

# Subjectlessness and Honorifics: Text Construction of Japanese

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## Introduction

In the second chapter of his *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday summarizes the traditional definitions of the Subject as follows (1985 : 35):

- ( i ) Psychological Subject that is the concern of the message
- ( ii ) Grammatical Subject of which something is predicated
- ( iii ) Logical Subject that is the doer of the action

These functions attributed to the notion Subject are separated in his functional grammar and given different terminologies : ( i ) psychological Subject is named Theme ; ( ii ) grammatical Subject is named Subject; ( iii ) logical Subject is named Actor. And he gives several model clauses to show their relationships.

- 1 This teapot my aunt was given by the duke.  
Theme      Subject                      Actor
- 2 My aunt was given this teapot by the duke.  
Theme                                      Actor  
Subject
- 3 This teapot the duke gave to my aunt.  
Theme      Subject  
                 Actor
- 4 By the duke my aunt was given this teapot.  
Theme    Subject  
         Actor

Then, Halliday gives a new functional definition for each of them (1985 : 36-37):

- ( i ) The Theme is a function in the CLAUSE AS A MESSAGE. It is what the message is concerned with: the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say.
- ( ii ) The Subject is a function in the CLAUSE AS AN EXCHANGE. It is the element that is held responsible: in which is vested the success of the clause in whatever is its particular speech function.
- ( iii ) The Actor is a function in the CLAUSE AS A REPRESENTATION(of a process). It is the active participant in the process: the one that does the deed.

In the present paper, I will discuss Japanese clauses from the viewpoint of this functional grammar, especially on the problem of the Subject in connection with honorifics in the verb.

## I Subjectless construction of Japanese conversation

### 1. Unmarked subjects

How is the Subject in English recognized? Halliday shows how to identify the Subject in a declarative clause, that is, to find an “element which is picked up by the pronoun in the tag.” In a usual series of rhetorical exchanges in English, only the Mood elements are “tossed back and forth,” as in a rhyme or a piece of information-exchange dialogue. The Mood consists of two parts: the Subject and the Finite element, a verbal group, that is a small number of verbal operators expressing tense (e.g. *is*, *has*) or modality (e.g. *can*, *must*) (Halliday 1985 : 71-73).

However, Halliday gives one possibility of omitting the Subject of a clause: when there is a signal by intonation it is possible for a clause to occur without the Subject (1985 : 90-91). If it is a giving clause, the unmarked Subject is ‘I.’ If it is a demanding clause, the Subject must be ‘you.’ So, if the clause is an offer or a statement, the hearer knows, without being overtly told, that the Subject is the speaker, that is, ‘I’ and if the clause is a question or a command, the unmarked Subject should be ‘you.’

In such cases, usually the whole of the Mood element is omitted: “(Shall I) Carry your bag?” “(Will you) Play us a tune!” When tense or modality need to be expressed by the Finite element, it is left, as in “(I) Might see you this evening.” Or when it is fused with the Predicator, as in “(I) Met Fred on the way here” (Halliday 1985 : 71).

Compared to this Mood element of English dialogue, the structure of similar sequence of Japanese dialogue is totally different. Although the fundamental frame of a dialogue is very much the same as English, Japanese frequently omits the Subject, both in the main clause and in the tossing-back-and-forth exchange. The main focus of the present paper is on this subjectless construction of Japanese in connection with the use of honorifics added to the verb and/or the auxiliary.

### 2. The Mood elements in English and in Japanese

Halliday gives a simple dialogue being tossed back and forth as an example of the

Mood elements. I will examine the Mood construction of this dialogue in its Japanese translation in two versions. In either version, the speakers are adults with good knowledge of Standard Japanese. The wording differs according to the participants of the conversation, the person being talked about, and the context of situation. Here I will give one translation in the most casual level as Version 1 and another in a fairly polite level as Version 2.

However, it is possible to translate the original English dialogue into at least twelve different versions in Japanese. This is because Japanese conversation quite differs according to the interactants' sex, status, and their relationships with the person/s in the topic (like 'the duke' and 'my aunt' in the following example). Moreover, when the role of speaker and hearer is exchanged, the whole expressions have to change accordingly. It is actually impossible to give all the possible translations here; so, I will give just two extremes and omit the rest for the present. This diversity in translation itself is another point to be discussed in the future concerning Japanese conversation.

