

# A Theoretical Account for the ‘Erroneous’ Genitive Subjects in Child Japanese and the Specification of Tense\*

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## 1. Introduction

It has been widely observed that children at around two to three years of age produce ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects. For instance, English-speaking children produce ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects such as those in (1).

- (1) a. That’s my write (2;2) (Radford 1998)                      b. Her haven’t got her glasses (2;9) (Huxley 1970)  
c. Can our do this – this red one? (3;0) (Fletcher 1985 in Radford 1998)

In (1), the genitive pronouns, *my*, *her*, and *our*, instead of the nominative pronouns, *I*, *she*, and *we*, are ‘erroneously’ used in the subject position.

‘Erroneous’ genitive subjects are also found in child Japanese. In adult Japanese, the subjects in simple sentences are typically marked with nominative Case marker *-ga*, but not with genitive Case marker *-no*, as shown in (2).<sup>1</sup>

- (2) a. Taroo-**ga**/\***no**    hon-**o**        yon-da                      b. Taroo-**ga**/\***no**    arui-ta  
      -Nom/-Gen book-Acc read-Past ‘Taro read a book.’                      -Nom/-Gen walk-Past ‘Taro walked.’  
c. Booto-**ga**/\***no**    sizun-da                      d. Ringo-**ga**/\***no**    aka-i  
      boat-Nom/-Gen sink-Past ‘A boat sank.’                      apple-Nom/-Gen red-Pres ‘The apple is red.’

In matrix clauses, the subjects of the transitive verb as in (2a), the unergative verb as in (2b), the unaccusative verb as in (2c), and the adjective as in (2d) are all marked with the nominative Case *-ga*. In these examples, the subjects marked with genitive *-no* are ungrammatical.

However, Japanese-speaking children at around two to three years of age also ‘erroneously’ mark subjects with genitive Case marker *-no*, as shown in (3) (Suzuki 2001, 2007, among others).

- (3) a. Jun-**\*no**    kowat-ta (=kawasita)    zoo (Jun, 2;2) (Adult form: Jun-ga)  
      -Gen break-Past                      Particle ‘Jun broke (the tire).’  
b. Moko-**\*no**    warat-tyat-ta (Moko, 2;3) (Adult form: Moko-ga)  
      -Gen laugh-Perfect-Past ‘Moko has laughed.’

The subject of the transitive verb, *kowat-ta* ‘broke’ in (3a), and that of the unergative verb, *warat-tyat-ta* ‘has laughed’ in (3b), are ‘erroneously’ marked with genitive Case *-no*, while both subjects must be marked with nominative *-ga* in adult Japanese as shown in (2).

Case errors are not limited to genitives. Japanese-speaking children also produce ‘erroneous’ dative subjects such as (4) at around two to three years of age, just around the time when they start making genitive Case errors (Murasugi and Watanabe 2008, Murasugi 2008, 2009, Watanabe 2008, among others).

- (4) a. A-tyan-**\*ni**    tabe-tya-u (A, 2;7) (Adult form: A-tyan-ga)  
      -Dat eat-Perfect-Pres ‘A (=I) will eat (it).’    (Suzuki 2002)  
b. Kotesasehime-**\*ni**    dakkosi-te (Moko, 2;7) (Adult form: Kotesasehime-ga)  
      -Dat hold-Request ‘I want Kotesasehime (=Mother) to hold me (in her arms).’  
c. Nekotyan-**\*ni**    ik-u        n                      da                      tte (Tai, 2;3) (Adult form: Nekotyan-ga)  
      kitty-Dat        go-Pres Nominalizer Copula C ‘(I) hear the kitty going away.’

In (4a), the subject of the transitive verb, *taberu* ‘eat,’ in the aspectual form is ‘erroneously’ marked with dative Case *-ni*. Similarly, in (4b), the subject of the transitive verb, *dakko suru* ‘hold,’ in the preverbal (imperative) form is ‘erroneously’ marked with the dative Case instead of the nominative Case *-ga*. (4c) shows that the ‘erroneous’ dative subject is also produced with the unergative verb, *iku* ‘go.’

Murasugi and Watanabe (2008) (henceforth M&W) and Murasugi (2008, 2009) argue that such Case errors as (4) are due to the underspecification of some features in Tense, and propose that the stage of Case errors corresponds to that

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<sup>1</sup> The Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: Acc=accusative, C=complementizer, Dat=dative, Gen=genitive, Nom=nominative, Pres=present, Prog=progressive, Past=past, Top=topical

of Root Infinitives in European child languages, where children at around two years of age use non-finite verbs in matrix clauses.

In this paper, we provide further support for the proposal given by M&W and Murasugi (2008, 2009). Based on our analysis of corpora available on the CHILDES (Tai (1;5-3;1, Miyata 2004a), Aki (1;5-3;0, Miyata 2004b), Ryo (1;4-3;0, Miyata 2004c), and Jun (0;6-3;6, Ishii 2004)), Moko (1;8-3;2) corpus (University of Connecticut and Nanzan University), and “Child A’s” data (1;10-2;8) that Suzuki (2001, 2002, 2007) describes in his articles, we argue that children’s genitive Case errors are also due to the underspecification of some features in Tense. We show that clauses with an ‘erroneous’ genitive subject in child grammar have parallel properties with adult clauses containing a genitive subject, and argue that children producing genitive Case errors in fact know the structure of TP headed by Adnominal T, which checks genitive (Saito 2004). However, children at this stage do not know that genitive subjects appear only in NPs (DPs). Precisely, they do not know the external relation of Adnominal T to N (D), since a default structure of the root clause is CP (Rizzi 1994) and the features [ $\pm$ Gen] in T that determine the external relation of Adnominal T are not fully specified. We then propose that setting the Relative Clause Parameter (Murasugi 1991) would trigger a retreat from the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects. When children set the value of the Relative Clause Parameter to TP, they find out that Adnominal T is compatible only with N, never with C. Thus, they are over the default CP setting for the root clause and the features [ $\pm$ Gen] are fully specified. Consequently, the genitive Case errors in non-NP contexts disappear. (See also Sawada and Murasugi (2010).)

This paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we review M&W and Murasugi (2008, 2009). Then, Section 3 describes our data of ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects. The previous analyses of children’s ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects are shown in Section 4. In Section 5, we first discuss the Case assignment system in adult Japanese and Saito’s (2004) analysis of genitive subject constructions in 5.1. Then, in 5.2, we provide a theoretical analysis of descriptive data and discuss three pieces of evidence for the claim that Japanese-speaking children regard the prenominal sentential modifiers containing genitive subjects as matrix clauses at the stage in question. In Section 6, the mechanism of the genitive Case errors and how children retreat from the Case errors are discussed. Finally, Section 7 concludes this paper.

