![The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive - OUKA logo]

Title	An argument for the focus-based approach to the nominative object constructions in Japanese
Author(s)	Yamaguchi, Maiko
Citation	OUCCL(Osaka University Papers in Comparative Contrastive Linguistics). 2025, 2, p. 145-162
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/103066
rights	
Note	

An argument for the focus-based approach to the nominative object constructions in Japanese

Maiko Yamaguchi[*]

Abstract   This article examines nominative object construction and its related issues. In traditional observations, nominative objects are associated only with a wide-scope reading (Tada 1992, Koizumi 2008). However, Nomura (2005) argues that there are also cases in which nominative objects can assume a narrow scope with respect to the stative predicate (marked scope). Moritake (2022) elegantly accounts for the multiple scope readings of nominative objects and the narrow reading of accusative objects through focus-based movement analysis and Upward Agree (Zeijlstra 2012). However, the marked scope of the accusative object counterpart is considered unobtainable in Moritake's work. This study examines how similar to nominative objects, accusative objects can also take a wide- scope reading (non-default reading) if the context is appropriately provided. More precisely, notwithstanding the strong preference for the default reading, marked reading is possible in principle. Unlike Moritake (2022), this study contends that a wide scope reading comes from an exhaustive listing focus feature that is licensed in the CP area. It is worth mentioning that nominative case marking can be not only an indicator of a structural Case, but also an indicator of focus. In Old Japanese (around 8th to 9th century), Miyagawa (2012) reports that the Japanese accusative case was used as an emphatic marker because it could be attached to non-nominals. Similarly, Oe (1972) indicates that nominative object is likely to be associated with the NP (object)-focus reading (whereas accusative objects are associated with VP focus). Additionally, Mihara (2022) remarks that nominative objects tend to bear focused reading. Cross-linguistically, in present day Korean too, nominative object is bearing focused meaning compared to the accusative object (c.f. Ishida 2023). Based on this perspective, this study provides a plausible supporting account for the focus-based analysis of nominative object constructions in consistent manner. Accordingly, this article suggests some adjustments to Moritake's (2022) analysis to reflect the informants' judgments and my assumptions. Additionally, some implications to acceptability shifts in the nominative/genitive conversion is also considered.

Keywords: nominative object, multiple nominative, focus, topic, exhaustive listing focus reading, focus-based analysis

1. Introduction

Nominative object construction has gained the attention of researchers due to its ambivalent nature. Although nominative objects are logical objects (Koizumi 2008, Mihara 2022), they bear the same morphological marking as that of grammatical subjects. In general, complex forms of

stative predicates allow for nominative/accusative conversion. Yet, Mihara (2022) states that simple form stative predicates only allow nominative case morphology on the grammatical object.

(1)   simple form (Mihara 2022:149 with modifications including glosses)
    a. Hanako-wa   tennis (ga/*o)   heta-da.
     Hanako-TOP   tennis-NOM/ACC bad at
     'Hanako is bad at tennis.'
    b. Taroo-wa   coffee-ga/*o   sukida.
     Taroo-TOP   coffee-NOM/ACC like
     'Taroo likes coffee.'

(2)   complex form (Mihara 2022:149 with modifications including glosses)
    a. Boku-wa kono CD (ga/o)   kai-tai.
     I -TOP   this CD NOM/ACC buy-want to
     ' I want to buy this CD.'
    b. Uchino   Musume-wa moo   Eigo-ga/o   hanas-eru.
     Home-GEN daughter   already English-NOM/ACC speak/can
     'My daughter can already speak English.'

For the complex form, accusative case-marking was considered default[1]. Moreover, Mihara mentions that the availability of NOM/ACC conversion is affected by several contextual restrictions, such as the locality between the nominative object and the predicate (Shibatani 1978), and the transitivity of the predicates (Iori 1995)[2].

---

[1] However, Maki and Morishima (2004) reported that accusative object becomes acceptable thorough embedding under a nominal or fronting operation.

[2] As to the transitivitiy restriction, even though a complex form is used in (i), if the predicate's influence onto the object is strong, it is said to repel the nominative marking on the object.

(i) (Iori 1995:56, Mihara 2022:150 with some modifications)
   naze ore-*ga/o   koroshi-tai-nda.
   why I-NOM/ACC kill-want to-COP
  'Why do you want to kill me?'

Admitting that the predicate is bearing high transitivity, but the main reason why this sentence is considered to be even more degraded should be the processing load/confounding factors. For instance, if *ore* is marked with nominative case, it can assume either an Agent reading (subject) or a Patient/Theme reading (object). Personally, it is rather difficult to interpret this nominative *ore* with the grammatical object reading. If the Agent nominal overtly shows up as in '*naze omae-wa ore-ga koroshi-tainnda?*', 'why do you (overt) want to kill me?' the nominative case-marking does not sound bad at all to this author. 6 out of 9 informants agreed to my judgment. The rest of them commented that it is puzzling to decide which one of the two arguments (*ore* or *omae*) becomes an Agent in (i).

However, if we apply Moritake's (2022) s analysis, the Agent theta-role that is originated in V (in this case *kill*), is rendered into the Experiencer after the stative affix is introduced into the structure. In principle, degradation in acceptability should not be expected as it is already suggested in my informants' judgements.

When sufficient contextual information is provided to (i), my informants judged this sentence as acceptable (8 out of 9 informants.) In the subject enforcing context, they could obtain the subject reading and 7 out of 9 informants said felicitous.

Incidentally, Mihara (2022) presented less confounding instance than Iori (1995) and for Mihara, it is judged as ungrammatical with the nominative case morphology. However, to my ear, (ii) does not sound degraded at all, compared to the example in (i).

(ii) supposedly less confounding instance (Mihara 2022:150, with some modifications including judgement.)
   Ano biru-ga/o   kowashi-tai.
   That building-NOM/ACC   destroy-want to.
 'I want to destroy that building.'

This study considers the requirement for complex predicates regarding the nominative object construction. Specifically, if the predicates allow stative reading, and if they are followed by stative/potential affixes, they are, in principle, candidates for holding the nominative object construction.

Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that accusative marking is reported to be preferred over the nominative case in the embedded context primarily due to the processing load (Nambu et al. 2020).

Regarding the identity of the nominative case marking on the object, I argue that it is structural and sometimes bears an exhaustive listing focus by moving to CP. Although there are analyses in which nominative case-marking is attributable to P (Mihara 2022) or inherent Case (Niinuma and Taguchi 2009), I do not adopt these in this study because they have serious problems[3].

