

# Japanese honorification as nominalization

Taking [HON] out of honorifics

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We claim that Japanese honorification involves no dedicated grammatical apparatus, *contra* longstanding analytical tradition. Examining the components of two productive honorification strategies, we show that these components lack honorific meaning in isolation, but are nominal in nature. We therefore suggest that Japanese honorifics are built from general nominalisation processes and light verb constructions. We also recharacterize ‘honorific suppletives’ as semantically bleached verbal substitutions, showing that their distribution conforms to a general morphophonological constraint of Japanese, which we call the monomoraic constraint. Crucially, this honorification-as-nominalization approach eschews *ad hoc*, honorification-specific grammatical machinery, advocating for a minimal and economical featural inventory.

## 1. Introduction: empirical background

Japanese has a highly complex honorification system, with both productive and irregular grammatical reflexes.<sup>1</sup> In this section, we first provide some empirical background into the shape of the Japanese honorification system, and then an overview of our analysis.

*Productive* honorifics add predictable morphological pieces to the verbal complex. Within productive honorifics, subject honorification (SH) is distinguished from non-subject honorification (NSH). *Irregular* honorifics involve an unpredictable change to the verbal complex. In our translations, (HON) indicates that the preceding referent is the target of deference.

SH is productively expressed by adding a ‘honorific’ prefix, *o-*, and the light verb *naru* ‘become’, to the verbal complex. In this particular construction, the dative marker *-ni* also appears. Throughout, we will refer to this as the *naru* strategy, which is always subject-oriented. The con-

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<sup>1</sup>Honorifics (traditionally termed *sonkeigo/kenjōgo*) are to be distinguished from politeness indicated by the verbal endings *-mas-*, *-des-* (traditionally termed *teineigo*). The former are targeted towards third persons, while the latter are targeted towards second persons and are better analysed as allocutive agreement (see Miyagawa 2017). Only the former will be covered in this paper.

trast between plain (1) and subject honorific (2) illustrates this, where (2) indicates the speaker's deference towards the subject.

- (1) Taro-ga Hana-o mats-u.  
Taro-NOM Hana-ACC wait-NPST  
'Taro waits for Hana.' (plain)
- (2) Sensei-ga Hana-o o-machi-ni nar-u.  
professor-NOM Hana-ACC HON-wait-DAT become-NPST  
'The professor (HON) waits for Hana.' (subject honorific)

SH can alternatively be expressed with the sole addition of the passive morpheme, *-(r)are*, without *o-* or the light verb *naru* 'become' (3). We will refer to this as the *(r)are* strategy.

- (3) Sensei-ga Hana-o mat-are-ru.  
professor-NOM Hana-ACC wait-PASS-NPST  
'The professor (HON) waits for Hana.'

While SH may be regarded as directly elevating the status of a referent, NSH may be regarded as demoting the status of the speaker, elevating the status of a referent indirectly (self-humbling). NSH is productively expressed by adding *o-*, and the light verb 'do' *suru*. We will refer to this as the *suru* strategy.

- (4) Watashi-ga sensei-o o-machi su-ru.  
I-NOM professor-ACC HON-wait do-NPST  
'I am waiting for the professor (HON).' (non-subject honorific)

Before we proceed, let us note two morphological quirks of Japanese. First, the prefix *o-* has an allomorph *go-* when it combines with Sino-Japanese stems such as *syookai* 'introduce'.

- (5) Hanako-ga Yamada-san-ni Sato-san-o go-syookai si-ta.  
Hanako-NOM Yamada-TITLE-DAT Sato-TITLE-ACC HON-introduce do-PAST  
'Hanako introduced Mr. Yamada (HON) to Mr. Sato.' (Hasegawa 2006:522)

Second, our examples of the SH *naru* and NSH *suru* strategies above involve the verb *matsu* 'wait', a verb which receives up to five different inflectional endings (a *godan* verb in traditional terms). Honorific verbal complexes occur with the infinitival form, illustrated below.

- (6) *Inflectional forms of matsu 'wait'*
- |                                 |              |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Dictionary form                 | <i>matsu</i> |
| Infinitival/nominal form        | <i>machi</i> |
| Negative/causative/passive form | <i>mata</i>  |
| Imperative/conditional form     | <i>mate</i>  |
| Volitional form                 | <i>mato:</i> |

It is notable that this infinitival form is the one used for nominalizations in Japanese.<sup>2</sup> This will be an important component in our re-characterizations of the *naru* and *suru* strategies as

<sup>2</sup>Its detail is discussed in §4.2.

nominalizations.<sup>3</sup>

In comparison, a distinct class of verbs (the *ichidan* class in traditional terms) does not receive distinct inflectional endings. An example of this is *tasuke* ‘help’, which inflectional ending starts with *-e* across all of its uses (7), including in honorific verbal complexes (8).

(7) *Inflectional forms of tasuke ‘help’*

Dictionary form	<i>tasukeru</i>
Infinitival/nominal form	<i>tasuke</i>
Negative/causative/passive form	<i>tasuke</i>
Imperative/conditional form	<i>tasukero</i>
Volitional form	<i>tasukeyoo</i>

- (8) Sensei-ga Taro-o o-tasuke-ni nar-u.  
 professor-NOM Taro-ACC HON-help-DAT become-NPST  
 ‘The professor (HON) helps Taro.’ (productive honorification)

Crucially, regardless of the class membership of the verb, the infinitival form is always used in productive honorifics. We wish only to alert the reader that the shapes of the infinitival inflections differ across verb classes (varying between *-i* and *-e*), but this morphological quirk is a matter independent of honorification.

Table 1 summarizes the shapes of the three productive honorification strategies of Japanese. This paper will focus on the *naru* and *suru* strategies, with passing mention of the (*r*)*are* strategy.

SH	<i>naru</i> strategy	<b>o-</b> +	V <sub>INF</sub>	+ <b>ni naru</b>
	( <i>r</i> ) <i>are</i> strategy		V	+ ( <b>r</b> ) <b>are</b>
NSH	<i>suru</i> strategy	<b>o-</b> +	V <sub>INF</sub>	+ <b>suru</b>

Table 1: Productive honorification strategies in Japanese

In contrast to productive honorifics, *irregular* honorifics involve unpredictable changes to the whole verbal complex, and have been analysed as suppletives (e.g. Volpe 2009, Thompson 2011). Each ‘suppletive’ form can be either subject- or object-orientated, as shown for the verb *iu* ‘to say/tell’ below.

(9) *iu* ‘to say/tell’

- a. Taro-ga soo **i**-u.  
 Taro-NOM so **say**-NPST  
 ‘Taro says so.’ (plain)
- b. Sensei-ga soo **ossyar**-u.  
 professor-NOM so **say.SH**-NPST  
 ‘The professor (HON) says so.’ (subject honorific)
- c. Taro-ga sensei-ni iken-o **mousi**-ta.  
 Taro-NOM professor-DAT opinion-ACC **tell.NSH**-NPST  
 ‘Taro told the professor (HON) his opinion.’ (non-subject honorific)

<sup>3</sup>Note that the SH (*r*)*are* strategy does not use the infinitival form, but the passive form, as expected since the passive marker is involved.

Here we see that the stem *i-* ‘say’ has irregular forms when one of its arguments is honorified. When its subject argument is honorified, *i-* changes to *ossyar-* (9b); when a non-subject argument is honorified, *i-* changes to *mousi-* (9c). No productive honorifics of *i-* exist.

Irregular honorifics affect only a handful of verbs in modern Japanese. We will see in §4 that this infrequency falls out naturally from a general morphophonological constraint of Japanese, what we call the monomoraic constraint. Furthermore, not all verbs have both SH and NSH irregular forms. Several more irregular forms are illustrated in Table 2 below.

