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Case in Japanese

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Abstract

This paper presents an outline of Case theory of Japanese within the general framework of the minimalist programme. Japanese seems to defy any structural Case analysis. Under some crucial assumptions, including the no-directionality-parameter hypothesis and the independent categorial status of inflectional endings of Japanese verbal morphology, an inherent Case theory of Japanese emerges, where categories are not associated with a specific Case, but rather they provide positions for general Case checking and other feature checking.

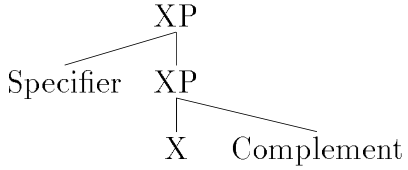
1 Introduction

This paper presents an outline of the Case theory of Japanese within the general framework of the minimalist programme (Chomsky 1995).[1] Before discussing the Case theory of Japanese, some findings or hypotheses that have been already expressed by the author or others need to be mentioned. They may well be controversial, and certainly not standard, but they are assumed in this paper. However they will have to be mentioned only briefly, and data will also have to be simplified for expository purposes.

2 There is no directionality parameter

First of all, as shown in (1), it is assumed in this paper that specifier-head-complement order is the only order made available by UG:

(1)



[1]I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Ronnie Cann for his useful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. However, only I am responsible for any shortcomings and errors that may be found in this paper.

This was first proposed by Kayne (1994), and then claimed by Chomsky (1995) on different grounds. The consequence is that there can be no directionality parameter. Head-final can only mean that the head in question is not followed by any overt material within its projection. For languages like Japanese, which is well-known as a typical head-final language, complement positions can no longer be taken to be to the left of their head. The fact that complements precede their associated head must be reinterpreted as indicating that, in Japanese, complements necessarily appear in specifier positions.

In the terminology of Chomsky's (1995) minimalist programme, it is a strong categorial feature contained in the head that triggers the overt operation because strong categorial features must be eliminated by specifier-head agreement to converge. Otherwise the derivation crashes.

This is the first important assumption: there is no directionality parameter and overt movement is forced by the presence of strong categorial features.

3 Basic clause structure

The next important assumption has to do with the basic clause structure of Japanese. Let us look at the pattern of Japanese verbal morphology first. The Japanese verbal morphology can be formulated as in (2):

(2) Root + IE (+ auxiliary*);
Auxiliary → root + IE
where IEs (= inflectional endings) do not inflect

Inflectional endings are considered to be a stem-forming element. Most of the forms are straightforwardly segmentable. That is, Japanese inflection assumes the form of agglutination of the Turkish-type rather than the inflectional or fusional morphology of the Latin-type. And the segmented endings are correlated with inflectional categories in a one-to-one fashion. An asterisk (*) indicates iteration. As indicated in the second part of (2), auxiliaries also inflect, but inflectional endings do not. Thus auxiliaries attached to a verbal stem also inflect to form complex stems, to which other auxiliaries may further attach to form more complex verbals. (2) is adopted in this study as the general pattern of the syntactically relevant Japanese verbal morphology. It is also assumed here that inflectional endings qualify as a functional category, which projects. Thus under the no-directionality-parameter hypothesis expressed in (1), the basic structure of a simple Japanese sentence can be informally depicted as in Figure 1. Strictly speaking, there are no nodes or no branches in Chomsky's (1995) bare phrase structure theory.

Note that tense is expressed by auxiliaries in Japanese, and that the Subject-inside-VP hypothesis is assumed: Subject and Object are inserted in [SPEC, VP] and as the complement of V, respectively.

