Case without φ-feature agreement: Nominative case in Japanese

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In minimalist theorizing case is regarded as a reflex of φ-feature agreement, but it is still not clear how to deal with agreement-LESS languages like Japanese. Detail investigation on Japanese, however, reveals that Focus-head in the CP-periphery has significant bearing upon nominative case. Our goal is to claim that Japanese Nominative is licensed by Foc^0, contra the obstinate hypothesis of Licensing by T-head and Baker's (2015) dependent case assignment.

Our claim is supported by the observation on *KARA* Reason Clauses (KRC).

(1) Taro-wa   ame-ga   yanda-kara Ken-ga/-no   asonde-iru

    Taro-Top rain-Nom   stopped-because Ken-Nom/-Gen   play-be

    kooen-ni itta.

    park-to   went

"Taro went to the park where Ken was playing because it stopped raining."

In the pre-nominal clause (PNC) with Nominative subject, the sentence is ambiguous (either SEE > BECAUSE or PLAY > BECAUSE), while in the PNC with Genitive subject only the one interpretation (SEE > BECAUSE) is possible. This is because PNCs with Genitive subjects lack Foc^0, which means RCs must be licensed by Foc^0. (See Miyagawa (2011) and Akaso & Haraguchi (2011) on the clause-sizes of PNC, and Kawamura (2008) on the connection between Foc^0 and RCs in English.) On the other hand, PNCs with Nominative subjects are equipped with FocP, which makes the other interpretation possible: the association of KRCs to them. It follows that Foc^0 is responsible for Nominative.

Further evidence can be observed in Japanese long-distance scrambling to post-subject position (LSPS). Saito (1985) claims that LSPS shows different grammaticality between out of finite clauses and out of non-finite clauses, as in (2).

(2) a. ??John-ga   sono hon$_i$-o minna-ni   Mary-ga t_i motteiru to itta.

        John-Nom   the book-Acc everyone-Dat Mary-Nom   have   that told

        "John told everyone that Mary has the book."

     b. Mary-ga   sono hon$_i$-o   Bill-ni   PRO t_i yomu yooni itta.

        Mary-Nom   the book-Acc   Bill-Dat   read   to   told.

        "Mary, the book, told Bill to read."

In addition, Hasegawa (1984) argues that a lexical subject may appear in a control construction, such as (3a). But LSPS makes the sentence worse, as illustrated in (3b).

(3) a. ? Taro-ga Hanako-ni   [ryoosin-ga okane-o   siharau yooni]   meijita.

        Taro-Nom Hanako-Dat   parents-Nom money-Acc pay   to   ordered

        "Taro told Hanako that her parents should pay the money."

     b. ??/*Taro-ga okane-o$_i$ Hanako-ni   [ryoosin-ga t_i siharau yooni] meijita.

        Taro-Nom   money-Acc Hanako-Dat parents-Nom pay   to   ordered

These observations lead us to the generalization that LSPS depends on the presence/absence of a lexical subject, which is nominative case-marked.

Assuming that scrambling is focus-driven (cf. Nakamura (2008) etc.), we propose that scrambled phrases containing [+focus] should be attracted by the nearest Foc^0 to satisfy the Focus Criterion in Spec, FocP. Given that the categorial status of -*YOONI* clause to be a FinP, scrambled phrases in (2a) and (3b)are to be licensed at Spec, FocP, and they cannot move further because of Criterial Freezing. On the other hand, typical control clauses such as (2b) are FinP without higher heads including Foc^0. Then scrambled phrases are licensed not at the periphery of the control clause, but at the next focus site: the post-subject position. If Nominative case were licensed by T, instead of Foc^0, it would be hard to explain the contrast between (2b) and (3b).

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