Verb	Plain form	Irregular SH form	Irregular NSH form
‘to go’	<i>iku</i>		
‘to come’	<i>kuru</i>	<i>irassyaru</i>	<i>mairu</i>
‘to eat’	<i>taberu</i>		
‘to drink’	<i>nomu</i>	<i>mesiagaru</i>	<i>itadaku</i>
‘to visit’	<i>tazuneru</i>	–	<i>ukagau</i>
‘to listen’	<i>kiku</i>		
‘to see/watch’	<i>miru</i>	<i>goran-ni-naru,</i> <i>goran-nasaru</i>	<i>haiken-suru</i>
‘to say’	<i>iu</i>	<i>ossyaru</i>	<i>moosu</i>
‘to do’	<i>suru</i>	<i>nasaru</i>	<i>itasu</i>
‘to feel/think’	<i>omou</i>	<i>obosimesu</i>	<i>zonziru</i>

Table 2: Irregular Japanese honorifics

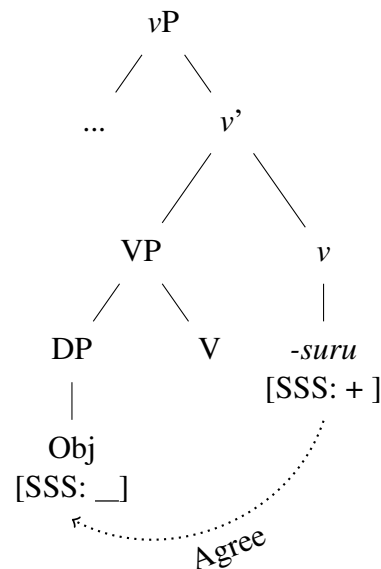
Note that the several pairs of verbs conflate their irregular forms: for example, ‘to eat’ and ‘to drink’ have distinct forms *taberu* and *nomu* in plain speech, but their irregular forms are conflated into *mesiagaru* (SH) and *itadaku* (NSH) in honorific speech. This semantic bleaching in honorific speech will be accounted for in §4.1.

## 2. Analytical background

### 2.1. Analyses of honorification-as-Agree

A longstanding tradition in the literature on Japanese honorification postulates a dedicated grammatical feature which drives a honorification-as-Agree analysis (Toribio 1990; Ura 2000; Hasegawa 2002, 2006; Niinuma 2003; Boeckx & Niinuma 2004; Kishimoto 2010; among many others). This grammatical feature typically takes the shape of [HON], or [SSS] (indicating that its DP referent is Socially Superior to the Speaker). This feature is then assumed to sit on the morphological pieces added to honorified verbal complexes, such as the prefix *o-* or the light verbs *-suru* and *naru*.

To see how such analyses work, let us consider Boeckx & Niinuma’s (2004) analysis of the NSH *suru* strategy. The *v* head is expounded by *suru*, and is a probe which seeks to value its [SSS] feature. The DP which receives honorific reference is the goal. This is illustrated in (10).

(10) *Non-subject honorification (NSH) as Agree*

The main motivation behind this analysis is the presence of intervention effects: in the presence of an indirect object, honorification towards the direct object is blocked (11a). Only when the indirect object is absent, can the direct object receive honorification (11b).

- (11) a. # Uchi-no imooto-ni Yamaha sensei-o go-syookai shi-ta.  
 my-GEN sister-DAT Yamaha professor-ACC HON-introduce do-PST  
 ‘(I) introduced Professor Yamaha (\*HON) to my little sister (HON).’
- b. Yamaha sensei-o o-tasuke shi-ta.  
 Yamaha professor-ACC HON-rescue do-PST  
 ‘(I) rescued Professor Yamaha (HON).’

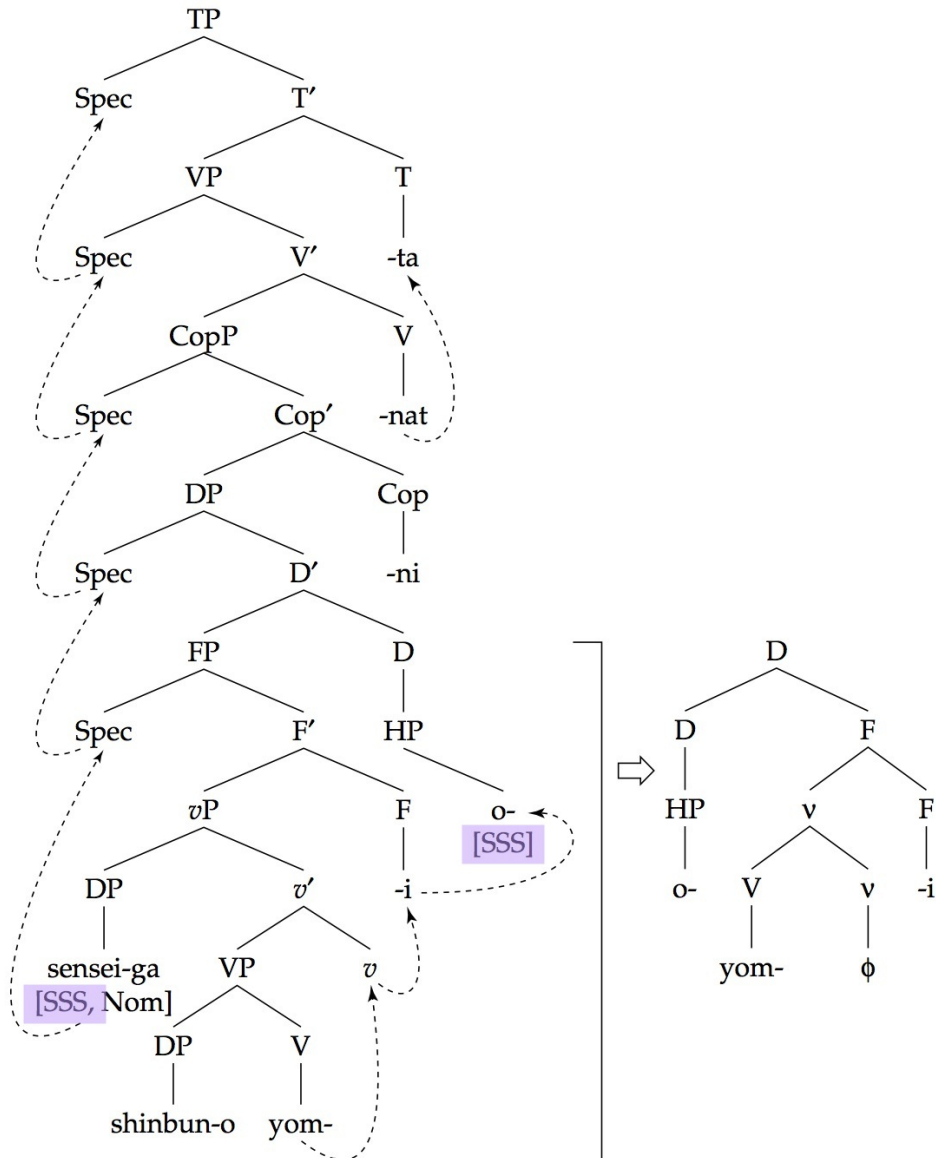
Assuming that indirect objects are structurally higher than direct objects, if an indirect object is present, it will be the indirect object which receives honorification. This intervention effect is correctly predicted under an Agree analysis.

Boeckx & Niinuma (2004) do not give an analysis of SH. Here, we reproduce Hasegawa’s (2006:507) adaptation of Toribio (1990) for the SH sentence in (12). The relevant feature for honorific Agree is still [SSS], which is now situated on both the honorific prefix *o-* and the subject DP (rather than just on *v* as in Boeckx & Niinuma 2004).

(12) *Subject Honorification (SH) as Agree*

- a. Sensei-ga shinbun-o o-yomi-ni nat-ta.  
 professor-NOM newspaper-ACC HON-read-DAT become-PAST  
 ‘The professor (HON) read the newspaper.’

b. Hasegawa (2006:507)



Already, we can sense that this makes for a rather complex analysis. To accommodate the various pieces of morphology that the *naru* strategy creates, several additional phrasal projections are postulated. The verbal stem, its inflectional ending, and the prefix *o-* undergo movement to form a complex D head. This complex D head carries the [SSS] feature and attracts another element with the [SSS] feature into its specifier, Spec-DP. This element would be the subject DP, which has been attracted from its base position, Spec-*v*P, to Spec-DP. To derive the correct word order, the subject DP then undergoes further movement through higher specifier positions until stops at Spec-TP.

We feel that this makes for a rather *ad hoc* and un insightful analysis: several specialized phrasal projections and syntactic movements have to be assumed. But putting aside issues of aesthetics, honorification-as-Agree analyses also face empirical problems regarding constituency facts, optionality of Agree, multiple exponence of the [SSS] feature and mismatch with c-command relation.

First, let us turn to the constituency facts. Both analyses predict that the prefix *o-* and the verb do not form a constituent, but this prediction is not borne out. Bobaljik & Yatsushiro (2006) use VP-preposing to show that [*o*+V] is a constituent, to the exclusion of the light verb (13); furthermore, *o-* cannot be stranded in a VP-preposing construction (14).

