

A Note on Case and Interpretation of Object NPs*

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1. Introduction

This paper explores the correlation between the use of the Accusative Case marker and the interpretation of the object NP in Japanese and gives empirical support to the idea proposed in Runner (1993, 1998) that a particular semantic type of object NP is interpreted in the syntactic position where the Accusative Case is licensed. Section 2 reviews the past literature on the correlation between the Case-marker and the interpretation of NPs. Section 3 illustrates the proposal of Runner (1993, 1998) on the syntactic mechanism of licensing and interpreting NPs. Sections 4 and 5 discuss some facts in Japanese to provide empirical support for the proposal.

2. Case-marking and Strong/Weak Interpretation

The correlation between the overt Case-marker on an NP and its interpretation has been pointed out in the literature. Enç (1991) points out the phenomenon in Turkish where the use of the Accusative Case marker *-i* on an object NP makes the NP a “strong” QP, while the absence of the marker makes it a “weak” QP:¹

- (1) a. *İki kız-i taniyordum.*
two girl-Acc I-knew
'I knew two of the girls'
b. *İki kız taniyordum.*
two girl I-knew
'I knew two girls' (Enç (1991))

As Enç observes, the object NP *kız-i* in (1a) has the strong reading since it refers to a subset of the set of girls previously established in the discourse. On the other hand, the object NP without the Case-marker in (1b) (*kız*) has a weak interpretation in the sense that it refers to a set of entities that are newly introduced in the discourse.

As Enç also points out, the NPs that are necessarily strong cannot drop its Case-marker:

- (2) a. *Ali her kitab-i okudu*
Ali every book-ACC read
'Ali read every book'

- b. *Ali her kitab okudu (ibid.)

The universal QP *her kitab-i* is necessarily strong since it ranges over a set previously established in the discourse.

A similar fact in Finnish about the correlation between the presence/absence of a Case-marker and NP interpretation is pointed out in de Hoop (1992):

- (3) a. Ostin leivän
I-bought bread-Acc
'I bought the bread'
b. Ostin leipää
I-bought bread-Part
'I bought (some) bread' (de Hoop (1992) (cited in Runner (1993))

As with the Turkish examples in (1-2), the use of the Accusative Case marker on the object NP makes the referent of the NP associated to the entity of bread previously established in the discourse, while the use of the other form of Case-marker makes the referent unrelated to the previous discourse.

3. Mapping Hypothesis and Case-checking

Runner (1993, 1998) makes an attempt to capture the above correlation between the presence/absence of a Case-marker and the strong/weak interpretation of QPs. He assumes Chomsky's (1992) Case-checking theory and proposes that the syntactic position, namely [Spec Agr-oP], to which the object NP moves for Case-checking is also the position where a strong NP is licensed and interpreted in the sense of Diesing's (1992) Mapping Hypothesis.² This idea nicely captures the correlation between the Case-marking and the interpretation in (1-2). The object NP in (1a), for example, is required to move to [Spec Agr-oP] since it has the Accusative Case-marker. This is illustrated in (4):

- (4) ... [_{Agr-oP} [_{NP} iki kız-i] [_{VP} t_i taniyordum]]

Then, since the NP is outside VP, the Mapping Hypothesis dictates that it receive a strong interpretation, making it refer to a subset of the set of girls from the previous discourse. On the other hand, the NP without the Case marker in (1b) does not raise into [Spec Agr-oP] and remains within VP, resulting in the weak interpretation.

4. Correlation between Case and Interpretation in Japanese

This section provides two pieces of evidence from Japanese for the claim that the strong interpretation of an object NP requires the Accusative Case marker.

4.1 Strong QPs

It is well-known that the Accusative Case-marker *-o* may be omitted in Japanese:³

- (5) Taroo-ga nani(-o) katta-no
 Taro-Nom what(-Acc) bought-Q
 'What did Taro buy?'

