Contextual Effects on Case in Japanese Copular Constructions

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Overview

This paper examines an unobserved type of case connectivity effect in Japanese copular sentences where the utterance context affects if the predicate NP can show accusative case. Although prior analyses of connectivity effects do not seem to explain the case connectivity effect, the paper demonstrates that one line of analysis, which assumes ellipsis to offer an general solution to connectivity puzzles (e.g., Ross 1972, den Dikken et al. 2000, Schlenker 2003), does explain it.

Introduction: Connectivity effects

(1) is a case connectivity sentence where the predicate shows accusative case even though it does not seem to be licensed (XP1 = subject, XP2 = predicate).

(1) [$_{XP1}$ Ken-ga e_1 tukuru-no]-wa [$_{XP2}$ onigiri-**o** mit-tu]$_1$-dayo
K-Nom make-C-Top rice ball-Acc 3-CL-Cop
'[$_{XP1}$ What Ken will make e_1] is [$_{XP2}$ three rice balls]$_1$.'

One line of analysis of connectivity effects (hence, *ellipsis analysis*) argues that XP1 and XP2 form a question-answer pair, and XP2 is underlyingly a clause (2).

(2) [$_{XP2/FocP}$ [onigiri-o mit-tu]$_1$ ~~[Ken-wa t_1 tukuru]~~]
rice ball-Acc 3-CL K-Top make
'[$_{XP2/FocP}$ [three rice balls]$_1$ ~~[Ken will make t_1]~~].'

- *Three rice balls* has undergone focus movement.
- The ellipsis is licensed under semantic identity with a linguistic antecedent in XP1 (e.g., Merchant 2004).
- Accusative case is assigned by *tukuru*.

Given a Hamblin/Karttunen semantics of questions, Dayal's (1996) answer operator, and the idea that copula equates XP1 and XP2 (e.g., Sharvit 1999), (1) approximately means: *the strongest answer to the question "what will Ken make?" is the proposition "Ken will make three rice balls".*

Puzzle

The availability of the accusative case in (3) depends on the context (4a-b).

(3) kyoo-wa [$_{XP2}$ onigiri-**o** mit-tu]-dayo
today-Top rice ball-Acc 3-CL-Cop
'(lit.) Today is three rice balls'

(4) a. **Context: ✓Acc in (3)**
Ken is the father of Ai, and always cooks lunch for Ai. It is 6am. Ai has just come to kitchen, seeing Ken preparing for making lunch. Ken says (1):

b. **Context: *Acc in (3)**
Ken and Ai have long been examining when different kinds of food they put in a showcase goes bad. Ken always checks which food has gone bad and how many they are. It is 10am. Ai has just come to the showcase. Looking at the condition of the food, Ken says (1) to Ai:

The ellipsis analysis does not seem to explain the availability of the accusative case in (3) due to no linguistic antecedent licensing the ellipsis of an accusative case assigner, unlike in (1). Data such as (3-4) raise some questions.

(5) a. What kind of contexts allow the predicate accusative case?
b. How is the predicate accusative case licensed?
c. How do contexts affect the availability of the predicate accusative case?

Answer to Question (5a)

(6) generalizes about the availability of the predicate accusative case.

Answer to (5a):
(6) Japanese copular sentence allows for the predicate accusative case only when there is a contextually salient wh-question (i) which the copular sentence answers and (ii) which contains an accusative case-marked wh-item (hence, *wh$_{Acc}$-question*).

Wh$_{Acc}$-question for (3) in context (4a):
(7) Ken-wa **nani-o** tukuru-no?
K-Top what-Acc make-Q
'What will Ken make for Ai's lunch'

- (7) is contextually salient because Ken always makes lunch for Ai in the morning, and the conversation is happening in the morning.
- The copular sentence in (3) answers (7).
- (7) contains an accusative case-marked wh-item.

