

Nominative as *no case at all*: An argument from raising-to-accusative in Sakha

Preminger (2011) argues for a reimplementation of Marantz’s (1991) configurational approach to case assignment entirely within syntax. He argues that the “disjunctive case hierarchy” given in (1), which must be stipulated in Marantz’s account, can be *derived* from this syntax-internal reimplementation.

- (1) LEXICALLY-GOVERNED CASE > DEPENDENT CASE > UNMARKED CASE

On Preminger’s account, LEXICALLY-GOVERNED CASE is the first case that a DP can receive because it is case assigned upon first merge (by the head that c-selects the DP); DEPENDENT CASE requires a c-command relation between two DPs, and so more structure must first be built; and finally, UNMARKED CASE is simply the morphological spellout of a DP whose case features *were never valued* in the course of the derivation (recall that Marantz’s 1991 approach to case eschews the Case Filter entirely). The ordering in (1) therefore follows from the bottom-up manner in which syntactic structure is built.

Preminger (2011) and Levin & Preminger (2012) argue that case in Sakha (Turkic) can be explained entirely within such an approach, building on Baker & Vinokurova (2010) (henceforth BV), but extending their configurational account to also include NOM and GEN (rather than ACC and DAT alone). We argue here that a certain kind of raising in Sakha discussed by BV provides a novel argument for the treatment of nominative as the wholesale absence of case—in accordance with Preminger’s proposal.

The construction in question involves raising of the subject of an embedded clause to a position where it receives accusative case. Raising-to-accusative is not unique to Sakha, of course, and close analogues are found in other Turkic languages. But BV provide a variety of arguments showing that accusative in Sakha is DEPENDENT CASE, rather than case assigned by a functional head (e.g. v^0). Thus, for example, the matrix verb in (2a) is unaccusative (and therefore its v^0 is presumably accusative-less), yet accusative is still assignable, provided that *ehigi* (‘you’) and *bihigi* (‘we’) enter into a sufficiently local relation. This differs from the state of affairs in, e.g., Turkish (Kornfilt 1977, Moore 1998).

- (2) a. Ehigi bihigi-ni kyajtar-dy-byt dien xomoj-du-gut [V:369]
 you we-ACC lose-PAST-1pS that become.sad-PAST-2pS
 ‘You (pl.) were disappointed that we lost.’
 b. Masha ejiigin yaldj-ya-ŋ dien tönün-ne
 Masha you.ACC fall.sick-FUT-2sS that return-PAST.3sS
 ‘Masha returned for fear that you (sg.) would fall sick.’

Note the presence of agreement on the embedded verbs in (2a-b); it is crucial to what follows that verbal agreement in Sakha cannot generally target accusative nominals, except in these raising environments.

The question we would like to pose is: what is the representation of nominative in Sakha, such that —

- (3) a. agreement on the embedded verb, which in Sakha normally targets *only nominative arguments*, is able to target, e.g., *bihigi(-ni)* (‘we(-ACC)’) in a construction like (2a)
 b. DEPENDENT CASE, which Marantz (1991) argued can only arise through case-competition by two *still caseless* nominals, can nonetheless arise on this raised subject

The provision of ‘still caseless’ in Marantz’s formulation of the conditions for DEPENDENT CASE was needed because otherwise, the objects of quirky-subject verbs in Icelandic would be assigned accusative, whereas they actually surface as nominative; but one could imagine that this is not so in Sakha, and that due to the lack of true quirky-subject verbs in Sakha, one could not rule out this possibility.

We argue that this is not so, and that the juxtaposition of (3a) with (3b) requires an account where:

- (4) a. agreement in Sakha can only target caseless nominals
 b. agreement does not give rise to case (Bobaljik 2008, Preminger 2011; cf. BV, Chomsky 2000, 2001)
 c. “nominative”(/“genitive”) in Sakha is simply a descriptive label for *caselessness* (within the clausal and nominal domains, respectively)

BV(:603) assume that Sakha allows *case stacking*, whereby a DP can receive case more than once. On this view, it is possible for the embedded subjects in (2a-b) to receive true, non-vacuous nominative within the

embedded clause, and subsequently raise to a position where they receive accusative, which is “stacked” atop (or outside of) the previously assigned nominative. Since Sakha never actually exhibits multiple overt case endings on a single DP (e.g. [[NP-DAT]-ACC]), the morphological component must then reduce each such “stack” of cases on a given DP to a single morphological marking.