However, consider the following example:

- (6) Taroo-ga daremo*(-o) nagutta
 Taro-Nom everyone(-Acc) hit
 'Taro hit everyone'

As with the Turkish examples in (2), it is impossible to omit the Accusative marker on the universal QP *daremo-o*. This point is further supported by other instances of strong QPs. Consider:

- (7) Taroo-ga aitura(-o) nagutta
 Taro-Nom those guys(-Acc) hit
 'Taro hit those guys'

While it is possible to omit the Accusative marker on the definite object NP *aitura* in (7), it is impossible to do so if we make the object NP a "strong QP" by attaching a floating quantifier such as *hotondo* ('most') and *hanbun* ('half'), both of which are "strong" since they range over a set of entities presupposed in the discourse.

- (8) a. Taroo-ga aitura?*(-o) hotondo nagutta
 Taro-Nom those guys(-Acc) most hit
 'Taro hit most of those guys'
 b. Taroo-ga aitura?*(-o) hanbun nagutta
 half
 'Taro hit half of those guys'

One might claim that example (9) is a counterexample since the Accusative marker can be omitted despite the fact that the object is followed by a floated universal quantifier, which should force a "strong QP" reading on the object:

- (9) Taroo-ga aitura(-o) zen'in nagutta
 Taro-Nom those guys(-Acc) all hit
 'Taro hit all of those guys'

On a closer examination, however, we find that the object without the Accusative marker in (9) does not behave as a true QP. Consider:

- (10) a. Taroo-ga aitura_i-o zen'in [soituzisin_i-no ie]-ni turete itta
 Taro-Nom those guys all he-self-Gen house-to take went
 'Taro took every guy to his house'
 b.?*Taroo-ga aitura_i zen'in [soituzisin_i-no ie]-ni turete itta

In (10a), it is possible to interpret *soituzisin* as a bound variable which takes the object NP *aitura-o zen'in* as its antecedent. This means that the object NP serves as a true QP, as with the English example in the gloss *Taro took every guy_i to his_i house*. Notice that (10a) is not a case of coreference since the antecedent is plural while *soituzisin* is singular. In contrast to (10a), it is impossible, or at least very difficult, to interpret *soituzisin* in (10b) as a variable bound by the object NP without the Accusative marker *aitura zen'in*. If this is so, we can say that (10b) does not constitute a counterexample to the claim that a strong object QP cannot drop the Accusative marker.

4.2 Focused NPs

The second piece of evidence for the correlation between the overt Accusative marker and the strong interpretation comes from a consideration of what we may call focused NPs. Consider the following discourse:

- (11) A: Taroo-wa dare(-o) nagutta no?
 Taro-Nom who(-Acc) hit-Q
 'Who did Taro hit?'
 B: Taroo-wa **Ziroo***(-o) nagutta yo
 Taro-Top Ziro(-Acc) hit-Prt
 'Taro hit Ziro'

As we see in (11B), it is impossible to drop the Accusative marker on the object NP *Ziroo*. We can say that this is because the object NP in (11B) serves as the answer to the question in (11A) and functions as the focus of the sentence. Indeed, this is in contrast to the following discourse where the omission of the Accusative marker is allowed:

- (12) A: dare-ga Ziroo-o nagutta no?
 who-Nom Ziro(-Acc) hit-Q
 'Who hit Ziro?'
 B: **Taroo-ga** Ziroo(-o) nagutta yo
 Taro-Nom Ziro(-Acc) hit-Prt
 'Taro hit Ziro'

The important difference is that the focus of the sentence in (12B) is not on the object NP *Ziroo-o*, but on the subject NP *Taroo-ga*. The observed contrast in (11) and (12) gives us the following generalization.

- (13) A focused object NP cannot drop the Accusative marker.

Now what does this fact tell us?

Chomsky (1981) notes that focused NPs behave in a way parallel to QPs in that they can be the antecedent of a pronoun only if they c-command the pronoun:

- (14) His_i mother loves
 a. John_i.
 b. * JOHN_i.
 c. * everyone_i.