As for how to license this nominative case, no agreement has been reached either. There are numerous licensing approaches, so a non-extensive list is provided: licensing by the stative affix and T (Tada 1992); licensing by T (Koizumi 1994, 2008, Nomura 2005); licensing either by T or by predication (nominative object in the latter case is considered a major subject and an inherent Case.) (Niinuma and Taguchi 2009); licensing by stative predicates (Kuno1973); licensing by the interpretable Case feature of C (ϕ-feature agreement is considered absent in Japanese in this account, and focus movement triggers movement to the TP spec.) (Moritake 2022); nominative case is P and the nominative object is PP Mihara (2022).

Most of these approaches above account for the default scope reading of the nominative object (a wide reading with respect to the stative affix). Among these, the empirical and theoretical coverage of Moritake (2022) was the most extensive[4]. Therefore, my analysis was adapted from Moritake's (2022). In the next section, relevant approaches and problems are presented. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, relevant scope facts with nominative objects, and precedent researchers' analyses and problems are introduced. Section 3 reviews Moritake's analysis. Section 4 presents my proposal, and Section 5 examines the implications. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

2. Precedent Analyses

In this section, relevant scope facts are provided from previous research. Subsequently, the essential approaches are presented. Their inherent problems are also considered.

2.1. Scope facts around nominative objects and accusative objects

First, we introduce a standard case of nominative object construction. As briefly mentioned in the last section, nominative objects tend to take wide scope compared to the stative affix when the focus sensitive particle like 'dake' *only* is attached to the objects. Most researchers argue that wide scope reading is the only form of reading. In the preceding analyses, the accusative case-marked counterpart has unanimously low scope with respect to the stative/potential affix.

---

[3] Specifically, Niinuma and Taguchi (2009) assumes two types of nominative cases in Japanese: structural nominative Case (which is associated with non-focus reading or neutral description reading (c.f. Kuno 1973)), and inherent Case, which is licensed by the sentential predicate since it is considered a major subject and it is associated with the exhaustive-listing focus reading. Although I agree with them in that exhaustive-listing focus should be licensed in the CP area, I do not think it as inherent Case nor a major subject. Arguments against major subject approach can be found in Koizumi (2008). Regarding P-analysis of the nominative case, it would suffice to mention that nominative objects can be associated with floating quantifiers but PPs cannot. (c.f. Moritake 2022, Koizumi 2008, Miyagawa et al. 2019)

[4] More accurately, Moritake (2022) accounts for both wide and narrow readings of the nominative object and the narrow-only reading of the accusative object.

(3)   (Moritake 2002: 2)
    a.   John-ga   migime-dake-o   tumor-e-ru.
        John-NOM right eye-only-ACC close-can-PRES
        'John can close only his right eye.'
  (i) can > only (John can wink his right eye.)
  (ii)?*only>can (It is only his right eye that he can close.)
    b.   John-ga   migime-dake-ga   tumor-e-ru.
        John-NOM right eye-only-NOM close-can-PRES
        'John can close only his right eye.'
   (i)* can>only, (ii) only>can

As Kuno (1973) remarks, if the predicate is presented without a stative affix, nominative case marking is not obtainable. In this sense, Kuno argues that this stative predicate is the source of nominative case marking of an object. Tada (1992) uses AgrO to license the accusative Case and the combination of AgrO and a stative suffix assigns nominative Case to the object. Case licensing is performed through a spec-head relation, so objects undergo movements and obtain Case at the landing sites. This analysis captures the wide scope reading of the nominative object in (3b) and the low scope reading of the accusative object in (3a). However, as Koizumi (2008:150) states, "It is not clear at all why nominative Case should be licensed by two distinct sets of categories as different as Tense and stative predicates." Koizumi also points out that Tada's (1992) analysis faces a problem when negation is introduced into the structure. In Tada's analysis, nominative objects are located roughly in the VP; it cannot capture the actual wide scope reading of the nominative objects when negation is introduced into the structure. Owing to space limitations, I will not go into any further detail.

Koizumi (1994) also adopts spec-head licensing for the nominative Case. To obtain a nominative Case, movement is obligatory. The negation problem can be entertained by using Koizumi's approach. However, as Moritake (2022) notes, Koizumi's (1994) may face problems for its obligatory movement. Moritake demonstrates that the nominative Case of the object can be obtained without moving to TP-spec.

Subsequently, regarding the non-default reading of the nominative object, Nomura (2005) argues that a low scope reading of the nominative object can be obtained if provided with a supporting context.

(4)   (Nomura 2005: 176): narrow scope reading of the nominative object is obtainable.
    Taro-ga   koyubi-dake-ga   mage-rare-ru no wa   shitteita-ga,
    Taro-NOM pinkie-only-NOM crook-can-PRES NML-TOP   knew-but
    (kare-ga) kusuriyubi-dake-mo mage-rare-ru   no-ni-wa   odoroita
    he-NOM   ring-finger-only-also crook-can-PRES NML-DAT -TOP surprised
    I have known that Taro can crook only his pinkie but I am
    surprised that he can also crook only his ring finger.' ("can > only" reading is possible)

The low scope reading presented by Nomura (2005) cannot be considered in most of the preceding analyses. In the following sections, we will observe how to account for non-default readings.

3. **Points from Moritake's (2022) Analysis**
    In this section, the points central to my analysis will be reviewed.

3.1. Case assignment does not involve phi-feature agreement in Japanese

Since Japanese has multiple case phenomena, such as multiple nominative case constructions, the phi feature agreement is said to be absent in Japanese. Thus, in Moritake's approach, phi-feature agreement is irrelevant to Case assignment (c.f. Saito 2016).

Instead, Case assignment is completed through agreement. He adopts an upward agreement system (Zeijlstra 2012). *u*Case on the DP is licensed by the interpretive features of each phase head: C bears NOM and *v**P bears ACC.

(5)   (Moritake 2022:17) structure for the accusative object

```
                 ssP
         _____
       v*P                  ss
    _____
  subject      v*´
           _____
         VP             v*
      _____
   object      V
```
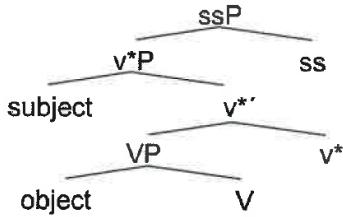
In the structure above, *v** assigns an accusative Case to the object and there is no room for the object to be marked as nominative Case.

