

Basic of Language Science

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Lecture 30

Exceptional Case Marking

So, let us look at case marking. Once again, particularly for Exceptional Case Marking, what we are going to discuss today is called exceptional case marking. But before we understand what is exceptional about the new type of case marking that we are going to talk about, it is very important to be clear about the actual, the real case markings that we have known so far.

So, briefly, once again case is a property of sentence that is we talk about case when we are talking about sentences, the case is only realized on NPs and there are two types of them, sometimes they are visible on the word with modifications in the word, so we call them morphological case that is, they appear in a morphological form and sometimes there is no change on the lexical or pronominal NP, then we call them abstract cases.

We have seen that heads are largely case assigners, that is whether we are talking about V, P or I all of them are case markers. Rest of what we have seen, which is how do these heads assign cases to their complements and to the NPs that are in their C-commanding domain, that phenomenon is called structural case marking that is, we captured the notion of case transfer from head to the NP in terms of a structural configuration with the help of X-bar scheme.

Therefore, it is called structural case marking and then we have seen two terms. We first started looking at structural relation in terms of dominance and precedents and we clarified what is the relationship of dominance and what do we mean, when we say a particular element precedes the other one and how do we capture this dominance and precedence in the X-bar scheme.

Soon after, while looking at cases, we saw two more, which is it is not enough to say that hence assign cases we wanted it more restrictive, in the sense that we went ahead and said heads assign cases because heads govern their complements. Heads govern the NPs that they assign cases to and they govern the NPs in a particular way, which is the notion of C-command.

So, V assigns accusative cases to their complements, because V governs their complements and they C-command their complements. However, when we started looking at nominative case marking, there was a problem and the problem is existing definition, existing notion of C-command was not giving us enough of space for the head I to be able to assign C-command, to be able to assign nominative case under the non-existing notion of C-command to the specifier position of IP which where we usually find subjects.

Then, as a part of modification in the existing definition and for that matter, existing apparatus in theory, we made a modification, we saw a modification and that modification comes up in terms of M-command, which is a little bit, which is in its nature more accommodative and it expands in such a way that we want this spec of IP that is the subject position under the M-command domain of the head I, that is what we wanted to do.

At the same time, we wanted to restrict it under the local domain of IP, therefore we added one more restriction, so that we can say I M-commands spec IP, but I does not M-command anything beyond its own scope that is anything within VP or further down. This is what we saw yesterday.

Now with that we do not have all our problems taken care of. Even with the idea of case marking, we see some problems. When we took care of accusative cases, we were very happy and we saw it structurally, it is working very nice. Hence, the government, C-command, is very nice. Then we saw a problem with nominative cases and we needed to expand existing apparatus and then we were still able to accommodate all of that.

See, what we are doing is, we are trying to accommodate things in the theory. As a matter of fact, as a matter of fact, as a consequence of that we are weakening the theory the more the patches, weaker the theory. But that patch also did not solve all the problems, we still run in problems. So, I am going to show you problems and then we are going to talk about how those problems are taken care of and such problems and the way we take care of that is called an exceptional way of taking care of case assignment. Therefore they are called exceptional case marking. So, we will look at that.

One more point. Before we discuss exceptional case marking. We saw nominative case assignment and difficulty with that. Please keep in mind that the bringing in notion of M-command to take care of nominative case marking was accepted within the existing parameters at that time.

But people were not completely comfortable with this as you can, as I can tell you we do not have enough time to go into every single step to see what we mean or to understand what we mean when we say researchers were not comfortable with this, this patch they wanted more comprehensive account of it and the reason why I am mentioning this thing is because I want you to connect what we have discussed a little earlier with this as well, that the patch in the theory and the problems of nominative case assignment was also one of the motivations for expanding IP, sorry expanding I in terms of AGRP, tense phrase and aspect phrase and getting rid of IP completely.

Which in a way created problem then, if we get rid of IP then where does subject go to and then under that dismissal of IP how do we account, how do we take care of cases, that was a new paradigm in the theory which we are not discussing now, after looking at exceptional case marking, we will again briefly go around that problem to go to a different module, which we have to look at, which I will start later.

But am I making sense to you and I say that the problems of nominative case assignment was one of the motivating factors for expansion of I in terms of AGRP, TP and all other, which did

not solve the problem, rather raised more problems and then people kept working on those things.

