

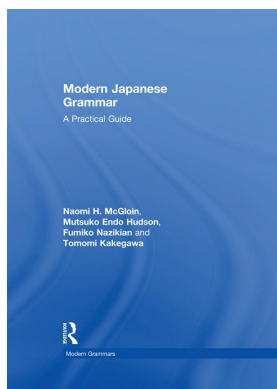
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## **Modern Japanese Grammar A Practical Guide**

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### **Relative (noun modifying) clauses**

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# 25

## Relative (noun modifying) clauses

A sentence can modify a noun, and in such a case, the noun is called the ‘head’ and the sentence the ‘relative clause.’

### 25.1 Features of Japanese relative clauses

Relative clauses in Japanese have the following characteristics.

1. The predicate of a relative clause is in the plain form.
2. A relative clause precedes its head noun.
3. There are no relative pronouns such as ‘who,’ ‘which,’ and ‘that’.

In the following examples, relative clauses are indicated by [ ] and the head noun is underlined.

- (a) [あそこにいる] 人は田中さんです。  
**[Asoko ni iru] hito wa Tanaka-san desu.**  
 The person who is there is Mr/Ms Tanaka.
- (b) [母が作る] カレーはおいしいです。  
**[Haha ga tsukuru] karee wa oishii desu.**  
 The curry that my mother makes is tasty.
- (c) [日本人がバレンタインデーに贈り物をあげる] 人は恋人に限られていません。  
**[Nihonjin ga Barentaindee ni okurimono o ageru] hito wa koibito ni kagirarete imasen.**  
 The people to whom the Japanese give presents on Valentine’s Day are not limited to their sweethearts.

In most cases the head noun has a grammatical relation with the predicate of its relative clause. For example, in (a), the head noun **hito** ‘person’ is the subject of the verb **iru** ‘to exist’ as in **hito ga asoko ni iru** ‘There is a person over there.’ In (b), **karee** ‘curry’ is the direct object of the verb **tsukuru** ‘to make’ as in **haha ga karee o tsukuru** ‘My mother makes curry.’ In (c), **hito** ‘person’ is the indirect object of **ageru** ‘to give’ as in **Nihonjin ga Barentaindee ni hito ni okurimono o ageru** ‘The Japanese give gifts to people on Valentine’s Day.’

Another characteristic of a Japanese relative clause is that the particle **ga** can be optionally changed to **no**.

- 母の作るカレーはおいしいです。  
**Haha no tsukuru karee wa oishii desu.**  
 The curry that my mother makes is tasty.

最近日本語のできる外国人が増えた。

**Saikin Nihongo no dekiru gaikokujin ga fueta.**

In recent years, the number of foreigners who speak Japanese has increased.

NOTE

If the particle **wa** appears in a relative clause, its function is contrastive, not indicating a topic.

[人の前では言えない] ことも家族には言える。

**[Hito no mae de wa ienai] koto mo kazoku ni wa ieru.**

Even things I can't say in public, I can tell my family.

▶ 27.4.1

## 25.2

## Gapless relative clauses

Japanese has another type of relative clause where there is no specific grammatical relation between the head noun and the predicate in the relative clause.

(d) 魚を焼くにおい

**sakana o yaku nioi**

the smell of fish being grilled. / Lit. the smell that someone grills fish.

(e) ピアノをひいている音

**piano o hiite iru oto**

the sound of (someone) playing the piano. / Lit. the sound that (someone) is playing the piano.

(f) 触った感じ

**sawatta kanji**

the feeling one gets by touching. / Lit. the feeling that (someone) has touched.

In (d), for example, the head noun **nioi** 'smell' does not bear any grammatical relation (such as subject, object, direction, etc.) to the verb **yaku** 'to grill, bake.' Rather, **nioi** is something which is produced as a result of what is described in the relative clause. Similarly, in (f), the head noun **kanji** 'feeling' is what is brought about as a result of touching (something). In this type of relative clause, there is a semantic/pragmatic connection between the head and the relative clause.