## 2. ‘Erroneous’ Dative Subjects in Child Japanese (Murasugi and Watanabe 2008, Murasugi 2008)

Murasugi (2008, 2009) argues that Root Infinitive Analogues appear in two ways in child Japanese, an agglutinative discourse *pro*-drop language. One is the very early non-finite verbs or the Surrogate Infinitives (Murasugi, Nakatani and Fuji 2009) observed at one year of age, and the other is the ‘erroneous’ Case-markings on subjects found at two years of age. As we discussed briefly above, Japanese-speaking children at around two to three years of age produce ‘erroneous’ dative subjects such as (4) (Murasugi and Machida 1998, Watanabe 2008, M&W, Murasugi 2008). Adopting Schütze and Wexler’s (1996) insight that Case errors have a linkage with Root Infinitives (RIs), M&W and Murasugi (2008, 2009) argue that the ‘erroneous’ dative subjects are attributed to the underspecification of some features in Tense as well.

Schütze and Wexler (1996) (henceforth S&W) argue that children even at around two years of age have the adult-like syntactic structures, but they produce non-nominative subjects since some features in Tense (or INFL) are underspecified. RIs are the non-finite verbs in matrix clauses produced by children at around two years of age. Some examples taken from the data of an English-speaking child are shown in (5).

- (5) a. He bite me (Nina, 2;2, File 13)      b. She drink apple juice (Nina, 2;3, File 19)  
 c. Him fall down (Nina, 2;3, File 17)      d. Her have a big mouth (Nina, 2;2, File 13) (S & W 1996)

Pointing out that such Case errors frequently co-occur with non-finite verbs, S&W argue that such non-nominative subjects are part of Optional Infinitives (OIs) or RIs. While the uninflected verbs sometimes co-occur with a nominative subject as in (5a) and (5b), they often co-occur with a non-nominative subject as in (5c) and (5d).

To account for the various types of errors described in (5), S&W propose the Agreement and Tense Omission Model (ATOM). According to this model, T(ense) and Agr(ement) are separated, and when either T or Agr, or both of them have negative values, errors like (5) are produced. The paradigm is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Agreement and Tense Omission Model (based on Schütze and Wexler 1996: 678-679)**

INFL	Description	Examples
[+tns, +agr]	Nom assigned	<i>he cries, he cried</i>
[+tns, -agr]	Nom unassigned, default Acc surfaces	<i>him cries, him cried</i>
[-tns, +agr]	Nom assigned, agreement invisible	<i>he cry</i>
[-tns, -agr]	Nom unassigned, Gen assigned	<i>my cry</i>

S&W argue that accusative is the default Case in English, and Agr, but not T, assigns the nominative Case to a subject NP. Thus, when the feature in INFL is [-agr], subject NPs do not get nominative Case. When the combination of the features is [-tns, -agr] (i.e., when there are no features that have a positive value in INFL), a subject gets the genitive Case as in (1).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Given the ATOM, it is expected that ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects would be found only in the non-finite clauses. However, Radford (1998) provides some counterexamples to the ATOM as shown in (i).

(i) a. My caught it (Nina, 2;1)      b. My broke it (Sarah, 2;6)      (Vainikka 1993/1994)

M&W and Murasugi (2008, 2009) then argue that the stage of Case errors in Japanese corresponds to that of RIs in European languages. They analyze that ‘erroneous’ dative subjects in Japanese are due to the unsetting of the Impersonal Parameter (Ura 1996), or the parameter regarding the obligation of the nominative Case that T assigns to the subject. According to Ura (1996), if the Impersonal Parameter is set as negative in a language L, the finite T in L always has a nominative Case-feature to be checked off. While the parametric value in adult Japanese is [-impersonal], in the course of language acquisition, there is a stage where the nominative Case-feature on T remains unchecked. The subjects are assigned default dative Case *-ni* inside VP, without moving to TP Spec, where subjects are marked with the nominative Case *-ga*. This hypothesis provides an elegant account for Watanabe’s (2008) interesting descriptive generalization that ‘erroneous’ dative subjects do not co-occur with unaccusative verbs. Adopting Kuno (1973) and Yatsushiro’s (1999) syntactic analyses of the Case assignment system, Watanabe argues that no ‘erroneous’ dative subject is produced with an unaccusative verb, since an unaccusative verb assigns the nominative Case *-ga* to a subject NP inside VP, without requiring the subject to move to the Spec of TP.

As for the very early non-finite verbs in child Japanese, Murasugi, Fuji and Hashimoto (2007) and Nakatani and Murasugi (2009), among others, propose that there is a Root Infinitive Analogue (RIA) or Surrogate Infinitive Stage in child Japanese. The Japanese RIA stage appears, just like Italian (Salustri and Hyams 2003, 2006) and Greek (Varlokosta, Vainikka, and Rohrbacher 1996, Hyams 2005), much earlier than the RI stage in European languages. The very early non-finite verb forms in Japanese are realized as the past tense form, *V-ta*, which is the most unmarked form (Murasugi 2009). Examples from the Sumihare corpus (Noji 1973-1977) are shown in (6).

- (6) a. Baba tui-ta (Sumihare, 1;6) (result state) (Adult form: tui-te-ru)  
 thread stick-Past ‘The thread is on the finger’  
 b. Tii si-ta (Sumihare, 1;7) (irrealis/volition) (Adult form: si-ta-i)  
 onomatopoeia (pee ) do-Past ‘I want to pee’ (Murasugi, Fuji and Hashimoto 2007)

The verb in (6a) should appear with the progressive morpheme, *-teiru*, but Sumihare used the past tense form, *tui-ta* ‘sticked’ instead. In (6b), the verb should appear with the morpheme *-tai* to express volition in adult Japanese, but the past tense form *si-ta* ‘did’ was used. Sumihare’s non-adult-like usage of *V-ta* forms disappeared when the use of nominative subjects increased in number, at around 2;1. (See Murasugi, Fuji and Hashimoto (2007), Murasugi and Fuji (2008, 2009), Murasugi, Nakatani and Fuji (2009), Murasugi (2008, 2009).)

Based on these descriptive findings, Murasugi (2008, 2009) argues that both the RIA stage and Case errors have a linkage with RIs in European languages. The age span where RIAs and Case errors are observed in child Japanese and the age that RIs are observed in European child languages can be schematized as in Table 2.

**Table 2: Root Infinitive Stages in Child Japanese and Other Child Languages**

Language \ Age	1;6	1;7	1;8	1;9	1;10	1;11	2;0	2;1	2;2	2;3	2;4	2;5	2;6	2;7
Japanese	Root Infinitive Analogues							Case Errors						
“Root Infinitive” Languages	Root Infinitives (RIs)													

In the next section, we argue that Japanese-speaking children produce not only ‘erroneous’ dative subjects but also ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects at around the time when RIs are found in European languages.

