The structure of relative clause in Japanese and Korean, and its consequences for ellipsis and availability of genitive subjects

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This paper offers a new empirical support for the postulated difference in the structure of relative clauses in Japanese and Korean. Using novel observation about the availability of ‘say-contraction’ in Korean (1), but not in Japanese (2), we argue that this fact is a consequence of the presence of CP layer in embedded relative clauses in Korean (Yoon 1990, Han 1992 among many others), but the lack thereof in Japanese (Saito 1985, Murasugi 1991, Taguchi 2008, Miyagawa 2011, among many others).

   John-NOM C-NOM Mary-DAT buy-IMP-C say-Rel book-ACC buy-PAST-DECL
   John-NOM C-NOM Mary-DAT buy-IMP-Rel book-ACC buy-PAST-DECL

(2) a. John-ga/wa [ C-ga Mary-ni ka-e to iu ] hon-o ka-tta
   John-NOM/TOP C-NOM Mary-DAT buy-IMP C say book-ACC buy-PAST
b.*John-ga/wa [ C-ga Mary-ni ka-e ] hon-o ka-tta
   John-NOM/TOP C-NOM Mary-DAT buy-IMP book-ACC buy-PAST

‘John bought a book that C told Mary to buy.’

We argue that Korean ‘say-contraction’ is in fact an instance of ellipsis. Concretely, it’s a TP-ellipsis. In a system like in Bošković (2014), ellipsis can target phases or complements of phasal heads, but only the ellipsis of the complement of the phase-head allows extraction out of its ellipsis site. This is exactly the case in the Korean construction analyzed here. (3) involves multiple scrambling of the subject, the object, and the complement clause of say. They can “survive” under the TP-ellipsis because of the presence of the CP-domain proving a landing site. Also note that the presence of the inherently marked dative argument Mary-DAT in (1b) indicates the presence of the dative-case assigning verb say.

(3) John-i [CP C-ka1 Mary-ekey2 [CP3 t1 t2 sa-la] [TP t3 malha-n] ] chayk-ul sa-ss-ta.
‘John bought the book that C told Mary to buy.’

The similar pattern can be found in the so-replacement, also involving TP-ellipsis in (4) (Yoo and Park 2014). Importantly, both (1b) (=3) and (4) cannot be used without a linguistic antecedent, which supports our argument that (1b) is genuine ellipsis.

(4) John-i [CP C-ka Mary-ekey [TP kuleh-n]] chayk-ul sa-ss-ta.
   John-NOM C-NOM Mary-DAT so-REL book-ACC buy-PAST-DECL
‘John bought the book that C told to John that he should buy.’

Under the assumption that Japanese relative clauses do not have CPs (Saito 1985, Murasugi 1991, Taguchi 2008, cf. Miyagawa 2011), the ungrammaticality of (2b) is predicted. As cases like (3) involve Complex NP construction, the only possible scrambling option is movement within the relative clause. The absence of CP precludes the available landing site for the
arguments that could survive this TP-ellipsis. Hence, the ungrammaticality of Japanese (2b) is caused by the illicit surviving material within an elided relative clause in this language without possibility of having a derivation that would allows so.

The analysis presented here is supported by the analogical so-replacement in Japanese, which targets the whole relative clause (5b), however no argument can be extracted out of it (5c), contrary to Korean (4). (5c) can be accounted for in the same manner as (2b) because of the illicit surviving material, John-DAT.

(5) a. Mary-ga John-ni [Barriers-o ka-tta to i-tta] syoonen-ni a-tta
   Mary-NOM John-DAT Barriers-ACC buy-PAST c say-PAST boy-DAT meet-PAST
   ‘Mary met a boy who told John to buy Barriers.’

b. Bill-wa [TP sonna] syoonen-ni-wa awa-naka-tta
   Bill-TOP such boy-DAT-TOP meet-NEG-PAST

c.*Bill-wa [TP John-ni sonna] syoonen-ni-wa awa-naka-tta
   Bill-TOP John-DAT such boy-DAT-TOP meet-NEG-PAST
   ‘Bill did not buy such a book’

The current analysis can further account for the asymmetry between Japanese and Korean in the availability of genitive subjects in the former, but not the latter (see (6) below).

(6) a. [TP watasi-no ka-tta ] uma-wa ii (Miyagawa 2011)
   I-GEN buy-PAST horse-TOP good
   ‘The horse I bought is good.’

b.*[CP na-uy sa-n] mal-i coh-ta.
   I-GEN buy-REL horse-NOM good-DECL

For the assignment of genitive Case in Japanese (6a), we adopt the analysis that clause external head N (or D) agrees with the embedded subject (Harada 1971, 1976, Miyagawa 1993, 2011 among others). Such derivation however is ruled out in Korean (8) given (i) CP is a phase and (ii) Phase Impenetrability Condition (Chomsky 2000 et seq.) renders the embedded subject inaccessible for the case assignment from the outside of the phase.

(7) [NP [TP Subj-GEN ] N(D )]          Japanese (Taguchi 2008, Miyagawa 2011)

(8) [NP [CP [TP Subj-GEN ] ] N(D )]  *PIC

Korean

Note that it is in fact possible in Korean to scramble the embedded subject to [Spec,CP] as in (3), which makes it visible to the outer probe N. However, the genitive Case assignment is still blocked given the Watanabe (1996)’s claim that the genitive subject should stay in [Spec,vP] in overt syntax, which in turn explains the observed Transitivity Restriction on genitive subjects in Japanese (Harada 1971, Watanabe 1996, Ochi 2008, Miyagawa 2011, see also Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 2007, and Deprez 1990 for similar facts cross-linguistically). In other words, PIC and [Spec,vP] in-situ requirement conspire by blocking the genitive Case assignment by D in Korean.