

The function of accusative case in Mongolian

Functional approaches to case (Comrie, 1989; de Hoop & Narasimhan, 2005, de Hoop & Malchukov, 2008), assume that the function of accusative case is either to **index** the thematic role 'patient' or to **distinguish** the direct object from the subject if they show similar features. Analyzing Mongolian data I argue that the accusative case in Mongolian has extended its functions: it distinguishes between the matrix subject and the embedded subject in a complex sentence. More precisely, in Mongolian, the subjects of embedded clauses can take the accusative case in order to be distinguished from the subjects of the main clauses, if i) the two subjects are adjacent and ii) if they have similar features in terms of referentiality and animacy. Thus accusative expresses a function **across clause boundaries**.

According to the functional approaches to case, overt case marking has the **indexing** function if it indicates information about the thematic role of the argument. For example, ergative case expresses agentivity, accusative case concerns patient. De Hoop & Narasimhan (2005) assume that strong arguments, which are prototypical and highly prominent, take case suffixes. On the other hand, overt case marking can also distinguish between two arguments if both arguments show similar features in terms of their strength, i.e. referentiality and animacy. The cross-linguistic phenomena Differential Object Marking (DOM) and Differential Subject Marking (DSM) may show both functions depending on individual languages. Modern Mongolian exhibits DOM as well as DSM.

DOM in Mongolian displays both functions. In cases, where direct objects are realised as personal pronouns, proper names and definite noun phrases they are marked obligatorily with accusative, and it displays the indexing function. The optional accusative marking of indefinite direct objects indicates distinguishing function since [+human, +specific] indefinite direct objects can take case suffix in order to be differentiated from the subjects, which are usually [+human, +definite]. Whereas the accusative marking of [-animate, -specific] indefinite direct object is almost ungrammatical, as illustrated in (1) and (2).

DSM in Mongolian provides evidence that the function of accusative case in Mongolian is clearly distinguishing. The subjects of (certain kinds of) embedded clauses can occur either with accusative suffix or in unmarked nominative form, as shown in (3), whereas the subjects of the main clauses (further: matrix subjects) occur always in nominative form.

To find out under which conditions the accusative suffix appears, an empirical survey by means of a written questionnaire was conducted. The questionnaire consists of 32 test sentences (with 15 lexicalization) to DSM and 720 subjects were asked. The results of this questionnaire show that speakers of Mongolian prefer the accusative marking of an embedded subject i) if it directly follows the matrix subjects, like in (4a) **and** ii) if the embedded subject is higher in referentiality and animacy than the matrix subject.

This preference disappears if there is an adverb between the two subjects, as in (4b) or if matrix subjects follows the embedded clause. There is also no preference if the embedded subject is lower on referentiality and animacy scales than the matrix subject, as in (5). Summarized, the accusative case attached to the embedded subjects has the function to distinguish it from the matrix subjects if they are close to each other and shows similar features in referentiality and animacy.

The conditions for both DOM and DSM in Mongolian show that the accusative case functions to distinguish not only between two different arguments in the same clause (DOM), but also between the two adjacent subjects across clause boundaries in order to clarify the interclausal relations. This extended function of the accusative case in Mongolian will be compared with similar phenomena of DSM in Miyagawa (1989) and some important consequences for a theory of case will be discussed in the final part of the paper.

Examples:

- (1) Dorj neg oyutan(-ig) hai-j bai-na.
Dorj a student-ACC search-CVB be-PRS
'Dorj is looking for a (certain) student.'
- (2) Bi neg nom(*?-ig) hai-j bai-na.
I a book search-CVB be-PRS
'I am looking for a (certain) book.'
- (3) Dorj bi / namaig ir-sn-ii daraa yav-san.
Dorj.NOM I.NOM / I.ACC come-PST-GEN after go-PST
'Dorj went after I came.'
- (4) a. **Sarnai Dorj*?(-ig)** unuudur huduu-nuus ir-sn-ig med-ne.
Sarnai Dorj-ACC today country-ABL come-PST-ACC know-PRS
'Sarnai knows that Dorj came today from the countryside.'
b. Sarnai **unuudur Dorj(-ig)** huduu-nuus ir-sn-ig med-ne.
Sarnai today Dorj-ACC country-ABL come-PST-ACC know-PRS
'Sarnai knows that Dorj came today from the countryside.'
c. **Dorj(-ig)** unuudur huduu-nuus ir-sn-ig Sarnai med-ne.
Dorj-ACC today country-ABL come-PST-ACC Sarnai know-PRS
'Sarnai knows that Dorj came today from the countryside.'
- (5) Bi ene oyutan(-ig) end amidar-dag-ig med-ne.
I this student-ACC here live-HAB-ACC know-PRS
'I know that here this student lives.'

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