

## GA-NO CONVERSION AND IDIOLECTAL VARIATIONS IN JAPANESE \*

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Traditional work on dialectal variations has largely been devoted to the study of regional dialectal variations with respect to the lexicon and the phonological (or morphological) component. Thus the central concern of a traditional dialectologist was to sort out a region wherein a particular lexical item or a particular variation of the phonological (or morphological) system is used. On the other hand, variations in the system of syntactic rules have not received the legitimate attention that they deserve, nor have variations among the speakers of a single regional dialect. Variations among the speakers of a single regional dialect have often been referred to as 'free variations', a misleading term since it tends to imply that an individual speaker allows any of the variants.

However, recent investigations have revealed that the so-called 'free variations' may not in fact be free variations for an individual speaker. It may very well be the case that individual speakers consistently use one variant although the regional dialect they speak allows more than one variant. Dialectal variations of this sort which cannot be accounted for in terms of geographic divisions or of social factors such as class divisions we shall henceforth refer to as 'idiolectal variations'.

The existence of idiolectal variations in this sense is not a new discovery, but systematic investigations have not been made until quite recently. For some of the results of work on idiolectal variations in English, see Carden (1970), Elliott et al. (1969), and Greenbaum and Quirk (1970). Unfortunately, however, there has appeared no such work on like phenomena in Japanese. The present paper will present one area of syntax of the Tokyo

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dialect of Japanese which clearly exhibits an idiolectal variation and will discuss how general linguistic theory could shed light on such phenomena.

## I. Ga-No Conversion

Japanese has a syntactic rule which optionally converts the particle ga into the particle no in certain types of embedded sentences, typically in relative clauses. Let us refer to this rule as 'Ga-No Conversion'. For example, (a)-structures in the following may be converted into corresponding (b)-structures by this rule:<sup>1)</sup>

- (1) a. boku ga yonda hon  
I read book  
'the book which I read'  
b. boku no yonda hon
- (2) a. umi ga mieru oka  
ocean seeable hill  
'the hill that commands the ocean'  
b. umi no mieru oka
- (3) a. okane ga aru hito  
money have man  
'the man who is rich'  
b. okane no aru hito
- (4) a. unagi ga tabetai hito  
eel eat-want  
'the one who wants to have eel dishes'  
b. unagi no tabetai hito

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1) All Japanese examples are transcribed in the National Romanization, with conventional spacing used to facilitate the matching of English glosses. English glosses are, however, only approximate and are given only to 'lexical' items on their first appearance.

- (5) a. kono onna-no-ko ga suki-na okasi  
       this girl                   like     candy  
       'the candy which this girl likes'  
       b. kono onna-no-ko no suki-na okasi
- (6) a. okasi ga suki-na onna-no-ko  
       'the girl who likes candies'  
       b. okasi no suki-na onna-no-ko

Although exact formulation of Ga-No Conversion is impossible at present, we will attempt to give an outline of necessary characterizations of this rule in order to facilitate the discussions to follow.

Firstly, the ga-phrase that undergoes this rule need not be a subject noun phrase, as is obvious from examples (2), (3), (4), and (6). In these examples, the ga-phrases that undergo this rule are object noun phrases.<sup>2)</sup>

Secondly, Ga-No Conversion cannot apply to all types of embedded sentences, but only to clausal embedded sentences, that is, embedded sentences with finite main verbs.<sup>3)</sup> Non-clausal embedded sentences such as those in the following do not permit application of this rule:

- (7) a. Watasi wa ototo                   ga kite hosii.<sup>4)</sup>  
       I                   younger brother     come want  
       'I want my brother to come.'  
       b. \*Watashi wa ototo no kite hosii.
- (8) a. Boku wa sake                   ga nomitai.  
       alcoholic drink     drink-want  
       'I want to have an alcoholic drink.'  
       b. \*Boku wa sake no nomitai.

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2) For justification of the claim that the ga-phrases in these examples are object rather than subject noun phrases, see Kuno (1970).

3) The bifurcation into 'clausal' and 'non-clausal' embeddings is due to Kuroda (1965:169).

4) Note that the particle ga in this example is in fact a variant of the more regular particle ni.

