Honorification and light verbs in Japanese

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Abstract   This paper deals with the syntactic structure of subject-honorific and object-honorific constructions in Japanese through a detailed examination of the morphological make-up of the so-called honorific form of verbs. The main claim is that the honorific form of verbs actually consists of separate morphemes, which include honorific prefixes, verb stems, nominalisation suffixes, and light verbs. We further argue that the honorific prefix *o-*, which has been generally disregarded in previous literature, is a functional category which heads its own projection. The proposed analysis solves a long-standing problem in the investigation of Japanese honorific constructions, as to why honorific verbs cannot be separated from light verbs, originally pointed out by Harada (1976). Furthermore, this analysis shows how the syntactic distinction between the light verbs *naru* and *suru* leads to the meaning difference between the subject-honorific and object-honorific constructions.

Keywords   Honorifics · Light verb · Japanese · Agreement

1 Introduction

In any language, honorific speech is a complex phenomenon involving pragmatic, lexical, and syntactic aspects. In Japanese, all of these are used extensively, making its politeness system one of the more intricate among the languages of the world. At the honorific utterance level, Japanese has various expressions that can be roughly

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divided into lexical and syntactic expressions. Lexical expressions include the so-called honorific words and fixed idioms.[1] Although frequently used, lexical honorifics are limited in number and are not productive, and they will not be dealt with any more in this paper. Besides lexical honorifics, there are two syntactical means of expressing honorification, illustrated in the examples below.[2]

(1)   Sensei ga   kaer-areta.
      Professor Nom   go home HAux
      'The professor went home.'

(2)   Sensei ga   o-kaeri ni   natta.
      Professor Nom   Hon go home Ren Obl   become Past
      'The professor went home.'

(3)   Watashi ga   sensei wo   o-yobi   shita.
      I Nom   Professor Acc   Hon call Ren do Past
      'I called the professor.'

Example (1) illustrates the usage of the *-rareru* auxiliary to express subject-honorification. This construction is possibly related to the passive auxiliary, and we intend to explore it in a future paper, but here we concentrate on the *o- ni naru/suru* construction illustrated in examples (2) and (3).

The syntactic and morphological structures of (2) and (3) immediately raise two questions. First, how does the combination of the prefix *o-*, the suffix *-ni*, and the ending *naru/suru* yield honorific meaning, and second, why does the alternation of *naru* and *suru* contribute to the selection of honorific targets? In this paper we shall answer these questions by bringing some evidence that *naru/suru* in honorific constructions are in fact very similar to light verbs, in the sense of Grimshaw and Mester (1988), such as the ones below.

(4)   Gichoo-wa   kaigi-wo   chuushi   shita.
      The chairman Top   meeting Acc   interruption   do Past
      'The chairman interrupted the meeting.'

(5)   Kaigi-ga   chuushi ni   natta.
      meeting Nom   interruption Obl become Past
      'The meeting was interrupted.'

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[1] The term *honorific* is used in some of the literature to designate all linguistic means used to express respect and consideration, both exalting and humbling, and it is with this meaning that we shall use this term hereafter. When a distinction has to be made between exalting and humbling expressions containing *suru* and *naru*, we follow Mikami (1970) and Shibatani (1990) and use *subject honorific* for exalting expressions and *object honorific* for humbling expressions.

[2] Throughout the glosses of this paper we shall be using the following abbreviations: Nom—Nominative case, Acc—Accusative case, Dat—Dative case, Obl—Oblique case, Q—question marker, Top—topic marker, Cop—copula, Nz—nominaliser, Past—past tense, Ren—the *renyookei* form/morpheme (variously translated as Adverbial (Shibatani, 1990), Conjunctive (Vance, 1987), and Gerundive (Suzuki, 1989), according to the needs of the respective authors), HAux—honorific auxiliary, Hon—honorific prefix, Neg—negation.

We show that this analysis solves a long-standing problem common to almost all previous studies and first noticed by Harada (1976) whereby the so-called honorific verbs *suru* and *naru* cannot be separated from the nominalised main verb. We further suggest that the honorific prefix *o-* is in fact a functional category that introduces the honorific meaning into the sentence. This means that *naru/suru* themselves are only indirectly involved in honorification (they may even be absent from honorific expressions), which is unlike what numerous previous studies suggest.

We briefly mention that the prefix only selects [+nominal] arguments which makes necessary a closer look at the structure of the nominalised main verb and the structure of nominal expressions in general. It is also necessary to account in a systematic manner for the selection of the target of honorification. Our analysis of *suru* and *naru* as light verbs also allows for a natural explanation of the alternation between subject-honorific and object-honorific, which is a matter closely related to the selection of the target of honorification. This particular matter has been treated as a form of agreement in the literature (Boeckx & Niinuma, 2004; Toribio, 1990, among others), and we intend to pursue this line of argumentation. The analysis of the honorific verbs as light verbs, coupled with an analysis of honorification as agreement, is important for the systematic analysis of the honorific expressions containing the prefix *o-*, as well as for the analysis of light verbs in general.

The paper is organised as follows. We first take a general look at the structure of grammatical constructions containing the verbs *suru* and *naru* from the perspective of the light verb structure proposed by Chomsky (1995, 2001). We then show that honorific *suru/naru* can be neither dummy verbs nor full verbs, and that they are most likely light verbs. We then look at the honorific prefix *o-*, which has been largely disregarded in the literature, and suggest that it is in fact a functional category that introduces the meaning of honorification in the structure. Finally, we look at the *suru/naru* alternation and its structural and semantic properties, and offer a preliminary explanation of the connection between *suru/naru* selection and the target of honorification selection.

2 Three kinds of *Suru*

In this section we take a look at the various uses of the verb *suru* and the positions it can occupy in the sentence structure. In subsequent sections we shall compare these to the honorific *suru* and *naru* and demonstrate that the so-called honorific verbs are light verbs. We assume here a light verb structure, i.e., a theory of phrase structure whereby an independent functional verbal projection exists above the verb and below the tense projection. Following Chomsky (1995, 2001), the light verb lacks lexical content, but it is capable of assigning the <Agent> thematic role. Moreover, we assume here that *wa* and *sae* attach to phrase level constituents, as is generally done in the literature (e.g. Kuroda, 1965).

