

HEADLINE CONSTRUCTIONS IN JAPANESE NEWSPAPERS  
- A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS -

T. Uyeno and O. Fujimura

0. The aim of the paper

Japanese newspaper headlines are being analyzed. Newspaper headlines<sup>1)</sup> are assumed to be constructed according to their particular syntax in conformity with the special circumstances which require that there be a minimal amount of redundancy. It may be hoped that certain performative<sup>2)</sup> aspects of syntax reveal themselves under this extreme condition of communication in the form of partial or complete suppression of certain kinds of syntactic elements. Particular interest may be directed to separation of those aspects in general syntactic structures and also to its implications in studies of linguistic peculiarities in certain pathological performances.

1. Material

The newspapers used in this study are both the morning and the evening issues of The Asahi, The Mainichi, The Yomiuri and The Nihonkeizai, which were randomly sampled from April, 1972 through February, 1973. Approximately 500 titles have been scanned, and this preliminary study deals mainly with qualitative observations of salient syntactic features.

For a long article, a lead is typically provided in addition to a headline. This report is concerned only with true headlines.

Headlines, needless to say, are written rather than spoken, and in order to facilitate rapid reading various visual effects are aimed at by using different sizes and styles of type font as well as their vertical or horizontal arrangements. These visual or typographical effects of headlines are perhaps no less important than their content, but they are not touched upon in this paper.

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1) Cf. Fujikura: Chapter 3; Kobayashi: pp. 29-35; Yoshioka; and Garst & Bernstein: Part Two.

2) Cf. Fujimura, p. 6.

## 2. Headline Conventions

Space requirement is the crucial factor in headlines, and there are some conventions that are consciously observed by the writers. Japanese headlines most commonly contain 7 or 8 symbols in a single line. In some cases 11 or 12 symbols or even more are allowed. Headlines are written in kanji and kana, both hiragana and katakana, as usual Japanese sentences are. This mixing facilitates separation of morphemes, and this is important since no apparent mark is given for word boundaries in Japanese orthography. No peculiarity of headlines, however, can be pointed out in this respect.

When the article is long, double lines (deck and bank) or triple lines (deck and banks) are used in a head. In general, it can be assumed that a line in a head represents a sentence. When there is more than one line, the top states the essence of the news in a sentence and the succeeding lines (banks) elaborate and add facts in another sentence or more.

Non-past tense is used as a rule for past events (see 3.3, however). Sentence-final periods are always omitted. Omission of minor forms such as particles, as in telegraphic writing, is common, under certain conditions. It is preferred that the head contain a verb (predicate); if it does not, the verb must be predictable from the content of the head. A news article is assumed to state an event in terms of who, where, when, what, why and how. Some of these six items compose the headline; which and how many of these are selected depends on the kind of news. Some news items are presented as single events while others are presented as subsequent to previous reports. Many items of police news belong to the former kind and the political and economic news items belong to the latter. Headlines for single events tend to have more constituents than those for subsequent ones.

## 3. Headline Construction

### 3.1. Headlines with verbs

#### 3.1.1. Sentence types

The dominant sentence type used in headlines is declarative, such as

(1).

(1) 日中国交開く

|             |                      |        |
|-------------|----------------------|--------|
| Nittyuu     | kokkoo               | hiraku |
| Japan-China | diplomatic relations | open   |

As mentioned above, the non-past/perfect tense may also be used for a past/perfect event, resulting in an ambiguity as to the time of the event. The past/perfect form with the suffix ta is used only when someone's statement is quoted in a head, as below:

(2) 日台条約は失効した

Nittai zyoyaku wa sikkoosita  
 (Japan- (treaty) (lost effect)  
 Taiwan)

背景説明 大平外相が表明  
 haikē setumee Ohira Gaisyoo ga hyoomēe  
 (background) (explanation) (Ohira (state)  
 Foreign Minister)

So-called interrogative sentences in headlines are used but they are obviously not directed to the readers to be answered. Both the particle ka, as in (3), and the question mark, as in (4), express the uncertainty of the propositional content. If an interrogative adverb is used in a line, then neither the particle ka nor the question mark is used, as in (5) below:

(3) 「円」一両日に決着か

"en" itiryoozitu ni kettiyaku ka  
 (yen) (one or two days)(in)(settle)

(4) 「反米」「反日」で協議?