It should be added at this point that Ga-No Conversion does not apply to all clausal embedded sentences but only to sentences embedded within noun phrases (irrespective of whether they are embedded as relative clauses or as complements). This excludes to-complements from the domain of the application of this rule, as seen in the following paradigm:

- (9) a. Taroo wa kinoo Ziroo ga kita koto o siranakatta,  
           yesterday          came that know-not-past  
       'Taroo wasn't aware that Jiro came yesterday.'
- b. Taroo wa kinoo Ziroo ga sinda no ni odoroiita,  
                                   died          got-surprised  
       'Taroo was surprised that Jiro died yesterday.'
- c. Taroo wa kinoo Ziroo ga kita to omotta,  
   thought  
       'Taroo thought that Jiro came yesterday.'
- (10) a. Taroo wa kinoo Ziroo no kita koto o siranakatta,  
       b. Taroo wa kinoo Ziroo no sinda no ni odoroiita,  
       c. \*Taroo wa kinoo Ziroo no kita to omotta.

The above observations lead us to the following tentative formulation of Ga-No Conversion:

(11) Ga-No Conversion (optional)

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc}
 X - [ & \text{NP} [ & S & Y - \text{NP} - \text{ga} - Z - \text{PRED} ] & S - N ] & \text{NP} - W \\
 1 & & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
 \Rightarrow & 1 & & 2 & 3 & \underline{\text{no}} & 5 & 6 & & 7 & & 8
 \end{array}$$

where X, Y, Z, and W indicate any string of formatives and PRED stands for the category 'predicate', which includes verbs, adjectives, nominal adjectives, and the copula.

## II. The Idiolectal Variation in the Ga/No Alternation

In the preceding section we were concerned with rather simple cases, where there is no disagreement among the speakers of the Tokyo dialect as to the acceptability of the outputs of Ga-No Conversion. When we further



that the structural description of Ga-No Conversion for speakers of Dialect B contains no variable in term 5 in the formulation (11), whereas the structural description of this rule for speakers of Dialect A contains a variable in that position.

At first glance this may seem to work, in view of the following additional examples:<sup>5)</sup>

- (14) a. me ga nakanaka denai sakura-no-ki  
 sprout be-slow-to come out-not cherry-tree  
 'a cherry tree which is slow to sprout'  
 b. (?\*)me no nakanaka denai sakura-no-ki
- (15) a. titioya ga dai-ongakka de-atta buturigakusha  
 father great-musician was physicist  
 'a physicist whose father was a great musician'  
 b. (?\*)titioya no dai-ongakka de-atta buturigakusha
- (16) a. zinkoo ga 500 man datta tokai  
 population ten thousand was city  
 'the city whose population was (once) five million'  
 b. (?\*)zinkoo no 500 man datta tokai

As predicted, the (b)-structures are unacceptable for speakers of Dialect B but are acceptable for speakers of Dialect A.

However, there are cases where the above-mentioned solution does not work. Firstly, if there is more than one element intervening between the ga-phrase and the main verb, Ga-No Conversion cannot be applied even for speakers of Dialect A:

- (17) a. kodomo-tati ga minna-de ikioi-yoku kake-nobotta  
 children together vigorously run-climb up  
 kaidan  
 stairway

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5) (?\*) means that the sentence marked with it is acceptable for speakers of Dialect A but highly unacceptable for speakers of Dialect B.

'the stairway which those children ran up together vigorously'

- b. \*kodomō-tati no minna-de ikioi-yoku kake-nobotta kaidan

(Unparenthesized asterisks mean that the sentences marked with them are unacceptable for both groups of speakers.) Secondly, there are cases where Ga-No Conversion is inapplicable even for speakers of Dialect A although only one element intervenes between the ga-phrase and the main verb:

- (18) a. Taroo ga Hanako ni kasita (Ziroo no) hon  
lent book  
'the book (of Jiro's) that Taro lent Hanako'  
b. \*Taroo no Hanako ni kasita (Ziroo no) hon
- (19) a. Taroo ga Hanako ni karita (Ziroo no) hon  
borrowed  
'the book (of Jiro's) that Taro borrowed from Hanako'  
b. \*Taroo no Hanako ni karita (Ziroo no) hon
- (20) a. Taroo ga Hanako kara katta budoo-syu  
from bought wine  
'the wine which Taro bought from Hanako'  
b. \*Taroo no Hanako kara katta budoo-syu<sup>6)</sup>

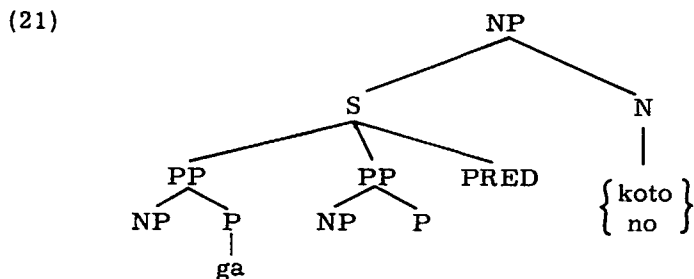
The first type of counterevidence can be accounted for if we restrict term 5 of the structural description of the version of Ga-No Conversion for speakers of Dialect A to an optional occurrence of a single phrase category (i. e. PP, NP, AdvP, etc.), but this cannot account for the second type of counterevidence.