### 3. Data: ‘Erroneous’ Genitive Subjects in Child Japanese

Our corpus analysis found that 103 out of 2246 utterances contained ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects. Some of them are shown in (7) through (10).

- (7) a. A-tyan-**\*no** tukat-te-ru no (A, 2;1) (Adult form: A-tyan-ga) [Transitive verbs]  
 -Gen use-Prog-Pres Particle ‘A-tyan is using (it).’  
 b. Taisyoo-kun-**\*no** tukut-ta (Tai, 1;10) (Adult form: Taisyoo-kun-ga)  
 -Gen make-Past ‘Mr. Taisyoo made (this).’
- (8) a. Mama-**\*no** odot-te yo (A, 2;1) (Adult form: Mama-ga) [Unergative verbs]  
 Mother-Gen dance-Request Particle ‘Please dance, Mother.’  
 b. Kore Masukuman-**\*no**ik-u (Ryo, 2;11) (Adult form: Masukuman-ga)  
 this mask man-Gen go-Pres ‘Here, Maskman goes.’
- (9) a. Tane-**\*no** hait-te-n no (A, 2;5) (Adult form: Tane-ga) [Unaccusative verbs]  
 seed-Gen enter-Prog-PresParticle ‘The seeds are in (a grape).’  
 b. Ti-**\*no** ar-u (Moko, 2;0) (Adult form: Ti-ga)  
 (letter) Ti-Gen exist-Pres ‘There is a block (that has the letter Ti).’
- (10) a. Taisyoo-kun-**\*no** sugo-i (Tai, 1;10) (Adult form: Taisyoo-kun-ga) [Adjectives]  
 -Gen great-Pres ‘Mr. Taisyoo is great.’  
 b. Terebi-**\*no** urusa-i-nai (=urusak-u-nai)ya (Jun, 2;9) (Adult form: Terebi-ga)  
 TV-Gen noisy-Pres-not Particle ‘The sound of the TV is not loud.’

As shown in (i), the genitive pronoun, *my*, is used as the subject of a verb overtly inflected for tense.



Budwig (1989) proposes Functional Analysis. She argues that English-speaking children at around two years of age contrastively employ first person singular pronouns (i.e., *I*, *me* and *my*) to mark various degrees of agentivity and control depending on their own involvement in the action frame. According to Budwig (1989), *me* subject is used with predicates expressing actions that affect the child himself (e.g., *Me jump*), while *my* subject generally appears in the situation where a child acts as an agent to bring about a change in the environment (e.g., *My did it*). Suzuki's (2007) longitudinal observation of Child A (1;10-2;8) shows that Budwig's generalization is also true for child Japanese. He argues that there is a 'subject split' stage, where the 'erroneous' genitive subjects are used as agents with such event-denoting predicates as a transitive verb as in (13a) and an unergative verb as in (13b), whereas the nominative subjects are used as a theme with an unaccusative verb as in (14).

- (13) a. A-tyan-**\*no** tukat-te-ru no (A, 2;1) (Adult form: A-tyan-ga) [Transitive verb]  
 -Gen use-Prog-Pres Particle 'A-tyan is using (it).'
- b. Mama-**\*no** odot-te yo (A, 2;1) (Adult form: Mama-ga) [Unergative verb]  
 Mother-Gen dance-Request Particle 'Please dance, Mother.'  
 (Suzuki 2007)
- (14) Boosi-**ga** ton-da (A, 2;2)  
 hat-Nom fly-Past '(The) hat flew away.'  
 (*Ibid.*)

According to Suzuki (2007), genitive subjects appear earlier than nominative subjects at 2;1, and the 'subject split' stage lasts until 2;3. Child A produced only 'erroneous' genitive subjects such as (13), but never the 'correct' nominative subjects, at 2;1, and the nominative subjects with unaccusative verbs such as (14) appeared at 2;2. Then, the child gradually extended his/her use of nominative subjects to transitive and unergative verbs at 2;3.

Our corpus analysis, however, found some counterexamples to the generalization. Non-agentive genitive subjects are, in fact, frequently produced with unaccusative verbs or adjectives as in (15).

- (15) a. Ti-**\*no** ar-u (Moko, 2;0) (Adult form: Ti-ga) [Unaccusative verb]  
 (letter) Ti-Gen exist-Pres 'There is a block (that has the Japanese letter *Ti*).'
- b. Taisyoo-kun-**\*no** sugo-i (Tai, 1;10) (Adult form: Taisyoo-kun-ga) [Adjective]  
 -Gen great-Pres 'Mr. Taisyoo is great.'

The examples in (15) are found at the very early stage of the 'erroneous' genitive subjects. Thus, our corpus analysis does not support the descriptive generalization proposed by Budwig (1989) and Suzuki (2007). Children's genitive 'errors' do not depend on the thematic properties of the subject, and whether or not the subject is associated with agentive role, the 'erroneous' genitive subjects are produced.

Nominal Analysis proposed by Pensalfini (1995) for child English is noteworthy. Pensalfini (1995) argues that children at the RI stage make various kinds of errors such as (12), and observes a parallelism between child clauses with the genitive subjects and adult gerund structures as in (16).

- (16) John's computer replies to the e-mail without [*his* having to turn it on].

According to Pensalfini (1995), in the child grammar, the subject is assigned genitive Case by virtue of being in the Spec of NP, just like the genitive subject *his* in a gerund construction given in (16), and children making genitive Case errors consider the whole NPs to be sentences. Similarly, Suzuki (2001) argues that the structure containing a genitive subject is DP. The sentence-ending particle *no*, which frequently occurs with 'erroneous' genitive subjects as in (13a), serves as D, which has a declarative feature [+D] that licenses genitive on a subject. The structure is shown in (17).

- (17) a. [<sub>DP</sub> A-tyan;<sub>i</sub>-**no** [<sub>D</sub>: [<sub>IP</sub>...<sub>i</sub>... tukat-te-ru] [<sub>D</sub> no]]]  
 -Gen make-Prog-Pres Particle 'A-tyan is making (this).'
- b. [<sub>DP</sub> [<sub>IP</sub> onaka sui-tyat-ta] [<sub>D</sub> φ]]  
 stomach be hungry-Perfect-Past '(I) got hungry.'

In (17a), *no* takes IP as the complement, and it nominalizes the whole sentence. Suzuki (2001) argues that even the sentence-ending particle *no* does not appear as in (17b), D, which is phonetically null, nominalizes the sentence.

Given this analysis, the 'erroneous' genitive subjects are not expected to co-occur with *wh*-phrases that require C projection. However, some counterexamples to Suzuki (2001) are found in our corpus analysis, as shown in (18).