But, as long as you see the expansion, the motivation for separating several bundles, several features under one bundle of I, we are okay with that then. Now, let us come back and look at this particular aspect and then we will talk about such things later. So, we are done with this thing.

Student: Any reason for highlighting the S place.

Professor: Any reason for highlighting.

Student: The place S is not highlighted. No, I think S is not highlighted

Professor: S is not highlighted, yes, there is a clear reason for that, the clear reason for that is S is a morphological unit, which is representing something else on the verb play and it is representing something which is part of infill.

Student: So, in this context.

Professor: No, not in this context, in this context I, the reason why will I left S is because I wanted to tell you that I has nothing to do with case assignment of accusative only play, the verb play as a head assigns accusative case, anything else that comes up on I unsurfaced structures has nothing to do with accusative case assignment, yes, that was the reason why I left that.

We have looked at these things and we saw until yesterday that I assigns a nominative case to the subject NP, alright clear, we have discussed all of this.

And here are the two things government and C-command, which are responsible for assignment of cases, but this existing definition of C-command was not enough to take care of nominative case assignment. Therefore, we talked about M command and then when we look at the difference between C-command and M-command afresh, we need to modify the notion of government and this is how, finally the notion of government looks like.

And this, under this notion of government, we can say both I and V govern the NPs that the cases sign. Now, these are the two sentences, which I wanted you to look at very simple sentences, I think one of, I have discussed one of them or I have briefly mentioned it to you, but now is the time to look at them carefully. Simple sentences, everybody is clear about these sentences. These sentences are similar to the sentences, we can also, we also say, I want to go.

So, when we say I want to go at the same time, I just want to make one additional point, when we say I want to go, what we actually say is I want I to go, I want I to go and the fact that both I are co-indexed with one another, therefore the second one is dropped. Following the principle of economy, there is no need to retain the second one.

That is just one example. You may ask why we are talking about first bringing in I into that sentence, that is I want I to go and then we are talking about deleting it. The only reason why I am talking about that is because I want you to see, that is one of the examples, which clearly

shows us the operating principle of economy, so there would be, there would be nothing wrong if we said I want it to go.

But we do not want to say because the principle of economy operates very categorically. Now let us look at these things and there is one more reason why I mentioned I want to go, I will discuss that when I come to these sentences. So, in a traditional fashion, slowly the way we have looked at every other sentence, let us look at this thing. Do you see that these sentences have two sentences in them? If yes, okay. If not still okay. No, fine.

What is the, what is the verb in this sentence? Want. Do you see another verb here? Go and which is to go. Please bring in your mind what we discussed about finiteness and non-finiteness. What did we say about finiteness? Finiteness equals tense which is, we say a sentence is a finite sentence when a sentence has tense and also agreement and things like that.

A sentence is non-finite, when we do not have tense in the sentence. Please keep that also in mind. So, want is the verb in the sentence, main verb in the sentence, by main verb we mean, when we are talking about the sentence, we are talking about want and with want the sentence is finite. I want, so which tense is here. I want you to go, I want him to go, what sentence, what tense is there, present tense, very nice. Want is a transitive or intransitive verb?

Student: Transitive.

Professor: Transitive verb. So, it is going to have an object. What is the object of this verb?

Student: John

Professor: John? Or something else? The complement or the object of the verb want is?

Student: John to go.

Professor: John to go. That is, the question is what do I want? I do not want John, I want John to go or him to go. Now look at that part, him to go, while I am waiting and I will draw this thing here, if you get time please draw the structure for this thing as well. So, so far you see IP and VP. Let me draw this thing for you.

Here is our good old IP. So, here is our I, NP, here is I which is present tense, present tense which means plus finite, that is the presence of the present tense makes the sentence finite. So, then we have a VP and since we have been retaining the specifier position so far, so, let me retain it once again and see we have a V, which is want. Now, the question is what is the complement of this verb want, John to go or him to go is the whole thing as the complement.

Now, if I say John to go is a sentence, what is missing from that sentence? Is that a real good looking sentence? No, that is not a real good looking sentence. That is, there are features of, there are ingredients of a sentence in this, where it seems like it has a subject John and it has a predicate to go.