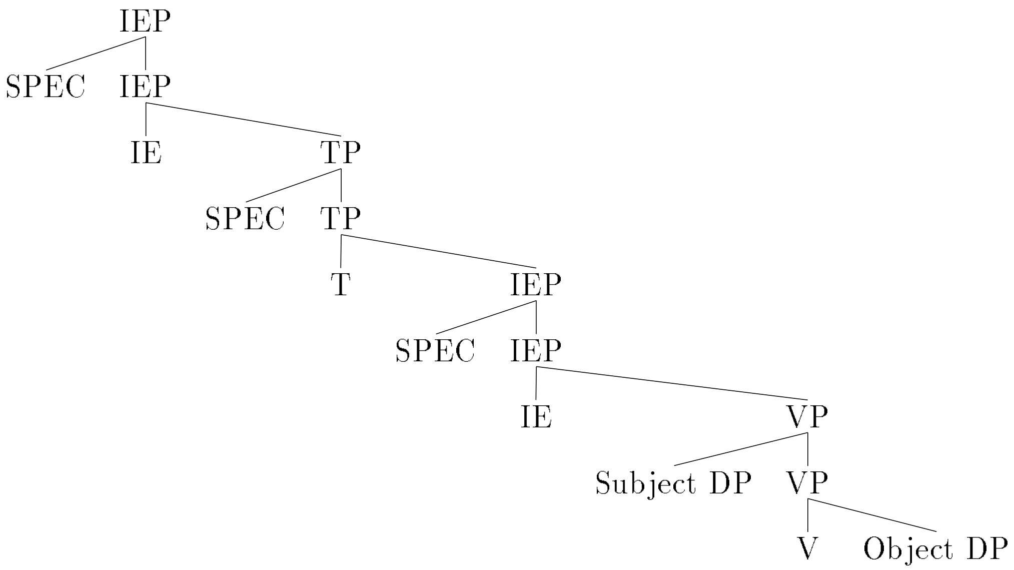


Figure 1: *Basic structure of a simple Japanese sentence.*

4 DP structure

Moving to DP structure, the basic internal pattern of Japanese DPs based on the distribution test is shown in (3):

(3) NP + K(ase) + D(eterminer) (*ga/wa/mo*)

where K	=	*o* (so-called object marker), *ni* (so-called indirect object marker, but can mark Subject or direct Object for some predicates; = in, to), *e* (= to), *de* (= at), *to* (= with), *kara* (= from), *made* (= up to), *madeni* (= by);
ga	=	so-called subject marker, but can mark Object for some predicates; can be new information
wa	=	so-called topic marker; old information
mo	=	‘also’; old information + implies other entity.

Members of K have traditionally been recognised as case particles. A group of particles *ga/wa/mo* can be considered as Ds, which function as clause reducers as illustrated in (4). This analysis is expressed by Tonoike (1989, 1991):

(4) a. *ga:* *Paul-ga hashir -i -ta -∅*
Paul-GA run -IE -PAST -IE
'Paul ran'
Paraphrase:
Though x is Paul, [x ran]

b. *wa:* *Paul-wa hashir -i -ta -∅*
Paul-WA run -IE -PAST -IE
'Paul ran'
Paraphrase:
If x is Paul, then [x ran]

c. *mo:* *Paul-mo hashir -i -ta -∅*
Paul-MO run -IE -PAST -IE
'Paul also ran'
Paraphrase:
Even if x is Paul, [x ran]

Interestingly, they can function as conjunctions, that is, as complementizers in some other environments as illustrated in (5):

(5) a. *ga:* *hashir -i -ta -∅ ga*
run -IE -PAST -IE GA
'though [I] ran'

b. *ba:* *hashir -e ba*
run -IE BA
'if [I] run'

c. *mo:* *hashir -i te mo*
run -IE TE MO
'even if [I] run'

The particles *wa* in (4b) and *ba* in (5b) are similar in sound but not identical. However, they are historically related and, as the translation shows, *ga*, *wa*, *mo* in (4) correspond to *ga*, *ba*, *mo* in (5) in terms of meaning, that is, presentational, conditional and concessive, respectively.

Ks do not include *ga* which has widely been thought of as the subject case marker. The particle *ga* cannot follow *o* and *ni*, but can follow other Ks only with the adjective *ii* 'good', as far as the author knows: *ga* may be a mixed category, but this paper will not go into this issue as well as some complications associated with other members of Ks.

It is assumed here that Ks and Ds are functional categories, which project. Thus again under the no-directionality-parameter hypothesis, the only possible tree diagram for (3) is Figure 2.