Notice, however, that there is in fact a difference between the examples (12)-(16) on the one hand and those in (18)-(20) on the other, if we take into consideration a bit deeper stage of derivation. The difference can be brought to light when we consider the stage of a derivation prior to the application of the rule that deletes a noun phrase in a relative clause identical

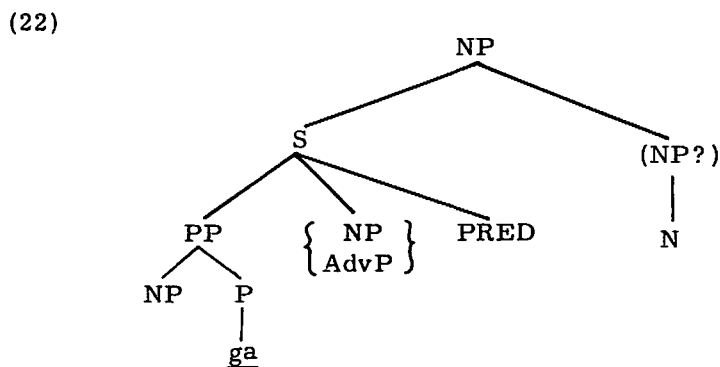
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6) Note that this structure is grammatical if derived from another source, Hanako kara katta Taroo no budoo-syu ('the wine of Taro's that he bought from Hanako'), which is irrelevant for the present discussion.

to the head noun (phrase) of that relative clause, which we shall refer to as 'Relativization'. At this stage of a derivation, configurations of the sentences in examples (12) and (13) are essentially the same as their surface configurations since they are not derived through Relativization. The configuration for the noun phrase with the embedded sentence will be shown below:

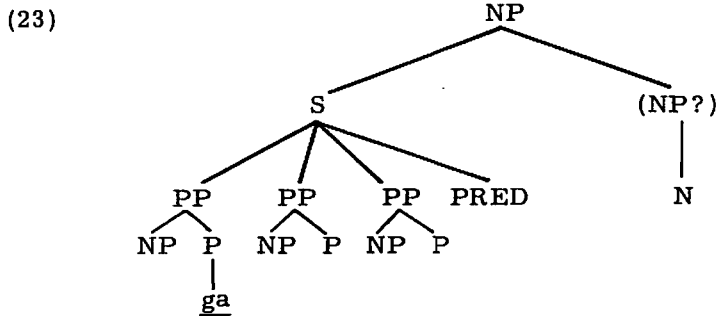


At this stage too, there is only one element intervening between the ga-phrase and the main verb of the embedded clause. Likewise, the configurations for the structures in (14)-(16), namely,



contain only one element intervening the ga-phrase and the main verb of the relative clause. On the other hand, the pre-Relativization stage for structures in (18)-(20) contains more than one intervening element, as seen from the following configuration:





Therefore, we may conclude that in order to account for the seemingly exceptional examples, we must adopt the revision in the structural description of the version of Ga-No Conversion for speakers of Dialect A and, in addition, stipulate that this rule will precede Relativization in the sequence of transformations. These revisions will enable us to account for the observations about the acceptability judgments by speakers of Dialect A. The resulting formulation of Ga-No Conversion for speakers of Dialect A will be as follows:

- (24) Ga-No Conversion for speakers of Dialect A
- |     |   |    |   |   |     |      |             |           |      |   |   |    |   |      |   |
|-----|---|----|---|---|-----|------|-------------|-----------|------|---|---|----|---|------|---|
| X - | [ | NP | [ | S | Y - | NP - | <u>ga</u> - | (A) -     | PRED | ] | S | -N | ] | NP - | W |
| 1   |   |    |   |   | 2   | 3    | 4           | 5         | 6    |   | 7 |    |   | 8    |   |
| =>  |   |    |   |   | 1   | 2    | 3           | <u>no</u> | 5    | 6 |   | 7  |   | 8    |   |

- Notes: (i) This rule is optional.  
(ii) This rule applies before Relativization.

where A is an abbreviatory variable for a single phrase category.