Further derivation of the accusative object up to the CP in Motitake (2022) is as follows:

(6)   (Moritake 2022:21) Further derivation to the CP domain

[$_{v*P}$ subject [$_{v*'}$ [$_{VP}$ object, V] v*]]

[$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$ subject [$_{T'}$ [$_{ssP}$ ~~subject~~ [$_{ss'}$ [$_{v*P}$ ~~subject~~ [$_{v*'}$ [$_{VP}$ object, ~~V~~] V-v*]] ss]] T]] C]

The movement of the subject to the spec of TP is rooted in EPP, since Moritake adopts Miyagawa's (2001) idea that EPP can be satisfied either by subjects or objects. Interestingly, the theta role of the object is assigned twice: First at the spec of *v**P (Agent) and then at the spec of *ss*P (Experiencer). Moritake assumes that the multiple theta role is permissible. Here, the uninterpretable feature of an object is licensed from the interpretable Case feature (ACC) of *v** through upward agree, and accusative Case is assigned to the object. The subject undergoes an agree relation with C's interpretable Case feature and the nominative Case is licensed. Moritake's analysis consistently captures the low scope reading of the accusative object with respect to the stative suffix.

The following is his structure for the (3a).

(7)   (Moritake 2022: 21) accusative object

```
                      CP
             _____
           TP              C
      _____
  John-ga          T´
           _____
         ssP              T
     _____
  John-ga       ss´
           _____
         v*P            ss
     _____
  John-ga       v*´
          _____
        VP            v*  ┐
   _____         │ focus-feature
 migime-dake-o    V´      │
           _____│
         migime-dake-o   V ◄
```
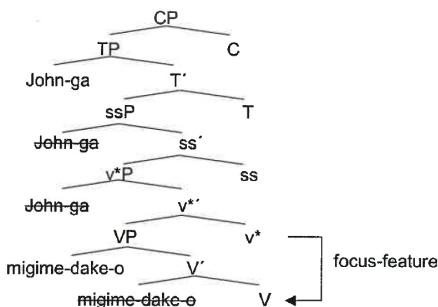
Moritake assumes that an accusative object can bear focus, but is licensed inside the domain of *v**P. For Moritake, the accusative object always takes a narrow scope compared to the stative predicate. The focus feature is inherited from *v** to V and the object moves to spec VP.

This involves movement from complement to spec of the same head. Normally, complement to spec of the same projection is ruled out by anti-locality (c.f. Bošković 2015). Anti-locality is a condition that rules out too short movement. According to Bošković (2015: 2) "Move must cross at least one full phrase (not just a segment)." However, a head movement is applied to V-to-v^*, so the movement itself seems feasible.

While it is evident that there is a VP/v^*P focus reading of the accusative object, I have a different view. According to Oe (1972), accusative objects are both compatible with the NP-focus reading (exhaustive-listing reading) and other focus reading: non-NP, v^*P (or VP) as a whole is being focused.

As the informants also perceived a wide reading of the accusative object in a similar sentence as (3a)[5], at least for some speakers who accepted the wide reading of the accusative object further consideration is required, if we adopt Moritake's (2022).

3.2. Derivation for the nominative object

Subsequently, the derivation of the nominative object counterpart is observed. Because the objects are marked as nominative case, the accusative case assignment function must be voided. To do this, Moritake (2022) initially applies Epstein, Kitahara and Seely (EKS)'s (2016) external pair-Merge for V and v^*. The consequence of this operation is to render v^* invisible to the syntactic operation, and the accusative case-assignment ability is lost during the process. Moritake maintains that the external pair-Merge cancels the v^*P phase. Regarding the initial application of the external pair-Merge of V and v^*, in nominative object construction, Moritake emphasizes that the presence of the stative predicate is quintessential on top of the external pair-Merge of V to v^* to make the nominative object possible. To overcome this, Moritake applies an external pair-Merge to the stative suffix (ss) and v^*. Here, accusative Case assignment capacity of v^* is also removed.

(8)   (Moritake 2022:19) updated version of the external pair-Merge application

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\underline{<ss, v^*>P} \\
\text{subject} \quad \underline{<ss, v^*>'} \\
\underline{VP} \quad <ss, v^*> \\
\text{object} \quad V
\end{array}
$$
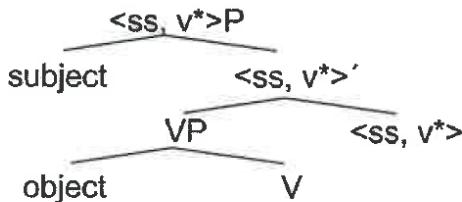
With this attempt, as presented above, it no longer needs to mention the necessity of the stative suffix independent of the external pair-Merge.

The following is Moritake's derivation for the nominative object.

(9)   (Moritake 2022: 22)
  a. [$_{<ss, v^*>P}$ subject [$_{<ss, v^*>'}$ [$_{VP}$ object, V] < ss, v^*>]]
  b. [$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$ subject [$_{T'}$ [$_{<ss, v^*>P}$ ~~subject~~ [$_{<ss, v^*>'}$ [$_{VP}$ object, V̶] V-<ss, v^*>]] T]] C]

A characteristic of this derivation is that the external argument (or theta role) is absent, as well as v^*'s Case licensing/assigning property. This is achieved by the external pair-Merge of

---

[5] When the sentence is provided with a supporting context, five out of nine informants commented that this wide scope reading of the nominative object is felicitous with respect to the possibility/stative affix. (non-default reading of the accusative object). In a similar vein, non-default reading of the nominative subject (can> only nominative object) was obtainable to my informants if it is provided with the right context. They mentioned that the narrow scope reading was forced from the context, though it is not natural.

the stative suffix with *v**. It seems that the head movement of V toward the amalgam <*ss, v**>
is also posited here. With the introduction of T, the subject is raised to its spec, probably be-
cause of the EPP. Then, when C is introduced into the derivation, it forms an agree relation
with the subject and the object through upward agree, and their Case is assigned as the nomi-
native Case. Looking at the output, essentially the same effect from the multiple Agree
operation is obtainable here (Hiraiwa 2005, Koizumi 2008). Since spec-head agreement is
only adopted for focus feature licensing, nominative objects can get nominative Case inside
the VP, thereby low scope reading of the nominative object can be entertained in Moritake's
analysis. When the nominative object takes a wider scope with respect to stative affix and
(negation), a wide reading is reported to be achieved from the focus-based movement to the
TP-spec. Moritake assumes that focus feature licensing is performed by the spec-head relation.
Moreover, he assumes that the focus feature, which originated in C, is inherited by T. However,
since he assumes that the TP-spec is already a place for the subject and the EPP is supposedly
met at that spec, moving the nominative object to the same Spec means admitting the existence
of multiple specs. When we look at his actual derivation of the example (10) the nominative
object is raised to the inner spec of TP (seemingly like a tucking-in operation)[6]. Although his
derivation captures the wide scope reading of a nominative object, several questions remain.
Since the focus on this object is presumably an exhaustive listing type of focus, how can we
make sure to focus only on the nominative object because both subjects and objects are located
in TP-spec? Moreover, as Kuno (1973) points out, the left-most nominative case-marked ele-
ment is likely to receive this exhaustive listing focus if multiple nominative cases appear in a
sentence[7]. Looking at his structure, it seems to predict the nominative subject, rather than the
nominative object should be focused. Alternatively, if multiple agree is possible with focus
licensing, both subjects and nominative objects should be exhaustively focused, which would
incur an odd interpretation from the actual reading (In a natural reading, only a nominative
object is being focalized, and the subject is read as a presentational phrase that is in sync with
a topic reading). However, for Moritake, the multiple focus reading seems permissible. It then
follows that his structure for the wide scope of nominative object construction could use more
adjustments to derive the other reading. Since Moritake suggests that the focus feature is li-
censed by spec-head relation, topic type feature and focus type feature should be associated
with distinct heads rather than a shared head. In the next section, I would like to touch on this
issue.