Based on Chomsky's structure, Sakai et al. (2004) show that the verb *suru* can be of three kinds, with different structures and properties, as discussed hereafter. The basic difference between the three kinds is the place that *suru* occupies in the sentence structure, as seen in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 The three possible positions of *suru*
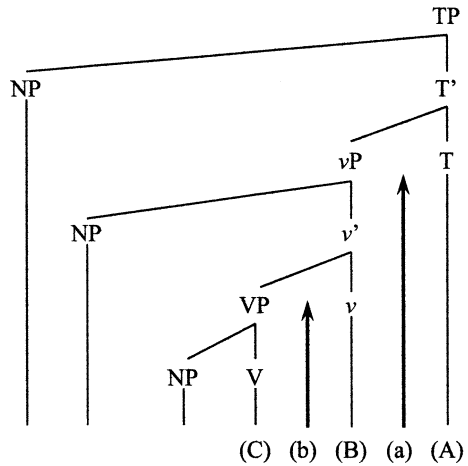
The so-called dummy verb *suru* is inserted directly under Tense, in position (A). In this position it has the role of carrying the tense morpheme, does not have lexical content, and does not participate in thematic role assignment. The light verb *suru* occupies the small *v* position (the light verb projection), in position (B) in our figure, where it plays the crucial role of assigning theta role to the subject. It does not have lexical content, and it does not assign theta role to the direct object. The full verb *suru* occupies the V position (C), it assigns theta roles to the subject and the direct object, and has lexical content.

An example of dummy verb usage is the *wa/sae* insertion structure illustrated below:

(6) Taroo ga   marason wo   hashiri wa   **shita**   ga,
     Taroo Nom   marathon Acc   run Ren Top   do Past   but
     saigo made   hashirikirenakatta.
     till the end   run finish Neg Past
     'Taroo did run in the marathon, but could not run till the end.'

(7) Taroo ga   isogi wa   **shita**   ga,   maniawanakatta.
     Taroo Nom   hurry Ren Top   do Past   but   be in time Neg Past
     'Taroo did hurry, but could not be there in time.'

(8) Akiko wa   hon wo   hiraki   sae   **shinakatta**
     Akiko Top   book Acc   open Ren   even   do Neg Past
     noni   ichiban   ii   seiseki wo   totta.
     although   first   good   marks Acc   take Past
     'Although Akiko did not even open the book, she received the best
     marks.'

(9) Akiko wa   unazuki   sae   **shinakatta**   node,
     Akiko Top   nod   even   do Neg Past   because
     watashi ga   iitai   koto wo   wakatte iru   ka doo ka

I Nom   want to say   thing Acc   understand   whether
wakaranai
understand Neg
'Because Akiko did not even nod, I do not know if she understands
or not what I want to say.'

In examples (6)–(9) the main verb is present in the *renyookei* form, and it is separated by *wa* or *sae* from the tense-bearing *suru*. In the general structure in Fig. 1, *wa* and *sae* are inserted somewhere after the main verb but before tense. Moreover, they have to be adjacent to a phrase-level constituent. This only leaves two possible positions, marked by (a) and (b). The structures that would yield such a configuration are discussed below. If *wa* or *sae* is inserted in position (a), then *suru* has to be inserted under Tense. In this case *suru* can only be a dummy verb. However, if *wa* or *sae* is inserted in position (b), then *suru* may be inserted either under the light verb *v* or under Tense, in positions (B) and (A), respectively.

Sakai et al. (2004) point out that transitivity alternation occurs by the alternation between light verbs *suru* and *naru*. This is because *suru* assigns the <Agent> theta role to the subject, while *naru* does not assign any theta role. If *wa* and *sae* were inserted in position (b) and *suru* under *v*, in position (B), it would be a light verb and not a dummy verb. As such, it should assign theta role to the subject, and it should allow at least some instances of transitivity alternation.

In examples (6)–(9) *suru* occurs both with transitive and intransitive main verbs and does not change the transitive or intransitive character of the sentences. This suggests that in these examples *suru* is a dummy verb and not a light verb. Moreover, Sakai et al. show that transitivity alternation occurs for light verb constructions like *atatakaku suru/naru* but not for the tense-bearing *suru*, as in the examples below.

(10)   Setsuko ga   heya wo   atatakaku   shi   sae   shinakatta.
        Setsuko Nom   room Acc   warm   do Ren   even   do Neg Past
        'Setsuko did not even heat the room.'

(11)   Heya ga   atatakaku   nari   sae   shinakatta.
        Room Nom   warm   become Ren   even   do Neg Past
        'The room did not even become warm.'

It should therefore be safe to assume that *wa* and *sae* are inserted in position (a), and that tense-bearing *suru* is a dummy verb and not a light verb in the *wa/sae* insertion construction.

3 Honorific verbs are not dummy verbs

Under these circumstances, let us consider the two honorific constructions illustrated below and try to determine what kind of verbs *suru* and *naru* are in these constructions. In this section we show that honorific verbs are not dummy verbs in the sense presented in the preceding section.

(12)   Sensei ga   o-kaeri ni   natta.
        Professor Nom   Hon go home Ren Obl   become Past
        'The professor went home.'

(13)   Taroo ga   sensei wo   o-okuri   shita.
        Taroo Nom   professor Acc   Hon send Ren   do Past
        'Taroo saw off the professor.'

In these sentences the main verb is in the *renyookei* form, just like the main verb in the *wa/sae* insertion construction. However, unlike the insertion structure, the main verb is preceded by the honorific affix *o-*. Moreover, the tense-bearing verb can be either *naru* or *suru*, similar to the transitivity alternation structure. This suggests at least that *suru* and *naru* are not dummy verbs. Indeed, as seen in the examples below, *wa/sae* insertion can occur on top of honorification.

(14)   Sensei ga   o-kaeri ni   nari
        professor Nom   Hon go home Ren Obl   become Ren
        sae   shinakatta.
        even   do Neg Past
        'The professor did not even go home.'

(15)   Taroo ga   sensei wo   o-okuri   shi
        TarooNom   professor Acc   Hon send Ren   do Ren
        sae   shinakatta.
        even   do Neg Past
        'Taroo did not even see off the professor.'

If the tense-bearing *suru* in these sentences is indeed a dummy verb, it should be the only dummy verb of the sentence. The reason for this is that the only purpose for the existence of the dummy verb is to bear the tense marker, and since there can be only one tense marker in one clause, there should exist only one dummy verb. Consequently, the other verbs are different from dummy verbs.

Moreover, these examples are exactly parallel with sentences like (16), which contain elements corresponding to positions (A)–(C) in Fig. 1.

(16)   Taroo wa   shinpai   shi   sae   shinakatta.
        Taroo Top   worry   do Ren   even   do Neg Past
        'Taroo did not even worry.'

