

Rising Declaratives in Japanese

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1 Introduction

Rising intonation is often tied to question formation in many languages, while some languages also use a syntactic strategy to mark an interrogative sentence. This arouses the question about a sentence called a rising declarative, such as *It's raining?*, which keeps the syntax of a declarative, but uses rising intonation to add a question-like impression (Gunlogson, 2001, Jeong, 2018, Rudin, 2017). In a language such as Japanese, it is not obvious whether a rising declarative like that in English exists because no syntactic operation is used to form an interrogative sentence. This paper introduces what we can call rising declaratives in Japanese, which are sentences accompanying rising intonation but cannot license a weak NPI that can be licensed in an interrogative sentence. In this paper, as a concrete example, I take a declarative with a sentence-final *yo* and rising intonation and propose an analysis that can capture the commonality of the contribution of rising intonation between English and Japanese. Specifically, I argue that rising intonation has a special discourse effect (Farkas and Roelofsen, 2017), which indicates that the speaker is not making a direct commitment to the sentence radical.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: In the next section, I provide some background data with which I claim that Japanese does have what we can call rising declaratives. This paper mainly explores assertions with a particle *yo* with rising and falling intonation, and the analysis in the previ-

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ous literature and its potential problems are introduced. Section 2 illustrates my proposal and introduces the framework used to build the analysis and its ingredients. The hands-on analyses of rising and falling *yo* assertions are provided in Section 3. Section 4 summarizes this paper, and possible future directions are stated.

2 Background

One natural way to mark an interrogative sentence in Japanese is to use rising intonation, which is shown by a question mark at the end of the sentence in (1a). The semantic contribution can be seen by the comparison between (1a–b), both of which contain a weak NPI *soko made* ‘to that extent.’ This minimal pair shows that this weak NPI can be licensed in an interrogative sentence.¹

- (1) a. Sore, soko-made omosiroi?
 that to that extent interesting
 ‘Is that that interesting?’
 b. ?? Sore, soko-made omosiroi.
 that to that extent interesting
 ‘(Intended:) This is interesting to that extent.’

Although rising intonation typically forms an interrogative as shown above, it is not the only contribution of this intonation pattern. (2a) is minimally different from (1a) in that (2a) has a sentence-final particle *yo* at the end. Notwithstanding that it accompanies rising intonation, the sentence is degraded. Note that when there is a negation *nai* as in (2b), *yo* can be used with both intonation contours, which shows that the infelicity of (2a) does not come from the incompatibility of *sokomade* with *yo*. This indicates that the rising intonation in (2a) is doing something different from the question-forming operation. These observations suggest that (2a) is not syntactically or semantically interrogative. If (2a) is not an interrogative, the most plausible candidate is a declarative; (2a) without *sokomade* is what we can call a rising declarative in Japanese.

- (2) a. ?? Sore, soko-made omosiroi yo?
 that to that extent interesting YO
 ‘Is that that interesting?’
 b. Sore, soko-made omosiroku nai yo?/.
 that to that extent interesting not YO

¹The licensing conditions of these weak NPIs are not simple. See Ido et al. (2021) for the full picture. They also use the table model of Farkas and Bruce (2010) in their analysis, and thus far, I see no incompatibility of the analysis of rising intonation given in this paper and their analysis of *sonnani*, whose distribution and meaning are similar to *soko made*.

‘That is not that interesting?/.’

In fact, the literature on this particular particle, *yo*, treats a *yo*-sentence with rising intonation as a declarative. For instance, Davis (2009) assigns two different semantics to two intonation contours accompanying *yo*, as shown in (3). Specifically, note that the semantics of rising intonation, (3a), has nothing to do with the semantics of questions. Rather, it maintains the same force type, which means that (2a) is treated as an assertion. Falling intonation, on the other hand, has something extra, known as a downgrade operation, indicated as ↓ in (3b). This is necessary to capture the empirical fact that the *yo* assertion with falling intonation signals that there is a conflict between the speaker and the addressee. For example, when the speaker tries to correct something, only the falling *yo* assertion is felicitous: (4b). In this case, the *yo* assertion with falling intonation signals that the addressee first has to downgrade their public belief asserted as (4a) with a different proposition *q*, which is a contextually available proposition and is identified with the proposition *COVID is just a cold* in this case.

