

# The discourse move of exclamatives revisited: a view from Japanese

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## 1. Background.

This paper investigates the pragmatic aspect of exclamatives. In the literature, it is not uncontroversial what kind of speech act or discourse move exclamative sentences have. It is often claimed that exclamatives have their own speech act, though the implementations are different by authors (cf. Zanuttini & Portner 2003, Castroviejo Miró 2010, Rett 2011, Balusu 2019, a.o.). Another approach is to assume that the speech act of exclamative sentences is assertion, as in Trotzke & Giannakidou (2021). One of the reasons for this debate is the tricky behavior of exclamatives in discourse. It is often assumed that exclamatives cannot be used as an answer to a question as in (1) and that exclamatives cannot be challenged by the addressee as in (2).

(1) A: How tall is Tony's child?

B: #How very tall he is!

(Zanuttini & Portner 2003)

(2) A: (My,) What delicious desserts John bakes!

B: ?No (he doesn't), these are store-bought. John's actually a terrible cook.

(Rett 2011)

However, Trotzke & Giannakidou (2021) present the data where an exclamative sentence is used as an answer to a question as in (3).

(3) A: Tell me, how did Eliud Kipchoge do in the race?

B: My god! How fast he was!

Furthermore, Castroviejo Miró (2010) observes that the propositional content of exclamative sentences can be actually challenged by the addressee as in (4).

- (4) A: How tall Bill is!  
B: Come on, he's not that tall.

No explanation has yet been given for the above elusive behavior of exclamatives. In this study, taking the position that exclamatives have their own discourse move, we discuss the data of the exclamative construction in Japanese and show that our proposal provides further empirical advantages especially with regard to Japanese data.

## 2. Data.

We exclusively focus on exclamatives with *nodaroo*, one of the standard exclamative constructions in Japanese. In addition to the controversial data in (1)–(4), we motivate our analysis by showing that *nodaroo*-exclamatives interact with certain discourse expressions unique to Japanese.

**2.1. Response to questions:** *Nodaroo*-exclamatives share the property w.r.t. question-responding observed in (1) and (3). That is, while they cannot be used as answers to questions that ask for specific information about the propositional content *p* (e.g., *the height*) (: (5)), they can be used to answer questions concerning the speaker's emotive attitude or impression towards *p* (: (6)):

- (5) A: How tall is Taro's child?  
B: # Taro-no kodomo-wa nante se-ga takai-nodaroo!  
'How tall Taro's child is!'

- (6) A: What do you think about Taro's race yesterday?  
B: *Taro-wa nante hayai-nodaroo!*  
'How fast Taro is!'

**2.2. Challenging by addressee:** In parallel with the English data in (4), the content of *nodaroo*-exclamatives can be challenged by the addressee, as shown in

B's response in (7). The attitude of surprise expressed by *nodaroo*-exclamatives, however, cannot be challenged, as indicated by B's response:

(7) A: Taro-wa nante ashi-ga hayai-nodaroo!  
'How fast Taro is!'

B: Iya, zenzen hayaku-nai yo.  
No, he isn't fast at all.

|| B: # Iya, omae-wa zenzen odorite-nai.  
|| 'No, you're not surprised at all.'

**2.3. Intonational marking:** Non-exclamative sentences with *nodaroo* can be followed by sentence-final rising (or questioning) intonation “↗”, as shown in (8). In contrast, the *nodaroo*-exclamative in (9) indicates that it disallows rising intonation.

(8) *Taro-wa ashi-ga hayai-nodaroo* ↗  
T-TOP foot-NOM fast-NODAROO  
'Taro is fast, isn't he?'

(9) \**Taro-wa nante ashi-ga hayai-nodaroo* ↗  
T-TOP how foot-NOM fast-NODAROO  
'[lit.] How fast Taro is! (Isn't he?)'

**2.4. Compatibility with discourse particles:** Japanese discourse particles are distinguished into two groups: (i) “notification” particles that provide emphasis or add a sense of urgency (e.g., *yo*) and (ii) “confirmation” particles that serve to indicate that the speaker is trying to get confirmation of the propositional content from the addressee (e.g., *ne*) (McCready & Davis 2020). As exemplified in (10), *nodaroo*-exclamatives are compatible only with the latter.

(10) Taro-wa nante ashi-ga hayai-nodaroo {\*yo| ne }.  
T-TOP how foot-NOM fast-NODAROO {YO/ NE }  
'How fast Taro is {\*YO/NE}!'

**2.5. CT-marking:** Tomioka (2010, fn.5) reports that regardless of the fact that Japanese contrastive topic (CT) marker *-wa* can appear in almost any type of speech acts (e.g., assertions, questions, and imperatives), only exclamatives cannot host CT-*wa*, as shown in (11).

- (11)      # *Kyooto-WA<sub>CT</sub>*      *nante kirei-na-nodaroo*  
                  Kyoto-CT              how    pretty-COP-NODAROO  
                  '[int.] How beautiful KYOTO is!!'