Returning to the acceptability judgments of speakers of Dialect B, we have already seen that the formulation of Ga-No Conversion for this group of speakers can be obtained if we drop term 5 from the tentative formulation in (11). Notice, in addition, that for this group of speakers this rule cannot precede Relativization, since if it does, it cannot be applicable to structures like (1) or (5). At the pre-Relativization stage of the derivation for a structure like (1) or (5), there is a noun phrase intervening between the ga-phrase and the main verb of the relative clause which is to be deleted later by Relativization, and this noun phrase would block the application of Ga-No

Conversion if this rule preceded Relativization. From this we see that the version for speakers of Dialect B cannot precede Relativization. To summarize:

(25) Ga-No Conversion for speakers of Dialect B

X -	[	NP	[	S	Y -	NP -	<u>ga</u> -	PRED	]	S -	N	]	NP -	W
1					2	3	4	5		6			7	
=> 1					2	3	<u>no</u>	5		6			7	

- Notes: (i) This rule is optional.  
(ii) This rule applies after Relativization.

Given these considerations, then, we are now in a position to give an affirmative answer to the question posed at the beginning of this section. There is indeed an underlying regularity behind the disagreement on the acceptability judgments by the two groups, and this regularity is to be captured by differences in the formulation and the ordering of the rule in question. Thus each group of speakers consistently obeys a single system of rules, which we can rightfully call a 'dialect' insofar as we define a 'dialect' as a coherent system of rules. In the next section we shall be concerned with the theoretical implications of these observations.

### III. Idiolectal Variations and Diachronic Change

In the preceding section we were concerned with the static aspect of the idiolectal variation in Ga-No Conversion. Here we shall be concerned with the dynamic aspect of the variation, and will discuss its relation to the general linguistic theory.

It should be mentioned at the outset that the acceptability judgments we have indicated were obtained from a rather small number of informants, no more than fourteen in total, including myself. It seems, however, to be beyond any doubt that there are at least two groups of speakers each of which has a consistent formulation of Ga-No Conversion. The idiolectal variation seems to have nothing to do with dialectal regions, since all the informants are native speakers of the Tokyo dialect. It also seems to bear no connection to social dialectal divisions, since all the informants belonged to the middle

class. There was, however, a faint suggestion of a correlation between the idiolectal variation herein discussed and the age of the informant. The informants were all in their twenties or early thirties, except for two, who were in their forties. The curious fact was that both these informants spoke Dialect A, although other informants (i. e. those who were in their twenties or early thirties) were bifurcated into two groups. It seems that this relates to the fact that of the two dialects elicited above, Dialect A was the majority dialect some forty years ago, although at present Dialect B is the majority dialect among speakers in their twenties. Thus we can obtain abundant examples of the outputs of Ga-No Conversion in the version of the Dialect A, from the literary work by Ryuunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1931). Some quotations follow:

- (26) a. (\*)Watasi no motto-mo odoraita no wa Lenin no  
 most  
 amarini atarimae-no eiyuu datta koto de aru.  
 unexpectedly ordinary hero  
 'What surprised me most was that Lenin was too ordinary a hero.'
- b. (\*)Ren'ai no si o omowaseru no wa sinkaron-teki  
 love death remind evolutionistic  
 konkyo o motte iru no ka mo sirenai.  
 basis have may-be  
 'There may be an evolutionistic reason for the fact that love reminds us of death.'
- c. (\*)Geizyutuka no geizyutu o uru no mo, watasi no kani  
 artist art sell crab  
 no kanzume o uru no mo, kakubetu kawari no aru  
 can especially change  
 hazu wa nai.  
 necessity there-is-not  
 'There can't be any difference between the artist's selling his art and my selling canned crabs.'

These observations seem to suggest that the Tokyo dialect is now in the process of a diachronic change and that the idiolectal variation that we pointed out above mirrors the current stage of the development of this change. Obviously Dialect A is on the edge of losing its status as the majority dialect, and the newcomer, Dialect B, is spreading among the speakers of the Tokyo dialect.

If this is the case, one may then wonder how such a change should take place. In the rest of this paper we shall try to give a partial explanation for this putative linguistic change.

