

The Nominative/Genitive Alternation in Modern Mongolian

This paper aims to report thus far unreported phenomena regarding the nominative/genitive alternation in modern Mongolian (Mongolian, hereafter), an Altaic language, and to discuss what they suggest for the theory of (comparative) syntax. We will report five phenomena in this paper.

First, while genitive subjects are disallowed in simple sentences, both nominative and genitive subjects are allowed, when they appear in sentential modifiers to nouns, as shown in (1-2), where CON = conclusive, ADN = adnominal, and \emptyset = an unpronounced element.

(1) Uchuedur Batu- \emptyset /*-iin nom hudaldun-ab-qie/*-san.
yesterday -nom/-gen book buy.take-past-CON/-ADN
'Batu bought a book yesterday.'

(2) Uchuedur Batu- \emptyset -iin hudaldun-ab-san/*-qie nom
yesterday -nom/-gen buy.take-past-ADN/-CON book
'the book which Batu bought yesterday'

(1-2) indicate that what licenses a genitive subject is an external nominal element. Note that while genitive subjects are allowed in sentential modifiers without overt nominal heads in Mongolian, just as in Hiraiwa's (2001) Japanese examples, those examples optionally have corresponding nominal heads, as shown in (3-4), suggesting that in the apparent head-noun-less examples, a nominal element is present in the structure, licensing genitive subjects in Mongolian.

(3) Batu- \emptyset Wulan-ne onsi-gsen/*-zie (hemze) es olan nom onsi-zie/*-gsen.
-nom -gen read.past-ADN/-CON degree than more book read.past-CON/-ADN
'Batu read more books than Wulan did.'

(4) Batu- \emptyset boron-ne zogsu-h (ui) boltal alban ger-t baila.
-nom rain-gen stop-pres time until office-at was
'Batu was at his office until (the time when) the rain stopped.'

Second, the examples in (1-2) also indicate that what Watanabe (1996) calls the Transitivity Restriction does not apply to the distribution of genitive subjects in Mongolian, since genitive subjects may appear, whether or not they co-occur with accusative objects. **Third**, a genitive subject is allowed in a non-local relation with the external nominal element, as shown in (5).

(5) a. Uchuedur bi- \emptyset Wulan- \emptyset hudaldun-ab-san/-qie gezu bodu-gsan nom
yesterday I-nom -nom buy.take-past-ADN/-CON that think-past book
'the book which I thought [that Wulan bought t] yesterday.'

b. Uchuedur bi- \emptyset Wulan-ne hudaldun-ab-san/*-qie gezu bodu-gsan nom
yesterday I-nom -gen buy.take-past-ADN/-CON that think-past book

c. Uchuedur mini Wulan- \emptyset hudaldaun-ab-san/-qie gezu bodu-gsan nom
yesterday I-gen -nom buy.take-past-ADN/-CON that think-past book

d. Uchuedur mini Wulan-ne hudaldaun-ab-san/*-qie gezu bodu-gsan nom
yesterday I-gen -gen buy.take-past-ADN/-CON that think-past book

(5b) shows that within the sentential modifier, the subject in the matrix clause is marked nominative, and the subject in the embedded clause genitive. As shown in (6), however, there must be an external nominal element, when the embedded subject is marked genitive. Note that in (5b) the embedded predicate, COMP, and the matrix predicate do not constitute a unit, so that there is a CP boundary between the two predicates.

(6) Uchuedur bi- \emptyset Wulan- \emptyset /*-ne nom- \emptyset hudaldun-ab-san/-qie gezu bodu-gsan.
yesterday I-nom -nom/-gen book-acc buy.take-past-ADN/-CON that think-past
'I thought [that Wulan bought a book] yesterday.'

This is evidenced by the fact that while clause internal passivization of an object is possible, as shown in (7), long distance passivization of an object across a CP boundary is impossible, as

shown in (8).

(7) Batu- \emptyset [Wulan- \emptyset_1 Baator-dd t_1 uze-gde-gsen gezu] hel-be.
 -nom -nom -by see-passive-past that say-past
 ‘Batu said that Wulan was seen by Baator.’

(8) *Wulan- \emptyset_1 Batu-dd [Baator- \emptyset t_1 uze-gsen gezu] hele-gde-be.
 -nom -by -nom see-past that say-passive-past
 ‘Wulan was said by Batu that Baator saw t .’

Fourth, in contrast to Dagur, one of its related languages, Mongolian allows complete optionality in (i) agreement between a genitive subject and the external nominal head, and (ii) agreement between a genitive possessor and the host nominal. Consider the Dagur examples in (9-10) from Hale (2002) and their corresponding Mongolian examples in (11-12).

(9) [[Mini au-sen] mer^y-min^y] sain.
 I.gen buy-perf horse-I.gen good
 ‘The horse I bought is good.’

(10) [Mini mer^y-min^y] sain.
 I.gen horse-I.gen good
 ‘My horse is good.’

(11) [[Mini hudaldun-ab-san] mor(-min)] sai.
 I.gen buy.take-past horse(-I.poss) good
 ‘The horse I bought is good.’

(12) [Mini mor(-min)] sain.
 I.gen horse(-I.poss) good
 ‘My horse is good.’

Also, as is clear from the data in (5), the nominative/genitive alternation is completely optional in Mongolian, in sharp contrast to Turkish, another Altaic language, in which there is no “genuine” nominative/genitive alternation, as shown in (13) from Kornfilt (2003).

(13) a. [Ben-im aile-m-i terket-**tiğ**-im] söylebti-si
 I-gen family-1.SG-acc abandon-FN-1.SG rumor-CMPM
 ‘the rumor that I abandoned my family’ (Kornfilt (2003, 69))

b. [Ben aile-m-i terket-**ti**-m] söylebti-si
 I (nom) family-1.SG-acc abandon-**past**-1.SG rumor-CMPM
 ‘the rumor that I abandoned my family’ (Kornfilt (2003, 70))

Note that there is a difference in the local marker for AGR between (13a) and (13b): it is nominal in (13a) and verbal in (13b). Therefore, (13a-b) suggest that genitive subjects are licensed by a particular AGR, not an external nominal head. **Fifth**, there is a restriction on the occurrence of genitive subjects in Mongolian, depending on the types of the predicates. As shown in (14b) and (15b), genitive subjects are disallowed, when the predicates are characterized as “stative” predicates.

(14) a. hasha- \emptyset baih/te ger b. *hashan-ne baih/te ger
 garden-nom have/have house garden-gen have/have house
 ‘the house which has a garden’ ‘the house which has a garden’

(15) a. zoozu- \emptyset ugui huun b. *zoosu-ne ugui huun
 money-nom not.have person money-gen not.have person
 ‘the man who does not have money’ ‘the man who does not have money’

We call this restriction the Stativity Restriction (SR). On the other hand, the Japanese counterparts of (14-15) with genitive subjects are perfectly grammatical. **The above findings suggest**, among others, (i) that the nominative/genitive alternation in Mongolian is completely optional, unlike that in Dagur and Turkish, shedding light on parametric syntax in Altaic languages, and (ii) that the locality of Move and Agree is actually different, supporting Bošković’s (2007) view. Under the phase-based model in Chomsky (2000, 2001), the fact that the embedded subject is marked genitive across a CP boundary poses a serious problem. However, this apparent problem constitutes evidence for Bošković (2007), who argues, contra Chomsky (2000, 2001), that the locality of Move and Agree is radically different in the sense that Agree is free from mechanisms constraining Move, such as the Phase Impenetrability Condition.