But there is, there are things missing in it, which is there is no tense. Because the moment we have tense, we will not be able to use infinitive verbs, to go, will not be used. So, this is an

example of a non-finite type of a sentence, which is not possible independently as an independent sentence, which is outside the domain of this main bigger sentence independently this type of sentence is not possible we never say I to go. You tweet. We do not say these types of sentences.

See your friend is laughing about this, but that type of sentence looks perfectly all here. We see that. So, there must be a reason why that type of sentence is allowed under the larger domain of a bigger sentence and it is not independently okay. Answer is very simple, there is no mystery here. The reason why this is not independently okay is that it is an infinite sentence and being infinite also, that sentence does not have agreement, is missing all sorts of connecting features between subject and predicate.

Therefore, that is not a good sentence. But nonetheless, that is the sentence. So, here we are going to say it is an IP. It is not a full looking, good looking IP. But this is an IP. But, so again, the problem is, let us draw this thing and then you will see further problems. So, here is your him or John, I am putting him for a specific reason that I want you to see that this NP in the subject position of the lower clause is not getting a nominative case. It is getting an accusative case. You see this thing, so hold on.

So, now we have I, here is our I and here is our VP and for the simplicity, I am going to put it as to go where there is no complement of this verb to go, it is an intransitive verb and we can put them together. Actually, it is in the V head position of V go or to go with this is, there is no complement we are just putting them together.

Interesting thing is this happens to be a non-finite sentence. Now, we are saying I assigns nominative case to the subject. See this thing? We have just discussed this thing. Here we have another IP. Where we do not have a nominative case. Can we say I want he to go? I want he to go, no. Now please notice the ungrammaticality of the sentence I want he to go, is located in he which means he has a nominative case and therefore it is not allowed.

Him has an accusative case and still it is allowed. What I am trying to hit at is, if this is can, if this I can assign nominative case to this, what is the problem of this I assigning nominative case to this NP? Does everybody see the problem? See the problem. But, so this one is assigning a nominative case, this one is not assigning a nominative case.

That is the conclusion, how do we explain this problem and how do we resolve this problem? This is what is called the explanatory capacity of this framework, that we can say I want him to go is a good sentence and I want he to go is not a good sentence. But beyond this giving a judgement or description we need to explain why so.

The earlier methods, earlier models, earlier theoretical approaches did not have the capacity to explain it. This theory, case theory with the help of X-bar scheme not only explains the problem clearly, but it also provides solutions of course with patches, but solutions to the problems that it comes up.

It does not try to brush the problems aside. It does not put the problems under the rug, it lets you see the problem clearly and therefore, if you can see the problem clearly you can try to solve them in a clearer fashion. Here is what happens, once we are clear that this I does not assign

nominative case to this NP, then we know what is about I that assigns nominative case, it is not just the I, which assigns nominative case. What assigns nominative case actually is the finiteness, is tense and other features, which is bundled under it is what is responsible for nominative case.

This I, lower I being non-finite having no tense is the limiting factor for this I not assigning nominative case to the subject and be of the lower class, is this much clear. We explained the problem also. So, we know finiteness and tense and agreement, which are very important in a sentence, have more things to do. It is important not just because of agreement and now you can see clearly why it becomes features like tense and agreement becomes the head of a sentence.

So, it has one more function that is assigning the nominative case. We do not have a nominative case here. That is one. We explained this far. But we do not have, we have not resolved the problem. You see, what is the problem now? The problem is, it may not have a nominative case, but he does have a case and what case do you see here, accusative case.

Then the problem is if it did not get a case from its canonical assigner, canonical head, which is responsible for giving it a case, where did it get a case from but particularly an accusative case. See the problem? Where did that get? Where did this NP get case from? See this thing. We can say or one can say look, this is not a big surprise. Probably it is a given case from V.

Because this V as a head must discharge its case, it is a V, it has its complement and it is a head it has capacity to assign accusative case. So, where is it assigning its accusative case? If it is an object, remember we have said the complement of this V is whatever comes here. NP or not just the end, but NP, the whole NP. So, to resolve that argument, where does this verb, this head discharge its case, one can say it assigns its case to IP.