Lack of wh$_{Acc}$-question for (3) in context (4b):
Most natural contextually salient question in (4b) is (8), but it does not contain an accusative case-marked wh-item.

(8) **nani-ga** kusaru-no?
what-Nom go bad-Q
'What will go bad?'

Answers to Questions (5b-c)

This paper follows the ellipsis analysis, so it assumes (2) as the structure of XP2 in (3) in context (4a).

Answer to (5b): The elided accusative case assigner in XP2 licenses the predicate accusative case.

Although there seems to be no linguistic antecedent for the ellipsis in XP2, I propose that a covert free pronoun *pro* exists in XP1 (9).

(9) kyoo-wa **[$_{XP1}$ pro]** [$_{XP2}$ [onigiri-o mit-tu]$_1$ ~~[…]~~]-dayo
today-Top rice ball-Acc 3-CL -Cop
'As for today, the strongest true answer to the question "What will Ryo make?" is "Ryo will make three rice balls".

- *kyoo-wa* is a topic phrase.
- XP1 is a covert free pronoun of type <st,t> whose value is set as the wh$_{Acc}$-question in (7) by the contextual variable assignment.
- The meaning of question in XP1 licenses the clausal ellipsis in XP2 (Weir 2014).

Answer to (5c): The value for pro is set to be a contextually salient question, and pro serves as an antecedent for the ellipsis in XP2. The structure of the elided clause, then, depends on the contextual value for pro, and only in certain contexts contains an accusative case assigner.

Presence of pro

1. On the assumption that the copula is a two-place predicate (e.g., Sharvit 1999), (3) has an argument besides XP2. Note that *kyoo-wa* 'today-Top' is not an argument and the lack of a linguistic antecedent eliminates the possibility of XP1 having an elided phrase.

2. The value of pro can be determined by a contextually salient wh-question in general in Japanese (10).

(10) [Context: Ken and Ai came to see a wrestling match. Looking at a masked wrestler whose faces are mostly hidden, Ai says A. Since Ai and Ken's acquaintances are mostly the same, Ai turns to Ken as she wonders if he knows who the masked wrestler is. Seeing Ai's inquisitive look, Ken says B.]
A: [kono resuraa-no hito mitakotoaru-to] omou
this wrestler-Gen person have seen-C think
'I think I have seen the person of this wrestler.'
B: boku-wa { pro/ kono resuraa-ga dare-da-ka} siranaiyo
I-Top this wrestler-Nom who-Cop-Q don't know
'I don't know pro/who this wrestler is.'

3. The implementation of the proposed pro can explain the difference in grammaticality among (11).

(11) [Context: Ken and Ai's parents are holding a party. They are looking forward to the things that the participants bring. One of the participants Ryo has just come with a thing in a plastic bag. Ken nods at it, and Ai raises her eyebrows at Ken. Ken says:]
a. *zyuusu-o b. zyuusu-o ip-pon c. zyuusu
juice-Acc juice-Acc 1-CL juice
'juice' 'one bottle of juice' 'juice'

In (11a-b), the presence of accusative case requires an accusative case licenser, which is presumably elided. Given that (11) does not contain an overt linguistic antecedent, it is only pro that can serve as a linguistic antecedent for such an ellipsis. But pro cannot appear in (11a) but in (11b), as shown in (12), which is assumed to show the underlying structures in (11) (copula can often drop in Japanese). (11c) is grammatical as (12c) is.

(12) a. *[$_{XP1}$ pro] [$_{XP2}$ zyuusu-o […]]-dayo
juice-Acc -Cop
b. [$_{XP1}$ pro] [$_{XP2}$ zyuusu-o ippon […]]-dayo
c. [$_{XP1}$ pro] [$_{XP2}$ zyuusu […]]-dayo

- Pro has its value determined as *what did Ryo bring?* by a wh$_{Acc}$-question.
- XP2 denotes *[(one bottle of) juice]$_1$ Ryo brought t_1.*

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