

# THE DISTRIBUTIONAL AND INTERPRETATIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AN INDEFINITE PRONOUN AND A GENERAL NOUN A JAPANESE CASE

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## 1 Introduction

The Japanese general noun *mono* '(tangible) thing' and *no*, a Japanese indefinite pronoun, seem to sometimes be interchangeable

Situation... at a flower shop

- 1a Kituroi bara, ari-masu ka?  
Yellow rose have-POL Q  
'Do you have a yellow rose?'
- 1b Siroi *mono/no* nara ari-masu ga  
White entity if have-POL  
'I have a white entity/one'

At other times, they are not interchangeable

- 2 (Dictionary/encyclopedia explanation)  
Kyooryuu-wa, ooku *mono/\*no*-wa 35 meetoru-o kosu  
Dinosaur-TOP big entity-TOP 35 meter-ACC exceed  
'As for dinosaurs, a big one exceeds 35 meters in body length'

This paper shows that the distribution of non-grammaticized uses of *mono* and *no* follows as a pragmatic consequence of the syntactic and semantic differences between them

## 2 Data discussed

The clear cases of *mono* and *no* as nouns are discussed in this paper. The so-called grammaticized uses of them (so-called "complementizer" [*no*] and "auxiliary verbs" [*mono* and *no*]) are not discussed. *Mono* and *no* as "sentence final particles" are also excluded from this discussion.

## 3 Syntactic difference *mono* can function as an NP, but *no* cannot

The difference between *mono* and *no* is that *mono* can function as an NP, like other nouns, but *no* cannot, as shown below

- 3 Zyon-wa *mono-/\*no*-o yoku kau  
John-TOP thing-ACC often buy  
'John often buys things'

*No* has to have a modifier or a complement to be acceptable, as shown below

- 4      Zyon-wa takai    *mono/no*-o kau  
        John-TOP expensive thing-ACC buy  
        'John buys expensive things/ones '

The fact that *no* cannot function as an NP demonstrates that *no* is not a syntactically independent noun

#### 4 Semantic difference between *mono* and *no*

This section demonstrates that *mono* has its own meaning 'entity', just as other ordinary nouns have their own meanings. *No* refers to a member of a set of entities<sup>1</sup>

##### 4.1 *Mono* means 'entity'

*Mono* means 'entity'. If this is true, then *mono* occurs as the object of a verb that strictly subcategorizes for an entity as its grammatical object as shown below

- 5      Oisii    *mono*-o    taberu  
        Delicious thing-ACC eat  
        '(One) eats a delicious thing '

It follows that when a verb strictly subcategorizes for a situation as its grammatical object, the sentence with *mono* should be unacceptable. *Suru* 'do' is a verb that subcategorizes for a situation as its grammatical object. When *suru* has *mono* as its object, the sentence is unacceptable, as shown below. However when it takes *koto* 'situation' as its object, the sentence is acceptable.

- 6      Ii    \**mono/koto*-o suru  
        Good thing-ACC do  
        '(One) does a good thing '

##### 4.2 *No* is interpreted against a set of entities and it is anaphoric to a member of the set

*No* is an indefinite pronoun and needs to have a reference set which is shared between the speaker and the addressee from which the meaning of *no* can be interpreted. Without such a set, its meaning is not interpretable. The set consists of 'entities'. In the above sentence 5, as predicted, *no* can replace *mono* and the sentence is acceptable as shown below.

- 7      Oisii    *no*-o    taberu  
        Delicious -ACC eat  
        '(One) eats a delicious one '

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<sup>1</sup> *No* can also have a set of situations. This paper does not discuss these cases.

Unlike the English *one*-anaphora discussed in Webber (1979) and Dahl (1989), the Japanese indefinite pronoun *no* can take a wider range as a set. *No* can take the set of all the entities in the speaker's mental representation that the speaker believes that she shares with the addressee. One such situation is where the speaker and the addressee are seeing the same set of objects in the speech context. As shown below, when the speaker and the addressee are walking together, the speaker can use *no* to ask about an object in sight.

Situation. The speaker and the addressee are walking together.  
The speaker finds something red and asks the addressee about it.

- 8     Ano akai *no*-wa nan desu ka  
 That red -TOP what COP Q  
 'What is that red thing?'

It is predicted that *no* is not used when the speaker does not believe that the same mental representation is shared with the addressee. One situation is where the speaker and the addressee are apart and do not see the same set of objects. As shown below, *no* is not used when the speaker is talking on the phone to the addressee.

Situation. The speaker and the addressee are talking on the phone.

- 9     Ano akai #*no*-wa nan desu ka  
 That red -TOP what COP Q  
 'What is that red thing?'

