

# snippets

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# Anatomy of *what* and NUMBER in Japanese

Ken Hiraiwa · Meiji Gakuin University

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It has been well known that an inanimate wh-pronoun *nani* in Japanese is optionally contracted to *nan* in colloquial speech if and only if followed by a coronal consonant (Martin 1975, among many others).

- (1) **Nan\*(i)-ga nan(i)-no** jaanaru-ni notta no?  
what-NOM what-GEN journal-on appeared C  
'What appeared in what journal?'

It has been unnoticed, however, that the same wh-pronoun is obligatorily “contracted” to *nan* in certain cases (actual forms are subject to sequential voicing and gemination).

- (2) a. nan(\*i)-{kai/pataan/hiki}  
what-{CL<sub>times</sub>/CL<sub>pattern</sub>/CL<sub>animal</sub>}  
'how many times/patterns/animal'  
b. nan(\*i)-banme  
what-order  
'which (ordinal) number'  
c. nan(\*i)-{zyuu/hyaku/sen}  
what-{ten/hundred/thousand}  
'(Lit.) how many tens/hundreds/thousands'

Note that the “contraction” in (2) is not phonologically conditioned because it is obligatory even when *nan* is not followed by a coronal consonant.

This obligatory short form *nan* in (2), however, has semantics distinct from *nani*. The latter refers to a concrete thing or an abstract property/concept etc., but the former exclusively refers to number. In all the examples in (2), *nan* appears in exactly the same position as numerals: before numeral classifiers (2a), before ordinal nouns (2b), and before numerical bases (as a multiplicand) (2c). It can be replaced with a numeral (e.g. *go* ‘five’) or another wh-element for amount (e.g. *iku* ‘how many’).

The minimal pair in (3) clearly shows this semantic difference: the same noun *ken* ‘prefecture’ gives rise to different interpretations, depending on whether it is prefixed by *nan* or *nani*.

- (3) a. nan-ken  
what-prefecture  
'how many prefectures'  
b. nani-ken  
what-prefecture  
'what prefecture'

One might hypothesize that *nan* itself is a numeral and hence a NUM head. But this is not tenable because *nan* co-occurs with a numeral classifier, which is a NUM head (Watanabe 2006). Given that numeral classifiers (in NUM) in Japanese require a number category as their specifier, *nan* cannot be a functional head higher than NUM either.

- (4) a. go-hiki  
       five-CL<sub>animal</sub>  
       ‘five (animals)’  
    b. \*hiki  
       CL<sub>animal</sub>  
       ‘(animals)’  
    c. \*{takusan/arera}-hiki  
       many/those-CL<sub>animal</sub>  
       ‘many/those (animals)’

It is thus reasonable to think that *nan* is combined with a silent element NUMBER (see Zweig 2005, Kayne 2005) and forms a numeral in the specifier of NUMP. This silent element NUMBER in (5) can also be overtly realized as a numerical base *zyuu/hyaku/zen* ‘ten/hundred/thousand’ in example (2c).

- (5) [<sub>NUMP</sub> [<sub>NUMERAL</sub> {**nan/go**} NUMBER] [<sub>NUM'</sub> [<sub>NUM</sub> classifier]]]  
       ‘{how many/five} (NP)’

If this analysis is correct, the obligatory lack of *-i* is understood as morphological evidence for the presence of the silent NUMBER. This in turn suggests that what we call numerals are more complex than they look. A number of studies have investigated the syntax of numerals (Ionin and Matushansky 2006, Cheng and Sybesma 1999, Watanabe 2006, 2010), but what kind of syntactic category a numeral is has rarely been addressed. The anatomy of *nan* shows that a numeral is a combination of a number word (e.g. *ichi* ‘one’, *ni* ‘two’, *nani* ‘what’) and NUMBER.

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Ken Hiraiwa  
[hiraiwa@ltr.meijigakuin.ac.jp](mailto:hiraiwa@ltr.meijigakuin.ac.jp)  
Department of English  
Meiji Gakuin University  
1-2-37 Shirokanedai, Minato-ku, Tokyo,  
108-8636 Japan