- (3) a. $\llbracket \uparrow \rrbracket = \lambda F \lambda p \lambda c. F(p)(PB_{addr}(c)+p)$
 b. $\llbracket \downarrow \rrbracket = \lambda F \lambda p \lambda c. F(p)((PB_{addr}(c)\downarrow q)+p)$
 where *F* is a variable over the force heads, of type $\langle st, \langle C, C \rangle \rangle$.
- (4) a. Korona-wa tada-no kaze da.
 covid-TOP just-GEN cold COP
 ‘COVID is just a cold.’
 b. Iya, tigua yo↓/# ↑
 nope wrong YO
 ‘Nope, that’s not the case.’

Giving specific semantics to rising intonation co-occurring with *yo* can provide a result that can explain the behavior of (2a) as an assertion. However, given that rising intonation can be used with other particles to make an apparent rising declarative, a more general analysis of rising intonation is favorable. For instance, Japanese outer negation questions do not allow a weak NPI, either, as in (5).

- (5) ?? Sore, soko-made **omosiroku**-nai?
 that to that extent interesting-NEG
 ‘(Intended:) That is to that extent interesting, isn’t it?’

Note that some Japanese negative questions are ambiguous, but in (5), bias toward a positive proposition can be obtained when phonological focus is placed on the predicate, *omosiroku* ‘interesting.’ Once the negation part has phonological stress, (5) becomes felicitous as an inner negation question

(*That is not interesting that much, is it?*). Even though an outer negation question such as (5) has been treated as a biased “question” in the literature (Ito and Oshima, 2014, Sudo, 2013), the behavior of a weak NPI with this sentence suggests that they should be treated as rising declaratives.

This paper aims to explain the contributions of rising intonation in rising declaratives in Japanese, comparing them to rising declaratives in English, primarily focusing on *yo* declaratives.

3 Proposal and Ingredients of the Analysis

I propose a pragmatics-based analysis of *yo* declaratives with rising/falling intonation, combining the discourse effects of the particle *yo* and intonation contour. In this analysis, rising intonation is not treated as a semantic operator but as a discourse effect modifier. Furthermore, an assertion with *yo* is marked and hence considered a special assertion that accompanies special discourse effects. The empirical facts about *yo* assertions can be explained by combining the discourse effects of each component compositionally (cf. Hirayama (2019)).

In my analysis, I use the discourse model of Farkas and Bruce (2010). Let us examine the discourse effect of a bare assertion using the discourse model. Assume that there are only two discourse participants, **A** and **B**. Table 1 shows the output obtained after **A** makes an assertion p using a bare declarative (i.e., without any particles). The basic discourse effects of an assertion by a bare declarative argued in Farkas and Bruce (2010) are as follows: First, it updates the discourse commitment of **A**, DC_A with p . Second, a singleton proposition $\{p\}$ is placed on the Table, which handles what is at issue in the immediate discourse or the immediate Questions under Discussion (QuDs) (Roberts, 2012). What is put on the Table awaits **B**’s acceptance to be included in the common ground. The projected set indicates the future common ground — in this case, once **B** accepts the proposition on the Table, a new common ground is to be made by taking the union of the common ground, which is the mutual knowledge of discourse participants (Stalnaker, 1978) at the time of utterance (s_1) and a set of worlds where p is true.

A	Table	B
$DC_A: p$	$\{p\}$	$DC_B:$
Common Ground: s_1	Projected Set: $PS_1 = \{s_1 \cup \{p\}\}$	

Table 1: An output discourse of a bare assertion

Note that **B** does not have to explicitly respond to **A**’s assertion. In other words, **B**’s acceptance can be realized as silence. In an assertion (crucially with falling intonation), **A**’s discourse commitment is also conveyed as part

of the discourse effects of this sentence type. B’s silence can be interpreted as having no objection to the proposition on the Table. Consequently, it is not always the case that A needs a response from B. Sharing new information with discourse participants, which is part of the basic discourse effects of a declarative, can be achieved without explicit acknowledgment.

Let us compare this to the output discourse of a polar question, which is illustrated in Table 2. Imagine that A asks B whether it is raining.

A	Table	B
DC _A :	{ <i>p</i> , ¬ <i>p</i> }	DC _B :
Common Ground: <i>s</i> ₁	Projected Set: PS ₁ ={ <i>s</i> ₁ ∪ { <i>p</i> }, <i>s</i> ₁ ∪ {¬ <i>p</i> }}	

Table 2: An output discourse of a polar question

Three differences are found in the table. The first is in the discourse commitment of A, DC_A, which is now empty. Because A asks a question, they do not have any commitment toward either of the propositions, *p*: *It is raining* or ¬*p*: *It is not raining*. Because both possibilities are available, the Table has two propositions: *p* and ¬*p*. Accordingly, the Projected Set has two possibilities, as well. Depending on B’s answer, the common ground is extended such that it includes either *p* or ¬*p*.

