

Accusative Case without Agree*

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1 Introduction

Since Chomsky (2000), Case assignment via Agree has been widely assumed, and Japanese is no exception in this respect (Hiraiwa 2005, Nomura 2005, Takahashi 2011 and Ura 2007). However, there is another strategy to assign a case (not a Case) to a DP, which is also widely discussed since Marantz (1992). Namely, case assignment is purely morphological, consulting c-command relations of multiple DPs in a given case-competition domain. The aim of this paper is rather modest: we will argue that the morphological approach to case assignment is needed at least for a certain set of Japanese adjectives whose (theme) argument can bear an accusative case.

2 Accusative Case and Adjectives

Adjectives like *suki-da* ‘be fond (of)’ or *kirai-da* ‘be averse (to)’, which Nishiyama (1999) calls Nominal Adjectives (NAs), allow their theme argu-

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ment to get an accusative case when embedded in a relative clause as in (1a), or an embedded question as in (1b). However, as (1c) shows, it sounds very awkward in the matrix context.

- (1) a. [Taroo-ga Hanako-{o/?ga} suki-na] riyuu-wa
 Taro-NOM Hanako-ACC/NOM fond-COP.ADN reason-TOP
 nani.
 what
 ‘What is the reason why Taro likes Hanako?’
- b. Boku-wa [Taroo-ga Hanako-{o/?ga}
 I-TOP Taro-NOM Hanako-ACC/NOM
 suki(-na-no)-ka] sit-tei-ru.
 fond-COP.ADN-NMLZ-Q know-ASP-PRES
 ‘I know if Taro likes Hanako.’
- c. Taroo-wa Hanako-{ga/??o} suki-da.
 Taro-TOP Hanako-NOM/ACC fond-COP.PRES
 ‘Taro likes Hanako.’

Fukuda (2020) recently discusses similar cases, arguing that a Voice that can assign an accusative Case is possible for a certain set of adjectives including *suki-da* and *kirai-da*, and he gives (2). We do not find the accusative option in (2) as bad as that in (1c), although it sounds a bit unnatural to us.

- (2) Sono otokonoko-wa ano on’nanoko-{ga/o} {suki/kirai}-da-ta.
 this boy-TOP that girl-NOM/ACC like/dislike-COP-PAST
 ‘This {liked/disliked} that girl.’ (Fukuda 2020:133)

Then, we raise two questions: (i) why in the first place the accusative option becomes available for a certain set of adjectives and (ii) why there is a variety in judgment, especially with or without embedding. If one wants to stick to any Agree-based approach like Fukuda (2020), s/he has to assume that Agree becomes possible when a given adjective is embedded, which seems unattractive. We thus propose a different approach without Agree.

3 Proposal

To explain the above examples, we propose with Baker (2015), Bobaljik (2008) and Marantz (1992) among others that the accusative case can be assigned as a morphological case post-syntactically. To be more specific, we argue with Baker and Vinokurova (2010) that NAs, composed of a nominal stem and a copula, constitute a phase, and that morphological case assignment is carried out on the Spell-Out basis (Baker 2015). Also notable is the fact that when the accusative case is chosen (or preferred) the case on the subject is nominative as (1a) and (1b) illustrate, so we argue that the nomina-

tive subject stays inside the copular VP, and the topic-marked subject moves to Spec-TP (Miyagawa 2009). Then, (1a)/(1b) and (1c) are structured as (3a) and (3b), respectively.

- (3) a. $[\text{TP } \underbrace{[\text{VP Taro-NOM Hanako-}\{\text{ACC/?NOM-}\} \text{fond-be }]}_{\text{Spell-Out Domain} \approx \text{Case Competition Domain}}] \text{ reason/Q}$
 ...
 b. $[\text{TP Taro-TOP } \underbrace{[\text{VP Hanako-}\{\text{NOM/??ACC-}\} \text{fond-be }]}_{\text{Spell-Out Domain} \approx \text{Case Competition Domain}}]]$

In (3a), the subject and the object are in the same Spell-Out domain; we assume that Spell-Out applies to the entire VP, not the complement of VP, at least for morphological Spell-Out (Fox and Pesetsky 2005). In contrast, in (3b), the subject moves to Spec-TP, so that the subject and the object do not share the same Spell-Out domain, so a nominative case is assigned to the object; following Baker (2015), we assume that the nominative case is assigned via Agree with T (Chomsky 2000), and that VP is still visible syntactically (Fox and Pesetsky 2005). In this way, the proposed analysis explains the contrast between (1a)/(1b) and (1c).