- (13) a. Tanaka sensei-o [o-tasuke]-sae Taro-ga t<sub>VP</sub> si-ta.  
 Tanaka professor-ACC HON-help-even Taro-NOM do-PAST  
 ‘Taro even helped Prof. Tanaka (HON).’  
 b. \*Tanaka sensei-o [o-tasuke-si]-sae Taro-ga t<sub>VP</sub> ta.  
 Tanaka professor-ACC HON-help-do-even Taro-NOM PAST
- (14) \*Lina-o [mise]-sae Kai-ga Tanaka sensei-ni o-t<sub>VP</sub> si-ta.  
 Lina-ACC show-even Kai-NOM Tanaka professor-DAT HON- do-PAST  
 Intended: ‘Kai even showed Lina to Prof. Tanaka (HON).’

(Bobaljik & Yatsushiro 2006:366, 369)

The constituency facts suggest that the prefix *o-* either directly attaches to the verb and nominalises it, or take a zero-nominalised verb as its complement. In §3, we will provide a structure for honorific verbal complexes which is consistent with these facts.

Secondly, such analyses do not capture the fact that honorific morphology is *optional*: in (15), the speaker can still express deference to the professor without honorific morphology.

- (15) *Deference without honorific morphology*  
 a. Sensei-ga Taro-o tasuke-ta.  
 professor-NOM Taro-ACC help-PAST  
 ‘The professor (HON) helped Taro.’  
 b. Taro-ga sensei-o tasuke-ta.  
 Taro-NOM professor-ACC help-PAST  
 ‘Taro helped the professor (HON).’

Thirdly, these analyses also do not straightforwardly capture the fact that the distribution of the prefix *o-* is not restricted to verbs. It can felicitously appear on the DPs in the sentence (16a), or both on the DPs and the verb in the sentence (16b), hinting that *o-* is nominal in nature.

- (16) a. Sensei-wa go-zibun-de o-kuruma-o araw-u.  
 professor-TOP HON-self-ACC HON-car-ACC wash-PST  
 b. Sensei-wa go-zibun-de o-kuruma-o o-arai-ni nar-u.  
 professor-TOP HON-self-ACC HON-car-ACC HON-wash-DAT become-PST  
 ‘The teacher (HON) washes her car by herself.’ (Hasegawa 2006:533)

The problem that (16) presents for an Agree analysis is twofold. First, the honorified referent must be assumed not only to undergo Agree with verbs, but also be able to undergo nominal concord with DPs like anaphors and objects. Second, these become cases of Multiple Agree, where one probe agrees with more than one goal, but previous analyses do not provide an account for these cases.

Fourthly, Bobaljik & Yatsushiro (2006) show that honorification does not depend on c-command. Non-dative marked indirect objects, such as those marked with *-kara* ‘from’ below, also participate in intervention effects (17), but do not allow reciprocal binding (18).

- (17) Taro-ga Tanaka sensei-kara hon-o o-kari si-ta.  
 Taro-NOM Tanaka professor-from book-ACC HON-borrow do-PST  
 Taro borrowed the book (\*HON) from Prof. Tanaka (HON).’
- (18) \*Taro-ga [Yamada sensei to Tanaka sensei]<sub>i</sub>-kara [otagai<sub>i</sub>-no hon]-o  
 Taro-NOM [Yamada professor and Tanaka professor]-from each.other-GEN book-ACC  
 kari-ta.  
 borrow-PST  
 Intended: ‘Taro borrowed each other<sub>i</sub>’s books from [Prof. Yamada and Prof. Tanaka<sub>i</sub>].’  
 (Bobaljik & Yatsushiro 2006:372)

If agreement is dependent on a c-commanding relation, the environments which allow honorific agreement should also allow other operations dependent on c-command, such as reciprocal binding. This not the case as the contrast above shows, suggesting that honorification should not receive an agreement analysis.

Lastly, honorification-as-Agree draws an unwelcome parallel with inflectional processes, such as subject-verb agreement. Such a parallel is unwelcome, as Japanese does not exhibit such inflectional agreement in the first place (lacking  $\phi$ -featural agreement morphology, for example). Not only is such a feature unusual for Japanese, it would also be a highly unusual feature given the usual characteristics of features in our current feature inventory. Unlike canonical syntactic features, [HON] not exhibit inflectional properties, and it does not trigger other grammatical processes such as movement (unlike *wh*-features), nor binding (unlike  $\phi$ -features), nor, as we will argue, true agreement.

## 2.2. Analyses of honorification without Agree: ‘suppletive’ honorifics

Alternatives to Agree analyses have also been proposed. For instance, Volpe (2009) proposes that honorific meaning originates as an HONOR head of an Expressive Phrase. This HONOR head then undergoes Fission, resulting in the somewhat circumfixal shape of honorific morphology (e.g. *o-V-suru*). Potts & Kawahara (2004) use multidimensional semantics containing a special logical type for expressive meanings, type  $\epsilon$ , composed by a syntactic rule with combines expressive meanings with propositional meanings. But while the exact mechanisms deriving honorific meaning are different, the core idea unifying previous analyses is that there is some specialised grammatical object, whether this object is a head, a feature, or a logical type.

For irregular honorifics, Thompson (2011) proposes that a [HON] feature triggers the deletion of productive honorific morphology and replaces it with honorific suppletive forms. We adopt a sketch of her analysis below, in order to provide analytical background for our own analysis of irregular honorifics in §4. The relevant examples are repeated from (9) below.

- (9) a. Sensei-ga soo **ossyar-u**.  
 professor-NOM so **say.SH-NPST**  
 ‘The professor (HON) says so.’ (subject honorific)
- b. Taro-ga sensei-ni iken-o **mousi-ta**.  
 Taro-NOM professor-DAT opinion-ACC **tell.NSH-NPST**  
 ‘Taro told the professor (HON) his opinion.’ (non-subject honorific)

To derive irregular forms, Thompson assumes that the locus of honorification is a *n*(ominalizing)

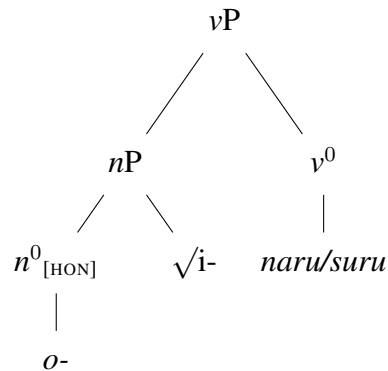


head which carries the feature [HON], normally exponed as the prefix *o-* (19).

$$(19) \quad n_{[HON]} \leftrightarrow o-$$

This *n* head combines with the verbal stem. There is also a higher *v* head which hosts the light verb, *naru* or *suru*. This produces the structure in (20).

(20)



If Vocabulary Insertion (VI) is allowed at non-terminal nodes (not an uncontroversial assumption), then the VI rule for the irregular form *ossyar-u* would be stated within the above structural environment as in (21), with the effect that the irregular form *ossyar-u* replaces the entire structure wholesale.

$$(21) \quad ossyar- \leftrightarrow \begin{array}{c} vP \\ \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ nP \quad v^0 \\ \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ \sqrt{i-} \quad n^0_{[HON]} \end{array} \quad \text{(adapted from Thompson 2011:172)}$$

If insertion is not allowed at terminal nodes, then the following set of VI rules must be posited. First, the [HON] feature triggers insertion of the irregular form *ossyar-* (22). Then, the pieces of productive honorific morphology, *o-* and the light verb, become zero in environments containing this irregular form (23).

$$(22) \quad ossyar- \leftrightarrow \sqrt{i-} / n^0_{[HON]}$$

$$(23) \quad \text{a. } n^0_{[HON]} \leftrightarrow \emptyset / ossyar- \qquad \text{b. } v \leftrightarrow \emptyset / ossyar-$$

This requires deletion rules in (23) to be listed as active in the derivation of every irregular form, but also specified as *inactive* in the derivative of every productive form. It also introduces an undesirable problem of look-ahead: an exponent (*o-* in this case) triggers suppletion, but then itself deletes, leaving no real evidence that it was the trigger for suppletion in the first place.

This characterisation of [HON] as a trigger for suppletion also does not provide any principled way of accounting for the difference between productive and irregular honorifics: since both have the same structure, what distinguishes a suppletive structural environment from a non-

suppletive one? Furthermore, it gives no explanation for why there should be a morphological difference between SH and NSH suppletives.

In sum, we have seen that much *ad hoc* technical machinery (e.g. specialized features or projections, Fission) has been additionally postulated in previous analyses to explain both productive and irregular honorifics. Below, we aim to provide a more minimal and elegant analysis of the Japanese honorification paradigm, without the burden of additional technical machinery.

### 2.3. Overview of our analysis

While these analyses have provided important insights, we argue that they are misguided in treating honorification as a dedicated linguistic feature. For one, many other agreement phenomena (regarding case, gender, tense, etc.) do not reflect social meaning as honorification does; all they do is to enforce grammatical well-formedness. [HON] is an oddity within the inventory of features, as it patterns away from other agreement phenomena in conveying social meaning instead of enforcing grammatical well-formedness.