"hanbee" "hanniti" de kyoogi ?  
 (anti-America) (anti-Japan) (about) (confer)

シアヌーク議長北鮮訪問へ  
 Sianuuku Gityoo Kitatyoosen hoomon e  
 (Sianuk) (Chairman)(North Korea)(visit) (toward)

(5) “小異”どう解消

"syooi" doo kaisyoo  
 (small difference) (how) (dissolve)

An apparent imperative sentence in a headline is invariably a quotation from someone's statement (see (6) and (7)), except in editorials, forums or the like (see (8)).

(6) 「米国はひけ」

"Beekoku wa hike"  
 (U. S. A.) (withdraw) (imperative)

英リベラル派一斉に忠告  
 Ee riberaruha isseeni tyuukoku  
 (British) (Liberals) (unanimously) (advice)

- (7) 「回転サーチライト禁止して」  
 "kaiten saatiraito kinsisite"  
 (rotary) (search-light) (prohibit) (suspended ending)  
 アマチュア天文家が "光害" 告発  
 amatyua tenmonka ga "koogai" kokuhatu  
 (amateur) (astronomer) (light-pollution) (appeal)
- (8) 汚染に強い樹木を植えよ  
 osen ni tuyoi zyumoku o ueyo  
 (pollution) (against) (strong) (trees) (object) (plant)

An exclamatory sentence as a headline is rare. A typical example is (9), which could be read as a complex noun phrase as a whole together with the second line.

- (9) 長かった!  
 nagakatta!  
 (was long)
- 27 年  
 27 nen  
 (years)

It must be mentioned that an exclamatory form must indicate perfect-nonperfect distinction, as indicated by the past/perfect ta in (9). This type of line may be considered as a sort of direct quotation.

### 3.1.2. Verbs

The verbs in headlines are morphologically grouped roughly into two categories: a compound verb consisting of a nominal base and a verb stem su- 'do' as in kaisyoosu- 'dissolve' and kinsisu- 'prohibit', and a simple stem such as hirak- 'open' and ue- 'plant'.

The use of compound verbs in headlines is very common. Whenever a compound verb is used as a main verb (of a nonperfect declarative sentence), the form su<sup>3)</sup> must be omitted as in (5) above. This is also true with the cases of interrogative sentences such as (3) and (4), in contrast with the exclamatory sentences as discussed above.

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3) The form su cannot be substituted for by such verbs as yar 'do'. It is a formal element and semantically the nominal part, e. g., kaisyoo of the verb kaisyoosu 'dissolve', has the verbal characterization.

### 3.1.3. Particles and commas

The particle ga, which marks the surface subject noun phrase, and o, which marks the surface object noun phrase, are often suppressed.<sup>4)</sup> The headline (1) can be interpreted as (1') with the pertinent (suppressed) particles in parentheses<sup>5)</sup>

(1') 日中 (が) 国交 (を) 開く  
Nittyuu (ga) kokkoo (o) hiraku

Naturally, headlines appearing with these particles are also numerous.

(10) 恋がたきが犯行を自供  
koigataki ga hankoo o zikyoo  
(rival in love) (crime committing) (confess)

(11) カワセミ 農薬がエサを一掃  
kawasemi nooyaku ga esa o issoo  
(kingfisher) (agricultural chemicals) (baits) (sweep away)

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4) The use of the term "suppression" here does not necessarily imply any assumption as to the existence of the forms o or ga in the underlying structure. In the following discussion, nevertheless, simply for the ease of comparison between the headline forms and the corresponding regular sentences, descriptions may be read as though those particles had been deleted by an optional rule which is characteristic of the headline grammar.