(10)   (Moritake 2022: 23) derivation when the nominative object is focused

---
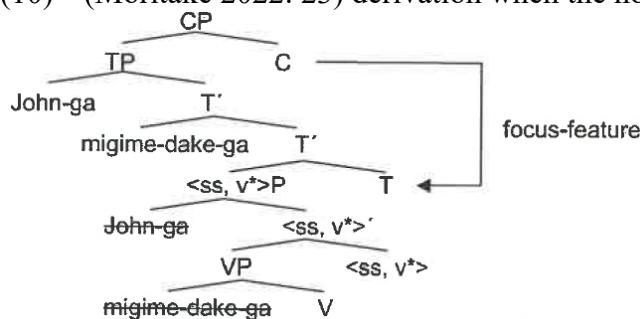
[6] Whether tucking-in is a universal operation or not is not considered here. (c.f. Paillé 2021).

[7] According to (Kuno 1973: 67), "when there is more than one NP-*ga* in a sentence that can potentially receive
the exhaustive-listing interpretation, the leftmost one takes precedence, and the rest are interpretable only as
neutral description."

Next, non-default readings and Moritake's views are observed.

3.3. Non default reading (wide reading of the accusative object) is absent

Moritake takes the position that a wide scope reading of the accusative object is absent because the focus feature of the accusative object is licensed $v*$P internally. Specifically, the focus feature of $v*$ is inherited by V, and the object is moved to the VP-spec position. Moritake suggests that a head movement takes place from V to $v*$; essentially, the focus feature of the accusative object is licensed in the $v*$P spec. Once the focus feature is licensed with the accusative object, no further movement is operative for this element because of the criterial freezing effect of Rizzi (2006).

His structure for the focused accusative object is given as (11).

(11)　(Moritake 2022: 26) obligatory narrow reading of the focused accusative object with respect to the stative suffix

```
                CP
          TP          C
     Taro-ga      T´
          ssP          T
     Taro-ga      ss´
          v*P          ss
     Taro-ga      v*´
          VP          v*
   koyubi-dake-o    V´        ┐ focus-feature
          koyubi-dake-o    V  ┘
```
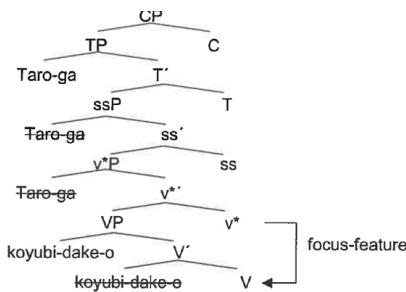
This accounts for the obligatory low scope reading of the accusative object in Nomura's (2005) example.

Incidentally, Koizumi (2008) suggests an Agree-based approach to nominative object construction. There, he adopts Hiraiwa's (2001) Multiple Agree and Multiple Move to derive multiple nominative Case occurrences in this structure. After the Multiple Agree is done among T, the subject and the object, multiple movements to the TP-spec are triggered by the EPP. However, Koizumi's (2008) approach also predicts doubly focused readings of the subject and the object if TP-spec was the locus for the focus, in accordance with Moritake's (2022). Some adjustments are also required to make a non-focused reading of the subject for his analysis.

Next, another non-default reading (a narrow reading of the nominative object) is reviewed.

3.4. Narrow scope reading of the nominative subject is less preferred

Moritake's stance toward the narrow scope reading of the nominative subject, which is said to be possible in Nomura (2005) is possible, but nonetheless unnatural or sounds degraded compared to the accusative counterpart. To explain why such a non-default reading is difficult to obtain, he mentions that the scope of the element that has undergone focus-based movement tends to be fixed at the landing site (surface scope). In Nomura's example, although the nominative subject has moved to TP-spec for focus reasons due to the narrow scope reading enforcing context, the actual scope interpretation of the nominative subject is done in the VP internal position. Thus, Moritake states that degraded judgments with this reading are attributable to the scope mismatches.

(12) (Moritake 2022:25) scope mismatch between the focus licensing position and the actual interpretation position
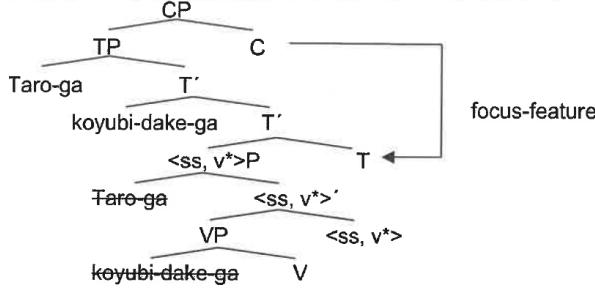
Additionally, it could be considered that the phonological feature of the copy and the semantic feature of the copy are read off at different positions due to the enforcing context. In the next section, I propose adjustments to the Moritake's analysis.

3.5. Another Important Aspect in Moritake (2022): dialectal variation

Before discussing the analysis, I would briefly mention another crucial aspect introduced in Moritake (2022), as it will be particularly relevant when we consider the focus property of nominative objects later.

According to Moritake (2022), interpretive differences on nominative case-marked elements can be found in both standard Japanese (SJ) and Kumamoto Japanese (KJ). However, unlike SJ, KJ exhibits morphological differences according to the interpretation: the *v*P-internal non-focus reading with -*no* marking and exhaustive listing focus reading in TP-spec. He takes the view that *ga/no* are both nominative markers, but that they exhibit different morphologies, whether they bear focus meaning or not. In addition, *no* is considered an anti-focus(/topic) marker (c.f. Nishioka 2019), and when it is marked with *no*, the nominative object is reported to remain in *v*P in the non-embedded context.

Later, I argue that these case-marking distinctions, according to the reading of the nominative case, are observable even in SJ, though it is strictly restricted to the nominal context and the positional indication can be drawn indirectly.