English Original by Halliday (1985 : 71)

- A1— The duke's given away that teapot, hasn't he?  
 B1— Oh, has he?  
 A2— Yes, he has.  
 B2— No he hasn't!  
 A3— I wish he had.  
 B3— He hasn't; but he will.  
 A4— Will he?  
 B4— He might.

Japanese Version 1

(A kind of gossip between close friends. They are not related directly to the duke; therefore they show no respect to him. Both are male.)

- A1— *Kooshaku wa ano kyuuusu o yat- timat- ta ne ?*  
 duke PARTICLE that teapot PARTICLE give-finish-PAST PARTICLE  
 B1— *E ? yat- tyat- ta no ?*  
 oh give-finish- PAST PAR  
 A2— *Soo da yo.*  
 So COPULA-PRESENT PAR  
 B2— *Sonna hazu nai yo !*  
 such possibility NEG-PRESENT PAR  
 A3— *Yatte i-ta ra ii noni na.*  
 give be-PAST if good-PRESENT though PAR

- B3— *Mada yatte nai yo. Demo yaru daroo ne.*  
 not-yet give NEG-PRES PAR but give COP-FUTURE PAR
- A4— *Soo daroo ka?*  
 so COP-FUT PAR
- B4— *Kamo ne.*  
 possible-FUT PAR

Since this is the translation, it must be the same in logical meaning. Then, what about the tossing-back-and-forth of the Mood elements in English? The Japanese version must have the same elements being tossed back and forth. What part could those elements be in Japanese? They must be the parts repeated in the sequence as in English.

The first and most important point here is that there is no pronoun which can be identified as the Subject, like 'he' in English. That is, the Japanese Mood can consist of the Finite alone, without the Subject. Halliday defines the Finite element as "one of a small number of verbal operators expressing tense (e.g. *is*, *has*) or modality (e.g. *can*, *must*)."

In Japanese Version 1 between close friends, what could be identified as the Finite in the sense of Halliday's definition of the English Finite?

In the opening clause A1, the verb equivalent to the English 's given away' is *yattimatta*, the main verb *yatt(e)*, meaning 'in the state of giving,' plus another verb (*s)ima(u)*, meaning 'finish,' plus an aux *ta*, denoting the past tense. The English tag question 'hasn't he' is expressed in a sentence final particle, *ne*.

In the succeeding clauses, the parts tossed back and forth by the speakers have two features: one with the main verb, *youtu*, as in B1, A3, and B3; the other without the main verb. The latter consists of items representing the main verb, auxes, and/or a copula. But there is no trace of 'the duke,' the Actor and the Subject of the verb *youtu*.

In B1, the Japanese equivalent to the English 'has he?' is *yacchatta no?*, including not only the modal *ta*, the past tense marker, but the main verb *youtu*. (The final particle *no* will be discussed later with other particles.) In A2, an adverb *soo* represents the whole clause of the duke's giving away that teapot, followed by the copula *da* in the present tense. And in B2, an adjective *sonna* stands for the whole action of the duke with the negative *nai* in the present tense.

In A3, the English 'he had' is expressed as *yatteita* with the main verb and the past tense aux in a subjunctive clause which is marked by *ra*, though the main clause is in the present tense expressed in an adjective *ii* by itself.

Also in B3, the English 'he hasn't' is expressed as *mada yatte nai* with the main verb and the present negative preceded by an adverb *mada*. The second clause in B3 is expressed as *youtu daroo* with the main verb and the copula in the future tense.

In A4, the same adverb *soo* as already seen in A2 is followed by the copula *daroo*, showing the future tense. B4 has neither the main verb nor a copula but a compound particle *kamo*, meaning the future possibility.

So far as has been examined above, the Japanese Finite includes tense and modality, as English, but it may have other items such as the main verb and sentence final particles. This is only the case of very casual dialogue between males. The scene will look totally different in the dialogue in Version 2.

Japanese Version 2

(A kind of social conversation between acquaintances of similar status and age, not close but knowing each other fairly well, talking quite politely. They both know the duke fairly well; so they show respect to him. Both can be male or female.)

