



The Nominative Constraint in Japanese Cleft Constructions: Agreement, Labeling and Timing of Feature-Valuation

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June 4, 2021

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This presentation examines focus agreement involved in Japanese cleft constructions. Japanese cleft exhibits "the nominative constraint (NC)," which bars a Nominative phrase from being the cleft focus, as the contrast in (1) shows (Takano 2015).

- (1) a. Ken-ga Mari-ni ageta no-wa **hon-o** da. 'It is a book that Ken gave to Mari.'
Ken-NOM Mari-DAT gave C-TOP book-ACC COP
b. *Mari-ni hon-o ageta no-wa **Ken-ga** da. 'It is Ken that gave a book to Mari.'
Mari-DAT book-ACC gave C-TOP Ken-NOM COP (Takano, 2015)

By extending Saito's (2018) notion of "strength" of the K(ase) head, we suggest attributing the contrast to the property of K; Acc(usative) K is strong and Nom(inative) K is weak. We further show that the strength of the head is not inherent but changes depending on whether it includes an unvalued Case feature at the particular phase. Such data suggest that the timing of Case-valuation can affect other kinds of agreement such as focus agreement.

1. Takano's (2015) Nominative Constraint

Japanese cleft constructions have the form of "Y *no-wa* X *da*," which is derived from the base form (2) by moving focus elements (Y) to C_{FOC}, boldfaced in (1), and then applying topicalization to the rest of the sentence (X) as in (3) (cf. Hiraiwa and Ishihara, 2011).

- (2) Ken-ga Mari-ni hon -o ageta. 'Ken gave a book to Mari.'
Ken-NOM Mari-DAT book-ACC gave (Takano, 2015)
(3) a. [TP ... XP...]
b. [_a XP C_{FOC} [TP... <XP> ...]] XP undergoes IM: focus movement
c. [_β TP C_{TOP} [_a XP C_{FOC} <[TP ...<XP>...]>]] TP undergoes IM: topicalization

Takano explains the NC in (1) by assuming that Japanese Nom and Acc phrases form [_{KP} DP K] and that a focus feature [Foc] percolates up from N to Acc K, but not to Nom K; Acc K in (1a) bears [Foc] while Nom K in (1b) has no [Foc]. The (un)availability of [Foc] on K makes a difference in labeling of the syntactic object (α) in (3) generated by focus movement as follows:

- (4) a. Acc K (=1a) b. Nom K (=1b)
 $\alpha = \{ \{K_{[Foc]}, DP\}, \{C_{[Foc]}, TP\} \}$ $\alpha = \langle Foc, Foc \rangle$ $\alpha = \{ \{K, DP\}, \{C_{[Foc]}, TP\} \}$ $\alpha = ??$

In Chomsky's (2013) labeling algorithm, {XP,YP} is not labelable only by minimal search (the XP-YP problem), but is labelable by shared features between X and Y through agreement. Since Acc K and C_{FOC} share [Foc] through agreement in (4a), α can be labeled as <Foc,Foc>. In (4b), K and C_{FOC} have no shared feature, so that α is not labeled, which is uninterpretable at the interfaces. Interestingly, the NC is not observed in multiple cleft; unlike in (1b), Nominative focus is allowed as one of the foci:

- (5) Mari-ni ageta no-wa [**Ken-ga hon-o**] da. 'It is Ken a book that gave to Mari'
Mari-DAT gave C-TOP Ken-NOM book-ACC COP (Takano, 2015)

Under Takano's analysis, the amalgamated multiple foci consist a label-less object. As it has no label, it does not cause the XP-YP problem with labeling of α. Although Takano's analysis nicely explains the NC, it remains unclear why Acc K can bear [Foc] by percolation from N but Nom K cannot.

2. Weak K in Japanese: Saito (2016, 2018)

Another potential problem is that we cannot accept Takano's analysis and Saito's view that Japanese Nom K is "weak" at the same time. Under Chomsky (2013), Case-valuation takes place as a reflex of phi-feature agreement and phi-features can be a label by feature-sharing, e.g. [_{φ,φ} DP, TP]. According to Saito (2018), the same doesn't happen in Japanese. If phi-feature agreement between T and the subject DP takes place in Japanese, there is no way to derive multiple nominative constructions allowed in Japanese in (6) since it is impossible that phi-features on T are valued by multiple DPs. Based on this fact, he claims that Case-agreement, not phi-agreement, takes place in Japanese. Also, DP in Japanese is KP and K is an inherently weak head, which doesn't have the ability to label.