5) This sentence presents an interesting problem about certain kinds of syntactic ambiguity. Along with an interpretation (1'), the headline form (1) may be given another interpretation:

(1'') 日中の国交が開く  
Nittyuu no kokkoo ga hiraku  
(Japan-China) (diplomatic relations) (open)

where the particle no (possessive marker) will not appear if a compound noun Nittyuukokkoo is used. All these readings, though apparently different as regular sentences, represent the same semantic structure, as long as the extent of semantic specificity that is aimed at by the headlines (namely, that should be described by the headline grammar) is concerned. In this sense, it is not like the constructional homonymity where one can perceive distinct meanings for the same surface forms, one of which the particular use of the form is meant for (except in puns). As discussed later, the active-passive distinction is also ambiguous when all the particles and the compound-verb ending su are suppressed. In fact this would be the case in (1) if the verb happened to be kaisi(su) in place of hirak. These cases bear essential similarity to commonly observed cases of nominalization, e. g., in English "change of price" etc.

The particle ga is often suppressed, particularly when the verb in a headline is intransitive, as in (12), and so is the particle o in an imperative sentence, as in (13).

- (12) ケンブリッジ五連勝  
 Kenburizzi gorenshoo  
 (Cambridge) (win 5 consecutive victories)

- (13) 有能教員優遇せよ  
 yuunoo kyoojin yuuguseyo  
 (able) (teacher) (treat well)

The majority of headlines are apparently active sentences. When the verb is compound and the particles are suppressed, however, the sentence is characteristically ambiguous in respect to the active-passive distinction.

- (14) 商魂の無料バス延長  
 syookon no muryoo basu entyoo  
 (commercial spirit) (free) (bus) (extend)

- (15) 商店主ら28人逮捕  
 syootensyura 28 nin taiho  
 (store owners) (persons) (arrest)  
 暴力団と花札トバク  
 booryokudan to hanahuda tobaku  
 (gangsters) (and) ('flower cards') (gambling)

Line (14) can be taken either as an active sentence with o attached to muryoo basu, meaning 'they extended the bus schedule' or as a passive with saru at the end, meaning 'the bus schedule was extended'. The same are the cases with (15) and (5) above. It is in fact questionable whether any such distinction is ever intended by the writer, or perceived by the reader (cf. footnote 5).

Particles such as ni, e, de, kara and made which indicate time, place or direction are generally kept in their noun phrases without suppression. Among those noun phrases the ones that are marked by ni as in (16) or de as in (17) tend to be used more in a headline with an explicit verb, while the noun phrases marked by the other particles are often used in a headline without its main verb, as discussed later.

- (16) 有明海に密漁船横行  
 Ariakekai ni mituryoosen ookoo  
 (Ariake Sea) (in) (poaching-boat) (infest)
- (17) 世田谷で八むね焼く  
 Setagaya de hatimune yaku  
 (Setagaya) (in) (8 houses) (burn)

Topics without contrastive intention for which wa is typically used in regular Japanese, are often marked in headlines by special devices such as commas, as in (19), (20), (21), smaller font, as in (18), quotation marks as in (3), without the use of wa.

- (18) 西独 あすも閉鎖か  
 市場 asu mo heesa ka  
 Seedoku (West Germany) (tomorrow) (also) (close) ?  
 sizyoo (market)
- (19) 焦点, 中ソ関係に  
 syooten, tyuuso kankee ni  
 (focus) (China-Soviet relationship) (to)
- (20) 軍国化, 一様に警戒  
 gunkokuka, itiyoo ni keekai  
 (militarization) (the same manner) (in) (alarmed)
- (21) 攻防, 一両日がヤマ  
 kooboo, itiryoozitu ga yama  
 (attack and defense)(one-or-two-days) (climax)  
 北部都市占領を企図 ?  
 hokubu tosi senryoo o kito ?  
 (northern) (cities) (occupation) (attempt)

The use of a comma sometimes may be interpreted as a replacement of o. Line (20) may be considered as such an example; however, it indicates also a sort of topicalization.<sup>6)</sup>

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6) It may be noted that wa can replace o in topicalizing the NP (in conjunction with preposing). In (21), another interesting use of topicalization (with the use of wa in place of the comma in regular Japanese) is demonstrated, in which the surface structure "NP<sub>1</sub> wa NP<sub>2</sub> ga NP<sub>3</sub> copula" may be translated as 'NP<sub>2</sub> is NP<sub>3</sub> of NP<sub>1</sub>' or 'What makes NP<sub>3</sub> of NP<sub>1</sub> is NP<sub>2</sub>'.