*No* is used to refer to a particular member of a relevant set that the speaker believes the addressee shares with the speaker. If this is true, then when the speaker does not refer to a member that has specific properties, it is predicted that *no* is not used. One such situation is where the number of the members of the set is relevant to the speaker. In the following examples, the speaker wants an apple/apples. It does not matter which apple she gets. Since she makes no reference to any member with any particular property out of the set of apples, the pattern [number + classifier for apple *tu* or *ko*], instead of *no*, appears as predicted.

Situation. Buying apples.

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>10     Ringo, arimasu ka<br/>         Apple have-POL Q<br/>         'Do you have apples?'</p>          | <p>11a    <i>Hito-tu/*no</i> kudasai<br/>         One-CL    please give me<br/>         'Give me one '</p> | <p>11b    <i>Huta-tu/*no</i> kudasai<br/>         two-CL    please give me<br/>         'Give me two '</p> |
| <p>12a    <i>Ik-ko/*no</i> kudasai<br/>         One-CL    please give me<br/>         Give me one '</p>   | <p>12b    <i>Ni-ko/*no</i> kudasai<br/>         two-CL    please give me<br/>         'Give me two '</p>   |  |
| <p>13     *<i>No</i> kudasai<br/>               please give me<br/>         '(Intended) Give me one '</p> |  |  |

## 5 Alternation between *mono* and *no*

The previous section showed that the general noun *mono* refers to an entity, and that the indefinite pronoun *no* can be used anaphoric to a member of a set of entities. Therefore, alternation between *mono* and *no* can occur. However, *mono* and *no* are not free variations. This section shows that the distributional and interpretational differences between *mono* and *no* follow from the syntactic and semantic differences between them as a pragmatic consequence. After presenting the syntactic condition in section 5.1, four cases demonstrate that this is indeed the case in sections 5.2 to 5.5. In every case, the properties held by indefinite pronouns do not hold in the cases where *mono* occurs.

The previous section is summarized as follows concerning the syntax and semantics of *mono* and *no*.

[1] *Mono* is a noun. It can function as an NP. It means "entity".

[2] *No* is an indefinite pronoun. It cannot function as an NP. It can refer to an entity.

Furthermore, it is proposed that the Japanese *no* occurs only when the speaker mutually believes that the addressee has a relevant set in mind against which *no* can be interpreted.

### 5.1 Syntactic condition

For the *mono/no* alternation, the syntax requires that the alternation occurs only when *mono* functions as an N' as shown below, since *no* cannot function as an NP.

14     *Zyon-wa mono-/\*no-o yoku kau*  
       John-TOP thing-ACC often buy  
       John often buys things '.

15     *Zyon-wa takai mono/no-o kau*  
       John-TOP expensive thing-ACC buy  
       John buys expensive things/ones '.

When this syntactic condition is met, *mono* and *no* can alternate in a principled fashion. The proposed hypothesis makes the following four general predictions about their alternations. In all four cases, some parts of the condition about *no* as an indefinite pronoun are not met.

### 5.2 Whether or not the speaker can assume the addressee's mind

The semantic difference between *mono* and *no* is that *no* needs a reference set that the speaker believes the addressee shares with the speaker in order to interpret it. However, *mono* does not. The difference predicts that when the speaker cannot assume the addressee's mental representation in which there is a relevant set, only *mono* occurs. *No* does not occur in such a situation. Thus, when the speaker addresses a mass audience (such as a formal book writing or a public lecture) and not a particular individual, *mono* can be used but not *no*. As shown below, in an encyclopedia, *mono* is used, but not *no*.

Dictionary/encyclopedia explanation

- 16 Kyooruyu-wa, ooku *mono#no*-wa 35 meetoru-o kosu  
Dinosaur-TOP big entity-TOP 35 meter-ACC surpass  
'As for dinosaurs, a big one goes beyond 35 meters in body length'

The difference between *mono* and *no* also predicts that *no* is acceptable when the speaker can assume the addressee's mind. This is because the speaker can assume that the addressee has a relevant set against which *no* is interpreted. Thus, *no* can be used if the above sentence were uttered in a casual conversation as shown below.

Casual conversation

- 17 Kyooruyu-wa, ooku *no*-wa 35 meetoru-o kosu yo  
Dinosaur-TOP big -TOP 35 meter-ACC surpass SFP  
'As for dinosaurs, a big one goes beyond 35 meters in body length'

This phenomenon is usually stipulated as a style difference without any explanation. This proposed hypothesis, however, can account for this phenomenon. Therefore, it does not have to stipulate for the occurrence of *mono* and *no* as a style difference.

