

YOSHIHISA KITAGAWA

Yoshihisa Kitagawa joined the Department of Linguistics at Indiana University in 1994 as a heavily recruited assistant professor, having already made a name for himself in the field of generative syntax as a primary architect of the VP (verb phrase)–internal subject hypothesis, now a principle of the theory that is introduced prominently in every first-semester textbook. In the 25 years since, Yoshi has fulfilled his scholarly promise over and over again and has shaped several generations of IU syntacticians—undergraduates, graduates, and colleagues. In addition to his continued role in the development of the theory now called “minimalism,” he has left his mark on a stunning array of subfields of linguistics clustered around pure syntactic theory: the syntax-prosody interface, syntax and information structure, experimental syntax, and sentence processing. His attention to the sound/meaning interface has also led him to develop interests in phonetics, phonology, and diachronic phonology, successfully crossing an internal disciplinary line that few linguists even attempt to navigate. In all these areas, he has made significant contributions both to the advancement of our knowledge of the human language faculty and to specific areas of inquiry inside the linguistics of Japanese and English.

A native of Tokyo, Yoshi was trained as an undergraduate at San José State University and Tokyo’s International Christian University. He returned to the United States in 1981 to begin a Ph.D. program at the University of Arizona and soon moved to the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where he finished in 1986 with the influential dissertation entitled “Subjects in Japanese and English,” later published in Garland Press’s *Outstanding Dissertations in Linguistics* series in 1994. The enormous long-term impact of this work, which hypothesizes that the subject of a clause enters the syntactic derivation as part of the verb phrase before being displaced to a VP-external position, has just been recognized by its republication by Routledge in 2019. After faculty positions at UMass and the University of Rochester, Yoshi embraced midwestern life in Bloomington and immediately became well known and well loved for his introductory graduate syntax class that served students from multiple departments and was built



entirely around materials that he developed himself rather than relying on a textbook. Over the years, Yoshi has created and taught 10 different seminars for advanced Ph.D. students, in addition to a wide array of graduate and undergraduate classes in syntax, general linguistics, and Japanese linguistics. The many dissertations that he has supervised treat the syntax of varied languages such as Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and Spanish as well as Japanese. Yoshi’s mentoring of graduate students has often included presenting joint papers at prestigious conferences and continues long past their Ph.D. defenses.

To give just a limited sense of the wide-ranging topics of Yoshi’s books and articles (now numbering more than 50 with no sign of a slow-down), we will focus on the last few years. Much of Yoshi’s recent work in syntax has been concerned with how prosodic and other physical cues correlate with specific interpretive effects. For example, in joint work with Yuki Hirose, Yoshi has shown that in Tokyo Japanese, the same string of words is interpreted as either “Are you curious which sumo wrestler won?” or “Which sumo wrestler is it that you are curious whether he won?” depending on the prosody with which the sentence is uttered. This indicates an important source of cross-linguistic variation between English and Japanese in terms of how question scope is grammatically encoded, and also points toward the need for a theory of syntax that enables direct communication between a sentence’s physical form

(pronunciation) and logical form (meaning). In a related vein, in joint work with Junghyoe Yoon, Yoshi explores various physical strategies that languages use to signal that a noun phrase is to be interpreted as the direct object of a verb. In Korean, this relationship must be signaled either via adjacency of the noun phrase to the verb or via a special marker that affixes to the noun phrase, or both. Taking together these two case studies from Japanese and Korean, among others, Yoshi argues that the superficial diversity we see in these phenomena (prosody, adjacency, affixation) is underlyingly unified by their common status as physical markers of logical dependencies. In a very recent and important paper co-authored with colleague Thomas Grano, Yoshi continues this work on adjacency effects to propose that the long-mysterious EPP (extended projection principle) effects, which apparently force sentences to have subjects, derive from simultaneous physical and logical requirements placed on lexical items.

As a colleague, Yoshi will be remembered for his quiet sense of humor, for his calm and reasoned approach to any difficulty, for the thorough preparation he has brought to every meeting of the syntax (or in later years, the syntax/semantics) reading group, and for his constant encouragement of colleagues’ research and teaching. As an experimental syntactician, Yoshi is always in need of multiple native speaker judgments in various languages, and we expect to continue to be consulted!

Yoshi looks forward to a slightly more relaxed pace in retirement and time to spend with his wife, Isoko, whose love and support over the past 50 years he deeply appreciates, and their family.

Barbara Vance
Tom Grano