Da and the Zero Form as the Two Contracted Forms of the Japanese Copula

The Two Contracted Forms of Dearu: This paper focuses on copular constructions with nominal predicates. The Japanese copula has two present tense forms, dearu and da, as exemplified in (1).

(1) Taro-wa isya dearu/da.

Taro-Top doctor is

Analyses differ as to what the relation between the two forms is; some claim that the syntactic status is different between dearu and da (e.g. Kubo (1992)) and others claim that da is the morphologically contracted form of dearu (e.g. Nishiyama (1999)). The argument in this paper stands on the latter analysis.

I further take into consideration the zero form of the copula. Assuming the principles of Distributed Morphology, I claim that the zero form is another morphologically contracted form of dearu. This is because in most environments the zero form is in a complementary distribution with da. See (2).

(2) Taro-wa gakusei dearu/*da/ rasii/mitaida.

Taro-Top student is seems (Narahara (2002: 157), slightly modified)

The zero form has a structure as in (3), which is based on Nishiyama’s (1999) structure. The syntactic structure is identical with da but the Predicate head has no phonetic realization. I claim that the covert Pred head selects a covert verb. The tense morpheme becomes covert concomitantly.

(3)

As we see below, an empirically adequate descriptive generalization about the distribution of da has never been provided. The main finding of this paper is that it is drawn by taking into account the zero form of the copula. Dearu can contract in all and only the contexts where both of the following conditions are met: (i) when it is used in indicative clauses, and (ii) when it is not used adnominally.

An Empirical Problem on the Previous Generalization: By examining sentences with nominal adjectival predicates, Nishiyama (1999) claims that da is the morphologically contracted form of dearu. He also points out that da cannot appear if an element intervenes between de and aru. See (4).

(4) Yoru-ga sizuka-de-mo-aru/*da-mo (aru)

night-Nom quiet-de-even-aru/da-even

‘The night is even quiet.’ (Nishiyama (1999: 186))

However, many environments disallow da even if de and aru are adjacent. To mention a few, main clauses with modals such rasii/mitaida ‘seems’ (2 above) and clefts (5) disallow da.

(5) Taro-ga gakusei dearu/*da no-wa kyuzitu dake da.

Taro-Nom student is C-Top holidays only is

‘It is only on holidays when Taro is a student.’
The fact shows that there are restrictions on the distribution of *da* other than adjacency.

**A New Descriptive Generalization:** I adopt Nishiyama’s (1999) claim that *da* is the morphologically contracted form of *dearu*. This is because there is no evidence that the difference is syntactic.

By taking into account the zero form of the copula, we can naturally draw a very interesting descriptive generalization about the distribution of the contracted forms of the copula. The environments are classified in two ways; whether the adjectival predicate takes the form *-i* or *-kuaru* and whether *dearu* can be replaced with *na*. The results are put into Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. The distribution of <em>da</em> and the zero form</th>
<th><em>da</em></th>
<th><em>-i</em> or <em>-kuaru</em></th>
<th><em>da/dearu—na</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main clauses</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional clause + <em>to</em> ‘if’</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>rasii</em> ‘seems’</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bekida</em> ‘should’</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement clause + <em>koto</em> (wishing V in matrix clause)</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complement clause + <em>koto</em> (factive V in matrix clause)</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleft constructions</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>OK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following new descriptive generalization is drawn from Table 1. *Dearu* can be contracted either into *da* or into the zero form in all and only the contexts (i) where the adjectival predicate takes the form *-i*, and (ii) where *dearu* cannot be replaced with *na*.

Following Watanabe (2011), I treat the environments where the adjectival predicate takes the form *-i* as indicative clauses. As for *na*, it is the adnominal form of *da* (cf. Hiraiwa (2001)). The descriptive generalization thus is restated: *dearu* can contract in all and only the contexts where both of the following conditions are met: (i) when it is used in indicative clauses, and (ii) when it is not used adnominally.

**Proposal:** Interestingly, the zero form can appear in present indicative clauses. I propose that this is a manifestation of the universal tendency of the copula to be absent in present indicative clauses.

Consider next the fact that from *dearu* to *da*, both *-e* and the tense morpheme are dropped:

(6) \( de-ar-u \Rightarrow d-\phi-ar-\phi = da \)

Notice that only the dropping of *-e* occurs in the past tense forms *deatta* and *datta*. Significantly, *datta* has a wider distribution than that of *da*. Compare (7) with (5).


Taro-Nom student was C-Top holidays only is/was

The fact shows that the dropping of *-e* is a phenomenon triggered by the environment inside a word. The narrow distribution of *da* is due to the other dropped item, the tense morpheme. I thus propose that the dropping of the tense morpheme is related to the contraction of *dearu* either into *da* or the zero form.