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## THE RUSSIAN GENITIVE OF NEGATION AND ITS JAPANESE COUNTERPART

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### Summary

The paper draws a parallel between the usage of the negative genitive in Russian, in which there is an exchange of the accusative form of a noun for a genitive one in negation, and a similar phenomenon in Japanese – the use of the topic marker -wa instead of the original accusative marker -o. Simultaneously, a use of the topic marker -wa is shown, in which case its function resembles that of the genitive marker -no.

**Key Words:** Russian language, Japanese language, genitive of negation, sentence topic.

### The Slavic Genitive of Negation

There is a phenomenon in Slavic languages called *negative genitive (genitive of negation)*. It is expressed in exchanging the accusative form of the direct object after a verb of negation for a genitive form or in exchanging the subject's nominative form again for a genitive form. In Polish, the exchange is mandatory, in Old Bulgarian, as in Russian, it is frequent, and in Czech and Serbo-Croatian it only exists in literary language, and in definite conditions at that (Feuillet 2006: 558; Dalewska-Greń 1997: 439). Examples from Polish (Moravcsik 1978: 264; Dalewska-Greń 1997: 436):

*Mam czas* 'I have time' – as against:  
have-1sg time-acc

*Nie mam czasu* 'I don't have time';

neg have-1sg time-gen

*Widziałeś wczoraj Ewę?*  
see-2sg-past yesterday Eve-acc  
'Did you see Eve yesterday?' – as against:

*Nie widziałem wczoraj Ewy* 'I didn't see Eve yesterday';  
neg see-1sg-past yesterday Eve-gen

*Tu są okulary* 'The glasses are here' – as against:  
here are-3pl glasses-nom

*Tu niema okularów* 'The glasses are not here'.  
here have-neg-3sg glasses-gen

Of the subject genitive in Russian, the most general idea is this one – the accusative marks definiteness, a concrete reference, and the genitive expresses non-referentiality, indefiniteness or unknownness. Thus contexts are achieved in which, with negation, it is one time the genitive is mandatory, and at another the accusative (Paducheva 2006: 24-28, 41; Dalewska-Greń 1997: 436-437):

*On ne chitaet gazet*  
he neg reads newspapers-gen  
'he (on principle) does not read any newspapers' (here the genitive signifies a class) – but:

*On ne chitaet gazetę*  
he neg read-3sg newspaper-acc-def  
'he is not reading the newspaper' (the genitive here signifies a concrete object).

Or:

*Polozhi soli* 'Put a little salt' (a certain quantity) – but:  
put-imp-2sg salt-gen

*Polozhi sol'* 'Put salt!' (an undefined quantity);  
put-imp-2sg salt-acc

*Koshka ne est vetchiny*  
cat neg eats ham-gen  
'The cat does not eat ham' (never) –

*Koshka ne est vetchinu*  
cat neg eats ham-acc  
'The cat is not eating or does not eat ham' (now or ever);

*Ne em vetchiny* 'I do not eat ham' (at all) – but:

neg eat-1sg ham-gen

*Ne em vetchinu*

neg eat-1sg ham-acc

‘Ham I do not eat’ (as opposed to other kinds of food);

*Ne l’ubl’u gromkoy muzyki*

neg like-1sg loud-gen music-gen

‘I don’t like loud music’ – but:

*Ne l’ubl’u sovremennuyu muzyku*

neg like-1sg contemporary-acc music-acc

‘I don’t like contemporary music’ (as opposed to other kinds of music).

### Negation in Japanese

Besides the Slavic languages, other Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages in Europe comply to the rule of the negative genitive – Lithuanian, Latvian, Gothic, Estonian, Basque, etc. What is interesting, however, is that in Japanese, distant from Europe, such a phenomenon can also be observed. According to Kamiya (Kamiya 1988: 82, 87), in negative sentences the accusative marker *-o* can be replaced with *-wa*, which marks the topic (the theme or logical subject in a sentence):

*Hon-o yomimasu* ‘I’m reading a book’ – but:

book-acc read-1sg

*Zasshi-wa yomimasen*

magazine-top read-1sg-neg

‘I don’t read a magazine/magazines’;

or, again (TL 2002: Japanese):

*Eigo-o hanasemasu-ka?* ‘Do (you) speak English?’ – against:

English-acc speak-?

*Eigo-wa hanasemasen* ‘(I) don’t speak English’.

English-top speak-neg

According to Akiyama (Akiyama 2002: 42) the marker *-wa* in such examples expresses a contrast – as in the Russian examples, mentioned above, with an alternation of genitive and accusative:

*Ne em vetchinu*

neg eat-1sg ham-acc

‘Ham I do not eat (as opposed to other kinds of food)’ – against:

*Ne em vetchiny* 'I do not eat ham at all' and:  
neg eat-1sg ham-gen

*Ne l'ubl'u sovremennuyu muzyku*  
neg like-1sg contemporary-acc music-acc  
'I don't like contemporary music' (as opposed to other kinds of music) – against:

*Ne l'ubl'u gromkoy muzyki* 'I don't like loud music'.  
neg like-1sg loud-gen music-gen

Akiyama (Akiyama 2002: 42) thinks that the contrast in Japanese is expressed notwithstanding the presence or absence of negation:

'(I) eat fish but I don't eat meat', literally: 'concerning fish, I eat, but concerning meat, I don't eat'

*Sakana-wa tabemasu-ga, niku-wa tabemasen.*  
fish-top eat-but meat-top eat-neg

Akiyama adds (ibid.) that the object in respect of which a contrast is made may not be indicated but still the contrast is there (it's even more important that the subject marker *-ga* here plays the role of the conjunction 'but' with which a contrast is expressed, too):

*Terebi-wa mimasen*  
TV-top watch-neg  
'(I) don't watch TV (although (I) like doing something else)'.

