Epistemic ‘determiner’ outside nominal projections in Japanese

1. Introduction
In Japanese, indefinite pronouns, semantically related to another NP, can appear in a preverbal position: for example, in (1), dare-ka ‘someone’ is related to a distant case-marked NP, otokonoko ‘boy’:

(1) otokonoko-ga sokoni dare-ka imase-n-ka ? (Kamio 1973: 83)

‘Is there some boy or other there?’

This study aims to shed new light on the syntax and semantics of nominal quantification in Japanese, by showing (i) that such floating indefinites are syntactically base generated as adjunct to a verbal projection, just like an adverb, and (ii) that they may be analyzed semantically as parallel to an epistemic determiner, quelqu’ in French, conveying the speaker’s ignorance about the identity of the referent (Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2003).

2. Syntaxe
Kamio (1973) observes that floating indefinites manifest similar distributions to floating numerals, as futa-ri ‘two-Classifier’ in (2a,b). Two competing views have been proposed for the syntax of floating numerals: (i) the adverb view which assumes that they are base generated as VP adjunct, like in (2a); (ii) the stranding view according to which, in the underlying structure, they are mutually c-commanded by the related case-marked NP, and are left behind after its movement, as in (2b):

(2a) otokonoko-ga sokoni [vp futa-ri [vp imase]]-n-ka ?

‘Are there two boys there?’

(2b) otokonoko-ga sokoni [tks] [futa-ri] [vp imase]-n-ka ?

In favor of the stranding view, the following restrictions on floating numerals have been argued: (i) VP adverbs cannot intervene between them and the related subject NP; (ii) they cannot be related to a NP within another NP; (iii) an object NP cannot intervene between them and the related subject NP. Nakanishi (2008) however points out systematic counterexamples to these generalizations, as in (3a,b,c), and further observes that floating numerals require a distributive reading, which consists in counting the number of events, and thus supports the adverb view:

(3a) kodomo-ga [vp butai-de [vp zyuu-nin odotta]]. (Nakanishi 2008 : 294)

‘Ten children danced at the stage separately.’

b. Ano isya- wa [vp zidoo-no me]-o sanzyuu-nin sirabeta. (ibid.)

‘That doctor examined thirty pupils’ eyes’

c. kesa- gakusee-ga sore-o go-nin katteitta. (adapted from Nakanishi: 295)

‘Five students separately bought it this morning’

As shown in (4a,b,c), floating indefinites behave in the same way as floating numerals in (3a,b,c):

(4a) kodomo-ga [vp butai-de [vp dare-ka odotta]]-rassii

‘I heard that that trainer of a high school baseball team had beaten some player or other on the head’

b. Ano kookooyakyuu- no kantoku-wa [vp sensyu-no kao]-o dare-ka nagutta-rassii. [\complex NP]

‘I heard that that trainer of a high school baseball team had beaten some player or other on the head’

c. gakusee-ga sore-o dare-ka katteitta-rassii.

‘I heard that that student or other had bought it’

The adverb view is further supported by the following observation. Cheng (2009) argues that dǒu in Chinese, as in (5a), is a definite determiner providing contextual domain restriction for strong determiners, and that it occupies a DP external (VP adjoined) position. In favor of the adverb view, she points out that a single dǒu may be related to each of the conjoined strong DPs, as in (5a). Similarly, in (5b), a single floating indefinite, nani-ka ‘something’, may be related to each of the conjoined NPs, okasi ‘cake’ and nomimono ‘drink’, as shown by the translation:

(5a) Dàpùfèn de xuéshèng hé nǐ-ge làoSǐ dǒu zǎo dào. (Cheng 2009: 68)

Most of student and every-Cl. teacher DOU early arrive

‘Most of the students and all the teachers arrived early.’
b. [okasi to nomimono]-o watasi-ni nani-ka kudasai. (adapted from Kamio 1973: 83)
cake and drink -A CC me-DAT something give ‘Give me some cake or other and some drink or other’