- (18) Dotti-**\*no** ooki-i? (Moko, 2;5) (Adult form: Dotti-ga)  
 which-Gen big-Pres 'Which (number on the cards) is bigger?'

In (18), the genitive Case *-no* is attached to the *wh*-phrase, *dotti* 'which.' Thus, Suzuki's (2001) DP analysis may be problematic, too.

Therefore, the previous analyses presented here cannot fully account for the 'erroneous' genitive subjects found in our corpus analysis. Then, how can we theoretically explain the errors? In the following sections, we will give our analysis of the 'erroneous' genitive subjects in the child grammar.

## 5. What Children Know and Do Not Know at the Stage of ‘Erroneous’ Genitive Subjects

### 5.1. The Genitive Subject Constructions in Adult Japanese

Before we go into the analysis, let us discuss the system of Case assignment in adult Japanese. In Japanese, as shown in (2) repeated in (19), subjects in matrix clauses are typically marked with nominative Case marker *-ga*, but never with genitive Case marker *-no* in sentences.<sup>4</sup>

- (19) a. **Taroo-ga/-\*no** hon-o yon-da  
 -Nom/-Gen book-Acc read-Past ‘Taro read a book.’  
 b. **Taroo-ga/-\*no** arui-ta  
 -Nom/-Gen walk-Past ‘Taro walked.’  
 c. **Booto-ga/-\*no** sizun-da  
 Boat-Nom/-Gen sink-Past ‘A boat sank.’  
 d. **Ringo-ga/-\*no** aka-i  
 apple-Nom/-Gen red-Pres ‘The apple is red.’

In (19), all the sentences are grammatical when their subjects are Case marked with nominative, but the sentences become ungrammatical when these subjects are Case marked with genitive.

Unlike in the matrix clauses, subjects can be marked either with the nominative Case *-ga* or with the genitive Case *-no* inside the prenominal sentential modifiers in NPs (DPs), as exemplified in (20).

- (20) a. [Taroo-ga/-no (gap<sub>i</sub>) yon-da] hon<sub>i</sub>  
 -Nom/-Gen read-Past book  
 ‘the book that Taro read’  
 b. [(gap<sub>i</sub>) se-ga/-no taka-i] hito<sub>i</sub>  
 height-Nom/-Gen tall-Pres person  
 ‘The person who is tall.’

The subject *Taroo* and *se* ‘height’ of the transitive verb *yon-da* ‘read’ in (20a) and the adjective *taka-i* ‘tall’ in (20b), respectively, can get either the nominative or the genitive. This is known as nominative/genitive (*Ga/No*) conversion (Harada 1971). Note here that with respect to the surface form of predicates, the declarative form and the adnominal form are homophonous, as shown in (21).

- (21) a. Sentence: [<sub>S</sub> Taroo-ga/-\*no hon-o **yon-da**]  
 -Nom/-Gen book-Acc read-Past ‘Taro read a book.’  
 b. NP: [<sub>Sentential Modifier</sub> Taroo-ga/-no (gap<sub>i</sub>) **yon-da**] hon<sub>i</sub>  
 -Nom/-Gen read-Past book ‘the book that Taro read’

The verb in the sentence-ending (or the declarative) form (*syuusikei*) in (21a), and the verb in the prenominal (or the adnominal) form (*rentaikei*) in (21b) are homophonous, both being realized as *yon-da* ‘read.’<sup>5</sup> However, as described in (19) and (20), sentences and the prenominal sentential modifiers in NPs (DPs) are different with respect to Case markings on subjects in adult Japanese. Only inside the prenominal sentential modifiers, nominative/genitive (*Ga/No*) conversion is allowed.

Furthermore, in adult Japanese, it has been widely argued that there is a restriction on nominative/genitive conversion, which prohibits the co-occurrence of an accusative object with a genitive subject (Harada 1971) as shown in (22).

- (22) [Taroo-ga/-\*no hon-o kat-ta] mise  
 -Nom/-Gen book-Acc buy-Past shop ‘the shop where Taro bought a book’

The accusative-Case-marked object, *hon-o* ‘book-Acc,’ can be present when the subject is marked with the nominative Case, whereas it is prohibited when the subject is marked with the genitive Case. This is called the Transitivity Restriction.

Miyagawa (2009:20) argues that genitive subject construction itself has an inherently stative meaning. First, he shows that the genitive subject constructions are amenable to the stative interpretation as exemplified in (23).

- (23) a. [kare-ga/-no e<sub>i</sub> sinzi-tei-ru] kami<sub>i</sub>  
 he-Nom/-Gen believe-State-Pres God  
 ‘the God that he believes in’  
 b. [kami-ga/-no] naga-i hito  
 hair-Nom/-Gen long-Pres person  
 ‘a person whose hair is long’ (Miyagawa 2009)

In (23), both the nominative and the genitive subjects are acceptable, but the latter is preferred with the stative predicate in (23a) and with the adjective that has stative meaning by nature in (23b).

<sup>4</sup> A psych-predicate or a potential predicate can have either a nominative subject as in (a) or a dative subject as in (b). Note here that in the latter case, the object (e.g., *eigo* ‘English’) must be marked with nominative Case.

- (i) a. **Taroo-ga** eigo-ga/-o hanas-e-ru  
 -Nom English-Nom/-Acc speak-Potential-Pres  
 ‘Taro can speak English.’  
 b. **Taroo-ni** eigo-ga/-\*o hanas-e-ru  
 -Dat English-Nom/-Acc speak-Potential-Pres  
 ‘Taro can speak English.’

<sup>5</sup> Copula elements in adjectival verbs are the exception; the sentence-ending (declarative) form and the prenominal (adnominal) form are distinctively realized. The sentence-ending (declarative) form of copula is *da* as in *sizuka-da* in (a); while the prenominal (adnominal) counterpart is *na* as in *sizuka-na* in (b).

- (i) a. heya-ga sizuka-**da**  
 room-Nom quiet-Pres ‘The room is quiet.’  
 b. sizuka-**na** heya  
 quiet-Adnominal room ‘A quiet room’

Second, he argues that the past tense form, *V-ta*, in certain relative clauses displays not only ordinary past tense reading, but also result state reading (Teramura 1982, Abe 1993, among others). Compare the sentence containing a genitive subject in (24b) with that containing a nominative subject in (24a).

- (24) a. [simi-**ga** tui-ta] syatu-o kiteiru [eventive reading]  
 stain-Nomhad shirt-Acc is wearing ‘He’s wearing a shirt that sustained a stain.’  
 b. [simi-**no** tui-ta] syatu-o kiteiru [result of eventuality reading]  
 stain-Gen had shirt-Acc is wearing ‘He’s wearing a shirt that has a stain.’ (Ibid.)