Thus, this paper argues that *honorification is not a linguistic feature* in Japanese. How, then, does honorific meaning arise without dedicated means?

We will show that in Japanese, the grammatical mechanisms recruited for honorification are *nominalisation* and *passivization*. Under our account, honorific verbal complexes additionally contain *suru* ‘do’, *naru* ‘become’, or passive marker *(r)are*, but contain nothing honorific *per se* in them: they are merely periphrastic nominalisations or passivizations. We will show that not even the honorific morphology of Japanese are exponents of the feature [HON] or [SSS]; rather, they are merely exponents of general nominalization and passivization processes.

This proposal can be easily and intuitively understood by way of the *(r)are* strategy. An example is given in (24). This can be straightforwardly re-characterised as a passivization strategy, since it adds the passive marker *(r)are* in the language.

- (24) Sensei-ga kodomo-o sikar-**are**-ta.  
 professor-NOM child-ACC scold-PASS-PAST  
 ‘The teacher (HON) scolded the child.’ (subject honorification)

In (24), *-(r)are* contributes no passive meaning. Indeed, (24) is a *fake* passive, having active meaning, active word order (Agent-Patient), and active case marking (ACC-marked object).

If (24) is made into a true passive by placing the agent into a *niyotte* ‘by’-phrase, and making the patient the grammatical subject, honorific meaning disappears (25).

- (25) Kodomo-ga sensei-niyotte sikar-**are**-ta.  
 child-NOM professor-by scold-PASS-PAST  
 ‘The child was scolded by the teacher (\*HON).’ (true passive)

This contrast between non-passive (24) and passive (25) shows that the *(r)are* strategy does not truly express passive meaning, and that it merely recruits passive morphology, something that is supported by the morpheme’s diachronic history. Oshima (2006:150) notes that *-(r)are* was first ambiguous between passive and spontaneous uses, with records dating from the 8th century. Its honorific uses emerged only afterwards, first being subject to grammatical and stylistic constraints until these uses became full-fledged. This is convincing evidence that honorific *-(r)are*

was co-opted from passive *-(r)are*.

In the next section, we will illustrate the same claim for the *suru* and *naru* strategies: that they are *fake* nominalizations, instead of true honorifics. There is no dedicated grammatical component involved for the expression of honorification; only recruited nominalizing morphology is involved. Bruening (2013) has several arguments showing that English passives and complex nominals in fact share a number of syntactic properties (patterning together in the availability of attaching by-phrases, instrumentals, comitatives, adverbials, and distributive *each*).

We will build on this and show that both passivization and nominalization have similar *semantic* effects; namely, distancing its internal argument from the verbal event. Under this view, the literal translation of the NSH sentence in (4), which has a more periphrastic flavor after nominalization, should be taken more seriously.

- (4) Watashi-ga sensei-o        o-machi    su-ru.  
 I-NOM        professor-ACC HON-wait do-NPST  
 ‘I am waiting for the professor (HON).’  
 → Lit.: ‘I am *doing the waiting of* the professor.’

It should be noted that there have been analyses of Japanese honorification showing that the honorific verbal complex consists of a light verb and a nominal element (Ivana & Sakai 2007, Sakai & Ivana 2009). This body of work supports our claim that honorifics are essentially nominalizations, where the light verb is merely a bleached verb which allows the nominal to project up the functional spine of the sentence as a verb. However, the crucial difference is that they still assume a dedicated feature, [HON], which is responsible for the shape of the Japanese honorification paradigm.

The table below summarises our stance in relation to previous analyses. We develop our proposal in the next section.

(26)	With nominalisation	Without nominalisation
With [HON]	Ivana & Sakai 2007, Sakai & Ivana 2009	Toribio 1990, Boeckx & Niinuma 2003, Hasegawa 2006, Volpe 2009, <i>a.o.</i>
Without [HON]	<b>This proposal</b>	Harada 1976

It is notable that the Japanese honorification paradigm is not automatically acquired, but has to be explicitly taught. This supports the core claim of this paper—that [HON] is not an independent grammatical feature or category.

From this section onward, we develop our theory of Japanese verbal honorification without [HON], organised around three main claims:

- §3: The prefix *o-* is not the locus of honorification, but a noun-selecting prefix.
- §4: Irregular honorifics are not [HON]-conditioned suppletives, but rather as verbal substitutions governed by a morphophonological constraint, the monomoraic constraint.
- §5: The light verbs *suru* and *naru* are general-use light verbs which allow a verbal root to realise its argument structure, which allow the normalised verbal root to project up the functional spine of the sentence.

3. *o-* as a noun-selecting prefix

In this section, we defend our first claim: that the prefix *o-* is a noun-selecting prefix.

To start, consider the fact that there are plenty of nominal expressions containing *o-*, as in (27). (In general, such instances of *o-* always target a noun, although *o-* can appear on a restricted amount of adjectives.)

- |      |    |                                   |    |                                    |
|------|----|-----------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| (27) | a. | <b>o-sushi</b> ‘sushi’            | h. | <b>o-shogatsu</b> ‘New Year’       |
|      | b. | <b>o-soba</b> ‘buckwheat noodles’ | i. | <b>o-zoni</b> ‘New Year’s soup’    |
|      | c. | <b>o-yu</b> ‘hot water’           | j. | <b>o-kogoto</b> ‘rebuke/complaint’ |
|      | d. | <b>o-sake</b> ‘alcohol’           | k. | <b>o-susume</b> ‘recommendation’   |
|      | e. | <b>o-bento</b> ‘lunchbox’         | l. | <b>o-iwai</b> ‘congratulations’    |
|      | f. | <b>o-kane</b> ‘money’             | m. | <b>o-shirase</b> ‘notification’    |
|      | g. | <b>o-hashhi</b> ‘chopsticks’      | n. | <b>o-hada</b> ‘body’               |

In these cases, the prefix *o-* is optional. When *o-* appears, the utterance which contains it is softened and polite. This suggests that the prefix *o-* is of a noun-selecting nature. On the other hand, there are frozen expressions which contain *o-* as in (28). In those cases, *o-* is obligatory, unlike those cases in (27).

- |      |    |   |    |  |
|------|----|---|----|--|
| (28) | a. | <b>o-mutsu</b> ‘diaper’                     | e. | <b>o-tangi</b> ‘lecture’                               |
|      | b. | <b>o-yatsu</b> ‘afternoon snacks’           | f. | <b>o-warai</b> ‘comedy’                                |
|      | c. | <b>go-han</b> ‘meal’                        | g. | <b>o-bake</b> ‘ghost’                                  |
|      | d. | <b>o-sechi ryoori</b><br>‘New Year’s bento’ | h. | <b>o-yakusoku</b> ‘predictable/clichéd<br>development’ |

These are all used as a noun in full sentences. In the examples below, there is no honorific meaning: *o-cha* ‘tea’ and *o-shime* ‘diaper’ are not honorified.

- |      |    |  |
|------|----|--|
| (29) | a. | Yuki-ga <b>o-cha-o</b> non-da.<br>Yuki-NOM HON-tea-ACC drink-PST<br>‘Yuki drank tea.’                        |
|      | b. | Taihei-ga <b>o-takara-o</b> nyuushusi-ta.<br>Taihei-NOM HON-treasure-ACC get-PST<br>‘Taihei got a treasure.’ |

If the prefix *o-* is merely a nominaliser or a noun-selecting prefix, this lack of honorification is straightforward. However, if *o-* is a specialized honorific head, then this lack of honorification is surprising: its honoring function should apply across the board, even to inanimate nouns.

The class of frozen expressions with obligatory *o-* further suggests that the attachment of *o-* should be low, in order to account for their idiosyncratic and opaque interpretations in some cases. For example, *o-yakusoku* ‘something predictable’ is derived from the prefix *o-* and the noun *yakusoku* ‘promise’. Clearly, its meaning is not compositionally derived from the lexical meaning of its root noun. (However, note that most of the examples in (28) have transparent meaning: *o-mutsu* ‘diaper’ is clearly related to its derivational root *mutsu* ‘to bind’. What is important here for our purposes is that opaque interpretations *can* arise.)

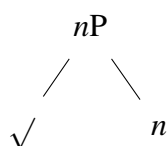
In this sense, these frozen expressions with *o-* share properties with *result nominals*. Result nominals are known to lack argument structure and eventive interpretations (Grimshaw

1990). *Warai* ‘laugh’ has an eventive reading with Taro being the agent of laughing, so the agent-oriented modifier *itotekina* ‘intentional’ is felicitous. On the other hand, *o-warai* ‘comedy’ lacks an eventive reading, being infelicitous with *itotekina* ‘intentional’—Taro can only have a possessive relation with the noun *o-warai* ‘comedy’.

