass t, ] you won’t get the degree.

A similar anti-topicalization effect is found in Japanese adverbial clauses too.

(2) [ Tingi {-ga/-wa} agare -ba] keeki `-ga kaihkusuru hazuda.

wage {-Nom/-Top} rise -if economy -Nom recover is.bound.to

‘The economy is bound to recover if wages rise.’

At first sight, this parallelism may suggest that the operator movement analysis can be extended to Japanese adverbial clauses. However, this paper demonstrates that despite the apparent parallelism, Japanese adverbial clauses do not involve operator movement. Another claim to be defended is that anti-topicalization effects are ascribed to different factors depending on types of topic involved. For instance, thematic topicalization is associated with epistemic modality. It fails to apply in a clause that is not able to host an epistemic modal. Meanwhile, a scene-setting topic is not subject to this restriction. It is instead blocked in a clause involving operator movement.

One diagnostic phenomenon for detecting operator movement is a weak island effect. An operator in the left periphery of a subordinate clause blocks extraction of a wh-adjunct (Rizzi 1990, 2004). The lack of this effect in (3) indicates that operator movement is absent in the conditional clause.

(3) Donokurai, anata -wa [ t, nemure -ba ] tukare -ga tore -masu ka?

how.long you -Top sleep -if tiredness-Nom go.away -Polite Q

‘How long, will you feel refreshed if you sleep t, ?’ (lit.)

Another diagnostics is scene-setting topicalization. Unlike the topic phrase in (4B), which indicates what the sentence is about, the one in (5) serves a scene-setting function.

(4) A: John -nitite osiete kudasai.  – B: John -wa daïgakusei desu.

-about tell.me please -Top university.student is

‘Tell me about John.’  ‘John is a university student.’

(5) Kyoo -wa kaze -ga tuyoi.

today -Top wind -Nom strong ‘Today wind is strong.’ (intended: ‘It is windy today.’)

Scene-setting topicalization is sensitive to operator movement. As shown below, relative clauses in Japanese may or may not involve operator movement (Ishii (1991), Murasugi (1991), etc.). While the relative clause in (6a) exhibits a subcency violation, the one in (6b) does not. This means that while the former involves operator movement, the latter does not.


b. [NP [CP [NP [CP e, e1 siken -o uketa] gakusei1] -ga minna ukaru ] hij/ /heya1] exam -Acc took student -Nom all pass day/room

A scene-setting topic can only occur in a relative clause that does not involve operator movement.
(7) a. *[NP [CP kyoo -wa Mary -ga e, omotya -o ageta ] kodomo,] today -Top -Nom toy -Acc gave child
b. *[NP [CP soto -wa tuyoi kaze -ga e, huite -ita ] hi,] outside -Top strong wind -Nom blowing -was day

Given this property, the well-formedness of (8) indicates that a reason clause also lacks operator movement.

(8) Mite! [ soto -wa ame-ga hutteiru -kara ] kasa -ga iru yo. look outside Top rain -Nom is.falling -because umbrella -Nom need Prt ‘Look! It’s raining outside. So you need an umbrella.’

By contrast, thematic topicalization is insensitive to operator movement. It does not exhibit the asymmetry observed above in (7a, b).

(9) a. *[NP [CP Mary -wa e, omotya -o ageta ] kodomo,] -Top toy -Acc gave child
b. *[NP [CP ookina ki -wa e, uwatte -ita ] kooen,] big tree -Top planted -was park

Instead, its applicability is contingent on epistemic modality. It applies in a clause that is able to host an epistemic modal.

(10) a. Mite! [ ame{-ga/-wa} hutteiru (*daroo)-kara ] kasa -ga iru yo. look rain {-Nom/-Top} is.falling (may) -because umbrella-Nom need Prt ‘Look! It’s raining. So you need an umbrella.’

b. [ John -wa 2-zu -ni kaete -kuru (daroo) -kara ] soremade mattei-nasai. -Top 2-o’clock -at back -come may -because until.then wait -Imp

‘John will come back at 2 o’clock. So wait until then.’

Viewed from this perspective, inapplicability of thematic topicalization in (2) should be ascribed to the incompatibility of a conditional clause with epistemic modality. The epistemic modal occurs in the layer above TP (see (11a, b))(Koizumi 1993). The illegitimacy of (12) then suggests that a conditional clause has a truncated structure lacking the CP layer.


(12) * Tingin -ga agaru daroo -ba, ... (cf. (2))

wage -Nom rise will -if

This observation is supported by the fact that the conditional clause resists a scene-setting topic.

(13) [ (*Kyoo -wa) kioi-ga sagare-ba ] asita -wa yuki -ga huru daroo. today -Top temperature-Nom drop -if tomorrow -Top snow -Nom fall will ‘If the temperature drops today, it will snow tomorrow.’

Given the absence of operator movement in the conditional clause (see (3)), the illegitimacy of the scene-setting topic in (13) cannot be reduced to an intervention effect. Rather, the topic phrase cannot find its position in the conditional clause, which lacks the CP layer altogether.

In conclusion, Japanese adverbial clauses are not derived via operator movement. The present study provides previously unnoted pieces of evidence for this observation. It also demonstrates that anti-topicalization is not a homogeneous phenomenon. It is caused by different factors, depending on types of topic.

Selected References