4. My Analyses

After an alternative adjustment to the external pair-Merge application for nominative object construction is presented, derivations using the proposed analysis are provided.

### 4.1. Similar but distinct Morphological Operation

In this section, I attempt to capture the same phenomena based on Moritake's (2022) approach to the nominative object construction.

First, instead of an external pair-Merge, I would assume that the morphological operation for *v** and the stative suffix takes place prior to the numeration. If my understanding of EKS (2016) and Moritake (2022) is correct, what is being affixed to goes invisible to syntax with this external pair-Merge. In EKS (2016), an external pair-Merge occurs between V and *v**: <V, *v**> in English. V is said to undergo an external pair-Merge to *v**. What is interesting about the external pair-Merge is that unlike head movement in syntax, which is a domain extending, and argument augmenting operation, external pair-Merge can be considered a domain reducing operation, since after this operation, *v**P is cancelled.

Putting aside English, let us consider Moritake's (2022) application of this operation in Japanese. I have no objections to applying pre-syntactic morphological operations to *v** and *ss*. However, when taking Japanese morphological order into consideration, Moritake's (2022) external pair-Merge applied to *ss* and *v** seems a bit odd. Note that in Japanese, stative

predicates actually follow verbal or light verbal elements, which is noticeable in the case of a causative instance, as in (V-*sase-rare-ru*) V-CAUSE-POTENTIAL SUFFIX-PRESENT. For an external pair-Merge, what is being attached to becomes invisible; this point may not be a serious problem, but if we resurrect more traditional morphological operation, when two elements are merged or combined, what is on the right-hand side tends to have the qualifications to decide the category of the derivatives as a whole. If external pair-Merge is a type of morphological operation, it is reasonable to expect these aspects to occur in the derived amalgam. According to Williams (1981:248), "In morphology, we define the head of a morphologically complex word to be the righthand member of the word…Call this definition the Righthand Head Rule (RHR)." For Williams, suffixes are qualified for heads and they decide the derivative's category as in (13). Here, what is placed righthand (suffix) is the head that determines the category N.

(13)   (Williams 1981:249)
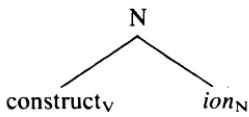
The following is the structure of the pre-syntactic morphological merger.

(14)   morphological merger to v^* and stative suffix: *ss*
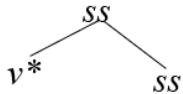
Following the righthand head rule, suffixes become the head of the derivative and the category of the derivative is determined by the properties of the suffix. Putting in more recent term, we suggest that suffixes are qualified as labelers in a morphological setting. *ss* projects and determines the label of the amalgam. In this way, the invisible property of v^* and the morphological order emerge effortlessly.

Again, because the external pair-Merge is a pre-syntactic operation, there should be no contradictions in positing a similar morphological operation, when we combine v^* and *ss* pre-syntactically. In fact, the righthand head rule derives the most coveted results of the external pair-Merge without positing extra assumptions: the invisibility of v^* and the necessary absence of the accusative Case assigning property. Since what is projected is on the right side, the property of the suffix remains and projects. In this study, the stative predicate has an Experiencer subject, and does not assign an accusative Case. Thus, traditional morphological operations are viable.

Therefore, I am not calling this operation an external pair-Merge, but instead assume it to be a pre-syntactic morphological merger, meaning the ultimate outcome should be the same as the external pair-Merge: cancellation of the v^*P and the absence of the accusative Case assigning property. To avoid confusion, I'll call the derivative as "*ss amalgam*" and write as "*ssa*" in my derivation.

Hence, although I mostly agree with Moritake (2022) and would like to adopt most parts, there are few differences. The difference is regarding the locus of the exhaustive listing type of the focus licensing position, the composition of the *ss amalgam*, and the treatment of the wide scope reading of the accusative object with respect to the stative affix.

Let us consider the wide scope reading of the accusative object. Recall that Nomura (2005) mentions that context helps derive the non-default reading of the nominative subject (narrow reading). A similar effect is observed in the context of an accusative object.

4.2. Accusative case marking and exhaustive-listing reading

Matsui (2008) reports that even if nominative case-marking is impermissible with the neutral description (non-focus) reading, an exhaustive-listing reading permits NOM/ACC conversion, as in (15-16). Here too, the supporting context seems effective in deriving an exhaustive-listing reading.

(15)   (Matsui 2008: 102) In the case non-focus reading doesn't accept nominative object
Musuko-*ga/o isha-ni si-ta-katta.
My son-*NOM/ACC doctor-DAT become-want-PAST
'I wanted my son to become a doctor.'

(16)   (c.f. Matsui 2008:103, Niinuma and Taguchi 2009:129)
Exhaustive listing reading with the supporting context:
A: I hear that your daughter is studying at a medical school. She will take over your clinic when she graduates.
B: Hontoowa, (musume-de   naku) musuko-o/-ga   isha-ni   shi-ta-katta.
   Actually,   my daughter-be not my son-ACC/-NOM doctor-DAT become-want-PAST
'In fact, I wanted my son to become a doctor, not my daughter.'

The point here is that accusative case-marked items can bear the exhaustive-listing reading type of focus[8]. Like Ueno (2017), I assume that the exhaustive-listing type of focus is licensed in the CP area, specifically, (FocP), and that the aboutness topic is licensed at TopP, which is located higher than FocP.

In this case, these features are preferably licensed by spec-head relations, by moving an element to these specifiers and interpreting them at that position.

Of course, when phonological and semantic features are interpreted in the same position, their interpretation is more readily obtainable, thereby inducing the default (preferred reading). In contrast, inverse reading (phonological and semantic features interpreted separately) requires more processing load and is less preferred. However, the latter interpretation becomes feasible with the help of context.

4.3. Derivations

Based on Moritake (2022) and the judgements result obtained from my informants, I allocate structures to the possible interpretations.
Firstly, I present default readings for the following sentences from Koizumi (2008). The following contexts are provided by the author.

(17)   (Koizumi 2008:154): wide reading is not obtainable for Koizumi (2008)
a. Kiyomi-wa   migime-dake-o   tumur-e-ru.
   Kiyomi-TOP   right eye-only-ACC   close-can-PRES
   Lit: 'Kiyomi cannot close only his right eye.'

---

[8] My informants said that the case markers are less likely to be omitted in this example (16) and genitive case-marking is out unless it is interpreted as possessive, which ensues quite bizarre reading. In fact, one of my informants is a speaker of Kyushu dialect who has a similar *ga/no* conversion pattern presented in Moritake (2022). She says in her dialect, too *no*-marking is impossible in this case, meaning that this sentence is strictly interpreted as the exhaustive-listing reading and nominative and accusative case-marked elements are both outside of the *v*P phase. They are both interpreted in the CP area.