- A1— *Kooshaku-sama wa ano kyusu o oageninat-ta n desu*  
 duke- HON PAR that teapot PAR give-HON-PAST PAR COP-PRES-HON  
*ne ?*  
 PAR
- B1— *E ? soo desu ka ?*  
 oh, so COP-PRES-HON PAR
- A2— *Ee, soo na n desu yo*  
 yes, so COP PAR COP-PRES-HON .PAR
- B2— *Iie, sonna hazu wa ari-mase- n yo.*  
 no, such possibility PAR be- AUX-PRES-HON- NEG PAR
- A3— *Oageninatte i- ta ra ii n desu ga.*  
 give-HON be-PAST if good-PRES PAR COP-PRES-HON though
- B3— *Mada desu yo. Demo oageninaru deshoo ne.*  
 not-yet COP-PRES-HON PAR but give-HON COP-FUT-HON PAR
- A4— *Soo de- shoo ka ?*  
 so COP-FUT-HON PAR
- B4— *Tabun soo nasaru deshoo ne.*  
 perhaps so do-HON COP-FUT-HON PAR

Now in Version 2, a social conversation between acquaintances, the biggest difference from Version 1 is that the main verb is enveloped in an honorific auxiliary when it denotes the action of the duke: the main verb *age(ru)* itself is an euphemistic alternative of *yaru*, 'to give,' and still more it is enveloped in an honorific aux *o-ninaru* to be realized in the verb *oageninaru*, literally meaning, 'honorably to give.'

This honorific envelopment presupposes that the Actor of the main verb is known fairly well to the speakers and holds a higher status than either of them. Thus, enveloping the verb by honorific auxes is an unmistakable sign that the Subject is the person higher in status than the speaker, that is 'the duke' in the above dialogue.

In Version 1, the speakers do not use such honorifics because the situation is such that two close friends are gossiping about the duke who they do not know personally. No matter how high a status a person holds, if s/he is not a direct acquaintance to the

speaker and/or the hearer, s/he is not referred to with honorifics.

Another part in Version 2 which is quite different from Version 1 is that each clause has either *desu* or *masu* near the end of it. These two elements, the former being an honorific copula and the latter an honorific aux, are another kind of honorific which show the speaker's polite attitude toward the hearer. In this version, both people are showing respect to each other by using these sentence final honorifics. As has just been explained, *o-ninaru* specifies who the Actor is by enveloping the verb with its connotation of the speaker's respectful attitude toward the Actor of the verb.

In the same way, *desu* and *masu* and their conjugational variants can specify the hearer, especially when there is a variety in the group of hearers. (See the example of 'A visit' in 3. 2.) The speaker use either of them only when they feel it necessary to show some respect to the audience. (The selection is decided by the preceding word.)

Besides those which have been discussed above, both Version 1 and 2 have small items like *ne*, *yo*, *no*, *na*, and *ka* at the end of each clause. These sentence final particles do not appear in formal writings, but they are indispensable parts in actual conversation. It is these particles that really toss the ball back and forth in the dialogue.

Fundamentally, *ka* has the force to change declarative into interrogative regardless of intonation. And *ne* and *no* can also change declarative into interrogative if pronounced with a rising intonation. *Yo* almost always affirms the declarative statement to which it is added, and *ne* and *no* can also have the same function if pronounced with a falling intonation. *Na* shows the speaker's wish or desire.

Among all of these particles, *ne* is most frequently used perhaps because its other connotation is to ask for agreement of the listener and by doing so it sounds as if it is softening the tone of the whole speech. This particle *ne* can follow not only verbs and auxes but also other content words regardless of the level of respect or politeness. (There are man-favored particles and woman-favored particles together with neutral ones. This is another interesting point in Japanese, though I will not go into any detail here. See for more about this in McGloin (1990).)

Although they are very small, these particles are quite important in the discourse of Japanese because one of them, *ka*, does change the grammatical function of the clause without the help of the Subject. Also they are the components, in Halliday's definition of the Mood, that are being tossed back and forth. Besides, they modify the clause with extra coloring of the speaker's feelings which might not be expressed explicitly in words.