From the three differences found between the two tables, it is possible to derive one more notable difference between assertion and question. That is, asking questions by nature requests an answer from the addressee. In Table 2, A does not make any commitment toward either of the possibilities on the Table. Without any response from discourse participants, in our case, B, the discourse can no longer move forward. B can certainly say, ‘I don’t know.’ if they have no ideas, but silence is not usually tolerated. This is one of the key differences between assertions and questions; we will come back to this shortly.

3.1 Ingredient 1: Intonation Contour

First, following Rudin (2017), I claim that intonation contours affect discourse effects in Japanese, as in (6).

- (6) Discourse effects of intonation contour (Rudin, 2017)
Falling intonation adds the speaker’s commitment while rising intonation does not

Specifically, intonation operates over the speaker’s commitment. In other words, rising intonation is not supposed to be a semantic operator such as INT, which turns a declarative into an interrogative. Thus, it is possible to avoid rising intonation’s assigning the interrogative semantics unconditionally. Even though rising intonation does not change the semantics of the

sentence, this special discourse effect can also bring a question-like flavor, namely, rising intonation signals that the speaker wants an answer from the addressee. This is done by combining the basic discourse effect of the declarative and the discourse effect modified by intonation, as shown in Table 3.

A	Table	B
DC _A :	{ <i>p</i> }	DC _B :
Common Ground: <i>s</i> ₁	Projected Set: PS ₁ ={ <i>s</i> ₁ ∪ { <i>p</i> } }	

Table 3: An output discourse after *p* ↑

Table 3 is different from Tables 1 and 2. First, it is different from Table 2, which shows the output discourse of a polar interrogative in that it is a singleton proposition that is placed on the Table. This is because rising intonation does not affect the semantics of the sentence per se. In English, such a semantic operation is realized as peculiar word order of the interrogative sentence that differs from that of the declarative sentence.

Even though rising declarative is “declarative,” Table 3 is also different from Table 1, which shows discourse effects of a default assertion, namely, a “falling” declarative. The only difference between Table 1 and this table is that the discourse commitment of **A** is empty in Table 3. This is due to the effect of the rising intonation. There is only one proposition on the Table, but it lacks support from **A**. Namely, the proposition is put on the Table since **A** considered it to be relevant to the current discourse, but no commitment is made.² Under this condition, **B** has no option to be silent. **B** must either accept that *p* is relevant or reject it. In any case, in terms of the common ground, *p* is included as the shared knowledge of discourse participants. The key point here is rising intonation: Even with assertion the addressee cannot be silent and must show some reaction.

3.2 Ingredient 2: Special Discourse Effects of *Yo*

In addition, I adopt the authority-based analysis of *yo* by Northrup (2014): *Yo* is a relative authority marker. Specifically, *yo* is a marker of maximal speaker authority and has not-at-issue content, as in (7). In (7), *E* is an evidential base, a set of propositions that support a commitment. In words, the speaker has the strongest authority for *ϕ*, which means that, by default, others must accept *ϕ*

²Saying “no commitment is made” might be too strong. There are cases in which the speaker is quite certain about the truth of the proposition, even when rising intonation accompanies the assertion. What is meant here is that the speaker is not making any commitment about whether the proposition on the Table is relevant in the immediate discourse. At this moment, it is not clear whether it is necessary to distinguish two types of speaker’s commitment in the discourse table (regarding the truth of the proposition and the relevance of the proposition). I will leave this for my future research.

on their word.

- (7) *Not-at-issue content of* $\llbracket yo(\phi) \rrbracket$ (Northrup, 2014, 112):
Any commitment to ϕ is conditioned on a base E_{MAX} such that:
 $E_{MAX} = \{q | \forall X \in D : AUTH_X(q) \leq AUTH_{S_p}(q)\}$

This analysis of *yo* as a relative authority marker is based on the fact that it is not natural to use *n* ‘yes’ to respond to the assertion with *yo* because using *yes* indicates that the addressee themselves can be a source of commitment (Gunlogson, 2008). Example (8) illustrates that English *yes* requires that this speaker be an independent source of proposition *p*, *The server is down*. On the other hand, when the speaker uses *Oh*, they can be dependent on another person as a source for the truth of the proposition.

- (8) A: The server is down.
B: # Yes, I didn’t know that. / # Yes, is it? / Oh, I didn’t know that.