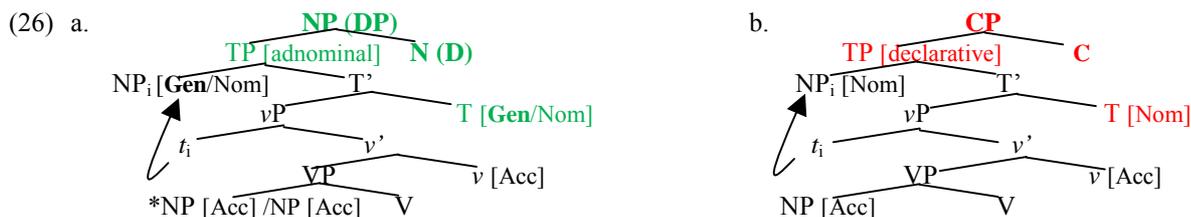
In (24a), the subject is Case marked with the nominative *-ga*, and the sentential modifier, *simi-ga tui-ta*, has the eventive reading, ‘sustained a stain.’ On the other hand, the prenominal sentential modifier with the genitive subject, *simi-no tui-ta*, has the result of eventuality reading, ‘has a stain.’

Third, Miyagawa (2009) shows that genitive subject clause is odd with an adverb that emphasizes the event, as shown in (25).

- (25) totuzen simi-**ga**/\***no** tui-ta syatu  
 suddenly stain-Nom/-Gen have-Past shirt ‘the shirt that was suddenly stained’ (Ibid.)

As in (25), when the subject *simi* ‘stain’ is Case marked with the nominative marker *-ga*, the adverb *totuzen* ‘suddenly,’ which emphasizes the event, can naturally appear while the subject marked with the genitive marker *-no* does not conform to it. Hence, Miyagawa (2008, 2009) argues that genitive subjects have the stative nature, as opposed to the eventive nature, and they tend to appear with stative predicates, namely, unaccusative verbs, adjectives, and aspectual expressions.

For the structure of the genitive subject constructions in adult Japanese, various analyses have been proposed. For example, Miyagawa (1993, 2008, 2009), Ochi (2001), and Maki and Uchibori (2008) argue that the genitive subject in a prenominal sentential modifier is licensed by D. On the other hand, Saito (2004), adopting Hiraiwa’s (2001) proposal that the genitive subject is licensed sentence-internally by the adnominal verbal inflection<sup>6</sup>, argues that an Adnominal T checks either genitive or nominative in the prenominal sentential modifiers and a Declarative T checks nominative in declarative sentences. The structures with an Adnominal T and a Declarative T are illustrated in (26a) and (26b), respectively.



As in (26a), the subject NP moves from the Spec of *vP* to the Spec of *TP*, and the Adnominal T checks either nominative or genitive on subjects. The *TP* headed by the Adnominal T must be compatible with *N (D)*, but not with *C*. According to Saito (2004), when the Adnominal T checks genitive, it absorbs the accusative feature on *v*, and hence, the genitive-accusative pattern (e.g., *\*Taroo-no hon-o katta mise* ‘the store where Taro bought a book’) is excluded. In (26b), the subject NP is base-generated in the Spec of *vP* and it moves to the Spec of *TP* to get the nominative Case by the Declarative T. The *TP* headed by the Declarative T is compatible with *C*.

In this paper, we employ Saito’s (2004) proposal and argue that the children’s ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects take place when children cannot specify the features [ $\pm$ Gen] in T that determine the external relation of Adnominal T to *N (D)* and have not decided that genitive subjects must appear only in NPs (DPs).

## 5.2. The Parallelism between ‘Erroneous’ Genitive Subjects in Child Japanese and Prenominal Sentential Modifiers with Genitive Subjects in Adult Japanese

In this subsection, we show that sentences containing an ‘erroneous’ genitive subject also have the properties found in adult prenominal sentential modifiers in NPs with a genitive subject, which are discussed in the preceding sections. We have three pieces of evidence for this claim.

First, the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects produced by children obey the Transitivity Restriction that prohibits the co-occurrence of a genitive subject with an accusative object as we discussed in (22). We found that 35 out of 40 sentences (87.5%) with the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects have a null object. Interestingly, when the context requires an object NP, children topicalize or right-dislocate the object to avoid violating the Transitivity Restriction, as shown in (27).

<sup>6</sup> Caroline Heycock (p.c.) points out that the synchronic development of the child ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects, and the diachronic development, i.e., the historical change of Case-markings on subjects in Japanese, are similar. Historically, genitive subjects were allowed to appear in matrix clauses in Old Japanese. From the early 13th century, in Middle Japanese, the morphological merger of the sentence-ending verb form into the prenominal verb form began. The loss of affixal identity triggers the disappearance of the genitive subjects in regular clauses (Hiraiwa 2002, among others).

- (27) a. *Kore*, A-tyan-**\*no** *tukut-ta no* (A, 2;3) (Adult form: A-tyan-ga)  
 this -Gen make-Past Particle ‘This one, A-tyan made (it).’  
 b. A-tyan-**\*no** *but-tyat-ta titi* (A, 2;4) (Adult form: A-tyan-ga)  
 -Gen hit-Perfect-Past father ‘A-tyan hit my father.’

The object *kore* ‘this’ in (27a) is topicalized, and *titi* ‘father’ in (27b) is right-dislocated from the basic position, the left of the verb. Although ‘correct’ nominative subjects and ‘erroneous’ dative subjects also tend to have a null object,<sup>7</sup> they can have an overt object in the basic position as shown in (28) and (29).

- (28) a. *Watasi-**\*ni** watasi-ga tamanegi mitetite-ta* (=mitukete kita)yo (Moko, 2;2)  
 I-Dat I-Nom onion find-Past Particle ‘I,...I found an onion.’  
 b. *Gura-ga ii koto-o omoituite...* (Moko, 2;8)  
 -Nom good thing-Acctthink of ‘Gura hit upon a good idea...’
- (29) a. *Mama-**\*ni** suupu ire-ta no* (A, 2;9) (Adult form: Mama-ga)  
 Mother-Dat soup pour-Past Particle ‘Mother poured (the) soup.’  
 b. *Taiya-**\*ni** nani yut-ta?* (Jun, 2;10) (Adult form: Taiya-ga)  
 tire-Dat what say-Past ‘What did the tire say (sound like)?’