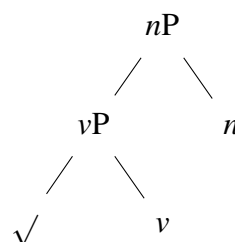
- (30) Taro-no itotekina **warai** / \***o-warai**  
 Taro-GEN intentional laugh / comedy  
 ‘Taro’s intentional laughing / comedy’

Yoda (2013) proposes the following structures for each. Since these non-honorific *o-* patterns like a result nominal, we will use (31a) in our representations of non-honorific *o-* nominals.

- (31) a. *Result nominals*



- b. *Event nominals*



So far, we have been treating *o-* as a noun-selecting prefix — a morpheme which has honorification as part of its lexical meaning, on par with respectful appellatives like Japanese *-sama*, *-san* or English *Mister*, *Miss*, *Sir*. This is contradictory to previous analyses which have treated it as a syntactic  $\text{Hon}^0$  head. We reject this syntactic analytical possibility mainly because *o-* does not have syntactic reflexes.

Consider the English derivational morpheme *un-*, which expresses a meaning roughly equivalent to negation (as in *unfriendly*) or reversal (as in *unlock*). Its reversal sense, especially, does not have any syntactic counterpart. Also, it is strange to analyse *un-* as a syntactic  $\text{Neg}^0$  head, as this wrongly predicts that *un-* licenses NPIs like  $\text{Neg}^0$  heads do. For example, while the  $\text{Neg}^0$  head expounded by *not* is a licenser for NPIs (32a), *un-* is not a licenser for NPIs (32b).

- (32) a. I do **not** want to see him ever again.  
 b. \*I **unlocked** the door ever again.

Rather, *un-* targets some resultant state and contributes a presupposition about the original state. This is a contribution which is not encoded in the syntax proper.

On this parallel, we reject a syntactic treatment of *o-*, precisely because *o-* does not participate in syntactic processes. Hence, there is no need to resort to a syntactic/featural analysis of *o-*. We do acknowledge that the addition of *o-* makes the overall utterance more polite and softened, but here a presupposition about *o-*’s referent is sufficient to capture this.

How, then, would one capture the SH orientation of the *naru* strategy versus the NSH orientation of the *suru* strategy? Here it is instructive to note that some derivational morphemes may select certain argument positions. The English *-er* suffix usually selects an (agentive) external argument (e.g., *tutor*) while *-ee* usually selects an internal argument (e.g., *tutee*).

- (33) a. John was the **tutor** of this course.  
 b. The **tutees** of this course should read this paper.

Though more work is necessary, we may assume that *o-* always targets a specific argument slot and presupposes a deference toward the referent of the DP which fills the argument position. Which argument is targeted is dependent on the semantics of *suru* and *naru*.

To summarize this section, (27) has shown that *o-* appears optionally with nouns, establishing it as a noun-selecting prefix. (28) shows that the addition of *o-* to now-frozen expressions may induce idiosyncratic interpretations, establishing it as heading a result nominal. Together with reasons above regarding why *o-* is unlikely to have syntactic reflexes, these facts suggest that *o-* is a noun-selecting prefix, not a syntactic Hon<sup>0</sup> head.

#### 4. The monomoraic constraint

In this section, we show that Japanese irregular honorifics in Japanese do not involve suppletion triggered by [HON], *contra* Thompson (2011). Thus, so-called honorific ‘suppletives’ should not be classified as instances of suppletion; rather, they are more akin to verbal substitutions, which are governed by a morphophonological constraint, the monomoraic constraint (§4.1). Furthermore, we show that this same constraint explains why productive honorifics use nominal forms (§4.2).

Our evidence for this claim consists of the following. Firstly, the alternation between a productive honorific form and an irregular honorific form is optional for most verbs, unlike canonical cases of suppletion. While a handful of verbs exhibit a non-optional, genuine alternation between productive and irregular honorific forms, we put forward the novel observation that such verbs all have a monomoraic verbal stem, being subject to a general morphophonological constraint in Japanese, the monomoraic constraint, which prohibits the zero-nominalisation of verbs with monomoraic stems. Thus, the appearance of a seemingly ‘suppletive’ honorific form is merely due to independent morphophonological repair processes.

##### 4.1. Irregular honorifics as verbal substitutions

First, irregular honorific forms are optionally realised: the regular form (the productive form) is still available under the same context. Consider the verb *taberu* ‘eat’ in (34). We see that the productive honorific *o-tabe-ni naru* and the irregular honorific *meshigaru* are not in competition in each other. Both forms are felicitous for the same interpretation.

- (34) a. Sensei-wa    yuushoku-o [o-tabe-ni    nar-u].  
           professor-TOP dinner-ACC HON-eat-DAT become-NPST  
       b. Sensei-wa    yuushoku-o [meshiagar-u].  
           professor-TOP dinner-ACC eat.SH-NPST  
           ‘The professor (HON) eats dinner.’

This behaviour is unlike that of true cases of suppletion, such as the English past tense (35), where the regular form *\*tell-ed* is infelicitous, and the irregular form *told* must be realised.

- (35)    Yesterday, Bobby told / \*telled me of the news.

Thus, suppletion normally involves such cases where the irregular form is *obligatorily* real-

ized, as in (35). In this regard, the Japanese example (34) patterns away from suppletion, as the irregular form *meshiagaru* is only *optionally* realized over the productive form *o-tabe-ni-naru*. This suggests that these irregular honorifics are not true suppletions, but more like verbal substitutions.

On the other hand, some verbs seem to be genuinely suppletive in this regard: the irregular forms are obligatorily realized. Consider the verb *kuru* ‘come’ in (36), where the productive form *o-ki-ni naru* is banned, and the irregular form *irassyaru* is obligatory.

- (36) a. \*Tanaka sensei-wa kesa [o-ki-ni nar-u].  
 Tanaka professor-TOP this.morning HON-come-DAT become-NPST  
 b. Tanaka sensei-wa kesa [irassyar-u].  
 Tanaka professor-TOP this.morning come.SH-NPST  
 ‘Prof. Tanaka (HON) will come this morning.’

However, even for these cases, we argue that they are not true suppletions, but verbal substitutions. The seemingly suppletive behavior is merely due to an independent morphophonological constraint, the monomoraic constraint.

To see this, let us begin with a seemingly unrelated observation from Japanese morphophonology: zero nominalisations are infelicitous (i.e. neither a process nor a result reading is available from the resulting nominalisation) if the infinitival form of that verb is monomoraic. (Recall from §1 that infinitival forms are characterized by a final epenthetic vowel *-i* or *-e*.) This observation is illustrated below in Table 3. Non-monomoraic infinitive forms can form zero-derived nouns, that is, free nominals.

	INF	Free N
ki-ru (cut)	kiri	kiri (‘?cutting/limit’)
su-ru (scrub)	suri	suri (‘scrubbing/pickpocket’)
ne-ru (knead)	neri	neri (‘kneading/parade’)
he-ru (decrease)	heri	heri (‘decreasing’)

Table 3: Non-monomoraic infinitival forms felicitous for zero nominalisation

In contrast, monomoraic infinitive forms do not form free nominals; such infinitive forms can only appear as part of a bound nominal, as in Table 4.

	INF	Free N	Bound N
ki-ru (wear)	ki	*ki (*wearing/*cloth)	ki-mono ‘cloth garment’
su-ru (do)	si	*si (*doing/*action)	si-you ‘product specification’
ne-ru (sleep)	ne	*ne (*sleeping/*sleep)	ne-maki ‘pajamas’
he-ru (pass)	he	*he (*passing/*history)	–

Table 4: Monomoraic infinitival forms infelicitous for zero nominalisation

We formalize this observation as the following morphophonological constraint:

(37) *Monomoraic Constraint:*

Only verbs with non-monomoraic infinitival forms can be zero nominalized.

This constraint, formulated on the basis of the distribution of zero nominalisations, is in fact a more general constraint which can be extended to the distribution of irregular honorifics.

Observe that the distribution of irregular honorifics follows the same morphophonological constraint: verbs with monomoraic infinitival forms cannot enter into productive honorification strategies, and must resort to irregular honorific forms, as in Table 5. (The irregular forms are bracketed in italics. For some verbs, neither productive nor irregular forms exist.) For example, the verb *kuru* ‘to come’ has the infinitival form *ki*, which cannot enter into productive honorification due to the monomoraic constraint. Since it cannot enter into productive honorification, it has an irregular form, *irassyaru*.

