

# Multiple foci in Japanese clefts revisited: A semantic incrementality account

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Received 21 November 2012; received in revised form 3 September 2013; accepted 10 September 2013

Available online 17 October 2013



## Abstract

There are two types of Japanese clefts, depending on the presence of a case particle attached to a focus item: multiple foci are possible only in clefts with case-marked foci. Despite attention in the literature, what has been overlooked is the possibility of mixed cases with the last focus item in multiple foci lacking a case particle. Multiple foci data pose a challenge to previous studies within Mainstream Generative Grammar, and in particular these partially case-marked multiple foci data. In this article, I show that a more dynamic conception of language, reflecting semantic incrementality as a core design feature of the grammar, can unify the two types of clefts and a range of further issues, including the partially case-marked foci data. Finally, the analysis is extended to long-distance clefts.  
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**Keywords:** Incrementality; Parsing; Dynamic Syntax; Case-marking; Focus

## 1. Introduction

Cleft constructions in Japanese have stimulated a number of studies. As will be pointed out in section 2, Hoji (1990) is a seminal work, a central claim being that Japanese clefts are divided into two types, depending on whether a focus element has a case particle.

- (1) [Tom-ga e<sub>i</sub> ka-tta no]-wa ringo<sub>i</sub> da.  
[Tom-NOM buy-PAST NO]-TOP apple COP  
'It is an apple that Tom bought.'
- (2) [Tom-ga e<sub>i</sub> ka-tta no]-wa ringo-o<sub>i</sub> da.  
[Tom-NOM buy-PAST NO]-TOP apple-ACC COP  
'It is an apple that Tom bought.'

The embedded clause *Tom-ga ka-tta* (= 'Tom bought') contains the gap e<sub>i</sub>.<sup>1</sup> This embedded clause is nominalised by the particle *no* and then topicalised by the particle *wa*. With respect to this topic, the focus *ringo* (= 'apple') is presented and the string ends with the copula *da*. The difference between (1) and (2) is that only in (2) is the accusative-case particle *o*

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<sup>1</sup> Some caveats are in order. First, *e* indicates a gap without any commitment to the presence of null items. Second, this article uses terminology within Mainstream Generative Grammar such as 'islands' and 'long-distance' but this is for the sake of illustration. Finally, the concepts of topic and focus are clarified in Section 4.2.

attached to the focus. In this article, clefts with a case-less focus as in (1) are called clefts<sub>-C</sub>, while clefts with a case-marked focus as in (2) are called clefts<sub>+C</sub>.<sup>2</sup>

It has been widely observed that clefts<sub>+C</sub> and clefts<sub>-C</sub> display distinct syntactic behaviours. For instance, multiple foci are possible only in clefts<sub>+C</sub> (Cho et al., 2008; Hiraiwa and Ishihara, 2011; Kuroda, 2005; among others).

- (3) [e<sub>i</sub> e<sub>j</sub> *purezento-o age-ta no-wa*  
 [ present-ACC give-PAST NO]-TOP  
*Tom-ga<sub>i</sub> Mary-ni<sub>j</sub> da.*  
 Tom-NOM Mary-DAT COP  
 'It is Tom<sub>i</sub> to Mary<sub>j</sub> that e<sub>i</sub> gave a present e<sub>j</sub>.'

- (4) \*[e<sub>i</sub> e<sub>j</sub> *purezento-o age-ta no-wa*  
 [ present-ACC give-PAST NO]-TOP  
*Tom<sub>i</sub> Mary<sub>j</sub> da.*  
 Tom Mary COP

This different behaviour of clefts<sub>+C</sub>/clefts<sub>-C</sub> has posed a challenge to a uniform analysis in the literature (cf. section 2). In addition, there is an empirical puzzle that has been overlooked. Although case particles have been generally presumed to be obligatory in multiple foci, a second focus, but not a first focus, may be case-less:

- (5) [e<sub>i</sub> e<sub>j</sub> *purezento-o age-ta no-wa*  
 [ present-ACC give-PAST NO]-TOP  
*Tom-ga<sub>i</sub> Mary<sub>j</sub> da.*  
 Tom-NOM Mary COP  
 'It is Tom<sub>i</sub> to Mary<sub>j</sub> that e<sub>i</sub> gave a present e<sub>j</sub>.'

- (6) \*[e<sub>i</sub> e<sub>j</sub> *purezento-o age-ta no-wa*  
 [ present-ACC give-PAST NO]-TOP  
*Tom<sub>i</sub> Mary-ni<sub>j</sub> da.*  
 Tom Mary-DAT COP

These partially case-marked foci data have not been noted elsewhere aside from Hiraiwa and Ishihara (2011:146), who make a passing remark but without analysis. This phenomenon as well as other new data to be provided in later sections is problematic for previous studies within Mainstream Generative Grammar (cf. section 2).

Thus, Japanese clefts raise two issues: a theoretical problem of how to handle the two types of clefts uniformly and an empirical problem of how to account for the partially case-marked foci data. Expanding upon my previous work (Seraku, 2012), I shall show that these two issues are fruitfully addressed in terms of semantic incrementality, a perspective examining how an interpretation is built up on the basis of left-to-right parsing. Through this case study, the present article aims to defend the thesis: semantic incrementality is a significant notion in linguistic theorising.

Section 2 surveys previous studies, uncovering problems to be tackled. Section 3 introduces Dynamic Syntax (Cann et al., 2005; Kempson et al., 2001, 2011) as a model of semantic incrementality. Couched within this framework, section 4 proposes a unified analysis of clefts and section 5 examines multiple foci. The analysis is extended to long-distance clefts in section 6. The article is concluded in section 7.

## 2. Previous studies

Japanese clefts have been analysed within what Culicover and Jackendoff (2005) dub Mainstream Generative Grammar (MGG), a syntactic theory that has been developed by Noam Chomsky in a series of works (e.g. 1957, 1965, 1981, 1995, 2000, 2001). An exception is Gunji (2007), who adopts Discourse Representation Theory (Kamp and Reyle, 1993). The pioneer of research on Japanese clefts within MGG is Hoji (1990), though there were insightful works previously (Harada, 1973; Inoue, 1976; Kitagawa and Ross, 1982; Nakau, 1973; Okutsu, 1974). After Hoji (1990), past studies have been divided into two strands. One line of research has elaborated Hoji's account (Hasegawa, 1997; Kizu,

<sup>2</sup> As noted in Hiraiwa and Ishihara (2011) and others, clefts with an accusative-case marked focus are degraded for some speakers. As Koizumi (2000) notes, however, they are acceptable when a numeral quantifier is present, as in *ringo-o mitsu* (= '3 apples') or when there are multiple foci, as in (3). Clefts with a nominative-case marked focus are quite degraded for many speakers but they are acceptable if a numeral quantifier is used or if there are multiple foci. Cho et al. (2008) report that examples of clefts with a *ga*-marked focus are indeed attested in the web.

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