A similar contrast can also be observed in Japanese, as shown in (9).

- (9) a. Saabaa-ga ochite-ru yo.
server-NOM down-PRES YO
‘The server is down.’
b. # N, sira-nakat-ta. / Soo ka siranakat-ta.
yes know-NEG-PAST oh know-NEG-PAST
‘Yes, I didn’t know that. / Oh, I didn’t know that.’

In the case of (9), *yo* indicates that it is the speaker who has the maximal authority over the truth of the proposition. Hence, it is impossible to use *yes* to accept the proposition because using *yes* indicates that the addressee has another source of information regarding the proposition. This conflicts with the not-at-issue content of *yo*.

Furthermore, I assume that *yo* has a selectional restriction on the type of sentence that it can take as its argument. For our current purpose, it is sufficient to say that *yo* can take a declarative but not an interrogative.³

4 Analysis

The previous section provided a sketch of the proposal and description of the ingredients of the analysis. In this section, I show how combining the discourse effects of intonation contour and *yo* can explain the empirical facts of falling and rising declaratives with this particle.

³ Strictly speaking, *yo* can appear with interrogative sentences, which involve *wh*-phrases or a question marker *ka*. However, such questions are interpreted as rhetorical questions, and they are infelicitous as information-seeking questions.

4.1 Yo Assertion with Falling Intonation

I analyze a *yo* declarative as a marked declarative, which has special discourse effects in addition to the default discourse effects: *Yo* declaratives signal that the speaker has the strongest authority among discourse participants. Let us assume that **A** used *yo*(ϕ) with falling intonation (\downarrow). The update made by **A** is presented in Table 4. In this case, we have a combined effect of (7) and falling intonation, that is, **A** is committed to p ($DC_A: p$), and also that commitment is based on an evidential base such that they have the strongest authority about it, as shown in the third row.

A	Table	B
$DC_A: p$	$\{p\}$	$DC_B:$
$AUTH_B \leq AUTH_A$		
Common Ground: s_1	Projected Set: $PS_1 = \{(s_1 - \{q\}) \cup \{p\}\}$	

Table 4: An output discourse of *yo*(ϕ) \downarrow .

Notice that the projected set in the table above is more complex than that seen earlier. The projected set now has a union of the proposition on the Table and the result of shrinking the previous common ground by q , which is incompatible with the discourse commitment of the speaker, who has the maximum authority in the discourse. This part reflects the downdating operation in Davis (2009), and I argue that the combination of indicating the speaker’s authority over a certain proposition and making a commitment toward the proposition is tied to the downdating effect. Remember that the semantics of *yo* with falling intonation in Davis (2009), (3b), involves downdating the addressee’s public belief with a contextually supplied proposition q . In other words, *yo* manipulates the common ground so as not to include q . For instance, in the COVID example, which I repeat here as (10), by using *yo*, the speaker directs the addressee not to believe the proposition q , which is identified with the proposition, *COVID is just a cold*.

- (10) a. Korona-wa tada-no kaze da.
 covid-TOP just-GEN cold COP
 ‘COVID is just a cold.’
 b. Iya, tigua yo \downarrow /# \uparrow
 nope wrong YO
 ‘Nope, that’s not the case.’

In contrast to the analysis of Davis (2009), which encodes this downdating operation into semantics, I argue that this is the result of the combination of the speaker’s commitment, authority, and pragmatic competition. By showing the speaker’s authority by using *yo*, which is not conveyed in discourse effects

of a bare declarative, and indicating their commitment to the proposition on the Table by falling intonation, a falling declarative with *yo* signals that there is a good reason for the speaker’s thinking that updating the public belief of the addressee is difficult without explicitly telling them to downdate their public belief with some contextually available proposition. In other words, a speaker who uses a declarative with *yo* indicates that using a bare declarative is not sufficient for them to update the addressee’s public belief and make a new common ground due to a conflict.

4.2 *Yo* Assertion with Rising Intonation

When *yo* is used with rising intonation, there is no commitment of the speaker involved, as shown in Table 5, where DC_A is empty.

A	Table	B
$DC_A:$	$\{p\}$	$DC_B:$
$AUTH_B \leq AUTH_A$		
Common Ground: s_1	Projected Set: $PS_1 = \{s_1 \cup \{p\}\}$	

Table 5: An output discourse of $yo(\phi)\uparrow$

Recall that rising intonation is not treated as a question operator here, and *yo* selects a declarative. Therefore, the basic discourse effects of the declarative are carried out. As a result, a singleton proposition is placed on the Table. Since the authority marking, which is part of the discourse effects of the particle, is not affected by the intonation, the third row is not different from what we saw in a *yo*-sentence with falling intonation (Table 4). As a whole, the speaker’s authority is shown, and a proposition awaits the addressee’s acceptance to be included in the common ground.