	INF	Productive SH	Productive NSH
ki-ru (wear)	ki	*o- <b>ki</b> -ni-naru ( <i>o-mesi-ni-naru</i> )	*o- <b>ki</b> -suru
ku-ru (come)	ki	*o- <b>ki</b> -ni-nar-u ( <i>irassyaru</i> )	*o- <b>ki</b> -suru ( <i>mairu</i> )
su-ru (do)	si	*o- <b>si</b> -ni-naru ( <i>nasaru</i> )	*o- <b>si</b> -suru ( <i>itasu</i> )
ne-ru (sleep)	ne	*o- <b>ne</b> -ni-naru	*o- <b>ne</b> -suru
he-ru (pass)	he	*o- <b>he</b> -ni-naru	*o- <b>he</b> -suru
mi-ru (see)	mi	*o- <b>mi</b> -ni-nar-u ( <i>goran-ni-naru</i> )	*o- <b>mi</b> -suru ( <i>haiken-suru</i> )

Table 5: *Monomoraic infinitival forms infelicitous for productive honorification*

In contrast, verbs with heavier infinitival forms are perfectly happy to form their honorifics productively, as in Table 6. These verbs do not have irregular honorific forms.

	INF	Productive SH	Productive NSH
ki-ru (cut)	kiri	o- <b>kiri</b> -ni-naru	o- <b>kiri</b> -suru
su-ru (scrub)	suri	o- <b>suri</b> -ni-naru	o- <b>suri</b> -suru
ne-ru (knead)	neri	o- <b>neri</b> -ni-naru	o- <b>neri</b> -suru
he-ru (decrease)	heri	o- <b>heri</b> -ni-naru	o- <b>heri</b> -suru
chir-u (scatter)	chiri	o- <b>chiri</b> -ni-naru	o- <b>chiri</b> -suru

Table 6: *Bimoraic infinitival forms felicitous for productive honorification*

The above contrast between productive and irregular honorifics is particularly evident in pairs of verbs with identical stem forms, but differ minimally in the moraic weight of their infinitival forms. For instance, ‘to cut’ and ‘to wear’ both have the identical stem form *kiru*, but differing infinitival forms *kiri* for ‘cut’ and *ki* for ‘wear’. Consequently, only *ki*, corresponding to ‘to wear’, is ruled out for productive honorification and results in irregularity.

Our account also explains the rarity of irregular honorifics: modern Japanese only has approximately ten verbs with monomoraic infinitival forms. Indeed, these are all of the verbs which have an irregular honorific form. To our knowledge, this is the only account of irregular honorifics which explains this limited distribution.



Thus, the monomoraic constraint explains why verbs with monomoraic infinitival forms do not have productive honorific forms and resorts to irregularity. But what determines the shape of the irregular forms that *are* realised — are they completely random, in that they have no correspondence to the stem at all? For example, why does *taberu* ‘to eat’ have the irregular form *itadaku*, but not some other random form like *kabanu*?

In answer to these questions, we would like to show that the irregular forms themselves have non-honorific uses, being independent stems in their own right. Thus, irregular honorifics in Japanese are neither [HON]-conditioned suppletives, nor random forms constrained by the monomoraic constraint; rather, they are *verbal substitutions*, where one verb is merely being substituted for another as a matter of pragmatics and/or convention.

We note again that the Japanese honorification paradigm is not automatically acquired, but has to be explicitly taught. If irregular honorifics are a matter of convention, then this fact about acquisition falls out naturally.<sup>4</sup>

Verb(s)	Irregular SH form	Meaning
‘to eat, to drink’	<i>mesiagaru</i>	<i>mesu</i> + <i>agaru</i> . <i>mesu</i> : ‘to put on (years); to eat/drink; to commit (seppuku)’; <i>agaru</i> : ‘to finish’
‘to see/watch’	<i>haiken-suru</i>	<i>haiken</i> + <i>suru</i> . <i>haiken</i> : ‘to humbly visit’; <i>suru</i> : ‘to do’
‘to do’	<i>sareru</i>	Passive form of verb ‘to do’
‘to wear’	<i>o-mesi-ni naru</i>	The <i>naru</i> SH strategy applied to <i>mesu</i> ‘to wear’

Table 7: Independent meanings of SH irregular forms

Verb(s)	Irregular NSH form	Meaning
‘to go, to come’	<i>mairu</i>	‘to be defeated; to collapse; to die; to be annoyed/confused’
‘to eat, to drink’	<i>itadaku</i>	‘to humbly receive’
‘to visit, to listen’	<i>ukagau</i>	‘to implore; to seek direction (from superior); to speak to (a large crowd)’
‘to see/watch’	<i>haiken-suru</i>	<i>haiken</i> + <i>suru</i> . <i>haiken</i> : ‘to humbly visit’; <i>suru</i> : ‘to do’
‘to say’	<i>moosu</i>	Light verb in Old-Middle Japanese, not in productive use currently.
‘to do’	<i>asobasu</i>	‘to let one play; to leave idle’ (archaic)

Table 8: Independent meanings of NSH irregular forms

Tables 7-8 show that verbs are substituted for another in honorific speech.<sup>5</sup> Taking the last line of Table 7 as an example, a respectful speaker substitutes the form *haiken-suru* with the meanings ‘to make a humble visit’ for the plain form *miru* with the meanings ‘to see/watch’.

<sup>4</sup>It would be interesting to see what speakers produce when presented with a nonce monomoraic verbal form and asked to produce an honorific form for it. Would they use productive honorification strategies (violating the monomoraic constraint), or produce irregular nonce forms?

<sup>5</sup>The precise meanings of each irregular form is difficult to pin down; some forms have a range of (unrelated) meanings so we only give a selection here.

The result of this substitution is that the choice of a different verb contributes an additional layer of politeness: to see someone is quite a different matter from making a humble visit to someone. We think that this additional layer of politeness is the reason why these particular forms are chosen for subject honorific irregular forms.

Taking the first line of Table 8 as another example, a humble speaker substitutes the form *mairu* with the negatively connotations ‘to be defeated; to be annoyed/confused; to collapse; to die’ for the plain form *iku/kuru* with the meaning ‘to go/to come’. The result of this substitution is that the choice of a different verb contributes an additional layer of self-debasement: to go somewhere is yet another different matter from being defeated, being annoyed, collapsing, or dying. We think that this additional layer of self-debasement is the reason why these particular forms are chosen for non-subject honorific (i.e. self-humbling) irregular forms.

Essentially, the so-called irregular honorifics of Japanese are merely verbal substitutions, where a socially neutral verb (like ‘to see’) is substituted for another with more social connotations (like ‘to make a humble visit’).

Lastly, note that several verb pairs (namely: ‘to eat, to drink’; ‘to visit, to listen’; ‘to go, to come’) share identical irregular forms. For example, the pair of verbs ‘to eat’ and ‘to drink’ have distinct plain forms (*taberu, nomu*), but have an identical irregular NSH honorific (*itadaku*). The result is that in honorific speech, these verbs are conflated into one.

Such semantic bleaching is not a quirk of the Japanese paradigm, but is actually a typologically common feature of respect registers. Several Australian Aboriginal languages feature a distinct speech register reserved for addressing and referring to in-laws. (These are not separate languages, as they share the same syntactic and phonological structures with the everyday language.) This phenomenon is found in languages including Dyirbal, Djaru, Warlpiri, and Guugu Yimidhirr. In Guugu Yimidhirr, the verbs ‘to go’, ‘to float/sail/drift’, ‘to limp’, ‘to crawl’, ‘to paddle’, ‘to wade’ normally have distinct forms in everyday speech, but are conflated into a single form *balil* ‘go’ in mother-in-law speech (Haviland 1979).

It is notable that our account will not give any formal derivation of irregular honorifics, having shown that they are merely verbal substitutions subject to morphophonological constraints. This is because irregular honorifics are not part of the narrow syntax. Their form is determined by social convention about the pragmatics of politeness, an area where Japanese parallels avoidance phenomena in Australian languages.

#### 4.2. Productive honorifics as nominal forms

Table 6 showed that verbs with non-monomoraic infinitival forms used exactly those infinitival forms in productive honorifics. For example, *heru* ‘decrease’ has the infinitive form *heri*, which is used within its productive SH form, *o-heri-ni-naru*. (38)-(39) further illustrate that infinitive forms are used for both verbal nominalizations and productive honorifics.

