

## Ongoing change of a syntactic variation: Nominative/Genitive alternation in Japanese

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Using two spontaneous speech corpora, I examined an ongoing change of a syntactic variation in Japanese called Nominative/Genitive alternation (NGA). NGA is a case alternation between the nominative case marker *ga* and the genitive *no* on a subject DP in certain embedded clauses such as adnominal clauses (Harada, 1971) (1). Based on his grammaticality judgment task, Harada (1971) hypothesized that there is a change in progress, whereby the nominative *ga* is increasingly preferred to the genitive *no* in relevant environments. The corpora I used are ‘the Minutes of the Japanese Diet’ (MJD) and ‘the Corpus of Spontaneous Japanese’ (CSJ). The data for *ga* and *no* consist of 7,600 tokens (*ga*=6,662, *no*=948) from the MJD and 4,945 (*ga*=4,540, *no*=405) from the CSJ. I present figures in which the rate of *no* in the MJD data with respect to speakers’ birth year, where each point represents each speaker. The gradual decline of the overall trend is fairly clear, with speakers switching from *no* to *ga*. The CSJ data, on the other hand, does not display ongoing change. The discrepancy between the two data sets was also revealed in the results of a logistic regression analysis in Rbrul (Johnson, 2008), which includes language-internal/external factors argued for in the previous studies (Nambu, 2007, to appear) and individual speaker as a random factor. The results for the MJD show that the use of the genitive is decreasing (log odds=-0.085, the genitive is an application value for the response, with a 5-year increase of birth year), in contrast to the CSJ. I assumed that this discrepancy is due to the different ranges of time periods in terms of speakers’ birth year. This assumption is supported by another logistic regression analysis with the MJD data in the period 1925-1970 where both of the corpora overlap. The results show that the model does not contain speakers’ birth year as a statistically significant factor. This indicates that the ongoing change is too slow to be observed in such a short period of time where the CSJ covers, since the change seems to be close to the end, referring to the S-shaped curve. Therefore, we need a corpus that contains longitudinal data spanning enough time in order to observe the ongoing change as in the MJD. Moreover, the existence of the change is supported cross-linguistically. Korean used to allow the same alternation but not anymore after the loss of the genitive subject (Whitman, 2006). The similarity in conditions on the variation between the two languages indicates that NGA in Japanese is experiencing a change towards loss of the genitive, tracing the Korean alternation. Furthermore, the historical path of the particles *ga* and *no* shows that the change is interpretable as a division of labor in their linguistic functions (Haiman, 1983). Table 1 shows that the particles *ga* and *no* have been heading towards a complementary distribution, which will be achieved when the change of NGA completes.