### 3.2. Headlines without verbs

#### 3.2.1. Copula sentences

Headlines that can be identified with copula sentences always suppress the copula da, which takes the surface final position otherwise.

(22) 汚染経路が問題

osen keero ga mondai  
(pollution) (forming process) (question)

(23) 通勤快速まるでガス室

tuukin-kaisoku marude gasusitu  
(commuting-express) (like) (gas-chamber)

(24) タダで国際電話かけ放題

tada de kokusaidenwa kakehoodai  
(no cost)(at) (overseas-phone-call) (callable as often as one wishes)

These headlines contain two or three noun phrases of which the last nominal is the predicate of each headline. In (23), the suppressed particle may be interpreted as either wa or ga, whereas in (24), it is either "kokusaidenwa o kakehoodai" making a single NP for the entire headline, or "kokusaidenwa ga kakehoodai" making a 'subject' ga 'predicate' construction.

#### 3.2.2. Headlines without verbs

A headline without a verb commonly contains two or three noun phrases. In stating somebody did or does something, the subject NP and the object NP will be the major constituents of a line. The use of the particle ga is optionally omitted as in the case of 3.1.3. In the case of verbless lines, peculiarly, it is obligatory to omit the object particle o that marks the second noun phrase in the line-final position, as in the following examples:

(25) 三木副総理が感謝電

Miki Hukusoori ga kansyaden  
(Deputy Prime Minister Miki) (telegram of thanks)

(26) 蔣介石がカゼ

Syookaiseki ga kaze  
(Chiang Kai-shek) (cold)



(27) 主婦が白昼強盗

syuhu ga hakutyuu gootoo  
(housewife) (daytime) (robbery)

The reader of these headlines will at a glance fill in a proper verb of a specific semantic value. Thus (25) can be understood as "Miki Hukusoori ga kansyaden (o utta)" 'The Deputy Prime Minister Miki (sent) a telegram of thanks', and (26) as "Syookaiseki ga kaze (o hiita)" 'Chiang Kai-shek (caught) a cold', where even the particular verb form is almost uniquely determined by the NP in the VP. The line (27) may be interpreted as "syuhu ga hakutyuu gootoo (o hataraita)" 'a housewife (committed) a daytime robbery', or perhaps "syuhu ga hakutyuu gootoo (datta)" 'A housewife (was) the daytime robber.' It must be noted, particularly, that in (27), a sentence "syuhu ga hakutyuu gootoo o tukamaeta" 'a housewife caught a burglar' is probably as unusual as the interpretation given above is, from a semantic point of view, and still this interpretation is clearly impossible for the headline (27). Even when the "syuhu" 'housewife' is replaced by "keikan" 'policeman' in (27), the semantically most probable interpretation that 'a policeman caught a robber' is impossible. Thus, the verb that can be suppressed must be one that is characteristic of the particular noun in the VP, and probably must be semantically most redundant within the VP but not necessarily the one that makes the information of the sentence most redundant.

The suppression of o is also obligatory when an object phrase occurs in a headline together with noun phrases other than a subject. (28) and (29) are two of these cases.

(28) “秘密の小箱,, で大きないたずら

"himitu no kobako" de ookina itazura  
(secret) poss. (small box)(with)(big) (mischief)

米の若者

Bee no wakamono  
(American) (youngsters)

(29) 両大国支配に疑念

ryootaikoku sihai ni ginen  
(two big countries) (control) (about) (doubt)

孤立感深めるアジア諸国  
 koritukan hukameru azia syokoku  
 (isolated feeling) (deepen) (Asian) (countries)

The readers of these lines will perceive the implicit verbs, viz. ...o suru 'do' and ...o idaku 'have', in (28) and (29), respectively, and interpret these lines as: 'American youngsters do big mischief with secret boxes' and 'they are uneasy about control by the two big countries.'