Looking at the projected set part, the bottom right section of the table, it can be seen that there is no downdating involved; without the commitment of the speaker on *p*, they cannot direct the addressee to downdate their private belief and then update the common ground. In other words, the speaker merely puts a proposition on the Table to call for the addressee’s attention to the proposition. The overall discourse effects are in accordance with the standard usage of this particle, which is attention-calling. This property is a result of the combination of the more authoritative status of the speaker and a lack of commitment. The speaker is informing the addressee of the information based on the assumption that it could be relevant to the addressee, and the speaker is in a position to be more authoritative about it.

The difference between *yo*-assertions with two intonation contours indicates that the speaker’s maximal authority is not sufficient to make the addressee give up their previous public belief, and showing the speaker’s commitment is also necessary. In fact, a continuation that shows the speaker’s un-

certainty about the proposition put on the Table goes well with a *yo*-assertion with rising intonation, but not with that with falling intonation, as shown in (11).

- (11) *Context:* A and B are traveling and now at the platform, waiting for the train. A planned the entire itinerary, and B did not know the plan. A is reading a book and does not pay attention to the incoming trains. B notices that a train is approaching. B says to A:

Nee, densya, kiteru yo↑/# ↓ Are noru yatu?
 hey train approaching YO that we take one

‘Hey, a train is approaching. Is that the one we are going to take?’

In this context, the use of rising intonation is more natural. Here, what B is doing is trying to direct A’s attention to an approaching train. Since B is not sure it is “the” train they are supposed to take, it is more natural for B not to make a commitment to it. In the immediate context, B is just more authoritative than A in terms of the fact that B is now paying more attention to the surroundings than A, who is now concentrating on reading. If the first sentence is read with the final falling intonation, *densya* is interpreted as “the” train, and following up with a question that asks if the train is what they are waiting for is less natural. This is presumably because the uncertainty shown by the question contradicts the speaker’s commitment, as shown by the falling intonation.

5 Conclusion and Future Research

In this paper, I showed that Japanese has what we can call rising declaratives, which have sentence-final rising intonation but do not license a weak NPI. Since there are a few such constructions, I propose an analysis of a rising declarative that makes use of the discourse effects of intonation contours rather than assigning them different semantic denotations depending on which particles each intonation occurs with. A *yo*-declarative with rising intonation is analyzed as an assertion indicating the speaker’s authority without commitment, which is intended to call the attention of the discourse participants.

This paper only considered two types of intonation contours: rising and falling. However, this is an oversimplification. As Oshima (2013) and the references therein indicate, there are more subtypes in intonation contours. Furthermore, this is also the case in English, as shown by experimental results (Jeong, 2018). As pointed out in the question-and-answer period during the talk, there are also dialectal differences in the use of intonation contours. More research is needed to explore whether a unified analysis of rising intonation is possible across and within languages.

The next direction is to apply this approach to another sentence type, and one potential candidate is the imperative. *Yo* can be used with imperatives and occurs with both falling intonation and rising intonation, as shown in (12). The difference between the two intonation contours is that an imperative with rising intonation is perceived as a request, while that with falling intonation sounds more like an order. Taking up the example in (12), when the speaker uses the falling intonation, it gives the impression that the addressee often forgets to wash their hands. With rising intonation, there is no such implication, and it can be perceived as general advice. Davis (2009) analyzes this by replacing public belief in (3) with public intention. To see if the proposed analysis can be applied to imperatives, it is necessary to identify the discourse effect of imperatives itself.

- (12) Kaet-tara te arae yo[↑] / ↓
 return-if hands wash.IMP YO
 ‘Wash your hands once you get home.’

The first problem that the proposed analysis faces with explaining imperatives is that bare imperatives in Japanese do not allow rising intonation. That is, without *yo*, (12) should be uttered with a falling intonation. Interestingly, this contrasts with the rising imperatives in English. English imperatives do allow rising intonation, and Rudin (2018) analyze them using the idea in (6) and expanding the discourse model of Farkas and Bruce (2010) to include the teleological context set, which is similar to the analysis of Davis (2009). The difference between imperatives in English and Japanese might be a clue to understanding more cross-linguistic differences in imperatives and the discourse effects brought by particles and intonation contours.

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