

Case for Labeling: A Case Study in a Language without ϕ -feature Agreement

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Chomsky (2013) proposes that one of the primary functions of ϕ -feature agreement is to accommodate labeling. For example, TP is labeled as $\langle \phi, \phi \rangle$ through the ϕ -feature sharing of the subject and T. On the other hand, a prominent, though controversial, view on Japanese has been that the language lacks ϕ -feature agreement altogether. This raises the question how labeling is accomplished in the language.

I present a hypothesis that Case and predicate inflection serve to make labeling possible in Japanese. More concretely, I suggest that those elements function as “anti-labeling devices” that indicate that the phrases they attach to do not provide labels for larger constituents. I show that the hypothesis leads to explanations for a number of outstanding properties of the language. They include multiple subjects, semantically vacuous scrambling, productive use of syntactic verbal compounds, argument ellipsis, and possibly, radical pro-drop.