Setting aside, for the moment, the question of why accusative ‘wins’ over nominative (in terms of overt expression), this assumption creates a problem elsewhere. If DPs that are already case-marked can enter into subsequent DEPENDENT CASE relations, then the prediction is that any nominative DP c-commanded by another DP can be assigned accusative—which will simply be “stacked” atop the nominative. The case in point concerns scrambling of an accusative-marked object across a nominative subject:

- (5) Deriebine-ni orospuonnjuk-tar xalaa-byt-tar [BV:604]
 village-ACC robber-PL raid-PTPL-3pS
 ‘Some robbers raided the village.’

BV argue that accusative on the scrambled object in (5) is assigned as the object passes through the edge of the VP phase; at that point, the subject locally c-commands the object, giving it DEPENDENT CASE:

- (6) Deriebine-ni₁ orospuonnjuk-tar [_{VP} t₁ [t₁ xalaa-byt-tar]]
 village-ACC robber-PL raid-PTPL-3pS
 ‘Some robbers raided the village.’

But now consider the surface configuration. Here, the subject is locally c-commanded by the object (note that even if object scrambling of this sort is A-bar movement, it still must be able to feed DEPENDENT CASE in Sakha, to account for case in raising-to-accusative constructions; see BV sec. 3.5). If DPs that are already case-marked can enter into subsequent DEPENDENT CASE relations, then by virtue of being c-commanded by the object, the subject in (5) should receive accusative, “stacked” atop its existing nominative (cf. the earlier discussion of (2a-b)). And since the morphological resolution for such a case-stack must favor realization of accusative over nominative, in order to account for (2a-b), the result is the false prediction of accusative morphology on the subject in (5).

Instead, we argue, Marantz’s provision that only caseless arguments can enter into DEPENDENT CASE relations must hold of Sakha, as well. This accounts for data like (5), because accusative having already been assigned to the object will prevent a subsequent DEPENDENT CASE relation being established when the object is scrambled across the subject. But it also accounts for data like (2a-b), if we crucially assume (with Preminger) that ‘nominative’ is none other than the *absence of case*. The restriction of verbal agreement in Sakha to nominative targets can be reconstrued as a restriction to only target caseless DPs; importantly, this retains BV’s insight that the embedded verb was able to agree with the raised subjects in (2), which ultimately come to bear accusative, because at that point, they were not accusative yet. Note that (4b) (i.e., that agreement does not give rise to case) is now crucial: the embedded subjects in (2) are first agreed with, and subsequently enter into a DEPENDENT CASE relation; that would not be possible if agreement had given rise to a representation of ‘nominative’ that was anything but caselessness.

Conclusion: If we accept BV’s arguments that accusative in Sakha is a DEPENDENT CASE, we must disallow already case-marked nominals from entering into new DEPENDENT CASE relations, otherwise the wrong prediction is made for structures like (5). Because only nominatives can be targeted for verbal agreement in Sakha, it follows that the embedded subjects in (2a-b) were ‘nominative’ at the point at which agreement took place; and because these raised subjects do subsequently enter into a DEPENDENT CASE relation (and consequently, receive accusative case), it follows that ‘nominative’ is simply caselessness.

SELECTED REFERENCES: Baker, M. & N. Vinokurova. 2010. Two modalities of Case assignment: Case in Sakha. *NLLT* 28:593-642. Bobaljik, J. D. 2008. Where’s phi? Agreement as a post-syntactic operation. In *Phi Theory*, eds. Harbour et al., 295-328. Oxford: OUP. Kornfilt, J. 1977. A note on subject raising in Turkish. *LI* 8:736-742. Levin, T. & O. Preminger. 2012. *Case in Sakha: Are Two Modalities Really Necessary?* Ms. Marantz, A. 1991. Case and Licensing. In *Proceedings of ESCOL 8*, eds. Westphal et al., Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications, 234-253. Moore, J. 1998. Turkish copy-raising and A-chain locality. *NLLT* 16:149-189. Preminger, O. 2011. *Agreement as a fallible operation*. PhD diss., MIT.