



The Prehead Relative Clause Problem: Noun Modification and Noun Complementation in Northeast Asia

Professor John Whitman (NINJAL/Cornell University)

Comrie (1996, 1998, 2010) and Matsumoto (1997) argue for the existence of a class of languages, including Japanese and Korean, where relative clauses (RCs) and clausal noun complements (NCs) have the same structure. The hallmarks of these “general noun-modifying clause constructions” (GNMCCs) are claimed to be surface similarity in the formal exponence of NCs and RCs, lack of evidence for extraction (“relativization”) in RCs, and the use of the GNMCC pattern in complex NPs with a very wide range of relations between the clausal constituent and the head noun. We show that even in Northeast Asian languages, which are claimed to have GNMCCs in Comrie, Matsumoto, and Sells (forthcoming), these properties do not hold together. In Japanese, Korean, Ainu, Tundra Nenets, Turkic, and Sakha NCs and RCs are clearly distinguished by phenomena such as agreement and/or N’ Ellipsis. To the extent that these have been carefully investigated, gapped RCs in alleged GNMCC languages also exhibit island phenomena. We show that previous arguments against an extraction analysis of gapped RCs in Japanese do not stand up to careful examination: gapped RCs show scope reconstruction and idiom chunk effects. We conclude that GNMCCs do not form a coherent typology. NCs and RCs are structurally distinct, even in languages that have been claimed to exhibit GNMCCs. [joint work with Anna Bugaeva (NINJAL)]

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The Chinese University of Hong Kong

ABOUT THE SPEAKER



John Whitman is Professor of Linguistics at Cornell University and director of the Department of Crosslinguistic Studies at the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (NINJAL) in Tokyo. He works on historical/comparative linguistics, language typology, and syntactic theory, with a primary focus on the languages of East Asia. He has published on the diachronic syntax, phonology, and morphology of Japanese, modern Japanese syntax, Korean syntax, and the diachronic syntax of Chinese. His current research focus is on the principles of syntactic change. His publications include *Proto-Japanese* (co-edited with Bjarke Frellesvig, John Benjamins, 2008), *Grammatical Change: Origins, Nature, Outcomes* (co-edited, with Dianne Jonas and Andrew Garrett 2011, OUP), “The relationship between Japanese and Korean” (in D. Tranter, *The Languages of Japan and Korea*, 2012 Routledge, and “Misparsing and syntactic reanalysis” (in A. van Kemenade, *Historical Linguistics 2009, 2012*, Benjamins).

All are welcome