[can > only] 'Kiyomi can wink his right eye.'
* [only> can] 'It is only the right eye that Kiyomi cannot close.'
b. Kiyomi-wa   migime-dake-ga   tumur-e-ru.
Kiyomi-TOP   right.eye-only-NOM   close-can-PRES
[can > only] 'Kiyomi can wink his right eye.'
[only > can] 'It is only the right eye that Kiyomi cannot close.'

(18) **Provided contexts to my informants**
(wide reading of the object inducing context)
Kiyomi has undergone surgery on her left eye and is still under the effect of anesthesia.
(narrow reading of the object inducing context)
Kiyomi often winks.

Unlike Koizumi (2008), the informants said that both readings were obtainable for the accusative object. If the sentence in (17) is presented with the supporting context provided above, a wider reading of the accusative object can be obtained. With regard to the narrow reading of the subject, the default reading is strong for them, and the non-default reading was possible, but sounds unnatural for them[9]. Despite sounding unnatural, as long as it is an obtainable reading, I would regard the narrow reading of the subject as a possible interpretation.

4.4. Narrow reading of the accusative object

Without prior context, the accusative object is read as being non-exhaustively focused. Here, even though *only,* a focus sensitive item is attached, it would only be interpreted as the non-exhaustive listing type of focus, possibly in v*P[10].

(19) Narrow scope reading of the accusative object (non-exhaustive-listing focus reading)
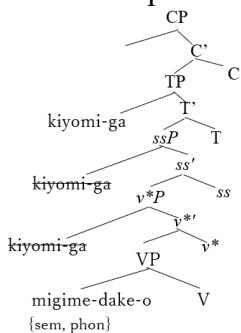
Regarding the core derivation of the accusative object, I follow Moritake (2022): Both semantic and phonological features are interpreted at the same position. Again, I assume that the default reading of the accusative object does not bear NP focus. Even if it appears with a focus sensitive particle, only the predicate as a whole is focused on at best, and it is a non-exhaustive listing type of focus that does not require movement to the CP area. Hence, I do not assume NP scrambling for this type. Therefore, I do not use split-CP here.

4.5. Wide readings of the nominative objects

There are two possible default readings of the nominative objects.

---

[9] In the narrow reading-inducing context, I ask them to dispose of the eye-surgery context from their minds. Yet, somehow, they find the narrow reading of the nominative subject pretty unnatural though it is obtainable.

[10] I am not against with Moritake (2022) in positing a focus licensing position in v*P, but I do not consider this position as the locus for licensing an exhaustive-listing type of focus.

The first is the double focus reading, as indicated by Moritake (2022) and the topic-focus reading presented in this paper. Other than the external pair-Merge, and licensing position of focus, I adopt Moritake's (2022) approach.

(20)   The nominative elements are doubly focused
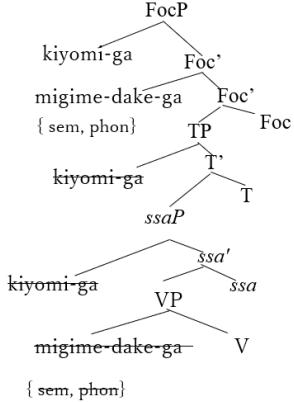
Here, both nominative subject and accusative object are exhaustively focused. Unlike Moritake (2022), I did not use tucking-in option, and the exhaustive-listing focus is licensed in the multiple specs of FocP.

The other wide scope reading of the nominative object is presented as follows.

(21)   nominative subject is interpreted more or less like a topic
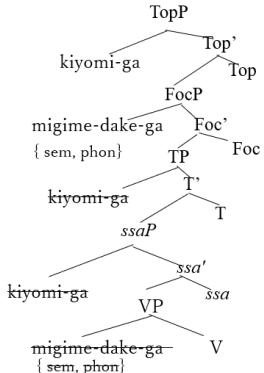
In this reading, the nominative subject does not bear an exhaustive-listing type of focus and works as a sort of topic item.[11] Personally, the latter reading is more natural to the former (double focus) reading. This demonstrates that there is a strong tendency for the nominative object to attract an exhaustive-listing type of focus, and thereby, the general pattern (the leftmost nominative element gets focused) is overridden, meaning that nominative objects are more likely to be focused than nominative subjects.

Next, non-default readings will be considered.

---

[11] In passing, Kuno (1973) reported that nominative marker and topic marker are neutralized in the embedded context. Interpretation-wise, I do not perceive any difference if I change the nominative case-marking of the nominative subject with the topic marker: *wa*. Of course, it is not in an embedded context, but to the extent my interpretation is correct, I would assume that *ga*-marked items, too can bear topicality even in the root clause. (Kuno 1973: 56)

The distinction between the thematic *wa* and the descriptive *ga* and the exhaustive-listing *ga* becomes neutralized in subordinate clauses. All three are realized as *ga*.

4.6. Structures for the non-default readings: wide scope reading of the accusative object
Here, we consider what happens in the non-default wide reading of the accusative object.

(22)   wide scope reading of the accusative object with respect to *ss*
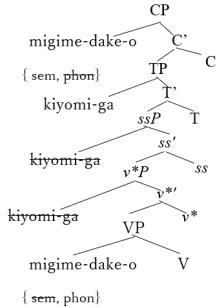
Recall that accusative case-marked items can bear a neutral or focused reading. As presented above, in some stative predicates, Matsui (2008) argues that in the non-exhaustive-listing sense, the nominative object was not allowed, and only accusative case marking was possible. In contrast, as we have already observed, in the exhaustive-listing sense, both nominative and accusative cases are acceptable, meaning that accusative case is read as non-focus as default, but it can bear an exhaustive-listing reading like nominative case. This indicates that nominative objects are likely to be interpreted as having an exhaustive-listing type.