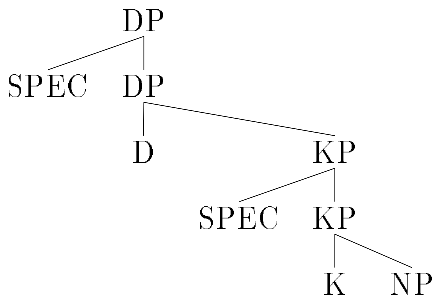


Figure 2: *Tree diagram for NP + case + determiner.*

5 Case theory of Japanese: at the DP level

Let us look at the tree diagram in Figure 3 to illustrate the derivation of a DP *Paul-ni-wa*. First as shown in (a), each element of the DP, that is *Paul*, *ni* and *wa* is inserted as NP, K and D respectively. K contains an intrinsic strong categorial feature [+N], thus the NP, which is the closest element that has the categorial feature [+N], has to overtly move to [SPEC, K] to eliminate the strong categorial feature [+N] in K by specifier-head agreement. Recall that, in the minimalist programme (Chomsky 1995), only strong categorial features trigger an overt operation, and movement is possible only if it is forced. As a consequence, the NP *Paul* has Case -*ni*, and a string *wa Paul-ni* as shown in (b) is obtained. The next step is the overt movement of the KP as a whole to [SPEC, D] as shown in (c). This has to happen because D contains an intrinsic strong categorial feature [+N], which has to be eliminated by the overt movement of the closest [+N] to [SPEC, D]. And the closest [+N] is found in the already merged syntactic object *Paul-ni*.

In the minimalist programme, a derivation simply crashes if a wrong choice is made. Now the syntactic object *Paul-ni-wa* has been obtained with no strong categorial feature. Note that this system of DP formation can generate every possible combination of K and D.

The syntactic object thus formed is not a legitimate one yet because it still contains a Case feature [+NI]. In the minimalist programme, Case features have to be eliminated: the Case feature [+NI] in Figure 3c has to be eliminated. To eliminate the Case feature, we have to consider the larger syntactic object: clause.

6 Data: structural vs inherent

The table in (6) summarises the possible patterns of the three major Case elements in non-scrambling two arguments' sentences. This paper will neither criticise nor summarise the structural Case analyses proposed in the literature, but the Case patterns shown in (6) are enough to suggest that it is highly likely that Japanese will almost certainly defy any structural Case analysis:

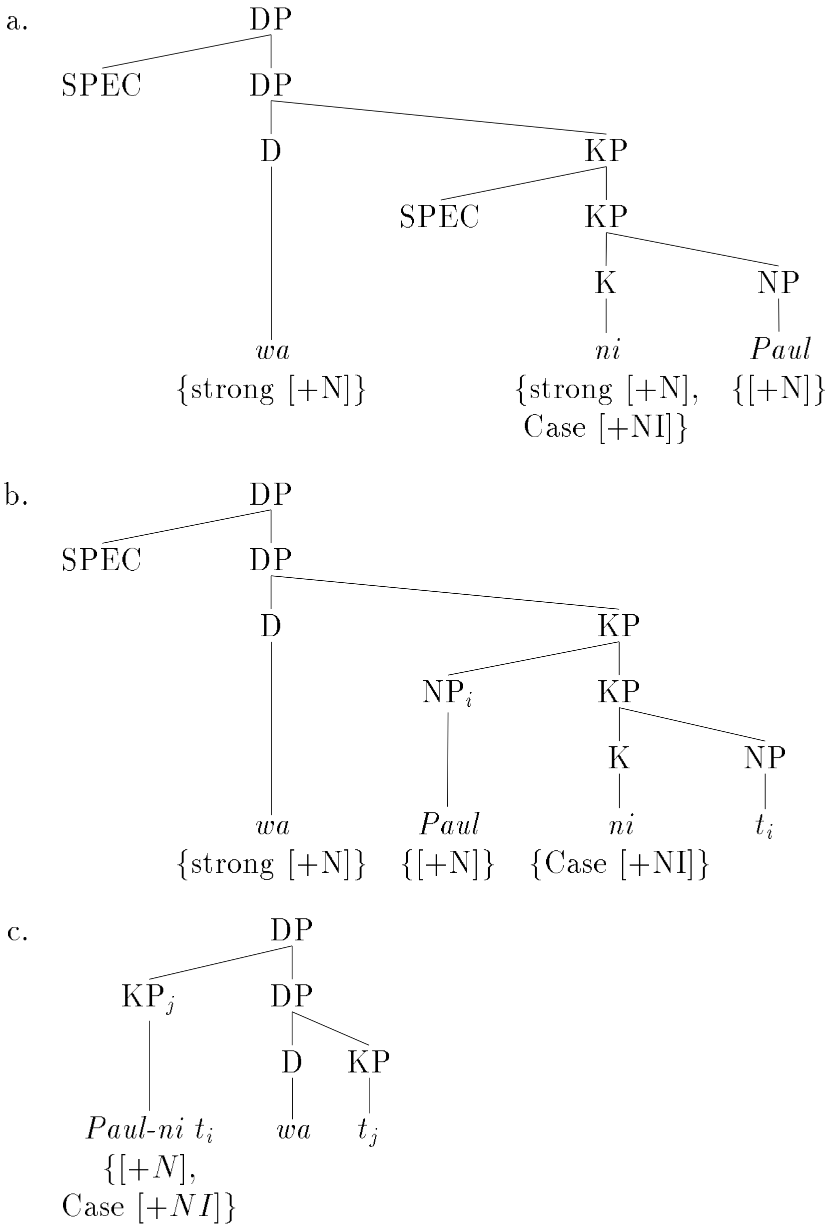


Figure 3: *Several derivation trees for* Paul-ni-wa.

(6)

Subject	Object
GA	GA
GA	O
GA	NI
NI	GA

Therefore this paper explores the inherent Case approach.

7 Case theory of Japanese: at the CP level

Let us look at the structure in Figure 1 to illustrate the derivation of a clause *Paul-ni-wa nihongo-ga deki-∅-ru-∅* (= Paul can speak Japanese), which is glossed in (7):

(7) *Paul-ni-wa nihongo -ga deki -∅ -ru -∅*
Paul-NI-WA Japanese -GA can do -IE -PRESENT -IE
'Paul can speak Japanese'

In this proposed Case theory of Japanese, the predicate verb *deki-* 'can do' has the Case-assigning features in the lexicon as in (8):

(8) *deki-*: NI/GA, GA
where: '/' indicates the optionality of either feature.

Some generalisation of the representation of Case-features can be possible, but no attempt for that is made here for simplicity. And also theta roles are associated with the Case features, but they are not shown for the same reason.

As the lexical item *deki-* is chosen from the lexicon, the options indicated by '/' are also chosen. Suppose that NI is chosen rather than GA in the first complex of the Case-assigning features. Then the predicate *deki-* is inserted as V in Figure 1 with the Case-assigning features as in (9):

(9) *deki-*: NI, GA

As Case-assigning features have to be eliminated to converge in the minimalist programme, they must be checked. How can they be eliminated?

Subject DP *Paul-ni-wa* is formed by the procedures explained earlier in Figure 3. Object DP *nihongo-ga* is formed likewise. Recall that the Subject DP *Paul-ni-wa* still contains the Case feature [+NI] as shown in Figure 3c which also must be eliminated. The same is true for Object DP *nihongo-ga*. These DPs, together with other lexical items, are inserted in the tree diagram of Figure 1 to produce Figure 4. Features that must be eliminated under each syntactic object are also shown in Figure 4.

Let us see the computation to form the desired syntactic object *Paul-ni-wa nihongo-ga deki-∅-ru-∅*. First, the predicate *deki-* covertly head-moves successively to the upper IE due to the intrinsic weak categorial feature [+V] contained in lower and upper IEs and