Thus, the Japanese Mood elements consist of the auxes denoting tense, modality, and honorification, together with various sentence final particles, but the Subject is not necessary. If the Subject is the item "picked up by the pronoun in the tag," as Halliday defines the English Subject, there is no such item as explicitly called the Subject in the Japanese Mood elements. Instead, there is a system, called honorifics, doing the work of the Subject.

Besides *auxes* denoting grammatical notions such as tense and modals as English, there are other *auxes* denoting relationships among speakers which are indispensable in Japanese conversation. The speaker is forced to decide whether or not to use honorifics, and if s/he decides to use one, s/he has to decide which honorifics to whom, what level to whom, etc. and etc. Therefore, when, by one reason or other, s/he is put in a group of strangers, s/he does not know how to call the other persons or which honorifics to use. The initiator of a conversation with a stranger finds it very difficult, almost impossible, to open his/her mouth, to begin to talk, or even to be engaged in a phatic communication. (This is one very strong reason why Japanese people are very quiet when placed alone among strangers.)

Therefore, when the Subject is human, the Finite inevitably tells the relationship between the Subject and the speaker of the utterance. Even though the Japanese Mood elements do not include the Subject, there is no misunderstanding of the on-going conversation or a tossing-back-and-forth dialogue because the Finite provides the cue for the Subject by the use or non-use of honorifics. Besides, there is no need to change the order of the Subject and the Finite to make questions because a single particle *ka* can change declarative into interrogative. (See for more complete explanation and examples about Japanese honorific verb formation in Hori (1986 : 375-377) and Hori (1988a).)

### 3. Transcription from a conversation

The Japanese dialogues given in the preceding section were translations from the English; so, they may not represent a real conversation in actual situation. In 1982-4, I worked in a research project to investigate the present state of the Japanese language from the viewpoint of the usage of honorifics by women with some contrast by men. One of the results of this project is a large body of transcribed conversation. There are 41 scenes in which the main speaker, a housewife, is talking with 37 people. I will pick up two scenes from this transcription to see if the above stated subjectless Mood construction is found in the daily conversation.

#### 3. 1. Watering the flowers

The first is a dialogue between the husband and the wife. They are talking about when the wife watered the floweres. The English translation will be given first to provide a general idea of the dialogue.

#### English Translation

H1— Did you water the flowers? Today?

W1— Yes, I did.

H2— Hum.

W2— In the morning.

H3— Huh?

W3— I watered in the morning.

H4— Yeah. Seems you watered around the entrance in the evening, right?

W4— As I forgot to water in the morning, I did it in the evening.

Japanese Original (Ide et al. 1984 : 223)

H1— *Hana ni mizu yat- ta no ? Kyoo ?*  
flower PAR water give-PAST PAR today

W1— *Yari-masi- ta yo.*  
give- HON-PAST PAR

H2— *Un.*  
hum

W2— *Asa.*  
morning

H3— *Un ?*  
huh

W3— *Asa yari-masi- ta.*  
morning give-HON-PAST

H4— *Un. Yuugata nanka genkan no hoo yat- ta mitai ne ?*  
yeah evening something entrance PAR direction give-PAST seem PAR

W4— *Asa yaru no wasure- ta kara yuugata yat- ta n desu.*  
morning give PAR forget- PAST as evening give-PAST PAR COP-PRES-HON

There is a little inconsistency in the wife's answer about the time of watering, but that is not the point here. The point is that there is no subject in any of the utterances above. The main verb is *youtu*, 'to give.' Here, together with the noun, *mizu*, 'water,' this verb means 'to water,' and no matter whether *youtu* appears in questions like H1 and H4 or in answers like W1, W3, and W4 (twice), it has no subject. It is followed by the tense marking aux *ta* and only in the wife's speech it is followed by honorific aux *masu* or honorific copula *desu* but no subject precedes it. In W4, there is another verb *wasureta*, meaning 'forgot,' which has no subject either.

Unlike the duke-giving-the-teapot dialogue, this dialogue has no introduction nor setting up the topic of conversation. Nevertheless, no clause quoted above have the subject; there is no knowing who does the action of 'watering' or 'forgetting.'

Halliday says of the English conversation that the subject of a declarative clause is often 'I' the first person and that of an interrogative clause is often 'you' the second person. The same generalization might be tested against the Japanese conversation; the subject of a declarative clause is 'I' and that of an interrogative is 'you.' Then we have the English translation above, and it is true to the Japanese meaning.