- (38) *nuru* ‘paint’
- a. Urushi-no **nuri**-ga ama-i.  
lacquer-GEN paint-NOM rough-NPST  
‘The painting of the lacquer was rough.’ (nominalization)
  - b. Sensei-ga tansu-o o-**nuri**-ni nar-u.  
professor-NOM wardrobe-ACC HON-paint-DAT become-NPST

- ‘The professor (HON) paints the wardrobe.’ (productive honorification)
- (39) *kiru* ‘cut’
- a. Ki-no **kiri**-kata-ga ara-i.  
tree-GEN cut-NOMLZ-NOM rough-NPST  
‘The cutting of the tree is so rough.’ (nominalization)
- b. Sensei-ga ki-o o-**kiri**-ni nar-u.  
professor-NOM tree-ACC HON-paint-DAT become-NPST  
‘The professor (HON) cuts the tree.’ (productive honorification)

Hence, both zero-nominalization and productive honorification are governed by the same morphophonological constraint, showing that productive honorifics involve a nominalization component. If stems within honorific verbal complexes have been nominalized, it is thus expected that they obey the same morphophonological constraint as that of nouns.

Lastly, the infinitival forms are justifiably ‘infinitival’ because they are elsewhere inflectional forms. For example, they appear in the environments with intervening focus particles *mo/sae*, or the politeness marker (41). As these items intervene between the root and *v*, only the elsewhere form is available (Yoda 2013).

- (40) a. Taro-ga **kaeri**-{*mo/sae*}-shi-ta.  
Taro-NOM go.back-FOC-do-PAST  
‘Taro even returned.’
- b. **iki**-mas-u.  
go-POL-NPST  
‘(We are) going.’

For more specified environments, this infinitival form is *not* used. Within environments of negation, passivisation, or causation, another form is used instead, namely, the irrealis form, which ends in *-a*. (41) shows this for the verb *nuru* ‘paint’, where the infinitival form *nuri* is systematically banned.

- (41) *Infinitival form banned in verbal environments*
- a. Hide-ga hon-o {**nura**/\***nuri**}-nai.  
Hide-NOM book-ACC paint.IRR/INF-NEG  
‘Hide did not paint the book.’ (negative)
- b. Hon-ga {**nura**/\***nuri**}-re-ru.  
book-NOM paint.IRR/INF-PASS-NPST  
‘The book was painted.’ (passive)
- c. Watashi-wa Hide-ni hon-o {**nura**/\***nuri**}-se-ru.  
I-TOP Hide-DAT book-ACC paint.IRR/INF-CAUS-NPST  
‘I made Hide paint the book.’ (causative)

This is strongly suggestive that productive honorifics, which contain infinitival forms, occur strictly under non-verbal environments — for example, *nominal* environments. This nicely fits with the argument made in the previous section: that the so-called ‘honorific’ prefix *o-* is just a noun-selecting prefix or a low-attaching nominaliser. Together, these two observations strongly suggest that Japanese honorification involves nominalisation, an account we develop in full in the next section.

### 5. Proposal: the syntax of productive honorifics as the syntax of nominalizations

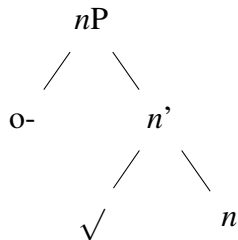
So far, we have argued that the prefix *o-* heads a nominalised verbal complex. As such, *o-* is merely a nominal prefix, not a  $\text{Hon}^0$  head, and the syntax of honorific constructions involves nominalisation. This was supported by two commonalities that honorific verbal complexes share with nominalisations: both use the infinitival form of the verbal stem, and both are governed by the morphophonological constraint.

Recall our central claim that there is no syntactic feature specialised for honorification. Honorific sentences are merely nominalizations; thus, the presence of the light verbs *naru* and *suru* in honorific verbal complexes is so that the nominalized verb can project up the functional spine of the sentence. (It is an open question as to whether the additional layer of functional structure adds periphrastic meaning characteristic of respectful speech.) We now proceed to adopt the syntax of nominalization and light verbs for honorifics.

#### 5.1. The syntax of *o-*

Based on the discussion on §3, we propose that the [*o-* +  $\text{V}_{\text{INF}}$ ] constituent is a nominalised verbal complex. The root is nominalized by a null *n*. The noun-selecting prefix *o-* is higher than this nominalized root projection (*n'*). The [*o-* +  $\text{V}_{\text{INF}}$ ] constituent is a *nP* (42).<sup>6</sup>

(42) *The honorific verbal complex as a nominalization*



Here, *o-* is a low attaching prefix in the sense that nothing can intervene between *o-* and *nP*. This supports several facts from Bobaljik & Yatsushiro (2006), which show that [*o-*+*V*] is a constituent, to the exclusion of the light verb (13)-(14). Furthermore, this renewed conception of *o-* as a noun-selecting prefix explains why *o-* is apparently optional even if the speaker wishes to express deference, as in (15). This is because *o-* is no longer the locus of honorification. Lastly, if *o-* is a noun-selecting prefix, we are also able to explain why multiple exponence of *o-* is allowed on both nominals and verbs, as was the case in (16).

#### 5.2. The syntax of *suru* and *naru*

Here, we propose that general light verb syntax in Japanese already provides what we need to account for the syntax of productive honorification. There is no special syntax for honorification — all we need is to refashion light verb syntax for our purposes.

<sup>6</sup>Alternatively, one can analyse *o-* itself as expounding the nominaliser,  $n^0$ , and this is equally available for our analysis.

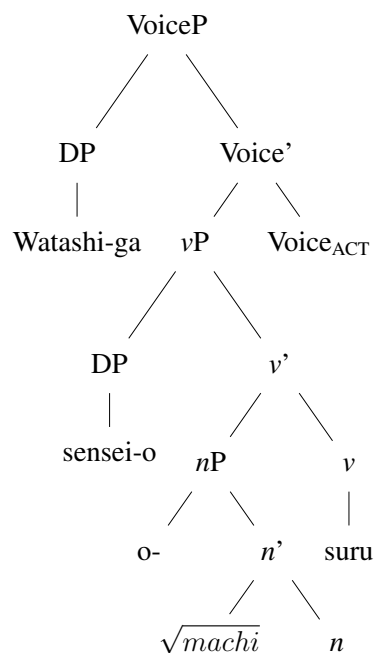
We adopt uncontroversial assumptions about the positions of objects and subjects in Japanese. Object DPs originate in Spec- $v$ P. Alternatively, it is possible to treat object DPs as the sisters of  $v$ , to which a root,  $n$  and  $o$ - adjoin via successive head movements. Note that the resulting complex head ( $[_v o- + \sqrt{\phantom{x}} + v]$ ) corresponds to classical V, and that this is just a variant of the standard assumptions for V. Subject DPs originate at Spec-VoiceP, following Kratzer (1996). Crucially, we propose derivations *without a dedicated component for honorification*, dispensing of Hon<sup>0</sup> or [HON]. We merely make use of standard assumptions about light verb constructions, the origin of the direct object, and the origin of the subject.

(43) gives a derivation of the NSH *suru* strategy. The light verb *suru* originates as a  $v$  head, taking the nominalized verbal complex  $n$ P as its complement. The object DP originates in Spec- $v$ P, and the subject DP in Spec-VoiceP. (Layers above VoiceP are omitted for exposition.)

(43) *The syntax of honorific suru*

- a. Watashi-ga sensei-o o-machi su-ru.  
 I-NOM professor-ACC HON-wait do-NPST  
 ‘I am waiting for the professor (HON).’

b.



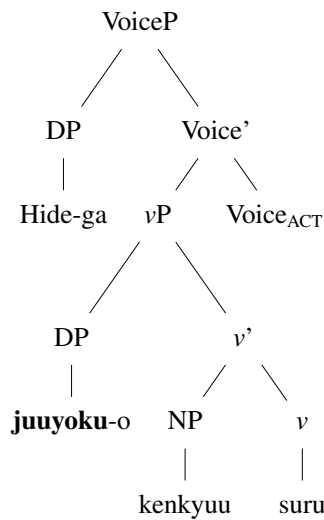
One may argue that if verbal honorification in Japanese involves light verbs, the same case-marking flexibility in light verb constructions should be observed. In its use as a light verb in *kenkyuu-suru* ‘to study’, *suru* may either assign accusative case to its direct object (44a), or genitive case to its direct object plus accusative case to its complement (44b).

