Minimizers and multiple focus constructions in Japanese

Data: This study investigates two types of Japanese minimizer expression with the numeral “one” (hereafter mini-one), as shown in (1). In pre-nominal mini-ones, the numeral “one” precedes a noun as in (1a). In post-nominal mini-ones, “one” follows a noun as in (1b).

(1) a. Alan-wa kooen-de [ip-piki-no inu ]*(mo) mi-nakat-ta. (Pre-nominal mini-one)
   Alan-TOP park-LOC one-CLS-GEN dog -MO see-NEG-PST
   ‘%Alan did not see any dog at the park.’
   ‘Alan did not see any animal at the park.’
   [restrictive interpretation]  [non-restrictive interpretation]

b. Alan-wa kooen-de [ inu ip-piki ](-mo) mi-nakat-ta. (Post-nominal mini-one)
   Alan-TOP park-LOC dog one-CLS-MO see-NEG-PST
   ‘*Alan did not see any dog at the park.’
   ‘Alan did not see any animal at the park.’
   [restrictive interpretation]  [non-restrictive interpretation]

There are several differences between these two mini-ones in Japanese. Difference I: Optionality of mo: Pre-nominal mini-ones require the additive scalar focus particle mo ‘also’, as in (1a). On the other hand, mo is optional in post-nominal mini-ones, as in (1b). One caveat is in order; Nakanishi (in prep.) reports that post-nominal mini-ones with mo are unacceptable. However, our consultants judged (1b) as acceptable. Difference II: (Un)ambiguity: Nakanishi (in prep.) reports that (1a) is infelicitous in a situation where Alan saw animals other than dogs at the park. We refer to this type of interpretation of mini-ones as the non-restrictive interpretation. In the non-restrictive interpretation of (1a), the domain of a set of alternatives is not limited to dogs. On the other hand, Ochi (2016) reports that pre-nominal mini-ones can receive another interpretation, which we refer to as the restrictive interpretation. Under the restrictive interpretation, the domain of a set of alternatives in (1a) is restricted to dogs, excluding other kinds of animals. Although the non-restrictive interpretation is more salient than the restrictive interpretation in (1a), we follow Ochi’s observation that pre-nominal mini-ones are ambiguous. In contrast to pre-nominal mini-ones, post-nominal mini-ones receive only the non-restrictive interpretation. (1b) receives only the non-restrictive interpretation.

Analysis: We propose that the differences between pre-nominal and post-nominal mini-ones follow from the assumption that post-nominal mini-ones contain a covert counterpart of the scalar focus particle sae. The structure of post-nominal mini-ones is given in (2).

(2)  [TP [ ... [XP NP [ [CIP # [ CL tNP ]] X_scal ]] -mo ... Neg ... ] T ]

Following Ochi (2016), we assume that in post-nominal mini-ones, a noun moves into Spec,XP from the complement of the classifier head (see also Watanabe 2006). Under this analysis, the covert scalar particle X_scal must be present in a structure to derive post-nominal mini-ones. As for pre-nominal mini-ones, we assume that they have an adjunction structure, following Huang & Ochi (2014). This means that pre-nominal mini-ones do not contain the covert scalar particle.

Difference I: Optionality of mo: The proposal can capture the optionality of mo. As discussed by Lahiri (1998) and Nakanishi (in prep.), scalar presupposition is an indispensable ingredients of the meaning of mini-ones. Under their analysis, the covert scalar particle in (2) suffices to derive the meaning of a mini-one. Therefore, the presence of mo is optional in post-nominal mini-ones. On the other hand, pre-nominal mini-ones do not include the covert scalar particle, and hence need the additive scalar focus particle mo. Difference II: (Un)ambiguity: As for the (un)ambiguity of mini-ones, we propose that post-nominal mini-ones cannot receive a restrictive interpretation because a focus particle do not have access to the numeral “one”, due to the presence of an intervening covert scalar particle. The crucial assumption here is that to obtain restrictive interpretations, the numeral “one” but not a noun must be associated with a scalar focus particle. This assumption is motivated by the example (3), in which the noun is separated from the measure phrase, and mo attaches to the measure phrase. Importantly, (3) receives only the restrictive interpretation.
   Alan-TOP dog -ACC park-LOC one-CLS -MO see-NEG-PST
   ‘He did not see any dog at the park.’ [restrictive interpretation]
   ‘*He did not see any creature at the park.’ [non-restrictive interpretation]

Under our analysis, both an NP and the numeral “one” are in the phrase headed by the covert scalar particle, as shown in (2). We assume that in (2) both the NP and the numeral “one” are obligatorily associated with the focus particle. Therefore, there is no way to have access to the numeral “one”, excluding the NP. In contrast, pre-nominal mini-ones do not contain the covert scalar particle, and they behave differently from post-nominal mini-ones.

Support: The proposal can capture another property of post-nominal mini-ones. As shown in (4), when a post-nominal mini-one is followed by a postposition, it cannot function as a minimizer.

(4) Taro-wa [DOOKYUSEI HITO-RI] -kara choko-o moraw-anakt-ta.
   Taro-TOP classmate one-CLS-from chocolateACC receive-NEG-PAST
   ‘*Taro did not receive chocolate from any classmate.’ [restrictive interpretation]
   ‘*Taro did not receive chocolate from anyone.’ [non-restrictive interpretation]
   ‘There is one classmate from who Taro did not receive chocolate.’ [cardinal interpretation]

The unavailability of the minimizer interpretations in (4) can be captured under the current analysis. Impossible structures of the post-nominal mini-one in (4) are given in (5).

   b. * [PP [XP [NP [CIP X scal]]] P ]

X scal must be a part of the structure of a post-nominal mini-one, and (5a) is impossible. If however X scal appears inside a PP as in (5b), we face another problem. As shown in (6), when sae occurs with a postposition, it must follow the postposition. (Sano (2001) mentioned that there is a speaker variation, but our consultants found that (6b) is degraded.)

(6) Taro-wa {Haruko-kara-sae | ??Haruko-sae-kara} choko-o morat-ta.
   Taro-TOP Haruko-from-SAE Haruko-SAE-from chocolateACC receive-PAST
   ‘Taro received chocolate even from Haruko.’

Based on the unacceptability in (6), we assume that postpositions cannot combine with a phrase headed by a scalar focus particle. X scal is a covert counterpart of sae, and it is expected that (5b) is impossible. Importantly, Sano (2001) observes that sae can precede a postposition when the postposition is followed by mo, as in (7).

(7) Taro-wa Haruko-sae-kara-mo choko-o morat-ta.
   Taro-TOP Haruko-even-from-MO chocolateACC receive-PAST
   ‘Taro received chocolate even from Haruko.’

Our proposal predicts that (5b) becomes available when mo immediately follows a postposition, similarly to (7). Moreover, if (5b) becomes available, our proposal also predicts that the mini-one in (4) can receive a minimizer interpretation when mo immediately follows the postposition. This prediction is borne out, as shown in (8).

   Taro-TOP classmate one-CLS-from-MO chocolateACC receive-NEG-PAST
   ‘*Taro did not receive chocolate from any classmate.’ [restrictive interpretation]
   ‘Taro did not receive chocolate from anyone.’ [non-restrictive interpretation]

The contrast between (4) and (8) can be accounted for under the present analysis in which post-nominal mini-ones contain the covert counterpart of sae.