What can be argued from this fact? First, in Japanese, everyday conversation has no subject so long as the subject of a declarative clause is the first person and the subject

of an interrogative clause is the second person.

Then what will happen when the the first person and the second person appear interchangeably in one clause, either declarative or interrogative? How is it possible to tell what is the subject? Let us examine another conversation from the same transcription.

### 3. 2. A visit

The following dialogue is taken from a conversation between the same housewife and a well-known writer, Mr. K, whose daughter happens to go to the same school as the housewife's daughter. He did some contribution to the PTA and she, being in charge of that event, visited him as a sign of gratitude with three other women. First the English translation is given for the rough idea of their conversation.

#### English Translation

W1— Thank you very much for your contribution.

M1— Not at all. I'm sorry I haven't asked you to come into the house.

W2— No, no, that's all right. I think I've heard you'll be taking a trip in July . . .

M2— Well, yes.

W3— As I heard from somebody that you'll be taking . . .

M3— Well..

W4— I thought I should have come much earlier . . .

M4— I'm going to the Ise Shrine.

W5— Oh?

M5— I've got to go to the Ise Shrine.

W6— Oh, is that so?

#### Japanese Original (Ide et al. 1984 : 3)

W1— *Hontoni arigatoo gozai masi- ta.*  
really thank-you COP-HON AUX-HON-PAST

M1— *Aaa. Itumo agatte itadaka nakute moosiwake nai....*  
*oh* always step-up receive-HON NEG-PRES excuse-HON NEG-PRES

W2— *Ie, ie, moo. Ano nanka sitigatu ni ohairinina-rare*  
no no not-at-all well something July in enter-HON-HON  
*masita ra sugu goryokoo de rassharutte koto o ne...*  
HON-PAST if soon HON-trip PAR go-PRES-HON thing PAR PAR

M2— *Ie, ie.*  
no no

W3— *Uketamawatte ori masi- ta mono desu kara...*  
hear-HON exist-HON AUX-HON-PAST thing COP-PRES-HON because

- M3— *Anoo...*  
 well
- W4— *Motto hayakuni...*  
 more early
- M4— *Ise zinguu e ne*  
 Ise Shrine to PAR
- W5— *Hah?*  
 oh?
- M5— *Anoo Ise Zinguu e tyotto itte ko- nai to...*  
 well Ise Shrine to a little go come NEG-PRES if
- M6— *Aa, sayoode irasshai masu ka.*  
 oh HON-so be-PRES-HON AUX-HON-PRES PAR

Here, again, can no subject be found in any of the above clauses. But when they are placed against the English version, it is clear that both ‘I’ and ‘you’ are understood in each utterance. Besides, there are lots of honorifics, scattered around nearly all the utterances. It is those honorifics which identify the Subject of each clause.

For example, in W2 the housewife says “*sitigatu ni ohairini narare masitara,*” literally meaning, ‘if it honorably happens that (someone) honorably enters July.’ This ‘honorability’ is expressed by such auxes as *o-nina-*, *-rare-*, and *-mas-*. The first two are auxes exalting the action of the main verb ‘to enter’ to the highest. So, this honorific envelopment of the verb clearly tells that ‘entering July’ has nothing to do with the speaker, even though the clause is declarative.

This exclusion of the speaker from the subject position consequently leads to the conclusion that the subject must be somebody other than the speaker. Who then could the subject be? The answer must be looked for in context. In this particular situation where there are only five people, the speaker, the hearer, and the speaker’s friends, and the purpose of the visit is to say thanks to the hearer, the most possible interpretation is that the focus of such exaltation should be the hearer, Mr. K. In this way, the only logical interpretation of this clause is that the person who enters July is not the speaker but the hearer, even though no pronoun designating the second person is used.

The third aux, *mas-*, already appeared often in Japanese Version 2 in **3. 1**, showing the speaker’s polite attitude toward the hearer. The same interpretation fits in this case; both *mas-* and *des-* show that the speaker is addressing the hearer politely, that is, treating that person as somebody either higher than the speaker herself or not close to her. So, it is clear that the housewife is talking to the man, Mr. K., and not to her friends who have come with her. Thus, this single clause “*sitigatu ni ohairini nararemasitara*” clearly designates the Subject of the verb and the hearer of the utterance.

