To agree or not to agree:
what variable case government tells us about possessor raising

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Case agreement is well-motivated cross-linguistically for predicate APs, secondary predicates, adjectival adjuncts, appositives, and floating quantifiers. Case-agreement is often assumed to underlie the shared case-marking for predicate NPs and the body-part NP in the Inalienable Possessor Construction. Possessor Raising has figured prominently in the linguistic literature because it poses challenges for theories of syntactic government, subcategorization, and case assignment. In the Inalienable Possession Construction in Korean, the whole (possessor) and part (possessed) NPs typically agree in case, as illustrated in (1a,b). In this paper, I show that the apparent case-agreement is epiphenomenal. Investigation of verbs of various types that exhibit alternative case patterns reveals that the part-NP bears all and only the cases assigned by V to the relevant argument, whereas the whole-NP may bear either the case(s) assigned by V or nominative assigned by Infl, depending on its surface position. Thus the observed case-marking cannot be a consequence of case-agreement per se, but rather reflects direct case assignment by V and Infl independently to both part-and whole NPs (Maling & Kim 1992; Maling 2000).

(1) a. Kangto-ka   Yumi-lul   phal-ul   pulettuli-ess-ta.
       burglar-NOM Yumi-ACC   arm-ACC break-Pst-Ind
       'The burglar broke Yumi's arm.'

    b. Yumi-ka   phal-i /*ul   pulettuli-eci-ess-ta.
       Yumi-NOM   arm-NOM/*ACC break-Pass-Pst-Ind
       'Yumi's arm was broken.'

For some verbs, the goal argument can be either dative or accusative, as illustrated in (2a,b) for the ditransitive verb *noh* 'inject'. If the goal argument is a possessed NP that undergoes Possessor Raising, we find that the case on the whole- and part-NPs can vary independently: it can be either dative or accusative. Thus we find all four logically possible case patterns, as illustrated in (3) (=Maling & Kim 1992, ex. (12a-d)).

(2) a. Nay-ka Yumi-eykey cwusa-lul noh-ass-ta.   DAT ACC
        I-NOM   Yumi-DAT shot-ACC give-Pst-Ind
    b. Nay-ka Yumi-lul   cwusa-lul   noh-ass-ta.   ACC ACC
        I-NOM   Yumi-ACC shot-ACC give-Pst-Ind
        'I gave Yumi a shot.'   (Maling & Kim 1992, ex. (12a))

(3) a. Nay-ka Yumi-eykey phal-ey   cwusa-lul   noh-ass-ta.   DAT DAT ACC
        I-NOM   Yumi-DAT arm-DAT shot-ACC   give-Pst-Ind
        'I gave Yumi a shot in the arm'

    b. Nay-ka Yumi-lul phal-ey cwusa-lul noh-ass-ta.   ACC DAT ACC
    c. Nay-ka Yumi-lul phal-ul cwusa-lul noh-ass-ta.   ACC ACC ACC
    d. ?Nay-ka Yumi-eykey phal-ul cwusa-lul noh-ass-ta.   DAT ACC ACC

These case alternations are entirely unexpected under a Case-agreement Analysis, which predicts the same cases to occur on the co-indexed NPs; neither DAT ACC nor ACC DAT are expected to occur. In contrast, for a verb which does not allow alternative case on the goal argument, only dative is possible on the part-NP in the Part-Whole Construction in both active and (lexical) passive versions; i.e. will only have the agreeing DAT DAT case pattern. Maling & Kim (1992) show that the dative case on the goal argument cannot be analyzed as the case of a locative adjunct. Dative is possible on the part-NP if and only if the verb assigns dative case to the relevant argument, and nonagreeing case patterns are found wherever case alternations exist independently of the Part-Whole Construction.

The phenomenon will be illustrated for several different multiple case constructions in Korean, including locative existential verbs, which exhibit alternative case assignment to either the grammatical subject or object.

This has implications for subcategorization. The case marking on part-NPs is a function of the case-assigning properties of verbs Selectional restrictions have sometimes been used to argue for the adjunct status of part-NPs (Kang (1986), Kim (1990)), a conclusion at odds with the case-marking data reported here. Kim (1990, 269ff), following Kang (1986), observes that part-NPs are generally optional. Since "free deletability is the most prominent property of adjuncts as contrasted with arguments" (p. 270), the optionality of the part-NPs is provided as evidence in support for the claim that they are unselected adjuncts, whereas the whole-NPs are the subcategorized arguments of the verbs. Consider verbs such as *ppop* 'to pluck', *calu* 'to cut', and *kkakk* 'to clip' with respect to the Part-Whole Construction, as illustrated in (4):

(4)   Chelsoo-ka   talk-ul   *(thel-ul)   ppop-ass-ta.
         Chelsoo-NOM   hen-ACC   feather-ACC   pluck-Pst-Ind
         'Chelsoo plucked the hen.'

The part-NP is not optional for these verbs, unlike for verbs such as *ttayli* 'hit' and *cha* 'kick'. These verbs do not take an animate object except in the irrelevant (rather metaphorical) interpretation in which *ppop* and *calu* mean 'to choose' and 'to fire', respectively. Hence, for these verbs, it is the part-NP which is obligatory, and the whole-NP can be optional (given that Korean is also a pro-drop language).

I will discuss other constructions standardly assumed to involve case-agreement. Predicative NPs have traditionally been assumed to agree in case with NPs they are predicated of; Maling & Sprouse (1995), however, argue that predicate NPs are always assigned m-case not via agreement, but as an instance of structural case. A predicate NP is nominative in Icelandic, Swedish, and German, but accusative in Danish, Norwegian and (colloquial) English. The basic parameter dividing the Germanic languages is whether or not the copula is itself a case-assigner in a given language; when it is not, the domain of the copula is transparent to structural case assignment from an external governor, i.e. Infl. They show that in very specific circumstances, the m-case of a predicate NP differs from that of a predicate AP: unlike a predicate AP, a predicate NP cannot "inherit" the case of its controller if that case is lexically assigned.

(5) a. Jón skipaði Haraldi$_i$ [$_{CP}$ að PRO$_i$ vera dyravörður/*dyraverði]
         Jón ordered Harold-DAT   to   be doorkeeper-NOM/*DAT

    b. Hana$_i$ langar [$_{CP}$ að PRO$_i$ vera(verða) dyravörður/*dyravörð]
         she-ACC   longs   to   be(become) doorkeeper-NOM/*ACC

A direct case analysis provides a solution to the puzzle noted by Sigurðsson (1989:206), namely that the nominative objects of dative-nominative verbs obligatorily retain their nominative when embedded under an ECM verb, whereas predicate nominatives obligatorily switch to accusative.

Selected references

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