This property is only true of strong QPs, since a weak QP, as exemplified in (15b), does not need to c-command a pronoun to be the antecedent of it:

- (15) a. *Lucy never kisses each guest_i when he_i talks about Hegel.
 b. Lucy never kisses a guest_i when he_i talks about Hegel. (Reinhart (1987))

Now consider the following examples:

- (16)a. [*e* hitome *pro*_i mita hito]-ga (yoku) Hanako_i-o sukini naru (koto)
 one glance saw person-Nom often Hanako-Acc fond become (fact)
 ‘A person who takes a glance at her usually falls in love with Hanako’
 b. * [*e* hitome *pro*_i mita hito]-ga (yoku) daremo_i-o sukini naru (koto)
 everyone-Acc
 ‘A person who takes a glance at her usually falls in love with everyone’
 c. [*e* hitome *pro*_i mita hito]-ga (yoku) kimono sugata-no zyosei_i-o sukini naru (koto)
 kimono appearance-of woman-Acc
 ‘A person who takes a glance at her usually falls in love with a woman in kimono’

The QP *daremo-o* in (16b) behaves in just the same way as the QPs in (14c) and (15a): it cannot bind the empty pronoun in the subject (*pro*) since the former does not c-command the latter. (16c) shows that the weak indefinite NP *kimono sugata-no zyosei-o* can be the antecedent of *pro* without a c-commanding relation.⁴ With this in mind, consider the following example, whose focused object NP is intended to serve as the answer to a question to the following effect: who is the woman such that the man who takes a glance at her falls in love with her?

- (17) * [*e* hitome *pro*_i mita hito]-ga yoku HANAKO_i-O sukini naru (yo)

The impossibility of anaphora in (17) tells us that focused NPs form a natural class with strong QPs, but not with referential NPs such as *Hanako* in (16a) or with weak NPs such as the object in (16c). Furthermore, the bound variable reading of *pro* in (16b) and (17) is possible if the antecedent NP is scrambled so as to c-command *pro*:

- (18) a. daremo_i-o [*e* hitome *pro*_i mita hito]-ga yoku *t*_i sukini naru (koto)
 b. HANAKO_i-O [*e* hitome *pro*_i mita hito]-ga yoku *t*_i sukini naru (koto)

This fact further confirms our point that focused NP forms a natural class with strong QPs. If so, then this gives support to our point that strong NP must bear the Accusative marker.

5. Positive Polarity NPs: An Argument for Object Raising

The preceding section has given a supporting argument for Runner's (1993) point that the strong interpretation of object NPs requires the overt Accusative marker. This section gives empirical support to the other half of Runner's claim that the object NP with the Accusative marker is raised into [Spec Agr-oP] for Case-checking.

The argument crucially involves "positive polarity items" such as *dokoka-no* N in (19):

- (19) Iraku-gun-ga dokoka-no kuni-o bakugekisita
 Iraq-army-Nom some-of country-Acc bombed
 'The Iraqi army bombed a certain country'

Dokoka-no is interpreted as an existential quantifier so that the semantics of (19) is represented as (20):

- (20) [$\exists x: x = \text{a country}$] (Iraqi army bombed *x*)

In a negative sentence, it is obligatorily interpreted as taking wide scope over negation:

- (21) Iraku-gun-ga dokoka-no kuni-o bakugekisi-nak-atta
 Iraq-army-Nom some-of country-Acc bomb-not-Past
 'The Iraqi army did not bomb a certain country'

- (22) a. [$\exists x: x = \text{a country}$] NEG (Iraqi army bombed *x*)
 (There is a country that the Iraqi army did not bomb.)
 b. *NEG [$\exists x: x = \text{a country}$] (Iraqi army bombed *x*)