The second clause in W2, *sugu goryokoo de rassharutte koto o ne*, literally meaning, ‘the fact that soon (someone) honorably is on an honorable trip.’ Here again, there are

two honorifics, *go-* and *(i)rassharu*. *Go-* is a prefix which exalts the noun followed, showing that the thing or action expressed by the noun is related to someone higher than the speaker. And *(i)rassharu* can be used as an honorific suppletive of any of such verbs as *iku*, *kuru*, or *iru*, meaning 'to go,' 'to come,' and 'to be,' respectively, for the purpose of exalting the doer of the action. So, again, the doer of 'taking a trip' cannot be the speaker or her friends, but the hearer, Mr. K.

As the last example, let us examine W3. The woman says "*uketamawatte orimasita mono desukara*," literally meaning, 'As the thing is that (someone) was in the humble state of humbly having heard.' The main verb *uketamawaru* is a suppletive deferential alternative of the verb *kiku*, 'to hear,' and *orimasita* is an agglutination of one verb *oru*, two auxes *masu* and *ta*. *Oru* is a suppletive deferential alternative of the verb *iru*, 'to be,' implying the highly deferential attitude of its Subject. *Masu* is an aux, often explained up to now, showing the speaker's polite attitude toward the hearer, and *ta* is the past tense marking aux.

So the subject of this clause seems as if s/he is lowering him/herself so low as to put his/her head to the ground. Who else could be the actor of such demeaning behavior but the speaker herself? If it is not the speaker, it must be someone belonging to her ingroup. In the present situation, the subject might include both the speaker and her friends. (This second interpretation is quite possible since the speaker and her friends are considered to belong to the same group, though temporarily, at least belonging to a different group from Mr. K.)

Based on the phenomena cited above from an actual conversation, it could be concluded that in a Japanese conversation, whenever possible, the speaker tries not to call a direct attention to the participants of the dialogue by employing the first and second person pronouns; instead, s/he would rather try to go some other way round like adding respectful honorifics to the verbs if the hearer does that action, and/or adding deferential honorifics to the verbs if the speaker him/herself does that action.

Such an interrelation between the subject and honorifics on the verb might be one of the reasons why the first person and second person do not appear for the most part as subjects in Japanese conversation although they appear when translated into English.

This result coincides quite well with the conclusion I have drawn from the analysis of the Japanese versions of the English dialogue taken from Halliday in I. 1. The subject can be dispensable in the construction of a clause if there is a context of situation which provides the key to it, but the decision-making of use or non-use of honorifics is indispensable in conversation in any situation.

If the presupposition is such that there is no given context or situation, that is, the speaker is talking in a vacant room where nobody is listening and with no personal feeling toward the topic s/he is talking about, then the subject is indispensable for a clause and honorifics are not needed. Strange to say, this is the linguistic situation in

which Japanese clauses have been discussed up to now.

My proposition is, therefore, that it is the Japanese language that must be reexamined in the light of the functional grammar, which takes 'context of situation' as the basic starting point to understand a clause.

## II Construction with the subject

Since I discussed the subjectless construction of Japanese in the preceding chapter, I will now examine clauses with the Subject.

### 1. A dialogue with the subject—Tape-recording

It is fairly widely said that the subject of a Japanese sentence is followed by the nominative particle *ga* and that the topic/theme of a sentence is followed by the thematic particle *wa*. What happens, then, if there is neither *ga* nor *wa*? No subject? No theme? Or are they all omitted like English ellipses in casual dialogues? Compared to the English examples given by Halliday (1985 : 90-91), ellipsis of the subject and/or theme in Japanese is too common and too widely prevailing; so it seems as if the phenomena are not caused by simple 'ellipses' but might be signalling something more profound.

In order to see how *ga* and *wa* are used in an actual conversation, I will quote a dialogue between the same woman as in the preceding chapter and one of her students at a cooking class this woman has been teaching for several years at her house. First I will give a rough idea of the dialogue in English. The first dialogue is about the tape-recorder the woman is carrying to record her speech. The cooking students are worried if their words are taken to be analyzed, too.