In (28), the subjects are ‘correctly’ marked with the nominative Case, and the overt objects, *tamanegi* ‘an onion’ and *ii koto-o* ‘a good idea,’ appear in the preverbal position. In (29), the ‘erroneous’ dative subjects also have the preverbal objects, *suupu* ‘the soup’ and *nani* ‘what.’ Thus, only the child ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects obey the Transitivity Restriction.<sup>8</sup>

Second, the predicates that appear with child ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects and genitive subjects in adult complex NPs share some syntactic properties. The distribution of predicates with each subject is given in Table 4.

**Table 4: Types of Predicates Occur with Nominative, \*Genitive and \*Dative Subjects**

Types of Predicates	Forms of Predicates	Nominative	Genitive	Dative
Transitive verbs	<i>V-ta (Past Tense Form)</i>	106 (7.8%)	19 (18%)	12 (35%)
	Aspectual	<b>59 (4.3%)</b>	<b>16 (15%)</b>	3 (9%)
	Non-aspectual	105 (8%)	6 (6%)	10 (30%)
Unergative verbs	<i>V-ta (Past Tense Form)</i>	31 (2.3%)	2 (2%)	1 (3%)
	Aspectual	<b>30 (2.2%)</b>	<b>12 (11.5%)</b>	0 (0%)
	Non-aspectual	59 (4.3%)	4 (4%)	1 (3%)
Unaccusative verbs	<i>V-ta (Past Tense Form)</i>	<b>153 (11.3%)</b>	<b>6 (6%)</b>	<b>3 (9%)</b>
	Aspectual	<b>159 (11.7%)</b>	<b>7 (7%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
	Non-aspectual	<b>303 (22.3%)</b>	<b>14 (13%)</b>	<b>2 (6%)</b>
Adjectives	Past Tense	4 (0.3%)	<b>2 (2%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
	Present Tense	<b>346 (25.5%)</b>	<b>15 (14.5%)</b>	<b>2 (6%)</b>
Total Number of the Errors (Percentage)		1356 (100%)	103 (100%)	34 (100%)

As we discussed with examples in (23) through (25), Miyagawa (2009) argues that genitive subjects in sentential modifiers tend to appear with unaccusative verbs, adjectives, and verbs associated with aspectual expressions. Table 4 shows that the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects, unlike the ‘erroneous’ dative subjects or the ‘correct’ nominative subjects, also tend to co-occur with adjectives (16.5%) and aspectual forms such as *V-te(i)ru* (perfect/progressive) and *V-tyatta/-ta* (perfect).<sup>9</sup> Thus, the types of predicates that appear with the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects in child Japanese are very much alike the predicates that appear with genitive subjects in adult Japanese.

Third, 96% of the child matrix clauses with ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects contain the verbs and adjectives with the prenominal (adnominal) form, which is homophonous with the sentence-ending (declarative) form (e.g., *tonda* ‘flew’ in

<sup>7</sup> 201 out of 271 sentences (74.2%) with the nominative subjects and 30 out of 34 sentences (88.2%) with the dative subjects have null objects. These results indicate that young children know that Japanese has ‘discourse *pro*,’ and they tend to drop the object NPs.

<sup>8</sup> The results obtained here do not contradict with Sugisaki’s (2009) experimental study showing that Japanese-speaking preschool children aged from 3;11 to 6;7 already have knowledge of the Transitivity Restriction on the nominative/genitive conversion.

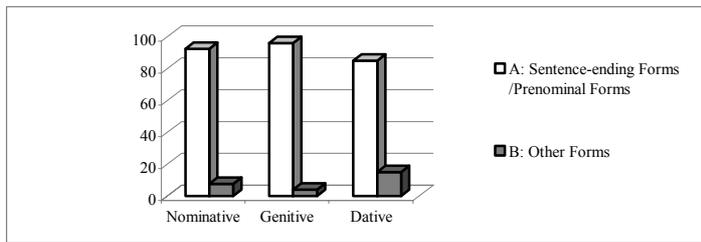
<sup>9</sup> The genitive Case errors occur with all types of verbs (i.e., transitive, unergative and unaccusative verbs), while the dative Case errors rarely occur with unergative or unaccusative verbs as Watanabe (2008) finds. Although the ‘erroneous’ dative subjects with the unaccusative verbs are found in our corpus analysis as in (i), total rate of the ‘correct’ nominative subjects co-occurred with an unaccusative verb (45.3%) is much higher than those of the ‘erroneous’ dative subjects that co-occurred with them (15%).

(i) *Zidoosya-**\*ni** too-ru yoo ni* (Jun, 3;5) (Adult form: Zidoosya-ga)  
 car-Dat pass-Pres for ‘(I will remove the things) so that the car can move.’

Therefore, our finding supports Watanabe’s (2008) generalization that dative Case errors do not occur with unaccusative verbs.

“*boosi-ga tonda*” ‘The hat flew away.’ versus “*tonda boosi*” ‘the hat which flew away’) as shown in the group A in Figure 3.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 3: Percentage of the Sentence-ending Form and Prenominal Forms of the Predicates that Occur with Nominative, \*Genitive and \*Dative Subjects**



The group B indicates the verbs and adjectives whose form is different from the prenominal/sentence-ending form (e.g., request form such as *Mama-ga odot-te* (Mommy-Nom dance-Request)), and the number of them is very small.<sup>11</sup> Figure 3 clearly shows that most of the predicates produced by children with ‘correct’ nominative subjects, ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects, and ‘erroneous’ dative subjects, appear with the verbs and adjectives whose prenominal form is homophonous with the sentence-ending form. This is in fact true for the adult usage: The sentence-ending form and the prenominal form of the verbs and adjectives are mostly homophonous. Hence, there is a good reason for the children to regard the prenominal sentential modifiers as the matrix clauses, based on the input available.

To summarize, there are three pieces of evidence for the claim that Japanese-speaking children regard the prenominal sentential modifiers containing genitive subjects as matrix clauses at the stage in question. First, the Transitivity Restriction is imposed only on the clauses containing ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects. Second, the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects appear frequently with unaccusative verbs, adjectives and the verbs with aspectual meaning as Miyagawa (2009) discusses for adult genitive subjects.<sup>12</sup> Third, most of the verbs and adjectives children produced at the stage in question were those whose sentence-ending form and the prenominal form are homophonous.

Then, why do children treat NPs (DPs) like Sentences? Contra Pensalfini’s (1995) Nominal Analysis, which suggests that the child’s grammar differs from the adult’s in allowing NP utterances to function as sentences, we argue, adopting Saito (2004), that Japanese-speaking children at around the age of two already know the internal structure of TP headed by Adnominal T and also know that Adnominal T checks genitive on subjects. However, children do not know that genitive subjects are allowed to appear only in the prenominal sentential modifiers, but not in matrix sentences, in their target grammar. In the next section, we discuss an analysis that children produce genitive subjects in sentences, since they ‘mistakenly’ hypothesize that Adnominal T is compatible with C then.