(44) *Case flexibility in light verb constructions*

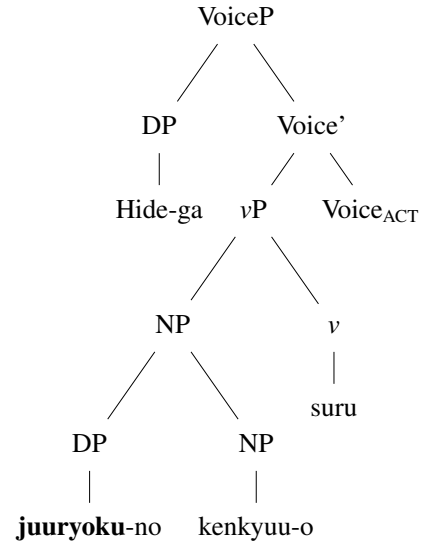
- a. Hide-ga juuryoku-o kenkyuu-si-ta. (DO-ACC N-suru)  
 Hide-NOM gravity-ACC research-do-PAST  
 ‘Hide studied gravity.’
- b. Hide-ga juuryoku-no kenkyuu-o si-ta. (DO-GEN N-ACC suru)  
 Hide-NOM gravity-GEN research-ACC do-PAST  
 ‘Hide studied gravity.’

This flexibility can be reduced to a structural difference: in (44a), the direct object *juuryoku* ‘gravity’ originates in Spec-*v*P, and is assigned accusative case by *v* in that position. In (44b), the direct object *juuryoku* ‘gravity’ originates within Comp-*v*P, and is unavailable for accusative case assignment in that position. This is because *kenkyuu* ‘research’ is an independent NP in which the direct object *juuryoku* ‘gravity’ is embedded. As a result, the accusative case is assigned to the NP *kenkyuu* ‘research’ and *juuryoku* ‘gravity’ is assigned the genitive case, just like ordinary possessor DPs.<sup>7</sup> (45) illustrates this.

(45) a. *DO-ACC N-suru*



b. *DO-GEN N-ACC suru*



Since we are assuming that the syntax of honorific *suru* is identical to the syntax of light verb *suru*, a potential problem for our analysis is that this observed case-marking flexibility does not extend to honorific uses of *suru*. Only the first case marking option (ACC to direct object) is available (46a). The second option (GEN to direct object, plus ACC to its complement) is not available (46b).

(46) *No case flexibility in honorific complexes*

- a. *Watashi-ga sensei-o o-machi su-ru.*  
 I-NOM professor-ACC HON-wait do-NPST
- b. \**Watashi-ga sensei-no o-machi-o su-ru.*  
 I-NOM professor-GEN HON-wait-ACC do-NPST  
 Intended: ‘I am waiting for the professor (HON).’

However, this asymmetry between light verb constructions and object honorification does not mean that honorific *suru* is somehow special. Rather, it means that the complements of *suru* differ across the honorific cases and the light verb cases. As we have shown in (30), *o*-headed nominals are result nominals which do not independently project argument structure. This means that they cannot be embedded in the structure (45b), which is precisely the option that allows

<sup>7</sup>We do not commit to any precise syntactic analysis of case marking in Japanese here. The point here is that accusative marked DPs receive case from the light verb *suru*, but genitive marked DPs receive case from the verbal noun *kenkyuu*. One can analyse verbal nouns as an amalgam of a root and *n*. This does not matter in our discussion of honorifics.

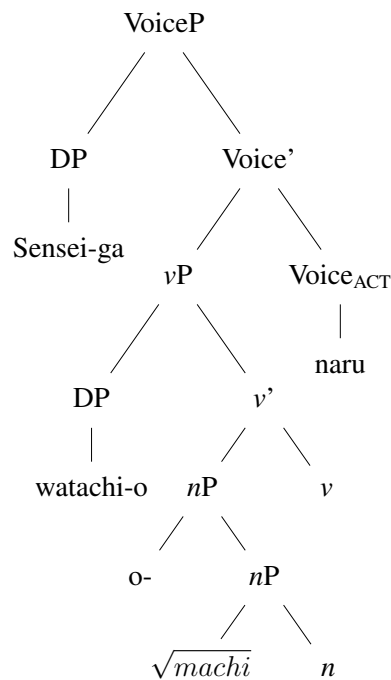
case-marking flexibility. Thus, this accounts for the rigidity of case-marking in honorifics, and further supports our conception of the [*o*-+V] constituent as a result nominal.

Now that we have provided a syntax for the *suru* honorification strategy, we turn to the *naru* strategy. In (47), we give a derivation of the SH *naru* strategy.

(47) *The syntax of honorific naru*

- a. Sensei-ga Hana-o o-machi-ni nar-u.  
 professor-NOM Hana-ACC HON-wait-DAT become-NPST  
 ‘The professor (HON) waits for Hana.’

b.



One might wonder about the status of dative case in the *naru* strategy, since it is not represented in our derivation above. We have abstracted away from the precise mechanisms of Japanese case assignment, but the presence of dative case is notable in two ways.

First, case only attaches to nouns in Japanese, supporting our claim that honorific verbal complexes are nominalizations (since dative case attaches to the nominal [*o*- + V<sub>INF</sub>] constituent, as in *o-machi-ni naru*). Second, dative case is obligatory in general uses of *naru*, not just in its honorific use. *naru* obligatorily assigns dative case in both in general uses (48) and its honorific uses (49).

- (48) a. byoki\*(-ni) nar-u  
 disease-DAT become-NPST  
 ‘to become sick, to get sick’  
 b. ki\*(-ni) nar-u  
 tree-DAT become-NPST  
 ‘to become a tree’

- (49) Sensei-ga Hana-o o-machi-\*(-ni) nar-u.  
 professor-NOM Hana-ACC HON-wait-DAT become-NPST  
 ‘The professor (HON) waits for Hana.’

This shows that the appearance of dative case is not a special effect of honorification, but ac-

companies general uses of the light verb *naru* ‘become’.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, we have re-characterized Japanese honorific verbal complexes as nominalizations, dispensing of a [HON] feature. In §3 and §4, we observed that *o-* is a noun-selecting prefix and  $V_{\text{INF}}$  is the form used for nominalizations. Building on this, the addition of the light verbs *suru* and *naru* to honorific verbal complexes is explained, because they enable the nominal [ $o$ + $V_{\text{INF}}$ ] component to project up the functional spine of the sentence as a verb. Nothing extra is needed to derive the overall shape of Japanese productive honorifics, once we conceive of honorifics as nominalizations.

## 6. Conclusion

In sum, the shape of the Japanese honorification paradigm can be explained by simply decomposing the (*r*)*are*, *suru* and *naru* strategies into their component morphemes as in (50).

- (50) a. (*r*)*are* strategy: passive marker  
 b. *suru* strategy: *o-*, nominal prefix; *suru*, light verb ‘do’  
 c. *naru* strategy: *o-*, nominal prefix; *-ni*, DAT marker; *naru*, light verb ‘become’

Crucially, this proposal eschews [HON] or any grammatical component dedicated to honorification. This move directly contradicts the longstanding analytical tradition in the literature, but we think that this is gainful in empirical, analytical, and theoretical ways.

Empirically, our proposal explains why the honorific paradigm does not exhibit typical properties of Agree (e.g. honorification is optional, does not enforce grammatical well-formedness).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the monomoraic constraint proposed for irregular honorifics in §4 explains the restrictions on their distribution: only verbal stems with monomoraic infinitival forms have irregular honorific forms.

Analytically, this proposal gives a principled explanation behind Japanese honorific phenomena. The so-called honorification strategies resemble nominalizations, precisely because they *are* nominalizations.

Theoretically, the resulting feature inventory without [HON] is a more minimal one, and suggests that the feature inventory is more economically organised (cf. Biberauer’s (2017) *Maximize Minimal Means*). Thus, nominalizing morphology is recycled for honorific meaning, precisely because nominalization *distances* the honorified referent, whether it be a subject or non-subject, from the verbal event.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many people that provided helpful and invaluable comments at all stages of this work. Above all, Wang would like to thank Nakamura, for sharing his unending well of enthusiasm and knowledge, without which nothing like this would have been possible. A huge distributive thank you to Coppe van Urk, Daniel Harbour, Angelika Kratzer, Hagit

<sup>8</sup>The light verb *naru* sometimes take a sentential complement and it is unlikely that *naru* has syntax of raising verbs. In that case, the syntax proposed above might be revised, though we do not discuss further.

<sup>9</sup>Although, the intervention effect in (11a) remains a mystery for us and many other analyses.



Borer, Yasutada Sudo, and Sam Steddy for their good questions, their wisdom, their constant encouragement, and their unending patience.

### Abbreviations

ACC accusative; CAUS causative; DAT dative; FOC focus; GEN genitive; HON honorific prefix *o-*; INF infinitival; IRR irrealis; NEG negative; NOM nominative; NOMLZ nominalizer; NPST non-past; NSH non subject honorification; PASS passive; POL polite; PAST past; SH subject honorification; TITLE title suffix; TOP topic.

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