#### English Translation

W1— So, it's something like this, you know, that when I talk, such as to people of my age, to people above me, and to people below me, then, they want to know how I talk, that is, how I use differentiating words. That's what they want me to record, I suppose.

S1— Oh, I see.

W2— So, please don't be worried about this tape-recorder, will you?

S2— So you mean, other people's speeches aren't going to be recorded for that purpose, are they?

W3— No.

S3— It's your words mainly, isn't it?

#### Japanese Original (Ide, et al 1984 : 138)

W1— *Dakara omoni watakusi ga, ano, are- na- n desu yo ne.*  
 therefore mainly I PAR well that-COP-PAR COP-PRES-HON PAR PAR

*Dakara doo- nenpai no hito, sorekara meue no hito,*  
 therefore same aged PAR people and senior PAR people  
*sorekara sita no hito ni ne, dooyuufuuni sono onaji kotoba o*  
 and junior PAR people PAR PAR how that same word PAR  
*tukai-wakeru ka to yuu koto rasii desu.*  
 use- separate-PRES PAR PAR say-PRES thing seem-PRES COP-PRES-HON.

S1— *A soo desu ka.*

oh so CUP-PRES-HON PAR

W2— *Doozo okininasara naide kudasai mase.*

please HON-be worried NEG give-me-HON-PRES HON-PRES

S2— *Aite no hito wa haira-nai n desu ne?*

other PAR people PAR enter-NEG PAR COP-PRES-HON PAR

W3— *Un.*

yeah

S3— *Sensei no kotoba ga omo ne?*

teacher PAR words PAR main PAR

This is one of the very rare cases in the whole transcription where the first person takes the nominative particle *ga*. In the total 1,328,601 utterances of all the conversations, tape-recorded for a week, only 36 nominative *ga* follow the first person pronoun: *watakusi ga* 9; *watasi ga* 13; *atasi ga* 12; and *boku ga* 2. Even if I include two intensified first person nominative cases, *watasi jisin ga*, ‘I myself,’ the total number is only 38.

In W1, this housewife says *watakusi ga* to make it clear who is the Subject of *tukaiwakeru* because she feels it necessary to make an excuse for tape-recording while she is talking with other women. Therefore she says, “It’s me whose words are being recorded, that is, how I talk differently to various people, equal, above, and below.” By using *ga*, she separates herself from her students who may not wish their words to be recorded.

Now, let us examine S2. The student says *aite no hito wa hairanain desu ne*, in which *aite no hito* means ‘the interactants’ and *hairanai* means ‘do not enter.’ Why does she say this? Because she wants to know what happens to the speeches of the interactants, the students themselves. She wants to make sure that their speeches are not going to be analyzed. As they are talking with the teacher, it is inevitable that their words are recorded, but if the target is the teacher’s words alone, they can feel greatly relieved.

That is why this student has picked up a new noun phrase, *aite no hito*, ‘the interactants,’ followed by *wa*, to discriminate them from the teacher, and gives a confirming question (perhaps with a rising tone on the particle *ne*) if it is not their speeches that are going to enter the tape-recorder for the purpose of analysis.

Since this clause begins with a new topic, *aite no hito*, this phrase should be the Theme, which fulfills the definition of the Theme given by Halliday, “the point of

departure for what the speaker is going to say.” So, the following particle *wa* can safely be called the Theme marker, or, as it is commonly called, the thematic particle.

Also, this topical Theme is the Subject of the clause and the Actor of the action of ‘entering.’ Therefore, the particle *wa* signifies three things at the same time, the Theme, the Subject, and the Actor. It is just like ‘the duke’ of the English clause, ‘The duke has given the teapot to my aunt.’ (See I. 2. to check that the two translations of this clause begin with a noun, meaning ‘the duke,’ followed by *wa*.)

In the last clause, S3, the student says *sensei no kotoba ga omo ne* in which *ga* follows a noun phrase *sensei no kotoba*, ‘the teacher’s words,’ and denotes it is the Subject of the clause. If there is no Subject and the clause consists only of the Mood element *omo ne*, ‘mainly,’ it might be taken that the omitted Subject is the same as that of the preceding clause, *aiteno hito*, ‘the interactants.’ So the clause comes to mean that the interactants’ words are mainly the ones to be recorded and analyzed.