## 6. Proposal: The Mechanism of the ‘Erroneous’ Genitive Case Marking

### 6.1. Analysis

Why do Japanese-speaking children produce ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects? We have shown so far that (i) Japanese-speaking children produce ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects in sentences at two to three years of age, (ii) at the time when the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects are produced, the ‘correct’ nominative subjects are also produced, and (iii) the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects produced by children in non-NP contexts share the properties with the adult genitive subjects in complex NPs. Given those, children seem to know at least the internal properties of TP headed by Adnominal T at the stage in question.

<sup>10</sup> In Japanese, the sentence-ending (declarative) forms and the prenominal (adnominal) forms of verbs and adjectives are homophonous as exemplified in (i) to (iii). The sentence-ending (declarative) forms in (ia), (iia) and (iiia) and their prenominal counterparts in (ib), (iib) and (iiib) are identical on the surface.

- (i) a. Taroo-ga ringo-o tabe-ru/-tei-ru/-tya-u [Sentence-ending Form]  
 -Nom apple-Acc eat-Pres/-Prog-Pres/-Perfect-Pres ‘Taro eats/is eating an apple.’  
 b. [Taroo-ga tabe-ru/-tei-ru/-tya-u] ringo [Prenominal Form]  
 -Nom eat-Pres/-Prog-Pres/-Perfect-Pres apple ‘the apple that Taro eats/is eating’
- (ii) a. Taroo-ga ringo-o tabe-ta/-tei-ta/-tyat-ta [Sentence-ending Form]  
 -Nom apple-Acc eat-Past/-Prog-Past/-Perfect-Past ‘Taro ate/has eaten an apple.’  
 b. [Taroo-ga tabe-ta/-tei-ta/-tyat-ta] ringo [Prenominal Form]  
 -Nom eat-Past/-Prog-Past/-Perfect-Past apple ‘the apple that Taro ate/has eaten’
- (iii) a. Ringo-ga aka-i/-katta [Sentence-ending Form]  
 apple-Nom red-Pres/-Past ‘The apple is/was red.’

<sup>11</sup> Besides the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects with verbs and adjectives, Sawada and Murasugi (2010) discuss the copula drop phenomenon in child language. In adult Japanese, the sentence-ending form of the copula appears *-da*, while the prenominal form is *-na*. Interestingly, in (i), the sentence-ending form of copula *-da* is omitted. See Sawada and Murasugi (2010) for the details.

- (i) Moko-tyan-*\*no* tensaai  $\phi$  (Moko, 2;0)  
 -Gengenius ‘Moko-tyan (=I) is genius!’

<sup>12</sup> Given the analysis of Miyagawa (2008, 2009) for adult Japanese, it is predicted that children’s genitive subjects are not agentive either. However, 60 out of the 103 (58%) ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects are agents, and the genitive subjects occur with active verbs (i.e., transitive or unergative verbs). We leave this problem for our future study.

Then, what do they NOT know? We propose that the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects are due to children’s initial hypothesis that Adnominal T can be compatible with C, since children assume that the default structure of the root clause is CP (Rizzi 1994). We discuss the learnability issue and argue that when children set the value of the Relative Clause Parameter to TP (not CP) as in adult Japanese (Murasugi 1991), they find that Adnominal T must be compatible with N (D) by fully specifying the features [ $\pm$ Gen] in T or the features that determine the external relation of T, and retreat from the production of the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects.

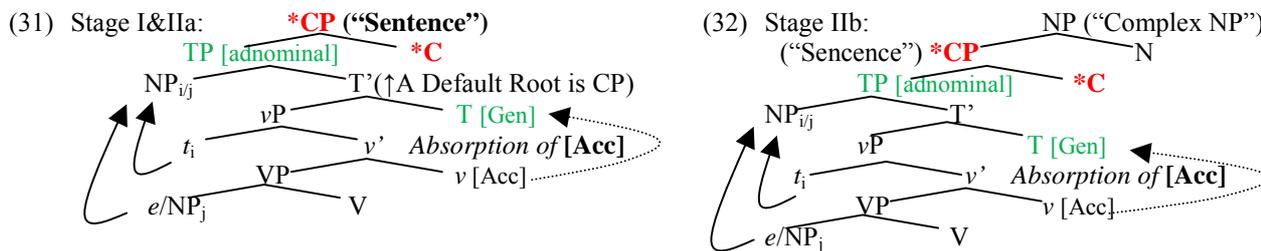
According to Murasugi (1991), the structure of relative clauses is parameterized; either CP or TP (IP) depending on language. Prenominal sentential modifiers in adult Japanese (and Korean) are TPs (IPs) (Saito 1985), whereas they are CPs in adult English. However, some children acquiring Japanese (and Korean) hypothesize CP relatives at one point of grammar acquisition, and they overgenerate a complementizer (the element also used in the head of presuppositional phrase in cleft sentences) between a sentential modifier and a head nominal, as shown in (30).

- (30) a. *Mama tukut-ta \*no syuukuriimu* (Emi, 2;11-4;2)  
 Mother make-Past C cream puff ‘the cream puff that Mother made’  
 b. *Emi-tyan-no kai-ta \*no Sinderera* (Emi, 2;11-4;2)  
 -Gendraw-Past C Cinderella ‘Cinderella that Emi-tyan drew’ (Murasugi 1991)

As shown in (30a), a Japanese-speaking child, Emi, ‘erroneously’ inserted a complementizer *no* between the prenominal sentential modifier, *Mama tukut-ta* ‘Mother made,’ and the head nominal, *syuukuriimu* ‘a cream puff.’ (30b) is a similar example with the genitive subject, *Emi-tyan-no*. According to Murasugi (1991), (30) indicates that Emi hypothesizes that Japanese relative clauses are CPs, and when children, in general, find out that relative clauses in adult Japanese are TPs and set the value of the Relative Clause Parameter (from CP) to TP, they stop overgenerating *no* like (30), and start producing (the adult-like) TP relative clauses. By assuming Murasugi’s (1991) Relative Clause Parameter and Saito’s (2004) structure of the genitive subjects in adult Japanese, the mechanism of the genitive Case errors is well explained in four steps or Stages I, IIa, IIb and III.

