On Subject Case Marking and A-movement in Sinhala

[SYNOPSIS] Subject case marking in Sinhala (Indo-Aryan; SOV) shows an intriguing correlation with volitivity. Specifically, previous studies maintain that non-nominative cases (most frequently, dative) are quirky cases assigned by involitive verbs (denoting involuntary/unplanned action) to the subject NP (=1a), whereas the morphologically unmarked nominative case (NOM) is semantically neutral, and arises as the default case when the semantic conditions for all available quirky cases fail (=1b) (see Gair 1990, Inman 1993, Henadeerage 2002, Beavers & Zubair 2010, 2013). In addition, under the assumption that subject case marking in Sinhala has nothing to do with T(ense), Gair (1990) contends that the EPP requirement drives the movement of both volitive and involitive subjects to spec-TP in Sinhala.

(1) a. Lal-
DAT   dance.INVOL
Lal.NOM dance.VOL
‘Lal (involuntarily) dances.’
Lal-!
DAT dance.VOL
‘Lal (actively/voluntarily) dances.’

Based on previously unnoted data, we argue that (i) NOM in Sinhala should not be characterized as the default case; rather, it is a structural case assigned/valued by a finite T, and (ii) A-movement in Sinhala is driven by case valuation (see Epstein & Seely 2006; Bošković 2002), rather than by a universal EPP structural requirement (contra Gair 1990).

[DATA: SCOPE INTERPRETATION] We find that a subject universal quantifier has scopal interaction with negation only in sentences with volitive verbs, as in (2a). By contrast, when we replace the volitive verb with an involitive counterpart as in (2b), only the partial negation interpretation is available.

(2) a. Lamai hæmome  nætune næhæ
children all.NOM danced.VOL not
‘All children did not (voluntarily) dance.’

b. Lamai hæmome  nætune næhæ
children all.DAT danced.INVOL not
‘Not all children (voluntarily) dance.’

If we follow previous analyses in assuming that both NOM and DAT in Sinhala are assigned within vP (either as the default case or as a quirky case), and that EPP on T triggers obligatory movement of both volitive and involitive subjects to spec-TP, we would wrongly predict that both (2a) and (2b) exhibit scope ambiguity because in both cases the subjects would raise to spec-TP above negation, acquiring the total negation interpretation.

[Proposal] Our analysis of the scope contrast between (2a) and (2b) is based on three assumptions: [1] only involitive verbs assign quirky case to their subjects, while volitive verbs are not lexically related to case marking in any way, [2] there is no universal EPP requirement in Sinhala, and [3] NOM is a structural case valued by a finite T. Based on [1], once the subject lamai hæmome ‘all children’ is base-generated at spec-vP in (2b), it receives quirky DAT within the involitive vP as in (3a), and no further movement to spec-TP is needed because of [2], thereby yielding only the partial negation reading. On the other hand, in (2a), [3] requires that the subject NP move to spec-TP to value its case feature as NOM as in (3b). Consequently, in (3b), the negation c-commands the lower copy at spec-v*P and is also c-commanded by the higher copy at spec-TP, yielding the scope ambiguity, the same way as in the English sentence “All students did not take the exam”.

(3) a. [TP T [NegP [vP lamai hæmome [vP nætune]] næhæ]] (=2b)
   b. [TP Lamai hæmome T [NegP [vP <lamai hæmome> [vP nætune]] næhæ]] (=2a)

structural case valuation

quirky case marking
Our analysis is supported by another intriguing contrast regarding the distribution of some, a PPI that cannot be interpreted under the scope of negation (e.g. *John did not buy some books; the same restriction holds in Sinhala, omitted due to space limitations). Notice that a DAT-marked involutive subject cannot contain kaudo ‘some’ in the presence of negation in the same clause (4b), while a NOM-marked volitive subject is free from this restriction (4a).

(4) a. kaudo lamaye-k potə gatte næhæ
   some child-INDEF-NOM book.ACC get.VOL.PAST not
   ‘Some child did (involuntarily) take the book.’

   b. *kaudo lamaye-ku-ŋə potə gænune næhæ
      some child-INDEF-DAT book.ACC get.INVOL.PAST not
      ‘Some child did not (involuntarily) take the book.’

Previous analyses do not predict this contrast. In particular, Gair’s (1990) postulation of EPP on T in Sinhala would force the movement of both subjects in (4) to spec-T above negation. As a result, (4b) is wrongly predicted to be grammatical. By contrast, our analysis correctly predicts the ungrammaticality of (4b) because the subject kaudo lamaye-kə marked with the quirky DAT remains within vP below negation. On the other hand, the subject kaudo lamaye-k in (4a) has to move to spec-T above negation for NOM valuation under our analysis, thereby leaving the c-command domain of the negation.

ECM in Sinhala shows an interesting volitive-involutive asymmetry. The subject of a volitive verb in (5) can bear either NOM or ACC from the ECM verb, while the subject of an involutive verb can take only DAT (6):

(5) mamə [eya/eya-wə natenəwa kiyəla] dannəwa.
   I.NOM he.NOM/he-ACC dance.VOL.PRES that know.PRES
   ‘I know (that) he voluntarily dances.’

   I.NOM he-DAT/he-ACC/he-DAT-ACC dance.INVOL.PRES that know.PRES
   ‘I know (that) he involuntarily dances.’

 Binding facts in ECM contexts lend support to our proposal that case valuation requires A-movement in Sinhala. First, the embedded subject pronoun cannot be bound by the matrix subject if it bears ACC (7). This is because the ACC valuation (by the ECM verb) requires that the embedded subject pronoun moves out of the embedded clause to the matrix clause, where co-reference with the matrix subject violates Binding Principle B (cf. *The king, believes him, to be a hero).

(7) rajəthu-a [eya/wə] weerəye-k kiyəla hithanəwa.
   king.NOM he.NOM/he-ACC hero-INDEF that think.PRES
   ‘The king thinks that he is a hero.’

Second, notice that only the ACC-marked embedded subject can bind the anaphor inside the matrix adjunct PP (8a). This is because the ACC-marked subject, but not the NOM-marked one, moves to the matrix vP where it can c-command and bind the anaphor in the matrix adjunct PP.

(8) a. rajəthu-a emathiwərə-ŋə warəd-i kiyəla thama-thamange ware-di oppu-kala.
   king.NOM ministers.ACC guilty-is that each other’s trial-during prove.PAST
   ‘The king proved the ministers to be guilty during each other’s trial.’

   b. *rajəthu-a emathiwərə warəd-i kiyəla thama-thamange ware-di oppu-kala.
   king.NOM ministers.NOM guilty-is that each other’s trial-during prove.PAST

One important implication of our proposal is that A-movement in Sinhala is driven by case valuation (see Epstein & Seely 2006; Bošković 2002), rather than by a universal EPP structural requirement on T (contra Gair 1990; see Chomsky 2000, 2001). We will also show (i) that a closer examination of the interaction between the ECM context and modal constructions lends further support to our proposal, and (ii) that subject case marking in Sinhala lends support to the hypothesis that structural case marking on the subject can be dissociated from phi-feature agreement/valuation with T (see Saito 2012 a.o.).