The topic marker *-wa* (Kamiya 1988: 67) "is often used in negative sentences to oppose positive to negative ideas". The subject is also prone to marking with *-wa* in negation (Akiyama 2002: 43):

*Tegami-ga kimashita* 'The letter has arrived' – but:  
letter-sub come-past

*Tegami-wa kimasen deshita*  
letter-top come-neg past  
'The letter hasn't arrived'.

That can also happen in constructions similar to the Polish one indicated (*Tu nie ma okularów* 'The glasses are not here'), where *-wa* replaces the subject marker (Kamiya 1988: 67), similar to the genitive in Polish:

*Haizara-ga arimasu* 'There are ashtrays' – against:  
ashtray(s)-sub are

*Machi-wa arimasen* 'Matches (however) there aren't'.  
match(es)-top be-neg

## The Japanese *-wa* and *-no*

It's clear that in the Japanese examples the topic marker *-wa* appears as a counterpart to the Slavic genitive endings after a negative verb. The striking similarity between the shown Russian (and Polish) examples on the one hand and the Japanese on the other is supplemented with yet another peculiarity of the Japanese topic marker *-wa*. In single cases it may resemble, at least apparently and in a definite context, the possessive function of the Japanese genitive. In Japanese, possession is expressed by the genitive marker *-no*. So, from *zō* 'elephant' there will be

*zō-no hana* 'elephant's nose' or 'the nose of the elephant'.

But in the next sentence (after Schmalstieg 1980: 166-167):

*Zō-wa hana-ga nagai,*  
elephant-top nose-sub long

which translates as 'the elephant's nose is long' or 'the elephant has a long nose' and actually literally means 'concerning the elephant, its nose is long', as the author also points out, it's hard to determine which is the subject – *zō-wa* or *hana-ga*. Here the topic marker *-wa* may be perceived as a genitive case marker, too. In any case, however, the sentence cited is semantically the same (at least in some contexts) as a sentence with a genitive marker *-no*:

*Zō-no hana-ga nagai.*  
elephant-gen nose-sub long

More such examples (after KEJLPD 1996: 109, 110, 187):

*Kare-wa chooshi-ga ii*  
he-top form-sub good  
'He is in a good form' = His form is good (my note – I. I.);

*Kono tegami-wa hizuke-ga nai*  
this letter-top date-sub is-neg  
'This letter has no date' = 'This letter's date is absent' (my note – I. I.).

Replacing *-wa* with *-ga* changes the meaning of the sentence (Shibatani 2002:274, 293, 297):

*Zō-wa hana-ga nagai* 'an/the elephant is such that its trunk is long' – but:

*Zō-ga hana-ga nagai* 'it is the elephant whose trunk is long';

*Takehi sensei-wa hige-ga rippa da* 'Prof. Takehi is such that his beard is impressive' – but:

*Takehi sensei-ga hige-ga rippa da* 'it is prof. Takehi whose beard is impressive'.

The Japanese subject marker *-ga* is sometimes used to indicate the direct object after passive verbs (Akiyama 2002: 44-45) – probably a remainder from an old passive construction of the sentence which can also be interpreted as a possessive construction in which possession is again expressed with *-wa*, as in the cited example ‘the elephant’s nose is long’:

*Marī-san-wa, tennisu-ga jōzu desu*  
Mary-ms-top tennis-sub good is  
‘Mary is good at tennis’ = ‘Mary’s tennis is good’ (my note – I. I.).

In addition, in some cases the possessive meaning of *-wa* is doubled by the possessive marker *-no* (Akiyama 2002: 42):

*Asagohan-o tabeta-no-wa haji ji deshita*  
breakfast-acc eating-gen-top 8 o'clock is-past  
‘the time (I) ate breakfast was 8 o'clock’/‘breakfast-eating (time) was at eight o'clock’.

## Conclusion

I may say, in conclusion, that the striking typological resemblance between Slavic and Japanese, concerning negation, is hardly haphazard. It is probably a reflection of ancient syntactical processes that have already faded off in contemporary languages. That allows for the possibility for the initial semantics of the negative Indo-European genitive to have been linked to the topic (regarding Indo-European as a topic oriented language see Lehman 1976: 450; Schmalstieg 1980: 166-188), and later additional semantic variations arose, as in any grammatical phenomenon. The same holds true for the Japanese morpheme *-wa*.

The present paper aims at stating a supposition and not making categorical inferences. Still, the material shown reasonably gives us food for thought and the reason for further researching the matter.

## Abbreviations

acc – accusative;  
def – definite;  
gen – genitive;  
imp – imperative;  
KEJLPD – The Kenkyusha English-Japanese Learner’s Pocket Dictionary;  
neg – negative;  
nom – nominative;  
past – past tense;  
pl – plural;  
sg – singular;  
sub – subject;  
TL – Transparent Language;  
top – topic;

top – topic marker;  
1 – first person  
2 – second person;  
3 – third person;  
4 – interrogative.

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