Note that (1a) and (1b) still somehow allow a nominative case on the object. This means that T can also Agree with it. Thus, the object gets both accusative and nominative cases, so we assume that either of them will morphologically surface. The slight deviancy of the nominative object in (1a) and (1b) should be the ambiguity of which person is the subject/object of the sentence. If we replace the object by an inanimate one, the nominative option becomes perfect.

- (4) [Taroo-ga eego-no benkyoo-{o/ga} suki-na]
 Taro-NOM English-GEN study-ACC/NOM fond-COP.ADN
 riyuu-wa nani.
 reason-TOP what
 ‘What is the reason why Taro likes studying English?’

Relevant to this sort of multiple case-assignment to a single DP, there are cases where both case morphemes can show up, as we will see in Section 4.2.

4 Consequences

4.1 Topicalized Subject and Accusative Object

As (1c) shows, the accusative option is not totally ungrammatical, and speakers exhibit variation in its acceptability. Relevant to this point, (2) sounds much better than (1c). However, if we put a stress on the object to highlight the person who Taro likes (e.g. in comparison to others), the following sentence with an accusative object becomes better:

- (5) Taroo-wa Hiroko-zya-na-ku Hanako-{ga/?o} kokoro-no
 Taro-TOP Hiroko-COP-NEG-ADV Hanako-NOM/ACC heart-GEN
 soko-kara suki-da.
 bottom-from fond-COP.PRES
 ‘Taro like Hanako, not Hiroko, from his heart.’

In this connection, the object in (2) has a demonstrative, so that it is specific/definite. Then, suppose that definiteness and (contrastive) focushood require (or at least prefer) object shift (cf. Lasnik 1995). Then, the object in (2) and (5) moves out of VP, so even if the subject moves to Spec-TP, both of them are in the same Spell-Out domain, hence the accusative case on the object.

4.2 Case-stacking

In our analysis, the object gets a case (accusative) and a Case (nominative). Although rare, there are languages where multiple cases appear on one DP (Levin 2017, Pesetsky 2013, Richards 2013), and Japanese also allows case-stacking when a given DP bears a focus particle *-dake* ‘only’.

- (6) ?Taroo-wa Hanako-o-dake-ga suki-da.
 Taro-TOP Hanako-ACC-only-NOM fond-COP.PRES
 ‘Taro likes only Hanako.’

Though not all Japanese speakers accept case-stacking, we find (6) marginally possible. The morphological order between two *c*/Case particles is determined by the order of their assignments: let us assume that *-dake* can be late-inserted (Shibata 2015), and that the source of the nominative Case is *C* (cf. Chomsky 2008, Johnson 1991). Under our analysis, (6) is structured as follows:

- (7) $[_{CP} [_{TP} \text{Taroo-TOP Hanako-ACC } [_{VP} \text{fond-be }]]] C_{[NOM]}]$
 Spell-Out Domain \approx Case Competition Domain

In (7), the entire TP constitutes a Spell-Out domain and hence a case competition domain, and *Taro* *c*-commands *Hanako*, so that the latter gets a morphological accusative case. However, TP is still available syntactically. Therefore, *only* can be late-inserted, and a nominative Case can be assigned to the object via Agree as in (8). When CP is Spelled-Out, we get case-stacking in (6). Probably, this sort of complex procedure leads to the somewhat degraded grammaticality of case-stacking.

- (8) $[_{CP} [_{TP} \text{Taroo-TOP Hanako-ACC-only-NOM } [_{VP} \text{fond-be }]]] C_{[NOM]}]$
 ↑
 Agree

4.3 Accusative Object in Matrix Clause

Interestingly, even in the matrix context, we can have an accusative case when the subject bears a nominative Case as in (9), where the nominative option for the object sounds awkward. This means that the subject stays inside the copular VP, so that case competition applies, leading to an accusative case on *Hanako*.¹

- (9) Dare-ga Hanako-{o/?ga} suki-na-no.
who-NOM Hanako-ACC/NOM fond-COP.ADN-Q
'Who likes Hanako?'

4.4 Canonical Adjectives and Accusative Object

In (10), we have *kowa-i* '(be) afraid', one of the Canonical Adjectives (Nishiyama 1999). Even if embedded, an accusative object still sounds difficult.