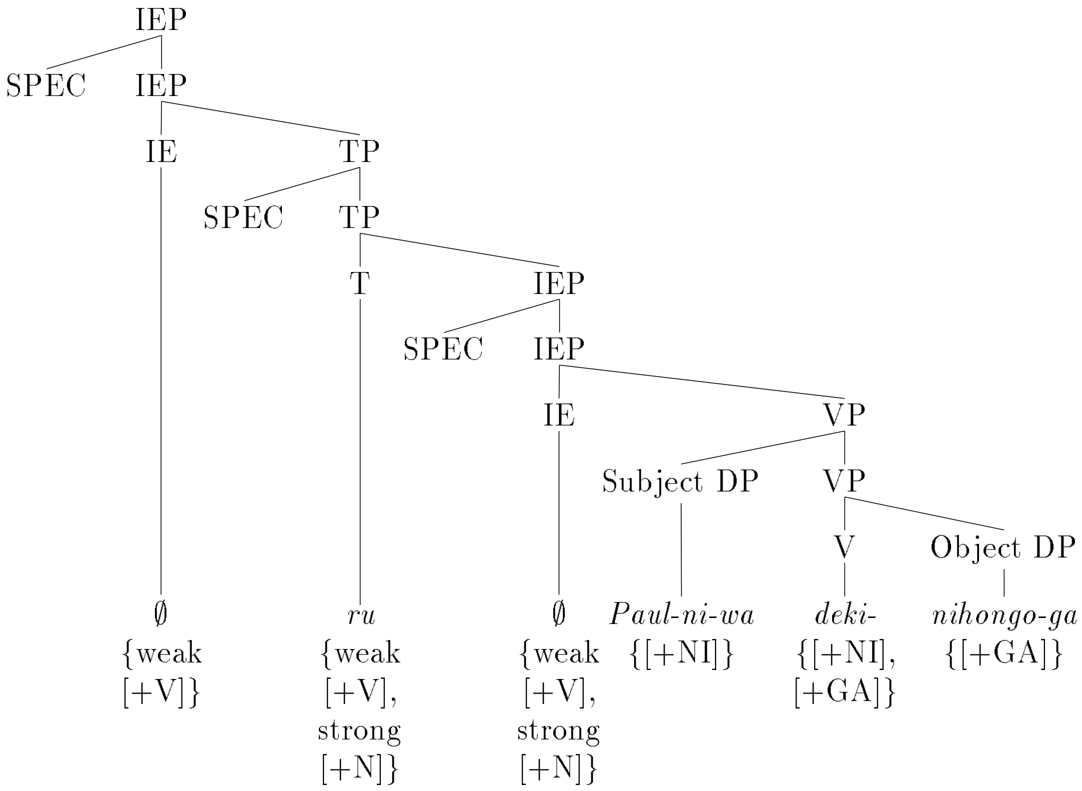


Figure 4: *Derivation tree for* Paul-ni-wa nihongo-ga deki-∅-ru-∅*.*

T. This movement has to be covert as, in Japanese, a verbal complex always comes last. This means that, at LF, the thus formed verbal complex *deki-∅-ru-∅* is under upper IE in Figure 4, but, at PF, the phonological features in question are bound to be under V in Figure 4.

This covert movement makes the whole clause the minimal domain of the predicate: any specifier position higher than the predicate is equidistant from any argument at the base. In other words, any movement of the arguments from the base to any specifier position higher than the predicate is equally economical. But movement cannot be random.

Here an economy principle (10) can be proposed:

(10) Movement which does not change the order at the base is more economical than any other movement which does.

This principle sounds odd as an economy principle. It may be expressed differently. But because at the moment there is no appropriate way to express this idea, and languages with the basic Object-Subject order are extremely rare, (10) can be tentatively assumed to be an economy principle.

Returning to the movement of the Object DP, it must overtly move to the specifier position of lower IE: this overt movement is forced because lower IE has an optional strong categorial feature [+N] to be eliminated, and the target must be [SPEC, lower IE]. This is because it is the closest specifier position from the Object DP which does not change the order of the two arguments at the base. Thus when the verbal complex is covertly under lower IE, the Object DP enters a checking relation with the verbal complex, and the Case-assigning feature '[+GA]' contained in the verbal complex and the Case feature '[+GA]' contained in the Object DP are matched, then eliminated. In the same way, the Case feature of the Subject DP is checked and eliminated when it is in [SPEC, T] and enters a checking relation with the verbal complex. Subject DP must move to [SPEC, T] as it is the closest specifier position from the Subject DP that does not change the order of the two arguments at the base, and this movement must be overt because T has an optional strong categorial feature [+N]. Now all the features that must be eliminated have been checked and eliminated, and the derivation converges in the most economical way.

8 Implications

This is an outline of Case theory of Japanese within the general framework of the minimalist programme. There are a number of implications in this theory. Perhaps the single most important point is that there is no structural Case in Japanese. None of upper and lower IEs and T are Case assigners: categories are not associated with a specific Case in Japanese, but rather they provide positions for general Case checking and other feature checking.

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