In (16) the verbal noun *shinpai* corresponds to position (C), that of the full Verb, the *renyookei* form *shi* of the verb *suru* is in position (B), under the Light Verb, and the negative past *shinakatta* is under Tense (or possibly Negation), in position (A). This is a strong indication that the honorific *suru* and *naru* in (14) and (15) at least are not dummy verbs. This discussion leaves two possibilities, namely *naru* and *suru* are either full verbs or light verbs. In the following sections we examine these possibilities and conclude that they can only be light verbs.

4 Honorific verbs are not full verbs

In this section we present data first mentioned by Harada (1976), and as yet unexplained, which shows that honorific verbs are not full verbs.

Several approaches have been proposed to explain the structure of honorific expressions, and two of them assume that honorification is achieved by the use of the so-called honorific verbs *naru* and *suru*. In one of these approaches, Kuno (1989) treats

the honorific verb *naru* as a normal verb and the main verb as a nominalised verb. Under these assumptions, he proposes the structure in Fig. 2 as the structure for honorific expressions. In this account, the morpheme -*i* of the so-called *renyookei* form is considered to have a nominalisation function, and the prefix *o-* is not given any importance. The main argument for this approach is that the honorific form of the main verb requires the post-position *ni*, which can normally be attached only to nouns. However, this account cannot explain why *suru* does not require any post-position and, more importantly, cannot explain the phenomenon noted by Harada (1976).

Harada (1976) claims that the structure of the honorific expressions is like the one in Fig. 3, i.e., that it is similar to a complex verb. His argument is that with the usual verbs *suru* and *naru*, ellipsis is possible while with honorific expressions it is not, in the manner illustrated below.

(17) A: Taroo wa   moo   daigakusei ni   narimashita ka.
         TarooTop   already   student Obl   become Past Q
         'Has Taroo already become a student?'
      B: Ee,   narimashita.
         yes   become Past
         'Yes, he did.,

(18) A: Yamada sensei wa   moo
         Professor Yamada Top   already
         kono hon wo   o-yomi ni   narimashita ka.
         this book Acc   Hon read Ren Obl   become Past Q
         'Has Professor Yamada already read this book?'
      B: *Ee,   narimashita.
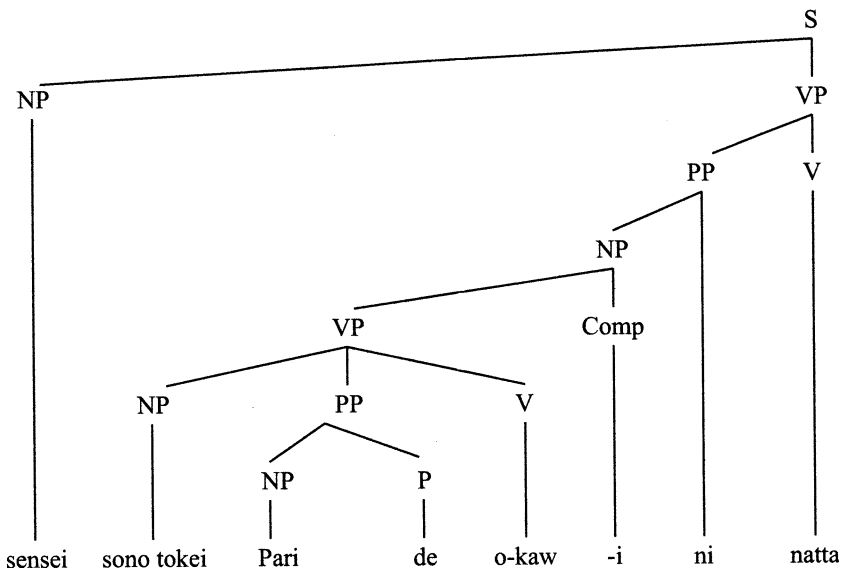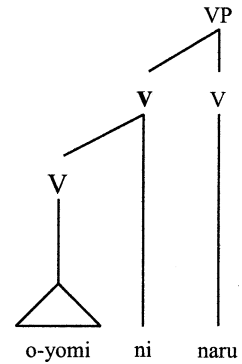   yes   become Past
         'Yes, he did.'

Fig. 2 Kuno's proposal for *Sensei wa sono tokei wo Pari de o-kai ni natta*

Fig. 3 Harada's proposal for *o-yomi ni naru*

In example (17), the argument noun of *naru* can be elided if it is understood from the context, while in example (18), ellipsis is disallowed.

(19)   Taroo ga   natta   yaku wa   Hamuretto da.
       Taroo Nom   become Past   role Top   Hamlet Cop
       'The role that Taroo played was Hamlet.'

(20)   *Yamada sensei wa   kono hon wo   natta   koto wa
       Professor Yamada Top   this book Acc   become Past   fact Top
       o-yomi da.
       Hon read Ren Cop
       'The thing that Professor Yamada did was read this book.' (intended)

In examples (19) and (20) no ellipsis takes place, but the argument of the verb is dislocated from its canonical position in this relative clause construction. The dislocation is possible with the normal verb but impossible with the honorific verb.

(21)   Taroo ga   natta no wa   gakusei da,
       Taroo Nom   become Past Nz Top   student Cop.
       'What Taroo became was a student.'

(22)   *Yamada sensei ga   natta no wa
       Professor Yamada Nom   become Nz Top
       kono hon no   o-yomi da.
       this book Acc   Hon read Ren Cop
       'What Professor Yamada did was to read this book.' (intended)

In examples (21) and (22) the arguments are dislocated in the cleft construction, and again the dislocation is allowed only with the normal verb. Harada (1976) claims that, since the normal verb can be separated from its arguments, they are independent words. On the other hand, the honorific verb cannot be separated from the nominalised verb, and they should therefore be considered to form a complex word, hence his claim

that the honorific expression is a kind of complex verb, which is derived from the normal verb through a series of transformational rules. However, Harada's account cannot explain the role of the post-position *ni* and the prefix *o-* in this structure.

Returning to Kuno's account, if *naru* is a normal verb, then it should allow the ellipsis and the dislocation of the nominalised main verb. However, this is not the case, and therefore the honorific *naru* cannot be a normal verb. In an approach similar to Kuno's, Toribio (1990) assumes that the main verb is nominalised and that *naru* and *suru* are raising and control verbs, respectively. She also treats honorification as a kind of Spec-Head agreement. Her approach tries to integrate verbal and nominal honorific expressions into a single system of honorification but unfortunately cannot explain Harada's observations either. Suzuki (1989) brings further evidence that the main verb is indeed nominalised but still leaves unexplained Harada's ellipsis data.

