

Case and Agreement

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1 Case and Agreement

Given that nominative case can be assigned to other positions than T, then it cannot be the case that nominative is assigned to only Spec,TP. It just *usually* is the case that this is what happens.

As Zaenen, Maling, and Thráinsson, 1985 show, this relationship between position and case can be overridden, and nominative can shift to another position.

The question is why?

One option that has been pursued, is the idea that (nominative) case and agreement are intimately linked together, such that agreement is a prerequisite for case assignment.

In German, it is only NOMINATIVE subjects that control agreement. Quirky DATIVE marked arguments do not control agreement, even from subject position.

- (1) Mir ist/*bin kalt
Me.DAT is/am cold
'I am cold.'

Baker, 2015 (also Baker and Vinokurova, 2010) shows that in Sakha, there is a direct correlation between agreement and nominative case in Sakha:

- (2) a. Masha aqa-ta kinige-ni atyylas-ta
Masha father-3sP.NOM book-ACC buy-PAST.3sS
'Masha's father bought the book.'
b. Uol uonna kyys kuorak-ka bar-dy-lar
boy and girl town-DAT go-PAST-3PS
'The boy and the girl went to the town.'

Agreement then targets nominative arguments.

In participles there is no agreement:

- (3) *Masha cej ih-er-e caakky
Masha tea drink-AOR-3s cup
'a cup that Masha drinks tea from.'

But there can be an agreement on the head noun. However, the case on the agreeing noun is Genitive in this case, as can be seen when there is a possessive:

- (4) a. Masha cej ih-er caakky-ta
Masha tea drink-AOR cup-3sP
'a cup that Masha drinks tea from.'
- b. Masha aqa-ty-n atyylas-pyt at-a
Masha father-3sP-GEN buy-PTCPL horse-3sP
'the horse that Masha's father bought.'

Without the agreement on the head noun of a relative clause, then the construction is only fine if there is not agreement:

- (5) cej ih-er caakky
tea drink-AOR cup
'a cup that one drinks tea from.'

"It is not necessary to have an agreement bearing functional head in a relative structure in Sakha. [...] It is, however, impossible to have an overt NP in nominative case as the subject of the relative clause, in the absence of any overt agreement."

- (6) * Masha cej ih-er caakky
Masha tea drink-AOR cup
'a cup that Masha drinks tea from.'

Finally, in Sakha, it is possible for either the auxiliary or the participle to host agreement. However, it is not possible for both at the same time to host agreement, nor is it possible for *netiher*:

- (7) a. En süüj-büt e-bik-kin
you win-PTCPL AUX-PTCPL-2sS
- b. En süüj-bük-kün e-bit
you win-PTCPL-2sS AUX-PTCPL
- c. * En süüj-büt e-bit
you win-PTCPL AUX-PTCPL
- d. * En süüj-bük-kün e-bik-kin
you win-PTCPL-2sS AUX-PTCPL-2sS
All: 'The result is that you won.'

Baker concludes that there is maximally one functional head which undergoes agreement in Sakha per clause, and this one assigns nominative case to the argument, and undergoes agreement. If it is not there, then the argument is left without case. It cannot be there twice due to a restriction that arguments can undergo agreement with maximally one functional head.

Finally, we see that in Sakha, agreement is not with non-nominative arguments:

- (8) a. Sonun-nar aaq-ylyn-ny-lar
news-PL read-PASS-PAST-3PS
'The news was read.'
- b. Sonun-nar-y aaq-ylyn-na
news-PL-ACC read-PASS-PAST.3sS
'The news was read.'
- c. Oqo-lor-go üüt naada-(*lar)
child-PL-DAT milk need-(*3PS)
'The children need milk.'

But, if these predicates have a nominative object, then agreement is possible with that

- (9) Ucuutal-ga student-nar tiik-bet-ter
teacher-DAT student-PL suffice-NEG.AOR-3PS
'The teacher doesn't have enough students.'

This is the same as in Icelandic, where it is well known that in the presence of a dative subject, a nominative object will control agreement on the verb (which usually cross-references the subject).

- (10) Um veturinn voru konunginum gefnar ambáttir.
In the.winter were.PL the.king.DAT given slaves.NOM
'In the winter, the king was given (female) slaves.'

Baker's conclusion:

- (11) Overt NP X has nominative case if and only if exactly one verbal form in the clause containing X agrees with it.

Many researchers have taken this to mean that functional heads assign case. There seems to be a close affinity between T^0 and nominative, which is mediated through agreement.

2 Problems

There are many languages that have overt case marking, but no agreement between the verb and nouns, such as Japanese and Korean (also Burmese, Garo, Kayardild, Khalkha, Lepcha, Malagasy, Maori, Martunthunira, Meithei, Pomo (Southeastern), Yaqui and Igbo, only looking at nominative-accusative languages.)

2.1 Where should accusative come from?

Quite often there is no evidence of accusative being assigned under agreement. Indo-European languages do not have object agreement, yet they do assign accusative, as does Sakha (including Barasano, Brahui, Evenki, Finnish, Fur, Hebrew (modern), Iraqw, Kannada, Khasi, Nenets, Nubian (Dongolese), Turkish, Urubú-Kaapor and Yuk-aghir (Kolyma).

For languages that do have object agreement, then it often does not directly track accusative. For instance, in Amharic, the object marker *can* track the accusative argument:

- (12) Ləmma wiffa-w-in j-aj-əw-al
 Lemma dog_{DEF-ACC} 3_{MS}-see-3_{MO}-AUX
 ‘Lemma sees the dog.’

However, it can also track dative objects, even when there is an accusative argument:

- (13) Ləmma l-Almaz məts’əhaf-u-n sət’t’-at
 Lemma.M _{DAT}-Almaz.F book.M-DEF-ACC give-3_{FO}
 ‘Lemma gave the book to Almaz.’

Finally, there are accusative objects in Amharic that do not show agreement at all:

- (14) Ləmma wiffa-w-in j-aj-al
 Lemma dog_{DEF-ACC} 3_{MS}-see-AUX
 ‘Lemma sees the dog.’

2.2 Nominative is sometimes seen without finite Spec,TP

- (15) Champa-vukku [Sudha oru samosa-vai saappiḍ-a] veṇḍ-um
 Champa-_{DAT} Sudha.NOM a samosa-ACC eat-INF want-3_{nS}
 ‘Champa wants Sudha to eat a samosa.’

References

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