Halle (1962) proposed that "the primary mechanism of [diachronic] phonological change is the addition of rules to the grammar with special (although not exclusive) preference for the addition of single rules at the ends of different subdivisions of the grammar."<sup>7)</sup> We have, however, observed a diachronic change which can hardly be regarded as rule addition. In fact the opposite seems to be the case, for the formulation (24) of Ga-No Conversion for Dialect A is a rule schema which abbreviates the following two rules:

- (27) a. X - [ NP [ S Y - NP - ga - A - PRED ] S - N ] NP - W  
           1                  2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
       ==> 1                  2 3 no 5 6 7 8
- b. X - [ NP [ S Y - NP - ga - PRED ] S - N ] NP - W  
           1                  2 3 4 5 6 7  
       ==> 1                  2 3 no 5 6 7

The formulation (25) for Dialect B is obtained by eliminating the rule (27a) from the schema (25). It should not be forgotten that Dialect B has another innovation, namely the change in the ordering of this rule with respect to Relativization.

On the basis of a host of other instances of diachronic change in the same direction, Kiparsky (1968) argued that simplification of a grammar should be regarded as another major mechanism for diachronic change. The simplification of a grammar as he puts it takes either the form of elimination of (a part of) a rule or the form of rule reordering.

7) Halle (1962: 347).

It can easily be observed that the diachronic change suggested above involves both types of grammar simplification. On the hand, it involves elimination of rule (27a); on the other hand, it involves reordering of Ga-No Conversion with respect to Relativization. The change is thus schematically representable as follows:

(28)	Dialect A	>	Dialect B
	Ga-No Conversion [(27a)+(27b)]		Relativization
	Relativization		Ga-No Conversion [(27b)]

It seems that the cause of such a simplification lies in the fact that a child acquires his native language through "constructing the simplest (optimal) grammar capable of generating the set of utterances, of which the utterances heard by the child are a representative sample."<sup>8)</sup> Notice that the set of data available for the child is inevitably restricted in size and often degenerate in quality. Since the child constructs the optimal grammar that is consistent only with the original data, the grammar he constructs need not be identical to the grammar that adults have constructed. In particular, he may not build both rules in (27) into his first grammar, since it is highly improbable for the set of data first given to him to contain instances of the ga/no alternation beyond the simplest ones, e. g. those in (1)-(6). It is therefore quite natural for him to set up only the restrictive rule (27b) in his earliest system of rules. When he encounters such examples as (12b)-(16b) uttered by adult speakers of Dialect A, which are beyond the generative capacity of his own grammar, the child is urged to revise his grammar and he does so by adding a new rule, (27a), to his grammar and then reordering this rule before Relativization. But such a wholesale restructuring of the grammar "is beyond the capabilities of the average adult."<sup>9)</sup> If, therefore, such crucial examples do not systematically occur in the set of linguistic data available for him until a fairly late stage of acquisition, the person learning his native language cannot incorporate the rule of Ga-No Conversion in the optimal way, "due to the deterioration or loss in the adult of the ability to construct optimal (simplest) grammars on the basis of a restricted corpus of

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8) Halle (1962: 344).

9) ibid.

examples."<sup>10)</sup> Since Ga-No Conversion is optional even in Dialect A, and since everyday speech, which provides the primary linguistic data for the construction of his grammar, consists more often of relatively simple structures, the child learning his native language may in some probability reach adulthood without being systematically exposed to the crucial examples such as (12b)-(16b). Such speaker may first form a minority group among the majority group (in this case, the speakers of Dialect A), but once this process of creating the speakers of Dialect B starts, it is accelerated by a sort of positive feedback effect, since the more of the speakers belong to Dialect B, the less opportunities the language learners will have to encounter the crucial examples such as (12b)-(16b).

We can also add that the direction of the rule reordering observed above is quite consistent with a recent proposal by Kiparsky (1968) that "feeding order tends to be maximized." When a rule (A) creates structures to which another rule (B) is applicable, A is said to be a 'feeding rule' for B. If A precedes B, these rules are said to be in the 'feeding order'. In the particular case under discussion, the ordering in Dialect B is a feeding order, since the application of Relativization creates structures to which Ga-No Conversion (with the formulation (25)) becomes applicable, from structures to which Ga-No Conversion was not applicable (as in e. g. (1) or (5)).<sup>11)</sup>

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10) Halle (1962: 344).

11) See Kiparsky (1968: 196ff). What is beyond the account by Kiparsky is that the diachronic change here discussed takes the form of 'leveling' rather than the form of 'extension', although it is observed by Kiparsky (1968: 202) that in general, grammar simplification by means of maximization of feeding order results in extension and not in leveling. Our present finding therefore seems to be a serious counterexample to Kiparsky's generalization.

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