Therefore, if nothing goes wrong, nominative objects are prone to take a wider scope and the accusative object assumes a narrow scope with respect to the stative predicate or negation. Therefore, a non-default reading of the nominative object (a narrow reading) is difficult to obtain if it is not for the appropriate context. Conversely, accusative objects are likely to be interpreted in the $v*$P area because they are usually associated with non-focus reading. Even if the focus licensing position is in the $v*$P domain, I assume that this is not an exhaustive-listing type of focus that can be licensed. Like Oe (1972), in the case of accusative object, only the predicate as a whole can be focused in VP/$v*$P. To get the exhaustive-listing reading, I assume that "covert scrambling" of the accusative object takes place. I call it covert not because it undergoes LF movement but because it is not audible and it has an inverse scope reading (sound and meaning are interpreted in distinct positions). Therefore, although the movement itself is operated, and the copy is present in the CP area, and its semantic feature is interpreted at the landing site, its sound or phonological feature is interpreted at the base (low) position, implying that it is not audible, that is, inverse scope reading. Here, because the scrambled copy meets the exhaustive-listing reading, its semantic feature is interpreted in the CP (FocP) area. However, it is somehow pronounced in the original position. Since its semantic and phonetic features are interpreted in the distinct positions, a wide scope reading of the accusative object reading is less preferred, probably because of the processing factor, if it were not for a good context to support it. In this sense, what is suggested in Moritake (2022:25) sounds right in that "focus-moved elements tend to take its scope at its surface position." In the same reasoning, personally, if the overt scrambling is applied to this accusative object, a wide reading is more easily obtainable[12]. However, to the extent that my informants had no

---

[12] The application of scrambling that feeds the Case-assignment is reported in Kasai (2018). Here, instead of Case, focus feature is licensed through this operation, although it is *covertly* done here, since it is not pronounced at the scrambled position.

problem getting this wide scope reading of the accusative object when it is supported by the context, I think my reasoning is on the right track.[13]

4.7. Structure for the non-default reading: narrow scope reading of the nominative object

The following structure shows narrow reading of the nominative object.

(23)   Narrow scope reading of the nominative object
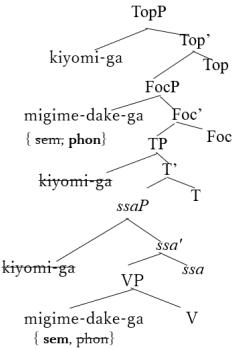
     A similar story to the previous subsection should be directly applicable to this derivation. Here too, the phonological and semantic features are interpreted separately: the phonological feature is read off in spec-FocP, and the semantic feature is interpreted at the base position. Hence, an inverse scope is derived[14]. At any rate, these non-default readings would cost much more processing load, and would be acceptable with the help of a supporting (enforcing) context.

5. Implications from the NOM/GEN conversion: nominative object tends to bear exhaustive listing reading more often than the nominative subject?

In this section, we will observe that standard Japanese (SJ) also has a way to distinguish between focused and non-focused reading morphologically, at least indirectly, by examining Niinuma and Taguchi. In the latter part of this section, the possibility of subject/object asymmetry in NOM/GEN conversion is briefly discussed. We consider the following example.

(24)   (Niinuma and Taguchi 2009:130) neutral reading of the nominative object
    a.   Watashi-ga   biiru-ga   nomi-ta-i
        I-NOM   beer-NOM drink-want-PRES
        'I want to drink beer
    b.   neutral reading allows NOM/GEN conversion
        Watashi-ga   biiru-no   nomi-ta-i   wake
        I-NOM   beer-GEN   drink-want-PRES reason
        'the reason that I want to drink beer' (neutral description reading)

---

[13] It could also be considered this way. Since a focus sensitive item *only* is attached to the accusative object, this item is attracted to the location in which certain focus feature is licensed: v*P. Although the exhaustive listing feature that comes from the accusative object is not met, this initial association might be negatively affecting the scrambling of the accusative object as a whole to the CP area. Therefore, only the semantic feature of the accusative object is scrambled to the CP area, and the sound feature is read off at its base position. Whether partial feature scrambling is a viable option or not will not be further pursued, since it is outside the realm of this paper.

[14] I would not call the scrambling of the nominative object to spec-FocP as *covert*, since it is pronounced at the landing site. Maybe simple scrambling and the inverse scope (feature interpretation at the distinct position) might be more appropriate word to describe this fact.

Niinuma and Taguchi (2009) argue that the nominative object disallows NOM/GEN conversion when interpreted as an exhaustive-listing focus. For them, when the nominative object bears a focus reading, this is considered an inherent Case (details aside). Thus, the inherent Case rejects case alternation. Note that the non-focused nominative object is considered to be licensed by T, and bears a structural nominative Case for them. Hence, according to their reasoning, the structural Case (neutral reading) does not prevent it from undergoing case alternation as in (24).

However, I would argue that what is reported in KJ is also happening in this case. Recall from Moritake (2022) that *no* acts as an anti-focus marker in KJ, and if the nominative object is marked with *no*, it is supposed to remain in the *v*P area in the root clause. The reason NOM/GEN conversion is infelicitous in standard Japanese can be explained in the same manner. Hence, even in a standard dialect, *no* can function as an anti-focus element in the embedded object. Being non-focused, the *no*-marked object should be located in *v*P, as in KJ.

However, the so-called neutral description reading of nominative objects may not be that common[15]. Even in cases where NOM/GEN conversion is allowed in the object position, as presented above (24), my informants find the sentence odd. This may be related to generation gap. In a recent study, NOM/GEN conversion decreased (Niikuni et al. 2017). If so, the younger the informants, the more acceptability judgements might be influenced by this trend. However, this prediction was not clearly observed, at least in the NOM/GEN conversion of subject nominals by my informants. Even among younger informants, the NOM/GEN conversion of the grammatical subject was not judged as ungrammatical[16]. However, a sharp dislike (degradation) of acceptability was found for nominative object conversion. This indicates that there might be an asymmetry between the NOM/GEN conversion of the subject and the object. Also, *no* being an anti-focus maker in standard Japanese seems solid since when the nominative object is directly followed by the focus sensitive particle like *dake* 'only,' the acceptability was lowest. Furthermore, even when the focus sensitive particle is not attached to it, if the context enforces the focus meaning, *no* version of the object in the embedded situation receives lower acceptability compared with the one without such a context. If this is on the right track, then this fact lends further support to the proposed assumption that exhaustive-listing focus prevents case alternation. This is incompatible with the anti-focus marker *no* and the KJ's morphological distinctions can be found in the SJ, especially in the embedded context. This indirectly supports the view that a focus reading is licensed in the CP area of the matrix clause. Furthermore, this may suggest that nominative objects are more likely to bear focus than subjects. Regarding the possibility of subject/object asymmetry in terms of the acceptability of the NOM/GEN conversion, I would leave this for future work.

6. Concluding Remarks

This study proposed possible adjustments to Moritake's (2022) study. After observing prior researchers' analyses and their problems, I decided that the range of data covered in Moritake (2022) was the most extensive. However, several aspects require adjustment. To derive a more natural morphological word order, some adjustments we made to the composition of the pre-syntactic morphological operation of *v** and the stative/potential suffix. Instead of an external pair-Merge, a more traditional morphological rule is adopted for this operation to derive the same output. Other diversions can be found in the locus of the licensing position

---

[15] Recall Matsui (2008) also claims that nominative objects have two readings: neutral description and exhaustive-listing readings (c.f. Kuno 1973). According to Matsui, with a certain stative predicate, the object can be marked with nominative case, only when it has an exhaustive-listing focus reading.