Should we claim, then, a rule of obligatory o-suppression for verbless headlines in general? The answer is no; there are cases where an explicit use of the particle o is in fact obligatory. - When a headline expresses a claim, a request, an appeal, a petition or the like, the object noun phrase of the line must be accompanied with the particle o.<sup>7)</sup> The following lines represent some such cases.

(30) E C 各国は団結を

EC kakkoku wa danketu o  
 (each country) (unity)

西独首相 通貨危機で訴え  
 Seedoku syusyoo tuuka kiki de uttae  
 (West Germany)(prime (monetary crisis)(about)(appeal  
 minister)

(31) 地熱発電開発に国が力を

tinetu hatuden kaihatu ni kuni ga tikara o  
 (under- (generation (devel- (to) (nation) (aid)  
 ground of electri- opment)  
 heat) city)

(32) 全東南ア参加の会議を

zen toonan-a sanku no kaigi o  
 (all) (South-East Asian) (participation) (conference)

A S E A N 外相会議終わる  
 ASEAN gaisyoo kaigi owaru  
 (foreign ministers) (conference) (end)

(33) 自主平和のアジア外交を

zisyu heewa no azia gaikoo o  
 (independence) (peace) (Asia) (diplomacy)

7) See Okuda for the use of o-phrases in relation to verbs in ordinary Japanese sentences.

野党要求へ  
 yatoo yookyuu e  
 (opposition parties) (demand) (toward)

(34) エネルギー節減を  
 enerugii setugen o  
 (energy) (saving)

米商務長官、企業に書簡  
 Bee syoomu tyookan, kigyoo ni syokan  
 (America) (Secretary (enterprises) (to) (letter)  
 of Commerce)

In (32), (33) and (34), the object noun phrases by themselves constitute an entire line. Among the noun phrases without embedded (surface) verbs, it is only the object noun phrase with o that can stand alone as a headline.

All of these headlines with o and without any verb do not simply state what has happened or is going to happen, but mention what should be done, demanding something. These headlines may be editorial proposals or quotes from somebody's statements. The illocutional force <sup>8)</sup> of these headlines may be assumed to be represented by performative verbs <sup>9)</sup> that underlie these sentences. Then, the obligatory use of the particle o for the object phrases will be viewed as being conditioned by the performative verbs of these lines.

Let us now turn to the use of other kinds of particles (postpositions). The headlines below, each of which has a noun phrase marked by the particle ni, have a wide range of syntactic and semantic properties. Typically, the combination of this noun phrase with another noun phrase is semantically specific enough to determine the interpretation of the ni-phrase as well as the suppressed verb. The verb ar- 'exist' will be assumed for (35) and (36), the verb nar- 'become' for (37) and (38) and tat- 'stand' for (39).

(35) 男女2人にイ病の疑い  
 danzyo hutari ni i-byoo no utagai  
 (man and (2 persons) (in) (itaiitai-disease) (suspicion)  
 woman)

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8) Austin: p. 103

9) Cf. Lakoff: Chapter IV. See also Austin and Ross.

(36) 昭和23年には水銀汚染

Syoowa-23nen ni wa suigin osen  
(1948) (in) (mercury) (pollution)

(37) 政局は波乱含みに

seekyoku wa haran hukumi ni  
(political (turbulent) (suggestive state) (toward)  
situation)

(38) 店舗数では首位に

tenposuu de wa syui ni  
(number of offices) (in terms of) (top) (at)

“太陽銀行、10月に誕生

"Taiyoo Ginkoo" 10-gatu ni tanzyoo  
(Taiyoo Bank) (October) (in) (birth)

(39) 米のアジア策、転換点に

Bee no Aziasaku, tenkanten ni  
(American) (Asian plan) (turning point) (at)

The use of the noun phrases marked by the particle de can be described in a similar manner. Noun phrases marked by the particle e, kara, or made also are used in similar surface syntactic structures as ni or de. The former group of particles characterize the noun phrase more uniquely, however, and the particles can contribute more to the prediction of the missing verbs.

