

A Movement Approach to Nominative Object Constructions in Japanese

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How is Case on nominal elements licensed has been one of the central topics in generative grammar. In Japanese, subjects are typically marked with the nominative Case, and objects, with the accusative Case; however, when a non-stative predicate is followed by the potential suffix *-(r)are/(r)e*, which makes the complex predicate stative, the object may be marked either as accusative or as nominative (Kuno 1973a, Takezawa 1987, Tada 1992, Koizumi 1994, 1998, a.o.). As nominative objects deviate from the typical Case licensing pattern in Japanese, the mechanism and position of Case licensing of nominative objects have gained much attention in the literature. For instance, Tada (1992) argues that the nominative object undergoes A-movement to Spec, AgrOP and the potential affix moves to AgrO. The stative feature of the potential affix is responsible for the nominative Case assignment (cf. Yatsushiro 1999, Kasai 2018); Koizumi (1994, 1998) argues that nominative objects move to Spec, TP, where the nominative Case is licensed by T; Nomura (2005) and Takahashi (2010) argue that nominative objects can remain within VP, with its Case licensed by Agree with T.

Among them, Yatsushiro (1999) argues that nominative objects do not undergo movement to TP for Case based on the *vP*-preposing data. In Japanese, *vP* can be fronted to the sentence-initial position when a focus particle such as *-sae* ‘even’ is attached to *vP* (Yatsushiro 1999, Funakoshi 2020). Of importance here is the fact that the nominative object can be included in the fronted *vP*_{(r)are}, as shown in (1b) (cf. Kishimoto 2001).

- (1) a. Kai-ga [hon-ga yom-e]-sae si-ta.
Kai-NOM book-NOM read-POT-even do-PAST
‘Kai managed even to be able to read a book.’
- b. [Hon-ga yom-e]-sae Kai-ga si-ta.
book-NOM read-POT-even Kai-NOM do-PAST
‘Kai managed even to be able to read a book.’ (Yatsushiro 1999: 96)

If nominative objects must move to TP overtly, as argued by Koizumi (1994, 1998), then it would be expected that the nominative object moves out of *vP* that undergoes *vP*-preposing, and hence it could not be a part of the fronted *vP*, contrary to fact. Therefore, the grammaticality of (1b) rejects the possibility that nominative objects overtly move to TP for Case, leaving us with the possibility of them moving to *vP* or remaining in-situ.

Furthermore, the following example indicates that while accusative objects may remain in-situ, nominative objects do not. Consider (2), where the potential affix follows not the main verb but the causative affix *(s)ase*. In such cases, when the transitive *vP* is fronted, as shown in (2b), the accusative object is allowed, while the nominative object is disallowed. This would be

unexpected if the nominative object could stay an in-situ position. The ungrammaticality of the nominative object in (2b) then suggests that the nominative object needs to move out of the transitive *v*P.

- (2) a. Hitomi-wa Maki-ni piiman-o/ga tabe-sase-rare-ru.
Hitomi-TOP Maki-DAT green.pepper-ACC/NOM eat-CAUS-POT-PRES
'Hitomi can make Maki eat green pepper.'
- b. [piiman-o/*ga tabe-sae]_i Hitomi-wa Maki-ni *t_i* s-ase-rare-ru.
green.pepper-ACC/*NOM eat-even Hitomi-TOP Maki-DAT do-CAUS-POT-PRES
'Hitomi can even make Maki eat green pepper.'

Therefore, I argue that nominative objects, including the ones in causative constructions, overtly move out of VP in order to get the nominative Case licensed by *v* that hosts the potential affix (*r*)*are* (cf. Tada 1992, Yatsushiro 1999). In support of the proposal, I examine binding conditions, coordination, *ga/no* nominative alternation in some dialects, and NPI in nominative objects in causative-potential constructions where the causative affix is followed by the potential affix.