As we have seen in the present and the preceding sections, honorific *naru* can be neither a full verb nor a dummy verb. It is therefore highly probable that it is a light verb, and we bring evidence to this effect in the following section.

5 Honorific verbs are light verbs

In this section we show that the so-called honorific verbs are in fact light verbs in the sense of Grimshaw and Mester (1988). In the previous section we have mentioned that in Kuno's approach the main verb of an honorific expression is nominalised. This would explain the presence of the particle *ni* in the construction, which cannot be justified in Harada's approach. However, Kuno also claims that the honorific verb *naru* is in fact a full verb which, as we have seen, is proven wrong by the phenomena reported by Harada in connection with the ellipsis and dislocation of constituents. Harada's argument against a nominalised verb approach is negative in nature, and it only proves that honorific verbs are not normal verbs. It also leaves the status of the particle *ni* unaccounted for.

Under these circumstances, we need to look for a theory that explains the dislocation phenomena as well as the status of the various constituents of the construction. As we have seen in the preceding sections, there is a strong indication that light verbs might be the answer to our problems. In this section we look at this possibility, and we try to bring some positive evidence in its support.

Light verbs have been discussed in connection with Japanese in many studies, of which Grimsaw and Mester's (1988) is of particular interest. Their discussion is centred upon the properties of the light verb *suru* that forms complex verbs with *kango* (Sino-Japanese) nouns. They argue that *suru* is semantically under-specified and therefore by itself it can only assign the <Agent> theta role to the sentence subject. In order to be able to assign the <Theme> theta role, *suru* must combine with a *kango* noun which can assign this role. *Suru* thereby acquires the capacity to assign the <Theme> theta role by a mechanism called 'argument transfer'. This can be done only if *suru* and the *kango* noun are sisters in the tree structure.

Under these circumstances, elision and dislocation of the *kango* noun should not be possible, just like in Harada's examples, a fact that was also pointed out in Saito and Hoshi (2000). Indeed, in (24)–(28), this is disallowed.

(23) A: Go-kazoku wa   shinpai ni   narimashita ka.
        Hon family Top   worry Obl   become Past Q
        'Are you worried about your family?'
     B: *Ee,   narimashita.
        Yes   become Past
        'Yes, I am.'

(24) A: Yamada-san wa   Yoshida-san no   koto ga
        Mr Yamada Top   Ms Yoshida Gen   matter Nom
        shinpai ni   natta.
        worry Obl   become Past
        'Mr Yamada is worried about Ms Yoshida.'
     B: *Tanaka-san   mo   natta.
        Mr Tanaka   too   become Past
        'Mr Tanaka is worried too.'

(25)   Taroo ga   kyoogaku shita.   *Naoko   mo   shita.
         Taroo Nom   fright   do Past   Naoko   too   do Past
         'Taroo was frightened. So was Naoko.'

(26)   Akiko ga   kizetsu shita.   *Naoko   mo   shita.
         Akiko Nom   faint   do Past   Naoko   too   do Past
         'Akiko fainted. Naoko fainted, too.'

(27)   *Taroo ga   shita no wa   kyoogaku da.
         Taroo Nom   do Past Nz Top   fright Cop
         'What Taroo did was to be frightened.'

(28)   *Naomi ga   shita no wa   kyoogaku de wa naku, koofun da.
         Naomi Nom   do Past Nz Top   fright Cop Top Neg   excitement Cop
         'What Naomi did was to get excited, not frightened.'

These examples show that non-honorific *suru* and *naru* can be used as light verbs, and when they are, they do not allow elision or dislocation. This behaviour is exactly parallel to the behaviour of honorific *naru* reported by Harada.[3] This parallel behaviour supports the idea that honorific verbs are in fact light verbs. This assumption explains Harada's observation without the need for a difficult-to-prove complex verb structure and allows at the same time for Kuno's observation that particle *ni* is a postposition that attaches to the nominalised main verb.

Under this assumption, the tree structure of the honorific construction is the one proposed by Kuno, with the only difference that the honorific verb is a light verb and cannot be separated from the nominalised main verb. However, if we are to treat

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[3] An anonymous reviewer remarks that examples like (27) are somewhat more acceptable than (20) and (22). One cause might be that suggested by the reviewer himself/herself, i.e., that in the case of (20) and (22) the prefix *o-* no longer c-commands the target of honorification (cf. the discussion in Sect. 7), and thus the honorific construction is degraded both by the impossibility of determining the target of honorification as well as the non-adjacency of the light verbs and the expressions that lend their thematic roles. Another possible contributing factor might be the one mentioned in Note 7, below.

both *suru* and *naru* within the same framework, we have to explain why we must use two verbs to convey honorification and why it is that only *naru* requires the particle *ni*, while *suru* does not accept any particle on the nominalised main verb.

6 The honorific prefix is the honorific marker

In this section we briefly discuss the role and status of the honorific prefix *o-*, which has been either ignored or considered a morphological prefix. We then put forth our claim that *o-* is in fact the head of a new functional category, the Honorification. In the foregoing discussion we have examined the role of the so-called honorific verbs, and we have briefly mentioned that the main verb of an honorific expression is nominalised. We now bring some evidence that it is the entire clause that is nominalised. The most reliable test for nominal category status is whether the element in question can bear case or not. In Japanese case is expressed by case particles such as *ga* (Nominative), *wo* (Accusative) and *ni* (Dative/Oblique).

As we have seen, one of the arguments for assuming that the *renyookei* form of the main verb is actually a noun is the fact that it must take the particle *ni* in combination with *naru*. Further evidence of the same nature is illustrated below (and also mentioned in Suzuki (1989)).

(29)   sensei ga   o-kaki no   hon
        Professor Nom   Hon write Gen   book
        'the book written by the Professor'.

(30)   Densha wo   o-ori no   sai wa
        Train Acc   Hon get off Gen occasion Top
        o-ashimoto ni   go-chuui   kudasai.
        Hon footing Dat Hon attention   please
        'Please watch your step when getting off the train.'

In these expressions, the *renyookei* form appears in a genitive construction in the modifier position where one would only expect nouns. The nominal predicate construction (i.e., an expression formed from a [+nominal] element and a copula) can also be used as a test for nominal status. The *renyookei* form of the main verb can also be used in a nominal predicate construction, as illustrated in the following example:

(31)   Sensei wa   moo   o-kaeri desu ka.
        Professor Top   already   Hon go home Ren Cop Q
        'Has the Professor already left?'