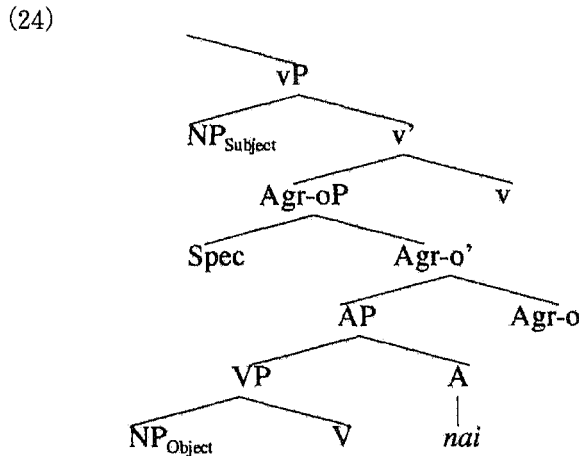
Example (21) must be interpreted as (22a), but not as (22b) where *dokoka-N* takes scope under negation.

Interestingly, the positive polarity object NP in the negative sentence in (21) cannot drop

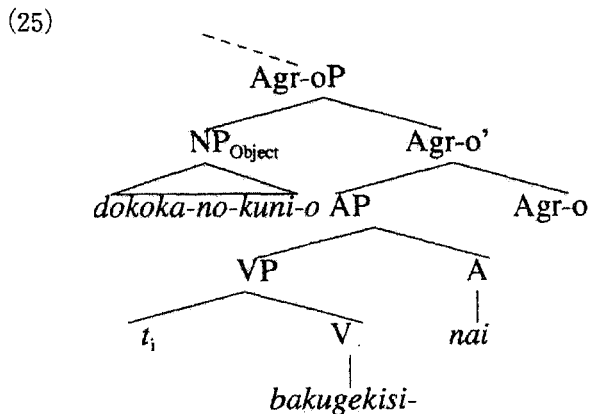
its Accusative marker, while the omission of it is allowed in (19). Observe (23):

- (23) a. Iraku-gun-ga dokoka-no kuni(-o) bakugekisita (cf. (19))
 b. Iraku-gun-ga dokoka-no kuni?*(-o) bakugekisi-nak-atta (cf. (21))

If this is a fact, then we can easily account for this contrast by assuming that the Accusative marked object NP is raised into [Spec Agr-oP]. Let us assume, as with Homma (1998), that a negative sentence in Japanese has the following underlying structure:

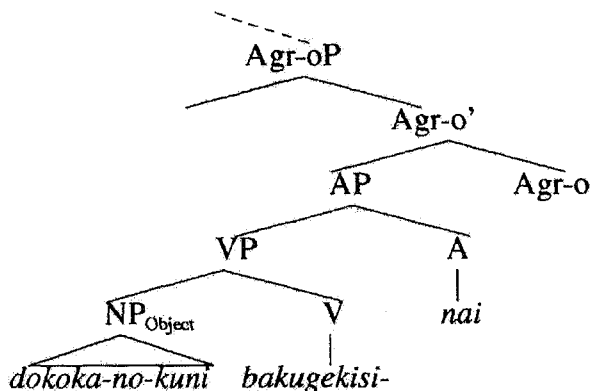


If we assume that an Accusative marked object moves into [Spec Agr-oP], either overtly or covertly, we get the following LF for (23b).



The moved object NP thus ends up being in a position c-commanding the negative *nai*. This explains the fact that the object takes wide scope over the negation in (23b). On the other hand, the object without the Accusative marker in (23b) is assumed to remain in VP, as in:

(26)



But then the object remains within the c-command domain of the negation and therefore is interpreted as under the scope of the negation. Since a positive polarity item must not be in the scope of negation, the sentence (23b) is ungrammatical without *-o*.⁵ Thus the above fact constitutes supporting evidence for the hypothesis that the object NP with the Accusative marker is raised into [Spec Agr-oP].