Great, that is also, that looks okay. But we have just defined that and if we say this assigns accusative case, because it assigns accusative case to the IP. Therefore, it assigns accusative case to the spec of IP also. This is the solution that has been proposed. But do you see a problem with this solution? What is the problem?

Student: (())(28:45)

Professor: Not M-commanding. Clear. Non M-commanding and what is, why is it not M-commanding?

Student: Because there is a barrier.

Professor: There is a barrier in it. It is M-commanding to the extent that first maximal projection dominating V also dominates this NP to this extent, it is okay. First maximal projection dominating V is VP and VP also dominates this one, to this extent, it is okay. But what is not okay is maximal projections are barriers. See that. There is another maximal projection here which is IP.

Following this definition of government V should not be able to assign its nominative case, V we should not be able to assign accusative case to this NP, see this thing. Very nice. But we see something beyond this happening, which is V actually does not care for this kind of a barrier and violating the barrier it is still assigning an accusative case to this.

That is the only way we can explain this problem. So, we say if we still say we are not making any changes to this notion of government, but if we still say that this type of sentence ends up violating this definition and still V happens to assign accusative case to the NP. The reason why we need to say that is because we need to explain the accusative case on this.

It is also true that this has an accusative case. What is true, is this is a barrier, but it is also true that this has an accusative case. So, we would, we or the theoreticians ended up saying that this and this V assigns accusative case to the NP in the subject position, disregarding the barrier. Do you see another weakness of this theory?

That it defines something, but soon after, it violates that prompt that theoretical module in order to explain the sentence. We are not violating it because we are offenders, where we allow this kind of violation, because we need explanation for this kind of a sentence and we clearly see that in the subject position that is spec IP, lower IP, we see the accusative case and now an NP with the nominative case is not even allowed here.

Which we can explain because this is non-finite IP I, a nominative NP is not allowed. But when we see an accusative NP, we do not know what to do. So, we again go ahead with the cost that we allow, this kind of violation, which is a weakness, a patch in the theory. Do you see the problem? Do we see the solution? We understand the problem, we see the solution to the problem and we also see the weakness of the theory.

Student: (())(32:46)

Professor: The accusative, what we are trying to say with that, with these two sentences, is John also has an accusative case, the fact that it is a lexical NP, the case accusative case on John is abstract. We do not see that and if we explain this problem just with John, it will not be very convincing.

So, we take another sentence, where we clearly see an NP with an accusative case. Therefore, I took another sentence. So, no one has any difficulty with the other sentence. But so after discussing the second sentence, if I tell you John also has an accusative case on it, it is convincing. But if I start with the first sentence, it will be further abstract and probably not so convincing.

So, John as an NP will also have an accusative case, because we do not want to get into another difficulty, where we say him has an accusative case, but John has a nominative case and how could the same position have two different cases. Therefore, structural case marking gets into difficulty, all the notion of C-command and government they keep running into difficulties.

Therefore, this kind of allowing case things to happen is called exceptional case marking. This is the reason why we call it exceptional case marking. So, some people, some people suggested a couple of more things, which is they said look, because they knew this is an, this is a barrier. They said look, there is one way to say that non-finite IPs. Please pay attention to their non-finite IPs, which are probably not barriers.

But again, it sounds okay, it solves the problem for the time being, but you can see that it is still a manipulation. If we are saying maximal projections are barriers, whether it is non-finite or finite,

what difference does it make? After all, it is a maximal prediction and it should be a barrier. But again, it is like life, we need compromises in life. So, they ended up saying probably non-finite IPs are not barriers.

We need more evidence to see such a thing, whether they are really barriers or not barriers. See the problem. So, John and him have accusative cases being in IP, spec IP of the complement clause, how do they get accusative cases? Did we solve this question? We understand. So, instead of, the main point is, instead of saying, instead of revising the notion of government once again or any way, we end up revising the notion of government, we are saying maximal projections are barriers, but not non-finite IPs, everything else will be still barrier, but not non-finite IPs, makes it weaker nonetheless, yet sounds like a convincing solution for the time being.

This is yet another reason why people were getting impatient day by day and felt compelled to look at the whole theoretical apparatus afresh that probably we are running into difficulty with nominative cases.