**5.3 Whether or not the speaker can depend on the addressee's work of figuring out the relevant set**

In using *no*, the speaker assumes that the addressee can figure out what the relevant set is. In other words, the speaker depends on the addressee's work to convey what he wants to convey. In contrast, in using *mono*, the speaker does not assume that the addressee has a relevant set, therefore the speaker does not depend on the addressee. It follows that in a situation where it is not suitable for the speaker to depend on the addressee, *mono* is favored, but not *no*. This contributes to politeness or formality (e.g. speaking to a socially high-ranking addressee in Japanese society). There is a particular addressee, unlike the mass audience case. However, assuming the addressee's mind and making the addressee figure out what the speaker is referring to is not fitting to one's lower social status and is therefore not polite. As predicted, *mono* is used in the following examples. The use of *no* is grammatical but not favorable in these cases.

From a secretary to the president

- 18 **President**  
Kaigi-no toki, OHP-o dasite-ote kure  
Meeting-GEN time overhead projector-ACC take out for future give  
'Please get an overhead projector ready for the meeting.'

**Secretary**  
Ooku *mono#no*-ni-itasimasyoo ka, tuisai *mono#no* ni-itasimasyoo ka  
Big thing decide-POL Q small thing decide-POL Q

'Shall I bring a big one or a small one?'

The hypothesis makes an inverse prediction. In a situation where the speaker can depend on the addressee to figure out the set, *no* can be used. This contributes to casualness or solidarity between the speaker and the addressee. As

predicted, when the same conversation about the overhead projector occurs between friends, *no* occurs as shown below

Between friends

19 **Friend 1**  
 Kaigi-no toku, OHP-o dasite-ote  
 Meeting-GEN time overhead projector-ACC take out for future  
 'Please get an overhead projector ready for the meeting.'

**Friend 2**  
 Ookii *no*##*mono*-ni-siyoo ka, tuisai *no*##*mono* ni-siyoo ka  
 Big thing decide Q small thing decide Q  
 'Shall I bring a big one or a small one?'

The use of *mono* is not favored between the speaker and the addressee who share a casual relationship. This is because the speaker is in a situation in which she can depend on the addressee to figure out what the relevant set is. Should the speaker choose not to, it indicates that she does not recognize the close relationship. Therefore, it results in the addressee receiving a cold impression from the speaker.

**5.4 Whether the speaker is picking out a member from the set, or referring to the category itself**

From the fact that *no* refers to a member of a relevant set, it follows that when there are members clearly enumerated in the speech context, but the speaker does not pick out any particular member, *no* is predicted not to occur. *Mono* occurs instead. One such situation is where the speaker mentions a category 'entity' with a certain property, then refers to its members as examples. In the following example, the speaker first describes what is in the treasure box in a general term. Then, the following sentence refers to examples, such as circulars and an abacus. The speaker uses *mono* in (20a), instead of *no*, when he mentions the category, as shown below.

Situation. A boy's treasure box

There are many things stored in a boy's treasure box that adults never expect. Newspaper advertisements, nails, leaves, etc.

20a Sono booru-bako-no naka-ni-wa,  
 That cardboard box-GEN inside-in-TOP  
 otona-no omoi-mo-kakenai *mono*##*no*-ga simatte-aru  
 adult-GEN expect-NEG thing-NOM store-RES  
 'In the cardboard box, things are stored that adults never expect.'

20b Sinbun-no hasami-kookoku, zasshi-no huroku-no soroban,  
 Newspaper-GEN circular magazine-GEN appendix-GEN abacus  
 'Circulars, abacus appended to a magazine.'

Replacing *mono* with *no* changes the interpretation due to the different assumption that the speaker has for *mono* and *no*. When *no* is used, the category expressed by the *mono*-phrase now refers to a particular member in the assumed set. Unless the speaker believes that there is such set that the addressee shares with the speaker, the sentence is not felicitous.

From the above claim that *mono* refers to a category, and *no* refers to a member, comes three predictions. First, when the speaker wants to negate something in a strong fashion, *mono* occurs, and *no* is not favored. This is because just negating a member of a set is not strong enough. The speaker negates the whole category to make a strong negation. Thus, *mon*, the colloquial form of *mono*, occurs when a junior-high student strongly negates what his father expresses as shown below.

Situation. A son talks back to his father about his computer skills

- 21 Father Pasokon,                    izikureru zyanai  
 Personal computer play with COP-NEG  
 'You are good with the personal computer, aren't you?'
- Son                    Anna *mon/#no*, tokugi-no                    uti-ni-mo                    ham-nee                    yo  
 Like that thing                    special skill-GEN inside-in-even included-NEG SFP  
 'That kind of thing, that's no special skill!'

When *mono* is replaced by *no*, the strong negation effect disappears. This is because *no* does not negate the whole category. *No* brings up a set that the speaker assumes the addressee would share with the speaker. The computer skill is one of the members of the set. Other members in the same category are not negated.