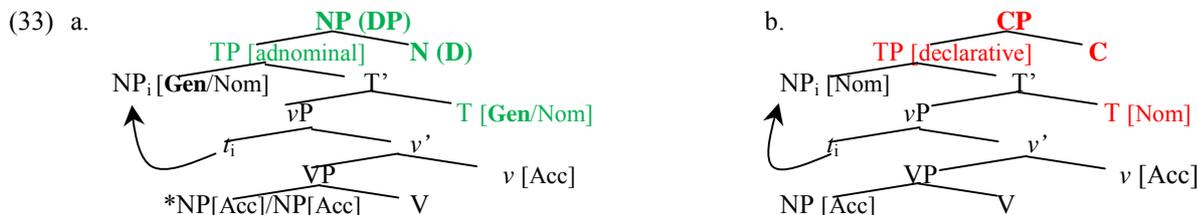
Recall that in Child A’s data, there is a stage where only ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects, but not nominative subjects, are produced (Suzuki 2001, 2007). We call this stage the Stage I. Stage II, where the ‘correct’ nominative subjects are optionally produced, is divided into two sub-stages, Stages IIa and Stage IIb, depending on whether relative clauses are produced or not.

Stages I and IIa are the stages where relative clauses are not yet produced, but children produce ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects. We conjecture that this is the stage where children, assuming that the default structure of the root clause is CP (Rizzi 1994), hypothesize that Adnominal T is compatible with C as in (31).



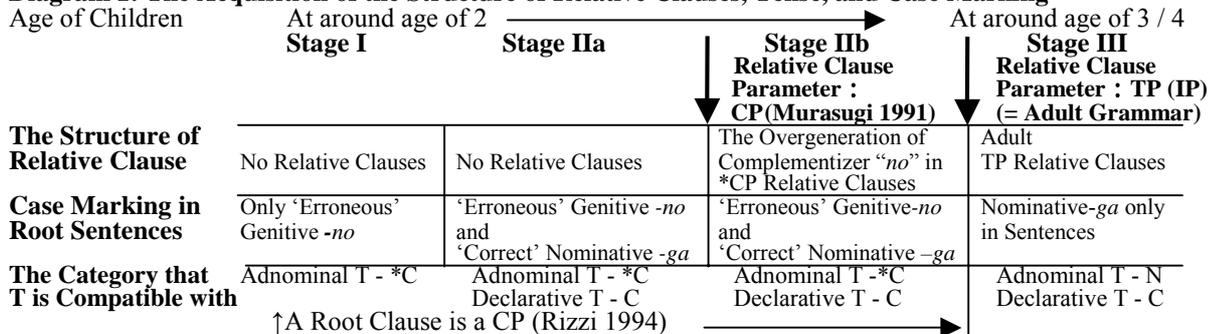
Stage IIb is the one where children start producing relative clauses. At this stage, since children still strictly assume that clauses are CP, they mistakenly set the value of the Relative Clause Parameter to CP and overgenerate a complementizer *no* between a prenominal sentential modifier and a head nominal (Murasugi 1991). Those children allow the CP layer to be above TP, as shown in (32). Thus, they still produce ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects in sentences.

Children at Stage III attain the adult grammar of relative clause structures and the Case assignment system. Consequently, both ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects in sentences and the overgeneration of complementizer *no* with complex NPs disappear.



Children set the value of the Relative Clause Parameter ‘correctly’ to TP, and find out that the adult prenominal sentential modifiers are TP, but not CP, as in (33a). At Stage III, the features [ $\pm$ Gen] in T are specified, and children know that Adnominal T must be compatible with N, but not with C. Children also ‘correctly’ know that Declarative T checks nominative on subjects in sentences just like adults as in (33b). The four stages are summarized in the Diagram 1.

### Diagram 1: The Acquisition of the Structure of Relative Clauses, Tense, and Case Marking



The ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects in non-NP contexts have the parallel properties with genitive subjects in NP-contexts in adult Japanese, and those children who produce the genitive Case errors know the internal structure of TPs headed by Adnominal T, but ‘erroneously’ assume that Adnominal T can be compatible with C, since children assume that the default structure of the root clause is CP (Rizzi 1994). When children learn that prenominal sentential modifiers that genitive subjects are optionally possible are TP, but not CP, and (re)set the value of the Relative Clause Parameter to TP as in adult Japanese (Murasugi 1991), they find that Adnominal T must be compatible with N. At this point, the features [ $\pm$ Gen] in T, or the features that determine the external relation of T, are specified. Then, they successfully retreat from the production of the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects.

### 6.2. Supportive Evidence for Our Proposal from the Corpus Analysis of Jun (0;6-3;8)

Our proposal that setting the TP value of the Relative Clause Parameter is a trigger for the retreat from the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects is further supported by our corpus analysis of Jun (Ishii 2004). Jun produced ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects such as (34) from 2;2 to 2;9, and apparently his stage IIa is from 2;2 to 2;7. Jun started producing CP relative clauses such as (35) from 2;8 frequently, when he still produced ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects. Thus, this is Stage IIb. Crucially, when Jun’s CP relatives decreased and TP relatives such as (36) increased at around 2;10, the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects completely disappeared. This would be the time when he entered into Stage III.

- (34) Koori-**\*no** ippai ar-u yan (2;8) (Adult form: Koori-ga)  
ice-Gen lots of exist-PresParticle ‘There is a lot of ice.’
- (35) Nimotu nose-te-n **\*no** torakku ya kore (2;9)  
load carry-Prog-Pres C truck Particle this ‘This is the truck that is carrying a load.’
- (36) Kore na Jun-**ga** geemu su-ru toko (2;10)  
this Particle -Nom game do-Pres place ‘This is the place where Jun plays the game.’

This data indicates that the value of the Relative Clause Parameter (Murasugi 1991) was set to TP (from CP) at around 2;10, and this triggers him to retreat from the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects.

### 7. Conclusion

In this paper we attempted to provide a theoretical account for the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects in non-NP contexts produced by Japanese-speaking children at around two to three years of age after the Root Infinitive Analogue stage.

We presented the empirical findings that the clauses containing the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects in child Japanese have parallel properties with the prenominal sentential modifiers in NPs (DPs) containing genitive subjects in adult Japanese. Hence, we argued that the children know the internal properties of TPs headed by Adnominal T, i.e., a genitive subject is checked by Adnominal T, but they do not know then that Adnominal T must be compatible with N in the adult grammar, since the features in T that determine the external T to N relation are not yet specified. Those children who ‘mistakenly’ hypothesize that Adnominal T is compatible with C assume that a default structure of the root clause is CP (Rizzi 1994), and allow the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects to appear even in non-NP contexts. It is after the Relative Clause Parameter is ‘correctly’ set (from CP) to TP, that children find out that adult prenominal sentential modifiers in NPs must be TP, and that Adnominal T is compatible only with N, that they stop making the ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects in sentences.

Thus, Japanese-speaking children’s ‘erroneous’ genitive subjects as well as the ‘erroneous’ dative subjects are attributed to the underspecification of some features in Tense, just like Root Infinitives in European languages, as proposed by Murasugi and Watanabe (2008) and Murasugi (2008, 2009).

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