These facts strongly suggest that the *renyookei* form is in fact a nominalised verb. In all these examples, the *renyookei* form of the verb is preceded by the honorific prefix *o-*, and none of the expressions are acceptable without it. This suggests that honorific nominalisation depends fundamentally upon the existence of the prefix. The prefix bears the honorific meaning, and its existence forces the nominalisation of the verb to which it attaches.

Historical linguistic studies such as Oono (1966) suggest that the honorific and *bikago* usage of the prefix *o-* has a long tradition that is in line with our observations, in that the two usages have evolved in parallel, and that the prefix has always been

attached to nouns. It is therefore highly probable that the honorific meaning of the entire honorific expression is essentially due to the presence of the prefix *o-*.

Structurally, Suzuki (1989) argues that the prefix *o-* can only attach to a [+N] constituent, i.e., a noun or an adjective. He examines, among other things, the *-soo* construction, illustrated below.

(32)   tabe-soo
        eat Ren seem
        'seem to eat'

(33)   oishi-soo
        tasty Ren seem
        'seem tasty'

(34)   *kodomo-soo
        child seem
        'seem childish/to be a child'

(35)   *o-tabe-soo
        Hon eat Ren seem
        'seem to eat'

These examples illustrate the fact that this construction can be used with constituents with verbal features, i.e., with verbs and adjectives. It can be used neither with nouns, nor with verbs with the honorific prefix, which suggests that the latter are indeed very similar to nouns.[4]

It is important to note that the *renyookei* form with the honorific prefix attached acts on the whole as a noun (as it takes case particles), i.e., for the constituents above it in the tree structure it is a noun. However, its internal structure is still that of a verb, because insertion of adverbs is possible, as illustrated in the example below.

(36)   [Sensei ga   hayaku/*hayai   o-kaeri]$_{HP}$ ni   natta.
        Professor Nom   early   Hon go home Ren Obl   become Past
        'The Professor went home early.'

If *o-kaeri* were just a noun, it should have been determined by an adjective and not by an adverb. Since an adverb is used, this means that before *renyookei* attachment the structure is that of a clause, and it is this clause that is nominalised. Another piece of evidence that the structure is clausal comes from the fact that accusative case can be assigned to the internal argument of the main verb.

(37)   Watashi ga   sensei wo/*no   o-tasuke   shita.
        I Nom   professor Acc/*Gen   Hon help Ren   do Past
        'I helped the professor.'

If the nominalised main verb were just a noun, its argument should have been marked with the genitive marker *no*.

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[4] We have glossed the *-soo* auxiliary as *seem*, but it should be noted that it is not verbal but rather nominal in nature, and that it attaches to the *renyookei* form of verbs and adjectives.

Summing up the discussion, the honorific prefix is the one that introduces the honorific meaning in the utterance. Structurally, it selects a noun or an adjective, and in order to be used for verbal predicates, the verb must be nominalised. The entire constituent formed from the prefix and the nominalised verb is itself very similar to a noun. Under these circumstances, it is likely that the prefix itself is in fact a functional category whose main purpose is to express the honorific meaning in the sentence, while the nominalised constituent that it selects is a nominalised clause and not just the verb.

Here we have to note an essential difference between our approach and Suzuki's. Suzuki states, as we do, that the structure of the honorific expression is clausal up to the point where the verb combines with the prefix *o-* and the *renyookei* suffix. However, the essential difference is that in his approach, the prefix and the suffix are a form of inflection that transforms the clause of the main verb into something similar to English gerunds, as illustrated in Fig. 4. Unlike Suzuki, we claim that *o-* and the *renyookei* suffix are different functional categories, as illustrated in Fig. 5. Our arrangement allows for the prefix *o-* to c-command the target of Honorification, while Suzuki's structure does not. This structure works for verb honorification, but it poses some problems for the integrated approach that we are attempting.

A serious problem is posed by Suzuki's claim that *o-* attaches only to zero-level categories. Since the prefix *o-* must select a zero level category, this means that the lower I head in Fig. 4 must be nominalised first. Under these circumstances, Suzuki's analysis cannot solve the apparent paradox that nominalisation must be applied at phrase level while the prefix must be attached at word level. In other words, examples like (36) should be unacceptable because of an adverb determining the noun-like constituent *o-+verb+Ren*. We claim that *o-*, being a functional head, selects phrase level constituents, which allows for examples like (36). Another problem is that Suzuki's analysis does not explain object-honorifics, because in his
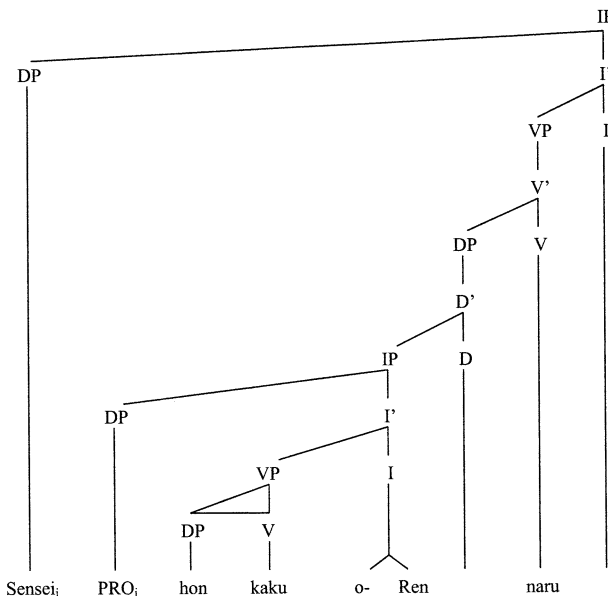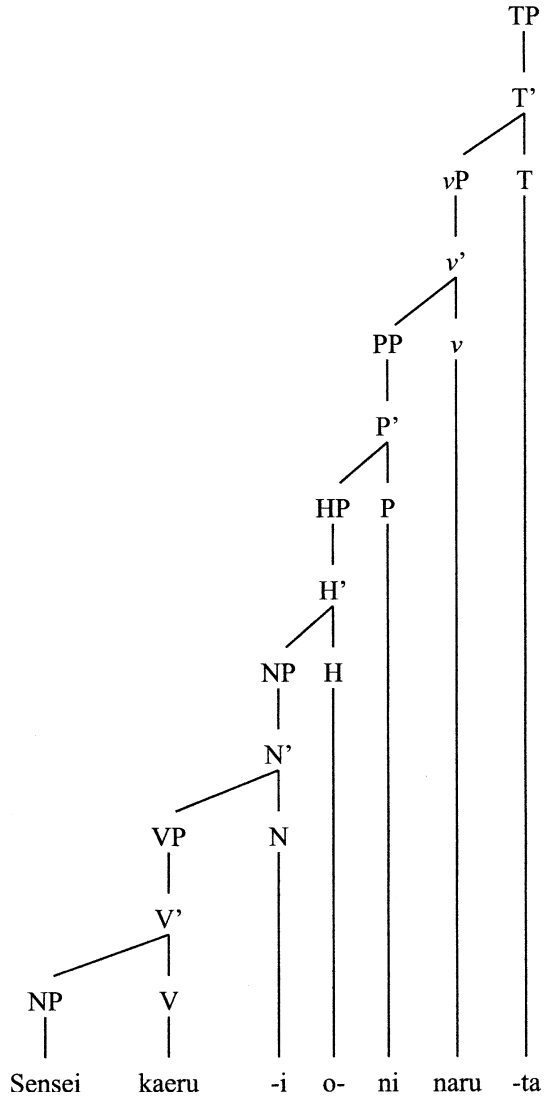