Similarly, in a strong negative command, *mono*, is predicted to occur. *No* is not favored. Thus *mono* is used when the speaker tells her children not to buy a worthless item, as shown below.

Situation. A mother scolds her children

- 22 Sonna tumaranai *mono/#no* kau-n-janai  
 Like that worthless thing buy COP-NEG  
 'Don't buy that kind of worthless thing!'

The use of *no* is not broad enough to make a strong order.

Third, when the speaker wants to inquire about some entity in a strong fashion, *mono* occurs. *No* is not favored. This is because just asking about a particular member is not strong enough. The speaker inquires about the whole category to make a strong question. Thus, the speaker uses *mono* when the speaker asks her child why the child needs the thing at issue, as shown below.

Situation. A child is asking her mother to buy sunglasses.  
 The mother asks the child why she needs it.

- 23 Sonna *mono/#no* nani-ni iru                    no  
 Like that thing                    what-for is necessary  
 'Why on earth do you need that kind of thing?'

When *no* is used in the above sentence, the question does not sound as strong as when *mono* is used. This is because just asking about a particular member is not strong enough to ask the reason why the addressee needs it.

The above demonstrations explain why *no* creates a concrete impression about its referents, and *mono* creates generic impressions about its referents. This is because *mono* refers to a category. It does not refer to any particular member. On the other hand, *no* picks out a member from the set that the speaker assumes the addressee has in mind.

**5.5 The speaker's reflexive belief that the addressee has a relevant set in mind**

This last section discusses the reflexivity of belief. From the fact that *no* is an indefinite pronoun, it follows that the speaker believes that the addressee has a relevant set in mind. However, believing this much is not enough to use *no*. In order to use *no* felicitously, the speaker must consider the reflexive belief, following Green (1989). Two cases demonstrate the relevance of the reflexive belief proposed. In both cases, one of the layers of reflexive beliefs is not met. Therefore *mono*, but not *no*, occurs. Since this section discusses the alternation between *mono* and *no*, it only includes a set of entities whose most informative form is *mono* 'entity' such as things unknown to the speaker.

First, it is not enough that the speaker believes that the addressee has a relevant set. The speaker must believe that the addressee also believes that the addressee has a relevant set in mind. This condition predicts that when the speaker believes that the addressee is not aware that the addressee has a set in mind, *mono* can occur, but not *no*. Thus in a situation where the speaker believes that the addressee forgot what the relevant set is, due to some elapsed time, *no* is not favored as in (24).

Situation. Commenting about the food in a speech context in which the addressee is also present

24 Kono akai *no*, oisu ne  
 this red delicious SFP  
 'This red stuff is good, isn't it?'

(Sometime later, the same speaker remembers about it and talks to the same addressee)

25 Ano akai *mono*/#no oisi-katta ne  
 that red thing delicious-PAST SFP  
 'That red stuff was good, wasn't it?'

*No* is felicitous only when the speaker believes that the addressee still has the same mental representation of the speech scene (this is the relevant set here) as the speaker's when the speaker talked about the food.

Second, there are cases in which it is not enough that the speaker believes that the addressee believes that the addressee has a relevant set. The speaker must believe that the addressee believes that the speaker knows that the addressee has a relevant set in mind. This condition predicts that when the speaker believes that the addressee is aware of the set, but the addressee does not believe that the speaker knows about that fact, *no* does not occur. Rather, *mono* occurs. For example, the speaker is asking her child about the location of some food she had seen sometime ago. When the mother saw it together with the child, *no* is predicted to occur, as shown below.

Situation. A thing that disappeared

The mother and the child saw some kind of food. It disappeared soon and the mother asks the child where he put it.

26 Koko-ni atta *no* doko-e yat-ta?  
 here-at existed where-to put-PAST  
 'Where did you put the thing that was here?'

However, when the mother believes that the child does not believe that the mother knows that the child has a relevant set in mind, then *mono* is predicted to occur, as shown below. This often happens when children shallow-mindedly think that parents do not know who ate the food.

27 Koko-ni atta *mono*/#no doko-e yat-ta?

here-at existed thing      where-to put-PAST  
'Where did you put the thing that was here?'

## 6 Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that the alternation between *mono* and *no* follows from their syntax and semantics as a pragmatic consequence. The alternation occurs only when *mono* is not functioning as an NP, since *no* cannot function as an NP. When some part of the use condition of *no* is not observed, *mono* occurs. There are four such cases, 1) when the speaker cannot assume the addressee's mind, 2) when the speaker can assume the addressee's mind but cannot depend on the addressee to figure out the relevant set, 3) when the speaker does not pick out a member from the set, and 4) when the speaker's reflexive belief that the addressee has a relevant set in mind is not held.

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