The Relative Clause Problem

In a series of papers, Comrie (1996, 1998, 2010) has argued for the existence of an "Asian-type" (1996), "verb-marked", or "Japanese" complex NP pattern which is fundamentally different from the complex NP structures found in English. Comrie's claim has two parts.

- **(I)   There is just a single noun-modifying (complex NP) construction.**
- **(II)   There is no extraction in relative clauses.**

Claims (I) and (II) have been particularly influential in the functional-typological literature. But claim (II) has also found some purchase in formal syntactic work on Japanese. The basis for (I) is the surface identity between the following three patterns in Japanese and some other languages within the purview of this conference (e.g. Korean):

(1)   **Relative clauses**
        [[Taroo ga   Ø yaku]   sakana]
        Taroo nom   broil   fish
        'the fish that Taroo broils'

(2)   **Propositional attitude noun complements**
        [[Taroo ga   sakana o   yaku]   zizitu]
        Taroo nom fish   acc   broil   fact
        'the fact that Taroo broils fish'

(3)   **Perception noun complements**
        [[Taroo ga   sakana o   yaku]   nioi]
        Taroo nom fish   acc   broil   smell
        'the smell of Taroo broiling fish'

The basis for (II) is data like (4):

4.   **Complex NP Constraint violation** (Kuno 1973)
        [[Ø kawaigatte ita inu] ga   sinde simatta] onna no ko
              doting.on was dog nom die end.up   girl
        *'the girl that the dog [e] was doting on died'

In this paper I will argue that

- **(II) is wrong**
        There is extraction in Japanese relative clauses.
- **(I) is wrong**
        There are structural differences between different types of Japanese complex NP.

The argument regarding (II) is based on data first noted by Inoue (1976) and analyzed by Sakai (1994); cf. Kim & Sells 2009 for a parallel argument regarding Korean. The argument regarding (I) is based on a number of structural differences between the Complex NP patterns in (1-3). These differences show that, in Japanese as in other languages, Complex NPs break down into a type where the clausal constituent is a predicate of the head (1), and

a type where the clause is a complement of the head (2, 3).

References

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