6. Conclusion

This paper has given empirical support to Runner's (1993, 1998) idea that the strong/weak interpretation of an NP crucially has to do with Case-marking of the NP. The correlation between Case-marking and interpretation is given support by the consideration of necessarily strong NPs and focused NPs in Japanese. The claim that Case-marked NPs move into [Spec Agr-oP] is supported by the observed behavior of positive polarity items in Japanese.

Appendix 1

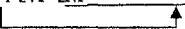
In Section 3 we observed that necessarily strong object QPs require their Accusative marker. However, the reverse of this does not seem to be true in Japanese: the use of Accusative marker does not force the strong reading on NPs that are potentially ambiguous between the strong and weak interpretation:

- (27) a. *watasi-wa ooku-no hon-o yonda*
 I-Top many-of book-Acc read
 'I read many of the books/many books'
- b. *Taroo-wa hutari-no otoko-o mita*
 Taro-Top two-of man-Acc saw
 'Taro saw two of the men/two men'

As indicated in the gloss, the QPs *ooku-no* and *hutari-no* in (27) can have either the strong and the weak interpretation. If we assume that *all* Accusative marked NPs are interpreted in [Spec

Agr-oP], then the fact in (27) is a problem since the Accusative marked NPs can also have the weak reading.

To avoid this problem, I follow Runner (1998) and assume that NPs in [Spec Agr-oP] can optionally be lowered into VP-internal position. Then the example in (27a), for example, will have either of the following two LFs:⁶

- (28) LF 1 : ... [_{Agr-oP} [_{NP} ooku-no hon]-o_i [_{VP} t_i yonda]]
 LF 2 : ... [_{Agr-oP} e_i [_{VP} [_{NP} ooku-no hon]-o_i yonda]]
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LF1 is the LF for the strong interpretation for the object NP, while LF2, in which the object has lowered into its original position, renders the object NP interpreted as a weak QP. The lowering option is not available for necessarily strong QPs such as *daremo-o* and *hotondo-no* N since being in the position for the weak interpretation is not compatible with their inherent semantics.

Appendix 2

The correlation between Case-dropping and NP interpretation is also observed with an example involving the indefinite expression *dareka*. It is possible, as the following examples show, to drop the Case-marker on an NP:

- (29) a. John-ga dareka-o nagutta
 John-Nom someone(-Acc) hit
 'John hit someone' (both strong and weak)
 b. John-ga dareka nagutta
 'John hit someone' (weak only)

Dareka with a Case-marker can have a strong interpretation, as well as a weak interpretation. For example, sentence (29a) is true if "John hit *x*" is true of at least one person in the set of people previously established in the discourse. On the other hand, the Case-drop version in (29b) can only have a weak interpretation: the interpretation of *dareka* does not presuppose the existence of a set of people prior to the utterance.

The same seems true of numeral quantifiers such as *sannin*.

- (30) a. John-ga sannin-o nagutta
 John-Nom three-Acc hit
 'John hit three persons' (both strong and weak)
 b. John-ga sannin nagutta
 'John hit three persons' (weak only)

However, I have avoided using these examples in this paper since we cannot tell whether the bare variants *dareka* and *hutari* are the result of Case-marker drop, since these bare forms can be used as a floating quantifier, as shown in (31):

- (31) a. John-ga hito-o dareka nagutta
 John-Nom person-Acc someone hit
 'John hit some person'
 b. John-ga hito-o sannin nagutta
 John-Nom person-Acc three hit
 'John hit three persons'

Thus the structure for the Caseless versions in (29b) and (30b) may be (32a) and (32b), respectively, where *pro* serves as the host NP for the floating quantifiers *dareka* and *sannin*:

- (32) a. John-ga *pro* dareka nagutta
 b. John-ga *pro* sannin nagutta

Indeed, it is possible to scramble *dareka* and *sannin* into a sentence-initial position, whereas an object NP without the Accusative marker cannot:

- (33) a. *dareka*_i John-ga *t*_i nagutta
 b. *sannin*_i John-ga *t*_i nagutta

- (34) dare*(-o) John-ga nagutta-no
 who(-Acc) John-Nom hit-Q
 'Who did John hit?'