3.2.3. Use of adverbials

Time words such as kyoo 'today', asu 'tomorrow' and a specific date (36) are often used in headlines indicating the time of the events. Adverbs such as moo 'already' (40) also mark the time of the events — the past, in this case.

(40) 「前任校にはもう辞表」

弱る先生たち  
"zenninkoo ni wa moo zihyoo" yowaru senseetati  
(former (to) (already) (letter (anxious) (teachers)  
employing of resig-  
schools) nation)

As mentioned before, the use of an interrogative adverb (wh-word) as in (5) marks the headline as an apparent interrogative sentence without the use of the particle ka or a question mark.

In (41) and (42) below, special adverbials tikarazuyoku 'vigorously' and tuini 'finally' are used in the respective verbless headlines, and this selection of adverbials largely reflects the semantic value of the suppressed verb.

(41) 力強く 第一歩

|              |                  |                     |
|--------------|------------------|---------------------|
| tikarazuyoku | daiippo          | 新 生 沖 縄 県           |
| (vigorously) | (the first step) | sinsee Okinawaken   |
|              |                  | (new-born) (Okinawa |
|              |                  | Prefecture)         |

(42) 日本ついに最下位

|         |           |             |                     |
|---------|-----------|-------------|---------------------|
| Nihon   | tuini     | saikai      | 世界アイスホッケーB          |
| (Japan) | (finally) | (the lowest | sekai aisuhokkee B  |
|         |           | rank)       | (world) (icehockey) |

In fact, the specific verb humidas is uniquely predicted in (41) in most cases. In (42), tuini 'finally' is rigidly associated with the verb nar 'become' in the overwhelming majority of cases. Thus in some cases adverbials not only provide the headlines with their proper semantic content, but also indicate what the suppressed main verbs are.

### 3.3 Headlines consisting of nominalized sentences

A headline often consists of a noun phrase which is obtained through nominalizing a sentence and the noun phrase is not accompanied by any particle. A typical example is (43), which is given as a title to a photograph.

(43) ひるがえった「日の丸」

|            |                 |
|------------|-----------------|
| hirugaetta | "hinomaru"      |
| (hoisted)  | (national flag) |

It may be mentioned that in the embedded sentence the suffix ta indicating past/perfect can be employed for a headline.

### 3.4 Summary and some remarks

In this preliminary study we have discussed some grammatical characteristics of newspaper headlines based on the assumption that a head-

line represents a sentence, and tentatively concluded as follows.

The dominant sentence type in headlines is the declarative. So-called interrogative headlines except in quotations, editorials and forums indicate only the uncertainty of their propositional contents. Apparent imperative lines are quotations except "demand" forms in editorials and forums.

Obligatory rules: The past/perfect marker ta is not employed except in quotations or nominalized sentences; the verb stem su of a compound verb, the copula da in declarative and so-called interrogative lines are suppressed; the particle ka is suppressed (except for emphasis) and a question mark is not used whenever an interrogative word (wh-word) is in a line; the particle o is suppressed in a verbless statement but it is used in a verbless line of demand.

Optional rules: Verbs in declarative lines, the particle ga in a line with or without the verb, and the particle o in a line with a verb can be suppressed.

Some peculiarities, such as the suppression of the verb stem su or the copula da, can be explained in terms of semantic redundancy, since they are formal, dummy elements rather than contentive. The non-use of the particle ka is a similar case. Non-use of the past/perfect in regular headlines, on the other hand, cannot be interpreted in the same way. The consistent use of non-past tense results in ambiguity as to the time of the event. The obligatory suppression or the use of the particle o in a verbless headline, depending on the type of the sentence, cannot be explained simply in terms of the space requirements, either.

The surface verb phrase is essential in ordinary Japanese sentences. Nevertheless, suppression of the verb phrase is common in headlines. This can result in a serious defect in semantic integrity as a sentence, even though there are also many cases where the suppressed verb can be predicted uniquely by its syntactically closely related constituent.

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