[16] As of 2025, my informants aged from 19 to 21 and it has been more than 15 years has passed from their article.

of the exhaustive-listing focus, as well as the topic: the treatment of the non-default readings, the wide scope reading of the accusative object and the narrow scope reading of the nominative object. In this process, I also provided another interpretation of the default reading of the nominative subject: the nominative subject is interpreted as a topic. I suggested that even in a matrix clause, nominative case-marked elements can serve as topics. This alternative reading supports the assumption that nominative objects tend to attract exhaustive-listing focus. I then looked at cases where *no* was used as an anti-focus marker in the embedded object position in SJ. This revealed that SJ has a morphologically distinct way of exhibiting the focused and non-focused status of an object. I briefly touched on the issue of NOM/GEN conversion related to the possibility of subject/object asymmetry. Although the implications are still speculative, I was able make some natural adjustments to the precedent research's account to further extend the coverage of the analysis.

References

Bošković, Željko. 2015. On the timing of labeling: Deducing Comp-trace effects, the Subject Condition, the Adjunct Condition, and tucking in from labeling. Ms., University of Connecticut, Storrs.

Epstein, Samuel D., Hisatsugu Kitahara & T. Daniel Seely 2016. Phase-Cancellation by Pair-Merge of Heads. *The Linguistic Review* 33, 87–102.

Hiraiwa, Ken. 2001. Multiple Agree and the Defective Intervention Constraint in Japanese. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 40, 67–80.

Iori, Isao. 1995. Ga-shitai and o-shitai: A note on Case-alternation in Japanese. *Nihongo Kyooiku* 86, 52–64.

Kasai, Hironobu. 2018. Case valuation after scrambling: Nominative objects in Japanese. *Glossa* 127, 1–29.

Koizumi, Masatoshi. 1994. Nominative objects: The role of TP in Japanese. In Masatoshi Koizumi & Hiroyuki Ura (eds.), *Proceedings of the first formal approaches to Japanese linguistics (FAJL 1)*, 211–230. Cambridge, MA: MITWPL.

Koizumi, Masatoshi. 2008. Nominative object. In Shigeru, Miyagawa & Mamoru, Saito (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Linguistics*, 141–164. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kuno, Susumu. 1973. *The Structures on Japanese Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Maki, Hideki & Tamami Morishima. 2004. A statistical analysis of the Nominative/Accusative alternation in Japanese: A preliminary study. *Gifudaigaku chiikikagakubu kenkyuuhookoku* 14, 49-86. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12099/4560.

Matsui, Haruko. 2008. Nominative objects restriction in Japanese causative constructions. Tsukuba oyoo gengogaku kenkyu [Tsukuba applied linguistic research], 15 101–14.

Mihara, Kenichi. 2022. *Nihongo Koobun Taizen* Vol. 2. [The Encyclopedia of Japanese Constructions Dai 2 kan.] Tokyo: Kuroshio Publisher.

Miyagawa, Shigeru. 2001. The EPP, scrambling, and WH-in-situ. In Michael, Kenstowicz (ed.), *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*, 293–338. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Miyagawa, Shigeru. 2012. *Case, argument structure, and word order*. New York: Routledge.

Miyagawa, Shigeru, Danfeng, Wu, & Masatoshi, Koizumi. 2019. Inducing and blocking labeling. *Glossa* 141, 1–26.

Moritake, Nozomi. 2022. A focus-based analysis of Nominative objects in Japanese. *Lingua* 278, 1-31.

Nambu, Satoshi, Shin-ichiro Sano, & David Yoshikazu Oshima. 2020. The Nominative-to-Accusative shift in Modern Japanese: A diachronic observation. In Shin Fukuda, Shoichi Iwasaki,

Sun-Ah Jun, Sung-Ock Sohn, Susan Strauss, and Kie Zuraw (eds.), In *Proceedings of the 26th Japanese/Korean Linguistics Conference*. 1–12. CSLI Publications. https://web.stanford.edu/group/cslipublications/cslipublications/ja-ko-contents/JK26/Nambu.pdf.

Niikuni, Keiyu, Yuuich, Wada, & Yoshiki. Ogawa 2017. Nominative-Genitive Conversion and Language Change Still in Progress: Evidence from Acceptability Judgements by Different Age Groups. Cognitive Studies, 24 (3), 395–409.

Niinuma, Fumikazu & Shigeki Taguchi. 2006. The Licensing of Nominative Case in Japanese: Evidence from Ga/No Conversion. *Proceedings of the 8th Seoul International Conference on Generative Grammar* 197–212.

Niinuma, Fumikazu & Shigeki Taguchi. 2009. On the relationship between Nominative Objects and Major Subjects in Japanese. Language & Information Society 10, 121–145.

Nishioka, Nobuaki. 2019. Discourse-configurationality and the scope of negation. *Nanzan Linguistics* 14, 25–55.

Nomura, Masashi. 2005. Nominative case and agree(ment), Doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut.

Oe, Saburo. 1973. Ganbo-no tai no maedeno o to ga no kootai. [ga/no conversion before desideratives.] Bungakukenkyu 70, 1–11.

Paillé, Mathieu. 2021. Tucking-in and pivot-third word order. In Henrison, Hsieh & Keely New (eds.), *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the Austronesian Formal Linguistics Association* (*AFLA*), 83–97. London, ON: University of Western Ontario.

Rizzi, Luigi. 2006. On the Form of Chains: Criterial Positions and ECP effects. In Wh-Movement: Moving on, ed. by Lisa Cheng and Norbert Corver, 97-133, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Saito, Mamoru. 2016. (A) case for labeling: Labeling in languages without phi-feature agreement. *The Linguistic Review* 33. 129–175.

Ueno, Takafumi. 2017. Nihongoniokeru wa-ku to ga-kaku no toogo kinoonitsuite: Itariagono CP Layer tono taishoo. [The Syntactic Function of "Wa" Phrases and the "Ga" Case in Japanese: Contrastive Study of the CP Layer with Italian.] Hiroshima daigaku bungakukenkyuka ronshuu,[Hiroshima university school of letters collected papers] Vol. 77, 31–50.

Williams, Edwin. 1981. On the Notions of Lexically Related and Head of a Word. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 12, 245–274.

Zeijlstra, Hedde. 2012. There is only one way to agree. *The Linguistic Review*, 29 (3), 491–539.

Radio Program
Ishida, Michiyo. 2023. NHK radio mainichi hangul kooza [everyday Korean lesson], lesson 58, June, 28th.