We use Farkas & Bruce's (2010) model of discourse where a context  $K$  is a tuple  $(A, T, DC_x, CG, PS)$ .  $A$  is a set of discourse participants. The *Discourse Commitment set*  $DC_x$  represents a set of propositions that the participant  $x$  is publicly committed to.  $T$ ,  $CG$  and  $PS$  correspond to *Table*, *Common Ground*, and *Projected Set*. Following Castroviejo Miró (2010) and Trotzke (2019), we assume the *surprising operator* for exclamative updates in (12). This operator takes a proposition and crucially returns the non-at-issue meaning that  $p$  is an unexpected (i.e., surprising) fact (cf. Rett 2019).

- (12)       $[[\text{surprising}]] = \lambda p. [p \text{ is a fact} \& p \text{ is unexpected}] : (st^a, t^c)$   
                  ( $\sigma^a$  stands for an at-issue type and  $\sigma^c$  a non-at-issue type including  
                  a CI-type (Potts 2005).)

Given the ingredients, we propose the discourse move of *nodaroo*-exclamatives as follows.

- (13)       $[[\text{nodaroo}(p)]]$  takes an input context  $K$  and returns an output  $K^t$  such that:
- a.  $DC^{K^t} = D \downarrow C^K \cup \text{surprising}(p)$
  - b.  $PS^{K^t} = \{CG^K \cup p\}$
  - c.  $T^{K^t} = T^K \cup \{p\}$
  - d. In all other respects,  $K^t = K$

In (13), the *nodaroo*-exclamative modifies the *DC* to include the non-at-issue information that *p* is an unexpected fact; the speaker is not committing to *p* itself but representing her attitudes toward *p*. The sentence also modifies the Table by adding  $\{p\}$ . The important point here is that what the sentence adds to *DC* (namely *surprising(p)*) differs from what it adds to *T* (namely *p*) (cf. Rett 2019). Intuitively, *nodaroo(p)* expresses the speaker's surprise and at the same time represents *p* as 'at-issue' in the conversation.

Let us show that the above proposal captures all the data set shown in the previous section.

**First**, given the assumption that a question in the discourse is resolved by the addition of the answer proposition to *DC* (Farkas & Bruce 2010), we argue that *nodaroo*-exclamatives can be a felicitous answer to a question only if the question is concerned with the speaker's emotive attitude to *p*, because in our proposal, *nodaroo(p)* puts an illocutionary attitude 'surprising(*p*)' to *DC*. This line of analysis captures the contrast found in (5) and (6); while the *nodaroo*-exclamative in (5) is felicitous since it can answer to the given question by putting "the speaker is surprised at *p*" to *DC*, in (6), the *nodaroo*-exclamative cannot be an answer to the question since the question requires an information of the content denoted by *p*, which is not added to *DC*.

**Second**, since *nodaroo*-exclamatives put *p* to the Table *T* (cf. (13b)), any discourse participant other than the speaker can make a challenge to the utterance if the challenge targets *p* (cf. the utterance by B in (7)). In contrast, the 'surprising' meaning is not added to *T* (and moreover the meaning is non-at-issue), thus cannot be challenged (cf. the utterance by B' in (7)). As for the data in (2) presented by Rett (2011), we argue that this is a case where the addressee challenges to the presupposition of the utterance, which leads to its oddness. That is, the exclamative in (2) presupposes that *John baked 'something'* (cf. Zanuttini & Portner 2003), and thus it cannot be challenged by the utterance targeting this part (cf. the 'hey, wait a minute' test, von Stechow 2004).

**Third**, following Hara's (2018) analysis that rising intonation in Japanese conveys the speaker's uncertainty toward the proposition, we claim that the meaning of rising intonation in *nodaroo*-exclamatives is inconsistent with the semantics of

surprising. That is, since *surprising(p)* encodes the factivity of *p* (cf. (12)), the truth of *p* must not be uncertain, thereby inducing the oddness in (9).

**Forth**, according to Uegaki (2021), a sentence with *yo* '*yo(p)*' presupposes that *p* resolves the given (either implicit or explicit) question. In other words, given that a question is resolved by adding an answer *p* to the speaker's *DC*, the speaker of *yo(p)* must be committed to *p* by virtue of the utterance. This correctly predicts that *nodaroo*-exclamatives, which put *surprising(p)* (rather than *p*) to the *DC*, cannot be compatible with *yo*, since the utterance can never satisfy *yo*'s presupposition that requires putting the *p* to the *DC*. The particle *ne*, on the other hand, has no presupposition that conflicts with the discourse move of *nodaroo*-exclamatives (cf. McCready & Davis 2020).

**Finally**, the data (11) is captured in much the same way as the explanation for the incompatibility with *yo*. According to Oshima (2021), an utterance with *CT-wa* '*wa(p)*' plays a role as "facilitating the discourse" by resolving at least one of the questions in the QUD-tree (in Büring's (2003) sense) with *p*. As we have already seen earlier, *nodaroo(p)* cannot provide a felicitous answer to questions that include *p* as the possible answers. Hence, *nodaroo*-exclamatives can never satisfy the pragmatic requirement of *CT-wa*, which explains the incompatibility.

This analysis has suggested that the discourse move of exclamatives is similar to that of assertions but not identical (in the sense that elements added to the Table and *DC* are different), contributing to provide a unified explanation to the set of data that has been controversial in the literature.

## References (selected):

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