- (6) Bunmeikoku-ga dansei-ga heikin-zyumyoo-ga mizika-i.
civilized.country-NOM male-NOM average-life.span-NOM short-Pres.
'It is in civilized countries that male's average life span is short.' (Saito, 2018)

Therefore, [KP, TP] is labeled as TP in Japanese, not <φ,φ>. If this is correct, the ungrammaticality of (1b) cannot just be attributed the XP-YP problem. Nom K is weak and hence should not block the other phrase to become the label.

3. Reconsidering the Nominative Constraint in Cleft Sentences

Given the above two problems, we propose the following: Weak heads resist feature percolation. Focus percolation is not possible in Nom KP (as Takano suggests) and thus focus agreement is impossible in (1b). This is because Nom K is weak (as Saito suggests). However, we diverge from Saito's analysis in assuming that K is weak only when it bears an unvalued Case feature.

The crucial difference between (1a) and (1b) is when Case-valuation takes place. Acc Case is valued by V in the vP phase while Nom Case is valued by T in the CP phase. Given that valued features become phonological features in the next higher phase based on Epstein et al. (2012), Acc K has no Case-feature in the CP phase so that it is no longer a weak head as follows:

	vP phase		CP phase	
accusative K	[Case:] → [Case: Acc]	weak	[Phon]	strong
nominative K	---	---	[Case:] → [Case: Nom]	weak

When focus agreement with C occurs in the CP phase, Acc K is a strong head but Nom K is still a weak head. Note also that our analysis can still explain the multiple cleft case in (5). The amalgamated foci has a strong K head with [foc] on the Acc phrase, so the focus agreement between C and the amalgam is possible, unlike in the case of the single Nom phrase in (1b).

Interestingly, the subject marked with Nom Case can be a cleft focus when focus movement takes place across clause boundaries (i.e. long distance focus movement) as in (7), where it seems like the NC is nullified. Under our analysis, the focus element *Ken-ga* has no Case-feature once it is moved to the higher phase (i.e. matrix vP phase), so that K is a strong head and [Foc] can percolate to K. As a result, the syntactic object resulting from focus movement is successfully labeled as <Foc,Foc>.

(7) Taro-ga Mari-ni hon-o ageta to omott-teitru no-wa **Ken-ga** da.

Taro-ga Mari-DAT book-ACC gave C think-PROG C-TOP Ken-NOM COP

'It is Ken that Taro thinks gave a book to Mari'

The fact that the NC disappears in higher phases supports the view under which the possibility of feature percolation is not due to the inherent property of the Nominative.

4. Implication for labels and their Roles at the CI Interface

Recall from Section 2 that, given the discussion on (6) by Saito, the NC example in (1b) cannot just be excluded because of labeling. Thus, we should diverge from Takano in this respect and claim that (1b) is impossible not because of the XP-YP problem (the label could be the phrase the Nom phrase merges with (i.e. CP)), but because of the unavailability of focus agreement based on the lack of feature percolation. We could restate this situation as the following. Unlike usual declarative clauses, which can be labeled as TP instead of <phi,phi> in Japanese, focus movement requires focus agreement, and hence always requires the label <Foc,Foc>. This implies how labels contribute to interpretation at CI. In the case of declarative sentences (e.g. *John bought the book*), the topmost node {C, {Subj, T}} is labeled as CP by Minimal Search. If the label CP is interpreted as declarative, non-declarative sentences need to be labeled differently. Otherwise, CI cannot distinguish sentence types (i.e. the representations are not interpreted properly). If the syntactic objects involving agreement with functional features such as Question, Focus, Topic etc. are labeled by shared features (e.g. <Foc,Foc>), CI can see the difference from declarative, which should lead to proper semantic interpretation of each sentence type at CI.

5. Summary and Conclusion

In sum, we extended Takano's feature percolation account of the NC and made it compatible with both Saito's analysis of (6) and our new example in (7). If our analysis is on the right track, it follows that (i) existence of unvalued features can interfere with certain types of agreement (i.e. focus agreement) and that (ii) different labeling requirements may be imposed on merging a subject and merging a focused phrase, which is another indication of the traditional A/A' distinction.

References

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