- (10) [Taroo-ga hebi-{ga/??o} kowa-i] riyuu-wa nani.
Taro-NOM snake-NOM/ACC afraid-PRES reason-TOP what
'What is the reason why Taro is afraid of snakes?'

For (10), it may be possible to buy the idea by Baker (2015) and Landau (2009) that the experiencer subject is covertly a PP, i.e. [_{PP} DP P]. Thus, the subject DP, contained in the PP structure, does not c-command the object DP. In fact, the experiencer can be a dative subject (cf. Ura 2000):

- (11) [Taroo-ni hebi-{ga/*o} kowa-i] riyuu-wa nani.
Taro-DAT snake-NOM/ACC afraid-PRES reason-TOP what
'What is the reason why Taro is afraid of snakes?'

However, a quick Google search brings us quite a few examples with an accusative object such as the following:

- (12) a. [dansei-ga unten-o kowa-i] riyuu to gen'in
guy-NOM driving-NOM afraid-PRES reason and cause
'(the) reason and cause due to which guys are afraid of driving'
b. [hoikusi-ga tensyoku-o kowa-i
nursery.school.teacher-NOM change.of.job-ACC afraid-PRES
] riyuu
reason
'(the) reason why nursery school teachers are afraid of changing
their jobs'

¹ Another possibility to analyze (9) is to assume with Shimoyama (2001) that *-no* is not an interrogative complementizer but a usual nominalizing suffix, and that there is a hidden structure that is responsible for the interrogative interpretation.

This may imply that there are speakers who still realize their experiencer argument as a DP.

5 Reconsidering Fukuda (2020)

As we noted above, Fukuda (2020) claims that there are kinds of NAs in Japanese that are selected by a Voice. Therefore, an accusative object is possible. He, however, assumes two types of Voice: one that assigns an accusative Case, and the other that does not assign the relevant Case. This is because there are NAs that obligatorily select an accusative object or nominative object. For example, Fukuda mentions NAs that he calls the verbal noun (VN) and the deverbal noun (DN). Observe:

- (13) a. Taroo-wa yooroppa-{o/*ga} hoomon-da.
Taro-TOP Europe-ACC/NOM visit-COP.PRES
'Taro will visit Europe.'
b. Koko-de renta-kaa-{o/*ga} uketori-datta.
this.place-at rent-a-car-ACC/NOM receipt-COP.PAST
'(I) received a rental car here.'
(Fukuda 2020:139)
- (14) a. Taroo-wa Hanako-{ga/*o} simpai-da
Taro-TOP Hanako-NOM/ACC worry-COP.PRES
'Taro is worried about Hanako.'
b. Taroo-wa Hanako-{ga/*o} meewaku-da
Taro-TOP Hanako-NOM/ACC bothersome-COP.PRES
'Taro found Hanako bothersome.'
(Fukuda 2020:139)

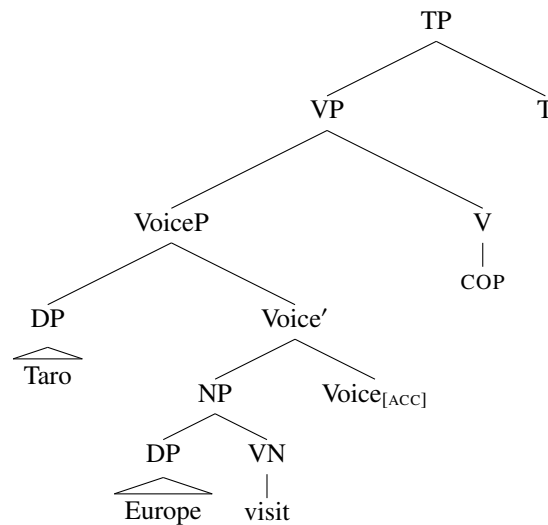
In (13), the nominative option is bad whereas the accusative one is excluded in (14).

However, when we embed the NAs in (14), the accusative object in fact sounds more natural.

- (15) a. [Taroo-ga Hanako-{o/?ga} simpai-na] riyuu-wa
Taro-TOP Hanako-ACC/NOM worry-COP.ADN reason-TOP
nani.
what
'What is the reason why Taro is worried about Hanako?'
b. [Taroo-ga Hanako-{o/?ga} meewaku-na]
Taro-TOP Hanako-ACC/NOM bothersome-COP.ADN
riyuu-wa nani
reason-TOP what
'What is the reason why Taro found Hanako bothersome?'