Furthermore, it is possible to capture the obligatory weak reading in (29b) and (30b) from a quite different viewpoint. Homma et al. (1992) observe that an NP with a weak floated quantifier necessarily yields a weak interpretation. Thus the example in (31), in which *dareka* and *sannin* are preceded by an overt Accusative marked host NP, obligatory have a weak reading. If this generalization is correct, then we can successfully account for the semantics of (29b) and (30b): the apparently Caseless versions have the weak reading since the quantifier *dareka* is a floating quantifier without an overt host NP.

The consideration along these lines does not necessarily exclude the existence of the structure in (35) for (29b) and (30b), in which the Case-marker has been dropped:

- (35) ... [_{VP} [_{NP} *dareka/sannin*]- ϕ nagutta]

However, since there does not seem to be any way to exclude the possibility of *dareka* and

sainnin having the structure in (32), it is safe not to regard these items solely as the Case-drop variants of *dareka-o* and *sannin-o*, respectively.

Notes

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¹ I employ the terms “strong QPs” and “weak QPs” in this paper and take them to refer to what Enç(1991) calls “specific NPs” and “nonspecific NPs.” Following the tradition, I define “strong QPs” as those NPs whose referents are a subset of a set of entities established in the discourse prior to the utterance. “Weak QPs” are those that refer to a set of entities newly introduced in the discourse.

² Diesing (1992) proposes the Mapping Hypothesis as a principle for mapping the syntactic structure to semantic interpretation.

- (i) Mapping Hypothesis
 - a. Materials in VP are mapped into the Nuclear Scope.
 - b. Materials outside VP are mapped into the Restrictive Clause.

The clause (ia) may be taken to mean that an NP remaining within VP at LF is interpreted as a semantic variable in the sense of Heim (1982) and Kratzer (1988) and results in receiving a weak, existential reading. (ib) may be taken to mean that an NP outside VP (as a result of overt or covert movement) receives a strong or generic reading. For details, see Diesing (1992).

³ One syntactic restriction on the deletion of the Accusative marker is that it cannot be omitted if the object NP is scrambled.

- (i) nani*(-o) Taroo-ga katta-no
 what(-Acc) Taro-Nom bought-Q
 ‘What did Taro buy?’

Because of this, we only discuss the examples where the object NP is not scrambled.

⁴ The anaphora between the weak indefinite NP and the pronoun in (15b) and (16c) is made possible by Heim’s (1982) unselective binding (or Ha?k’s (1984) indirect binding). In (15b) the adverb of quantification *never* c-commands both the indefinite *a guest* and the pronoun and thus serves as the unselective binder for them. This makes the anaphora possible between *a guest* and *he*. For (16c), I assume, as with Homma (1995), that the adverb of quantification *yoko* or the invisible generic operator serves as the unselective binder for *pro* and the weak indefinite *kimono sugata-no zyosei-o*. Indeed, the anaphora is degraded if we turn (16c) into a non-generic

sentence, in which the invisible generic operator is not available:

- (i) * [\bar{e} hitome *pro*_i mita hito]-ga kinoo kimono sugata-no zyosei-o sukini natta one glance saw person-Nom yesterday kimono appearance-of woman-Acc fond became 'A person who took a glance at her fell in love with a woman in kimono yesterday'

⁵ This constraint on the scope of positive polarity items only holds in the case of declarative sentences. Hasegawa (1987) observes that positive polarity items can be in the scope of negation in conditional clauses and in interrogative sentences. See Hasegawa (1987) for details.

⁶ A question may arise as to the validity of assuming the lowering operation in the grammar. Runner (1998) takes the lowering operation as the result of deleting the upper copy of a chain in the sense of Chomsky (1992). See Runner (1998) for details.

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