

# Japanese Noun Clauses: Functions and Historical Changes

Satoshi KINSUI  
Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University

## ABSTRACT

An embedded sentence that expresses the content of an utterance or perception in nominal form may be referred to as a content clause. Content clauses in modern Japanese are grouped morphologically into those that deploy *koto* as the head noun (*koto* clauses) and those that deploy *no* as the head noun (*no* clauses). Many similarities and differences between these two types of noun clauses have been identified, mainly from the perspective of their combinations with verbs, but here I give particular attention to the fact that *koto* clauses can be subjects of predicates indicating existence (*aru*) and non-existence (*nai*) while *no* clauses cannot. In this paper, I argue that this distinction arises from differences in part of speech and semantic type between *no* and *koto* clauses. Specifically, I claim that *koto* clauses are Determiner Phrases that can be bound with quantifiers whereas *no* clauses are Complementizer Phrases that cannot be bound with quantifiers. Viewing historical linguistic materials from this perspective, one can identify the following characteristics.

1. Examples of *koto* clauses appearing as subjects of existential predicates can be found consistently throughout the historical corpus. This means that the syntactic and semantic characteristics of the *koto* clause have remained unchanged throughout the history of the Japanese language.
2. On the other hand, *no* clauses appear as content clauses in the corpus from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, but before then one finds Headless Relative Clauses (HRC) and, before the 8<sup>th</sup> century, *ku* clauses. Based on the absence of examples of the HRC and *ku* clauses appearing as subjects of existential predicates, it can be hypothesized that these clauses possessed the same characteristics as the modern Japanese *no* clause and were similarly distinguished from the *koto* clause.

This analysis not only provides a unified morphological, syntactic, and semantic account of Japanese content clauses, but also promises new analyses of the many historical changes originating in these clauses.