That is not what the speaker wants to make sure by saying this. She wants to be sure that it is the teacher’s words that are going to be recorded and studied but not hers or other students’. So, she must state her Subject overtly and take the nominative *ga* after it, in order not to make any confusion in identifying the Subject. By using this particle, she can clearly separate the teacher’s words from the students’ words and place herself and other students far from the focus of tape recording.

(Concerning the differentiated use of honorifics revealed in the tape-recording of this housewife, some of the results are published both in Japanese and in English. The English papers are : Hori (1986, 1988a & 1988b) & Ide (1990).)

## 2. The function of *ga*

If the above analysis is taken to be true, it seems plausible that the so-called ‘nominative particle’ *ga* might better be reexamined in the definition and use. As exemplified in the data from the transcription, the occurrence of the first and second person as the subject is very small in everyday conversation, so the particle *ga* rarely appears as the nominative marker of the first and second person pronouns. That is, its appearance in a clause has a very clear reason on the part of the speaker. The speaker employs this particle quite consciously with the purpose of identifying the subject overtly, “marking” the Subject by the particle *ga*.

Even when it appears on the surface of a clause, the occurrence of *ga* after the first person pronoun and the second person pronoun is very small; in the transcription referred to above, among the total 1,328,601 utterances, there are only 38 first person pronouns preceding *ga*, and as for the second person pronouns only 2 precede this particle.

Considering these two phenomena, it might be said that in Japanese everyday conversation, the first person pronoun and the second person pronoun appear only when they are “marked” preceding the nominative particle *ga*; in other words, this particle appears only when the Subject is “marked.”

This statement sounds somewhat similar to Halliday's statement concerning the first person pronoun in English: "In everyday conversation the item most often functioning as unmarked Theme (Subject/Theme) in a declarative clause is the first person pronoun *I*"(1985 : 45).

Thus, it could be argued that the particle *ga* is not indispensable to denote the subject of a clause; rather, it appears only when there is a danger of misunderstanding of the Subject in the text as a whole.

### 3. Subjectless construction of Japanese

So, when the subject is 'I' in a declarative clause and 'you' in an interrogative clause, there usually is no mentioning of the subject. There are two exceptions to it; when the speaker wants to make the subject explicit, and when there is a possibility of making some confusion on the part of the hearer if the subject is not stated overtly.

Also, there are other ways encouraging avoidance of the subject. When the Subject is the Actor of the verb, the most tactful manipulation is to envelope the verb with honorifics, respectful and/or deferential, as has been exemplified in the analysis of Japanese conversations above. This is the most favored method by Japanese people because it relieves them from choosing just one pronoun among many that would best suit the present interactant. However, this in turn, raises another problem: which honorifics are the most appropriate to use toward that person?

The next problem to be taken in the functional analysis of Japanese is how honorifics and human relations are intertwined in the discourse of this language. I will conclude this paper with the expectation that the next topic of my paper will be on this topic of honorifics and human relations.

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Abstract

Not many theoretical linguists doubt that the Japanese sentence is ambiguous out of context; for they often begin discussion with sentences already furnished with subject and verb. But the commonest type of Japanese sentences in conversation has no subject at all. Therefore, it is often impossible who is the doer or the receiver of the act described by the verb if the sentence is viewed only in the light of Western linguistics which presupposes the existence of the subject. The only key to discern the subject is in the context and honorific element(s) scattered around in the sentence.

However, there has been no clear statement in the literature so far about how this subjectless phenomenon is related to honorific system in this language. Most discussions have been either on how to conjugate verb or aux forms (traditional Japanese scholars) or on how differently people speak to various people from politeness viewpoint (both Japanese and non-Japanese sociolinguists). This second approach is exactly what I have been taking for several years but now I believe Japanese honorifics and politeness in English sense cannot be discussed in the same domain. And this paper is one of the first steps to prove it.

With this in mind, the paper will give several examples of texts, both with and without subject and show how it is misleading to interpret a single sentence per se without help from the context and from differentiated use of honorifics. Data will be taken mainly from the dictated dialogues collected by Hori and others. (Text analysis, subjectless construction, honorifics, politeness, Japanese)

(The original of this paper was presented at the 19th International Systemic Functional Congress, Macquarie University, July 13-18, 1992)