Therefore, contra Fukuda's observation, the accusative object is still possible for the adjectives in (14). In contrast, the issue (13) poses to us is not the same as what we have just seen regarding (14), since the accusative object is obligatory even if the subject is topic-marked. Then, we may assume with Fukuda that there is a Voice that assigns an accusative Case as in (16). This analysis does not hinge on anything but only on the Voice that has [ACC] for its Case specification. Then, what is predicted is that even if we take the copular V and T away from (16), the accusative object is possible. This however seems impossible as in (17).

(16)



(based on Fukuda 2020:140)

- (17) [Taroo-{no/*ga} yooroppa-{no/*o} hoomon]-ga
 Taro-GEN/NOM Europe-GEN/NO visit -NOM
 hookoku-s-are-ta.
 report-do-PASS-PAST
 'That Taro visited Europe was reported.'

Fukuda is, in a sense, aware of this issue, since he cites a similar example from Tsujimura (1992). However, his analysis in (16) does not say anything about how to exclude (17). One way to supplement his analysis in this respect is to assume with Kishimoto (2006) that licensing an accusative Case requires the presence of T, and the presence of the copula *-da* indicates that T is involved in the structure.

However, there is still another issue. As Kageyama (1982) and Tsujimura (1992) among others point out and Fukuda himself provides the relevant data,

the accusative object is possible in the following example:

- (18) John-wa gakui-o syutoku-go nihon-e ki-ta.
John-TOP degree-ACC obtaining-after Japan-to come-PAST
'John came to Japan after obtaining his degree.' (Fukuda 2020:130)

This example is not considered to involve any instances of T, unless we assume some covert one. Should we do so, we would be challenged by the ungrammaticality of (19).

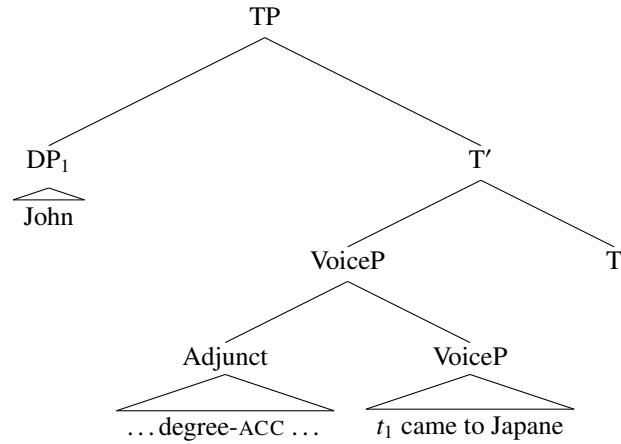
- (19) [Hakase-no gakui-{no/*o} syutoku-go]-ga
Ph.D.-GEN degree-GEN/ACC obtaining-after -NOM
daizi-da.
important-COP.PRES
'It is important what we will do after obtaining a Ph.D. degree.'

In (18), the accusative object appears in the adjunct whereas in (19) it is inside the argument, i.e. the subject. It should be very speculative and ad hoc if we assume that a covert T is possible for the former but not for the latter. Therefore, it should be safe to assume that there is no TP projected when a copula is not present,² and that the grammaticality of (18) has a different source. Then, we suggest that our analysis based on morphological case may come to the rescue. To be specific, the relevant adjunct items are visible for the c-command relation, so that the accusative object will be licensed as in (20), where the embedded object is c-commanded by the matrix subject. Admittedly, this possibility needs to be elaborated more, but we suggest that this may constitute another case where we need the morphological licensing of an accusative case.

² *Syutoku* 'obtaining' can be followed by *-da*, and its object must be marked by an accusative case.

- (i) Taroo-wa kotosi hakase-no gakui-{o/*ga} syutoku-da.
Taro-TOP this.year Ph.D.-GEN degree-ACC/NOM obtaining-COP.PRES
'Taro will obtain his Ph.D. degree this year.'

(20)



6 Conclusion

We have seen that there are NAs that can license an accusative case, which is contingent on whether a given NA is embedded or not. This disparity should not be understood in terms of the availability or unavailability of Agree as we have argued. Rather, morphological case assignment can explain the relevant data, and there should be at least two modes of realizing an accusative case morphologically: the accusative “Case” and “case”.

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