Two Different Superlative(-like) Morphemes and Their Semantic Behaviors in Japanese

It is a well-known fact that an English superlative sentence such as *John climbed the highest mountain* allows two types of reading: (i) a reading where mountain climbers' achievements of climbing high mountains are compared; (ii) a reading where the heights of mountains that John climbed are compared. Based on Szabolcsi's (1986) and Heim's (1985) analyses that *-est* is a degree quantifying operator which can take different scopes in a sentence, Aihara (2009) argues that the expressions *ichiban* and *mottomo* (intentionally glossed *-est*) correspond to English *-est* and that they move in a sentence to take different scopes, as follows.

(1) a. John-ga {ichiban/mottomo} takai yama-ni nobot-ta.

John-Nom -est high mountain-to climb-Past

(reading (i/ii))

b. {Ichiban/mottomo} John-ga takai yama-ni nobot-ta.

-est John-Nom high mountain-to climb-Past

(reading (i) only)

"John climbed the highest mountains"

Apparently, however, the above Japanese superlative morphemes have different morphological shapes and they do not always appear in the same syntactic/semantic context, as in (2), which suggests that two superlative morphemes comes with different semantics.

- (2) Context: A mountain climbing competition was held yesterday.

 I report who was the best climber.
 - a. Taro-ga ichiban dat-ta.
 b. *Taro-ga mottomo dat-ta.
 Taro-Nom. -est be-Past Taro-Nom. -est be-Past "Taro was the best."

In this talk, I deepen the analysis of Japanese superlatives by examining how different semantics of *ichiban* and *mottomo* fares with the analysis of plural superlatives and of NPI licensing under superlative constructions.