Fig. 4 Suzuki's (1989) structure for *Sensei ga hon wo o-kaki ni natta*

Fig. 5 Proposed structure *Sensei ga o-kaeri ni natta*

```
                                                                              TP
                                                                              |
                                                                              T'
                                                                             /|
                                                                          vP   T
                                                                          |
                                                                          v'
                                                                         /|
                                                                      PP   v
                                                                      |
                                                                      P'
                                                                     /|
                                                                  HP   P
                                                                  |
                                                                  H'
                                                                 /|
                                                             NP   H
                                                             |
                                                             N'
                                                            /|
                                                        VP   N
                                                        |
                                                        V'
                                                       /|
                                                   NP   V

        Sensei      kaeru      -i    o-    ni    naru    -ta
```

approach there would be no difference between subject and object-honorific structures. Our approach to this difference is discussed in Sect. 7.

At this point we have laid out the basis for an integrated analysis of honorific constructions containing the *o-* prefix. Thus, the prefix is a functional category of honorification, which selects nouns and adjectives as its complements. When honorification must be applied to a verb phrase, it has to be nominalised with the *renyookei* form, and the entire complex containing this form and the prefix acts just like a verbal noun, requiring a light verb, either *naru* or *suru*, in order to form a finite sentence. The choice of *naru* or *suru* is determined pragmatically and syntactically, as explained in the following section. When *naru* is chosen, the particle *ni* is required

for structural case assignment. The actual structure of the finite sentence is given in Fig. 5 (see also Fig. 7 in Sect. 7).

In our structure, the *o-* prefix appears in a different place than the real morpheme order. However, we have shown that the prefix is a functional category that selects nouns and adjectives; therefore it must c-command them. As Japanese is consistently a head-final language, we have assumed that the constituent order is such that this functional head also comes after its argument. Therefore we have to assume that the overt morpheme order is obtained by some other mechanism.

This apparent inconsistency is not a real problem if we consider the analysis of the English past tense morphology proposed by Lasnik (1999), whereby affixal inflections must merge with verbs at PF, under adjacency, and linear order can be modified by the morphological merger operation. In our case, the prefix merges with the adjacent nominalised verb, which is exactly parallel with Lasnik's approach.[5,6]

7 The *suru/naru* alternation in honorific constructions

There are two aspects to this matter. First, there is a semantic-pragmatic aspect, which explains the choice of verb, and there is the structural aspect, which deals with the presence of the particle *ni*. These two aspects are considered in Sects. 7.1 and 7.2, respectively.

7.1 Semantic and pragmatic considerations

We must first note that the *suru/naru* alternation is not specific to honorific speech. It also occurs in transitivity alternation with *kango* verbal nouns, as in the examples below.

(38) Gichoo ga   kaigi wo   enki   shita.
      Chairman Nom   meeting Acc   extension   do Past
      'The chairman extended the meeting.'

(39) Kaigi ga   enki ni   natta.
      Meeting Nom   extension Obl   become Past
      'The meeting was extended.'

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[5] An anonymous reviewer points out that in the subject-honorific structure both the subject and the object could become targets of honorification, because they are both within the c-command domain of the honorific prefix. However, we regard the c-command condition as a necessary but not sufficient condition for honorification. In a separate paper (Ivana & Sakai, 2006) we deal in detail with the mechanism of honorification, but here we shall only mention that the target of honorification is selected by agreement with the honorific *o-*, and for this agreement to occur there are several more prerequisites that must be fulfilled, such as the requirement that there should be no intervening element between the constituents in agreement (cf. Boeckx & Niinuma, 2004; Chomky, 2001).

[6] One anonymous reviewer points out that our approach to this matter runs counter to the Mirror Principle, which is well attested in Japanese. However, we would like to claim that while the order of verbal suffixes does indeed reflect the syntactic structure, honorific *o-* is a prefix, and therefore nothing can be inferred from its position alone, i.e., its position before the verb does not necessarily imply that it is placed lower than the verb in the structure. With regard to the reason why *o-* only is a prefix, while the other affixes are all suffixes, it may be for historical reasons. Oono (1966) mentions that the prefix *o-* has a long history as a beautification prefix, going back to the Heian period, and it may be that *o-* as a functional category has evolved from the beautification usage.

The alternation is used to describe the action of a person versus an event without any obvious agent. In these examples both *suru* and *naru* are light verbs and, similar to the honorifics, *naru* requires the use of postposition *ni*.

Semantically speaking, the honorific verb *naru* is quite closely related with the full verb *naru*, which expresses a non-volitional change. Indeed, they are so close that Kuno (1989) and Toribio (1990) assumed that they are identical. We have shown above that this is not the case, but the semantic connection cannot be denied. On the other hand, honorific *suru* is related to the full verb *suru*, which expresses an intentional action or activity directed at an object.[7]

The honorific usage of these verbs, however, appears to be related to the notion of responsibility towards the event described in the utterance. As we have mentioned above, the full verb *naru* expresses a non-volitional change. As such, it excludes the responsibility of the agent from the event described in the utterance. Although in reality the agent, who is also the respected character, does have the responsibility of his/her actions, the event is described just like a natural phenomenon and therefore is treated with the same reverence as a natural phenomenon. The view that honorific *naru* is closely related to the full verb *naru* describing natural phenomena is mentioned in Oono (1966). According to Oono, treating a person as one would treat a force of nature amounts to treating that person as if he/she were as powerful as a force of nature, hence the meaning of respect towards him/her.

In the case of *suru*, which expresses an intentional action, the immediate interpretation is that the subject is responsible for the described event. The fact that the speaker describes the subject as having responsibility for the event implies a certain insight into his/her intentions, hence a certain closeness with the subject. This closeness means that the subject is not respected, and the respect is directed at the theme of the event if the event is beneficial to the theme. Of course, the theme has to be a respectable person for the whole phenomenon to take place.

Bearing in mind these semantic considerations, let us turn to the syntactic analysis of the alternation between subject-honorific and object-honorific and see how semantic considerations are incorporated into the formal analysis based on the light verb structure.

7.2 Structural considerations

The alternation between *suru* and *naru* can also point to the difference between subject-honorific and object-honorific constructions under the assumptions that the

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[7] In actual non-honorific use it can be extremely difficult to tell apart the light verb usage and the full verb usage, and even a reliable test like the ellipsis discussed in Sect. 4 can sometimes be incapable of making the distinction between the two. For instance, in the case of *chikoku suru* 'be late', ellipsis should be disallowed. This is true on average, but the responses of our informants varied greatly. There are speakers who find the ellipsis perfectly acceptable in this case. This appears to happen with compounds that are used in daily conversation rather more frequently than with less usual compounds. Moreover, the amount of control the subject has over the action depicted by the verb also appears to have an important effect on the acceptability of *kango* ellipsis. Thus, with expressions like *benkyoo suru* 'learn', which require subject control, ellipsis is perfectly acceptable, while with expressions like *kizetsu suru* 'faint', it is not. In the case of expressions like *chikoku suru* 'be late' or *koi suru* 'fall in love', which allow for at least some degree of control over, and perhaps responsibility for the action of the verb, some speakers accept ellipsis while others do not.

domain of honorification is the embedded VP, and that the target of honorification has to be included in this domain.[8] With regard to structural considerations, *naru* is formally an intransitive verb, and as such it cannot assign structural case to the nominalised main verb. The nominalised verb therefore must take a postposition in order to receive oblique case.

Moreover, this postposition must be *ni*, because it is formally selected by the verb *naru*. On the other hand, *suru* is formally a transitive verb, and as such it assigns structural Accusative case. Accusative case is normally marked with the postposition *wo* in Japanese, but this is elided in canonical position in all usages except the written style. As the nominalised main verb cannot occur away from *suru* in the honorific usage, the postposition is always elided.

As a light verb, *naru* does not assign any thematic role. Consequently, it does not license the subject position. Instead, the subject position is licensed by the main verb before it is nominalised and before it receives the honorific prefix, as illustrated in Figs. 5–7.

On the other hand, the light verb *suru* does assign one theta role, and therefore it does license the subject position of the sentence. However, it does not assign other theta roles, and thus it cannot license the direct object. The structure becomes then like the one illustrated in Fig. 6, with the subject in the Spec position of *suru* and the object inside the clause of the main verb.[9]

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[8] Takita (2005) argues for a similar idea in a lexicalist approach. However, his argument depends essentially on the existence of *suru/naru*, which makes it difficult to explain expressions like (29)–(31).

[9] An anonymous reviewer gives the following examples as counter-evidence to our proposal.

(i)   Kono   boodan-chokki ga   shushoo wo   o-mamori   shita.
       This   bulletproof vest Nom   prime minister Acc   Hon defend Ren   do Past
       'This bulletproof vest defended the prime minister.'

(ii)   Kono   boodan-chokki ga   shushoo wo   mamori   tsuzuketa.
       This   bulletproof vest Nom   prime minister Acc   defend   continue Past
       'This bulletproof vest continued to defend the prime minister.'

(iii) *Kono   boodan-chokki ga   shushoo wo   mamori   oeta.
       This   bulletproof vest Nom   prime minister Acc   defend   end Past
       'This bulletproof vest finished defending the prime minister.'

(iv)   *Kono   boodan-chokki ga   shushoo wo   mamori   sonjita.
       This   bulletproof vest Nom   prime minister Acc   defend   fail Past
       'This bulletproof vest failed to defend the prime minister.'

The claim here is that since *suru* allows an example like (i), similar to *tsuzukeru* 'continue' (which can be either a raising or a control predicate) in (ii), but unlike *oeru* 'end' and *sonjiru* 'fail' (which are control verbs) in (iii) and (iv), it cannot be a control verb, and therefore the noun in its Spec position cannot control the PRO which is the real subject of the main verb.

However, our informants find (i) unacceptable or hardly acceptable, and much degraded in comparison to (v) and (vi), which means that these examples actually support our proposal.

(v)   Bodiigaado ga   shushoo wo   o-mamori   shita.
       Bodygyard Nom   prime minister Acc   Hon defend Ren   do Past
       'The bodyguard defended the prime minister.'

(vi)   Bodiigaado ga   shushoo wo   mamori   oeta.
       Bodyguard Nom   prime minister Acc   defend   finish.
       'The bodyguard finished defending the prime minister.'

Consequently, in the case of *naru*, the subject, which is also the target of honorification, is below the honorific prefix in the structure. In the case of *suru*, the subject, which is not the target of honorification, is above the prefix, while the object, which is the target of honorification, is below it. Under these circumstances, we may say that only constituents that are structurally within the c-command domain of the honorific prefix can become the target of honorification. In the case of *naru*, the subject fulfils this condition, while in the case of *suru*, it does not. Consequently, in the case of *suru*, the subject cannot become the target of honorification.[10,11]

The main claim of this paper is that *suru/naru* are not honorific in themselves, but rather light verbs, and that honorification phenomena take place somewhere below the light verb level in the sentence structure. This paper is therefore focussed on the sentence structure above the honorification level and has little to say about the structure below the honorific projection and about the actual mechanism of honorification.

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[10] Boeckx and Niinuma (2004) argue that three-argument verbs such as *shookai suru* 'introduce', only allow one of their arguments to become the target of object honorification. Our analysis still leaves open the matter of which of the arguments becomes the target of honorification in the case of a three-argument main verb.

[11] We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer who has suggested another piece of evidence in support of our theory, as follows.

(i)   Yamada sensei ga   asu   Taroo ni   o-watashi ni
         Professor Yamada Nom   tomorrow   Taroo Dat   Hon hand over Ren Dat
         naru   tegami
         become   letter
         'the letter that Prof Yamada will hand Taroo tomorrow'

(ii)   Yamada sensei ga   asu   Taroo ni   o-watashi no
         Prof Yamada Nom   tomorrow   Taroo Dat   Hon hand over Ren Gen
         tegami
         letter
         'the letter that Prof Yamada will hand Taroo tomorrow'

(iii)   Taroo ga   asu   Yamada sensei ni   o-watashi
         Taroo Nom   tomorrow   Prof Yamada Dat   Hon hand over Ren
         suru   tegami
         do   letter
         'the letter that Taroo will hand Professor Yamada tomorrow'

(iv)   *Taroo ga   asu   Yamada sensei ni   o-watashi no
          Taroo Nom   tomorrow   Prof Yamada Dat   Hon hand over Gen
          tegami
          letter
          'the letter that Taroo will hand Professor Yamada tomorrow' (intended)

Subject-honorific and object-honorific constructions can be used in relative clauses, as illustrated in examples (i) and (ii). However, when these clauses are changed into nominalisation constructions such as (iii) and (iv), object honorification is disallowed. This is predicted by our analysis, because in subject honorification the theta role of the subject is assigned by the main verb *watasu* 'hand over' both in the relative clause and the nominalised constructions, while in object honorification the subject theta role is assigned by *suru*, which is absent in the nominalisation construction. Thus, in the nominalisation construction the subject can no longer be assigned theta role, which renders the construction ungrammatical.

Fig. 6 Proposed structure for *Watashi wa sensei wo o- tasuke shita*
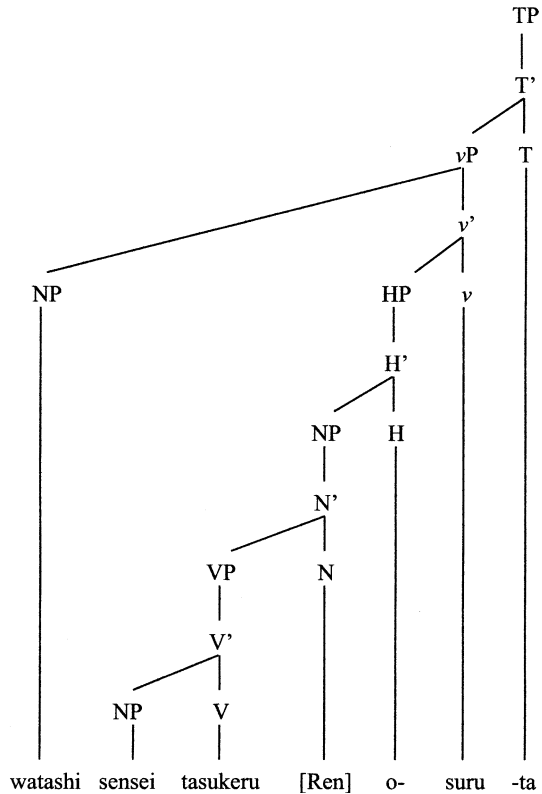

The selection of target of honorification has been treated in the literature as a form of agreement (Boeckx & Niinuma, 2004; Kishimoto, 1996; Toribio, 1990). While there are also authors who take the opposite stance, denying the feasibility of an agreement approach (Bobaljik & Yatsuhiro, 2006), our analysis clearly shows that the selection of target is constrained by the notion of c-command. We intend to examine the theoretical mechanism that enables us to capture this restriction in a separate paper (Ivana & Sakai, 2006). This is because the honorific prefix selects nominal categories only, and thus honorification must actually take place within the noun phrase. Therefore, the matter of target of honorification selection is linked to the noun phrase structure of Japanese. As such, this particular problem is outside the scope of the present paper and therefore not treated here. It is, however, of the utmost relevance to this discussion, whose primary aim is to offer a unified explanation for all expressions that include the honorific prefix.

8 Conclusions and remaining issues

In this paper we have argued for the claim that the so-called honorific *suru* and *naru* are in fact light verbs. This solves a long-standing difficulty in explaining why these verbs cannot exist away from the nominalised main verb bearing the

Fig. 7 Subject-honorific structure for *Sensei ga watashitachi wo o-tasuke ni natta*
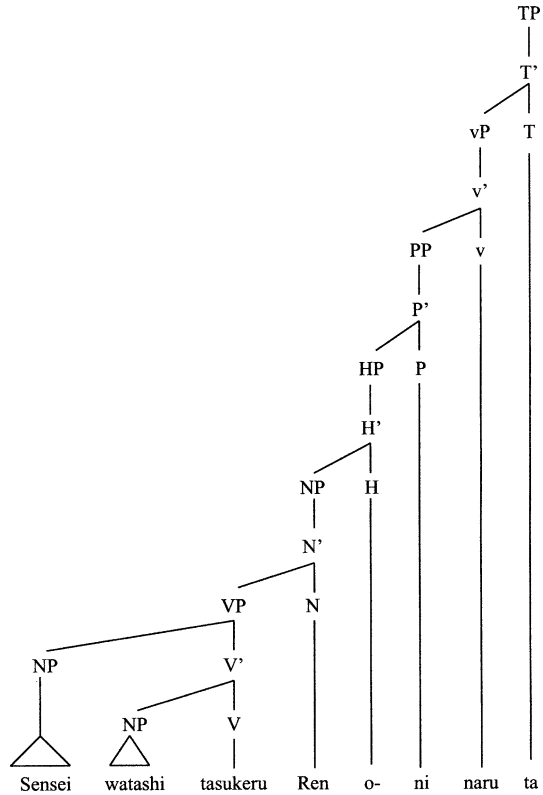
honorific prefix. The fact that *suru* and *naru* are light verbs also explains in a natural manner the alternation between *suru* and *naru* in subject-honorific and object-honorific expressions. We also suggest that the honorific prefix is in fact a functional category which is essential for honorific expressions in that it is this constituent that introduces the honorific meaning in the expression. Furthermore, we claim that the structure remains clausal until the *renyookei* form and the prefix are introduced. The *renyookei* form nominalises the embedded clause so that the prefix may attach to it, and in order to express tense, light verbs *suru* and *naru* are attached.

One of the remaining issues is the mechanism whereby the target of honorification is selected from among the arguments of the main verb. One mechanism proposed in the literature is Agreement, and it is this possibility that we intend to pursue. If our claims are correct, *suru* and *naru* are only indirectly involved in honorification while the honorific prefix is essential. The prefix can attach to the nominalised main verb or to other nominals, and honorification by prefix only is possible in entirely nominal expressions. All these issues are closely related to the structure of the Japanese noun phrase in general, and once clarified, they should provide meaningful insights into the structure of Japanese nominals in particular, and possibly other languages as well. For reasons of space we leave these issues for some of our future papers.

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