We are running into difficulty with these kinds of sentences where we have I want him to go type of sentences, are we really looking at the whole idea of case assignment and in a proper way? Maybe there is a problem in the way we are looking at it, is there an alternative way of looking at it, the alternative way was proposed and that is called what is the, what have we, what have we been calling this whole framework so far?

Student: (())(37:53)

Professor: That is exceptional case marking, it is part of principles and parameters approach of language principles and parameters approach of language. Because of these problems, when they revise the whole theoretical apparatus, they call it a minimalist program. So, minimal is program is yet another revised version of theoretical apparatus to look at language.

So, we will not go too far into minimalist program, because our domain is to look into principles and parameters and we are looking at principles we are looking at parameters, we are also looking at it at their limitations, we are looking at the problems that they have, they run into and we are looking at the solutions that existing paradigm existing framework provides.

Even though weaker, but, that is the solution. See this thing. Just to underline and not leave what I said as a mystery, when we see separation of the bundle of features into AGRP, TP and aspect phrases. They are going to have more implications in the theoretical apparatus and those implications and the separation, all of them are part of a minimalist program. So, in a way I have given you a flavour of that minimalistic approach of looking at it what they mean by minimalistic approach is, let us go deeper into the, into features and then probably we will have a new way of talking about cases.

Because case is such an important aspect of a sentence, we cannot leave it unexplained. Right now principles and parameters approach explains case assignment, but with a lot of patches.

Student: (())(40:14)

Professor: No, there are many languages where you have this problem, English definitely runs into this problem. True, very, not very nice questions just for English, again will be a weaker argument. But also keep in mind, even if it is available in one language, the problem remains in the theory.

Keep in mind that for a theoretical understanding of language, we do not really need quantitative ways of numbering in terms of more than 50 percent of languages having this problem, that is not really important. But to answer your question, in short, I do not have the examples from top of my head right now, but this problem was in other languages too.

I mean, for the simplicity of theory and for the simplest, for retaining our attention with the abstraction of these discussions, I am not bringing in examples from Hindi and other languages.

Student: () (41:25)

Professor: Absolutely not, see this, this model developed in the 80's, we are not talking about the old English period, we are not talking about Shakespearean English. This model of description, the explaining language came up in the 80's and the minimalist program that I am telling you about was developed in 95. So, it is a very recent phenomenon.

It is not about Old English or Shakespearean English or English having a different form or things like that. At the same time, what I have not told you is keeping regard, keeping abstraction in mind, it is things like ergative cases. Remember, we have seen agreements like Raju ne chai banai. Ne was an ergative, ergative is a case ergative.

Student: () (42:30)

Professor: Ergative, ne as the marker was an ergative case marker. So, how does case assignment take place in Hindi? And when, what is the reason we looked at agreement in that sentence. We said for the purpose of agreement, Chai agrees with the verb and not Raju. So, that is another reason, another motivating factor to separate features of agreement and tense.

So, we are not going into too much detail, I wanted you to look at thematic relations, cases, particularly nominative and accusative with clarity and exist within the existing paradigm. Then I further wanted you to see the problem with the existing paradigm, I hope with a microscopic view, we have seen the problems. So, we already looked at this thing, him to go is an IP. It is not a full-fledged IP, it is a non-finite IP and this is what saved the theory for the time being.

This is how it looks like and this is what I have been trying to show you on the board. We needed a diagram on the board, but this is how it looks like.

At the end of it, I want you to know that these are the terms with clarity you should keep in mind what we mean by morphological case and what we mean by abstract case. So, look at this sentence, John. In sentence number 1, I want John to go, John is an example of an abstract case. That accusative case appears on John in an abstract way. I want him to go, him is an example of a morphological case.

It appears, the accusative case appears on him in a morphological way in the sense that we are not saying I want he to go, he is a nominative form him is a morphologically modified accusative form and therefore, we can see with, see the difference with clarity. So, that is about morphological and abstract cases.

And then we wanted to, I wanted you to understand the difference between structural case marking and exceptional case marking, exceptional case marking is also part of structural case marking, because we are looking at an exceptional way of marking case to a particular NP, also within structural notions. So, keeping the differences and similarity in mind, try and understand exceptional case marking and a structural case marking, is this clear to you.

If that is clear, then before I ask you anything else we will look at, we will stop and then we will talk okay.