3. Semantics
Semantically, floating indefinites (i) convey, as noted above, the speaker’s ignorance, as well as an epistemic
determiner quelque in French (and probably un quelque in Italian and algún in Spanish). Thus, in a context where
the speaker can naturally obtain direct information about the referent, as in (6a,b), these two expressions are deviant:
(6a). ?? Hier, j’ai rencontré quelque amie. (Jayez & Tovena 2008: 1)
‘Yesterday, I met some friend or other.’
(6b). ?? watasi-wa tomodati-ga kokode dare-ka odoru- no- o mita.
I- TOP friend NOM here someone dance-COMP-ACC-saw ‘I saw some friend or other dance there’
Moreover, both of them (ii) manifest Free Choice reading in modal contexts, as in (7a,b), (iii) never take narrow
scope under a clause mate negation, as in (8a,b), and (iv) allow an extensional narrowing of alternative domain, as in
(9a,b), which suggests that they evoke extensional alternatives. These four similarities indicates that Japanese
floating indefinites can be analyzes semantically in a parallel way to the French epistemic determiner quelque.

(7a). Il faut avoir quelque protecteur à la cour. (van de Velde 2000: 256)
‘We must have some protector or other at the Court (anyone is ok)’
You-TOP drink- ACC something buy-may what-even good ‘You may buy some drink: any choice is ok’
(8a). *Je n’ai pas mangé quelque pomme. (Corblin 2004: 101)  [*Neg > quelque]
‘I did not eat some apple’
(8b). Taro-wa nomimono-o nani-ka kawa-nakatta [ ∨ nani-ka > Neg / *Neg > nani-ka]
Taro-TOP drink- Acc what-or buy-didn’t ‘There is some drink or other that Taro didn’t buy’
(9a). Yoronda a probablement rencontré quelque amie qui n’était pas Marie.  [domain narrowing]
‘Yodonda probably met some friend or other, who was not Mary’ (Jayez & Tovena 2008: 7)
(9b). gakusee-ga kinoo dare-ka kita ga sore-wa Taro-de-wa-nai. [domain narrowing]
student-Nom yesterday who-or came but it-TOP Taro-be-TOP-Neg
‘Some student or other came yesterday, but it was not Taro’

(10) (Mary came) ∨ (John came) ∨ … (student n came) [student n ≠ Taro]  (for (9b))
Aloni (2006) suggests that the ignorance reading of epistemic determiners is derived from a disjunction of relevant
alternative propositions, by way of Grician Quantity Principle: the fact that the speaker asserts a disjunction
conversationally implicates that she doesn’t know the truth of each disjunct which is more informative than the
whole disjunction. Inspired by this analysis and taking into account that Japanese indefinites (ex. dare-ka
‘someone’) include, besides a WH word (ex. dare ‘who’), a disjunction marker –ka ‘or’, I argue that the semantics
of floating indefinites consists of inducing a disjunction of alternative propositions, as in (10). Gil & Tsoulas (2009)
argue that in East Asian languages, nominal quantification may be effectuated in the verbal domain. As noted above,
Cheng (2009) claims that dōu in Chinese is a DP-external definite determiner. In the same vein, this study proposes
to analyze Japanese floating indefinites as indefinite (epistemic) determiners outside nominal projections.

Reference
expression in Chinese, in A. Giannakidou & M. Rathert (eds), Quantification, Definiteness & Nominalization: 53-75; Corblin, F.
Issues in quantification and DP/QP structure in Korean and Japanese, in Giannakidou & Rathert (eds): 133-159; Jayez, J. &
Tovena, L. 2008, Many facets of a determiner: quelque, handout of a talk given at ESSLLI’08 Workshop on Free choiceness:
facts, models and problems; Kamio, A. 1973, Observations on Japanese Quantifiers, Descriptive and Applied Linguistics 6: