1-1-2005

Two types of multiple nominative constructions in Japanese

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Reiko Vermeulen*

1 Introduction

1.1 Nominative phrases in Japanese

It is well known that Japanese permits more than one nominative phrase in a single clause. In addition to the subject, the particle *ga*, which is generally regarded as the nominative case marker, can mark a possessor of the subject, as in (1), or an adjunct, as in (2).

(1) Possessive Multiple Nominative Construction

usagi-ga mimi-ga naga-i.
rabbit-GA ear-GA long-Pres
'It is rabbits which have long ears.' (modified from Takahashi, 1994: 395)

(2) Adjunct Multiple Nominative Construction

ano mise-ga gakusee-ga yoku hon-o kau.
that shop-GA student-GA often book-Acc buy
'It is at that shop that students often buy books.'

In both sentences, the second *ga*-phrase functions as the subject and the sentence-initial *ga*-phrase is obligatorily focused. The standard view in the literature is that all *ga*-phrases are nominative NPs or DPs and that they are uniformly licensed in multiple specifier or adjoined positions in one particular projection, such as TP, IP or VP (Fukuda, 1991; Fukui, 1986; Heycock, 1991).

*1 am greatly indebted to Ad Neeleman for all his help and support. For useful discussions and comments, I am particularly grateful to Peter Ackema, Tomohiro Fujii, Caroline Heycock, and Johan Rooryck. All remaining errors are of course my own. I thank Takane Ito, Yoko Nakano, Hitoshi Shiraki, Takumoto Suda, and Hiro-yuki Uchida for their help with the data. Thanks to the audience and organisers at the 28th Penn Linguistics Colloquium.

2There are two other types of multiple nominative constructions. One involves a stative predicate, while the other involves a locative phrase and an existential predicate. For reasons of space, I will not discuss these types in this paper, but see Vermeulen (2002).

More precisely, it must receive an exhaustive listing reading (Kuno, 1973).

U. Penn Working Papers in Linguistics, Volume 111, 2005
1993b; Hiraiwa, 2001; Saito, 1982; Ura, 1996; among many others). In other words, an explicit distinction between the two constructions is rarely made. Although the superficial similarities seem to support a unified approach, there are in fact a number of significant differences between the two constructions, which will become clearer later.

In this paper, I will argue, contrary to the standard view, that the particle *ga* does not always function as the nominative case marker. It can also mark focus. More specifically, *ga* functions as a case marker whenever it marks an NP bearing a θ-role. However, it is also interpreted as a focus marker, if it appears on the first *ga*-phrase in a multiple nominative construction. I will argue furthermore that a possessive *ga*-phrase is a nominative NP, licensed by predication, while *ga* attached to an adjunct *ga*-phrase is interpreted as a focus marker. I will first discuss theoretical assumptions made in the analysis, and then deal with each construction.

1.2 Theoretical assumptions

Firstly, following Takezawa (1987), I assume that tense licenses nominative case in Japanese. I remain agnostic here as to whether case licensing takes the form of feature-checking or assignment by a head.

Secondly, although there are various alternatives, I will assume here, following the standard approach, that a single tensed head can license more than one *ga*-phrase in multiple specifier positions in its own projection.\(^1\) This yields a structure like the following for licensing of multiple *ga*-phrases.

(3)

```
TP
   /\  
XP1-ga   TP
     /\   /\  
  XP2-ga  TP
     /\   /\   /\  
    VP   T

```

Finally, according to the structure in (3), the obligatorily focused constituent is the higher one of the two *ga*-phrases. I assume a correlation between this position of the *ga*-phrase and the focus imposed on it, and propose the following generalisation.

\(^1\)See Whitman (2001) and Vermeulen (2002), which assume multiple heads for licensing multiple *ga*-phrases.
Focus Generalisation

*Ga* is interpreted as a focus marker if the constituent to which it is attached c-commands at least another *ga*-phrase and no *ga*-phrase c-commands it.

The generalisation essentially states that *ga* is interpreted as a focus marker if it appears on the first *ga*-phrase in a sequence of multiple *ga*-phrases. I will take this generalisation to function as an interpretational rule which applies cyclically and as such it will regulate the distribution of *ga* as a focus marker.

These three assumptions will remain constant. The differences between the two constructions will fall out from independent properties of each type.

2 Possessive Multiple Nominative Construction

2.1 Licensing of possessive nominative phrases

A possessor of the subject need not always appear in the nominative. It may alternatively bear the genitive case marker *no* (Kuno, 1973):

(5) usagi-ga/no mimi-ga naga-i.
rabbit-GA/Gen ear-GA long-Pres

One insight that emerges from the literature is that a possessive genitive phrase occupies a position internal to the subject, while a possessive *ga*-phrase appears externally to the subject and is licensed by predication (Fuu...)

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4 There is an exception to the generalisation. Kuroda (1986) observes that a possessive *ga*-phrase need not be focused in an embedded clause and Satoshi Tomioka (p.c.) tells me that for him, some adjunct *ga*-phrases need not be focused in an embedded clause. At present, I have no account for this contrast between the matrix and the embedded contexts.

5 Caroline Heycock (p.c.) and Satoshi Tomioka (p.c.) have suggested to me that the obligatory focus of the first possessive *ga*-phrase may be accounted for on a par with another construction in Japanese, in which the subject *ga*-phrase of an intransitive stative predicate must be focused, although it is the only *ga*-phrase in the sentence (Kuno, 1973; Heycock, 1993a). We seem to have a situation where two generalisations overlap. The generalisation in (4) misses the potential correlation between the first possessive *ga*-phrase and the subject *ga*-phrase of an intransitive stative predicate, while the alternative misses the observation that the first *ga*-phrase in a sequence of multiple *ga*-phrases must be focused. I leave for future research how or whether the generalisation in (4) can be extended to include other instances of obligatorily focused *ga*-phrases.
However, the question of how this predication relation is achieved is often not satisfactorily addressed. I argue that it is established by means of a null operator as in the case of English tough constructions. In a tough sentence, a null operator moves from the complement position of the infinitive to the specifier position of the infinitival clause and then perhaps to a specifier position of AP, as shown in (6) (Browning, 1987 and references therein). This movement has the effect of θ-role promotion, whereby the internal θ-role of the please is promoted and assigned to the clause external DP John. This allows John to be interpreted as the complement of please. In other words, θ-role promotion derives a predicate out of the AP, since it provides the AP with an external θ-role.

\[ \text{Predicate} \]

(6) John is \[ \Theta_i [\text{AP easy to please t}_i] \]

Applying this mechanism to the possessive multiple nominative construction, I propose the following structure for the example in (1).

(7)

```
TP — Predicate
   /      \\
  /       \\
NP1-ga    TP
  usagi   TP — Predicate
    'rabbit'
```

The possessive ga-phrase usagi-ga 'rabbit-GA' is base-generated in a specifier position in TP. A null operator binds a pro in the immediately following NP projection, which has the effect that an NP-internal θ-role (possessor role) is promoted. The promoted θ-role is assigned to the possessive ga-phrase, explaining the possessive relation between the two ga-phrases. The null operator does not move from the position which pro occupies, since
such movement would violate the CED.6

*Ga* attached to the possessive *ga*-phrase functions as the nominative case marker, as the possessive *ga*-phrase is an NP carrying a θ-role. However, it is also interpreted as a focus marker in (7), because this *ga*-phrase appears as the highest *ga*-phrase in a sequence of multiple *ga*-phrases (cf. (4)).

There is one significant consequence to the proposed approach. If a possessive *ga*-phrase is licensed by predication, it should share syntactic properties with ‘normal’ subjects and the clause to its right should behave like a predicate. I will now provide evidence showing that these predictions are correct.

### 2.2 Subject-like properties of a possessive *ga*-phrase

A number of researchers have observed that a possessive *ga*-phrase displays various subject-like properties. Since these observations are uncontroversial, for reasons of space, I will simply list them here and not discuss them in detail.

1. Under an ECM/control verb, the leftmost possessive *ga*-phrase may appear in the accusative (Heycock, 1993b; Takahashi, 1994).
3. A possessive *ga*-phrase can control PRO in a nagara-clause ‘while’-clause, which requires the closest c-commanding subject to be the antecedent (Perlmutter, 1984; D. Takahashi, 1996; Ura, 1996, 2000).
4. When a possessive *ga*-phrase refers to a person for whom the speaker has respect, subject honorification can be triggered on the predicate (Takahashi, 1994, 1996).

### 2.3 Predicate-hood of the clause to the right of a possessive *ga*-phrase

There are two pieces of evidence suggesting predicate-hood of the clause in question. Firstly, in a coordinate construction, both conjuncts must be of the same semantic category. The clause in question can be conjoined with a

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6The idea that a null operator can be base-generated is not so peculiar, as there are other instances of base-generated null operators, for instance, an island in English containing a resumptive *pro*, as in the following example.

(i) 'This is the man [who, they think [that [if Mary marries him,] everyone will be happy]].
clause which contains no nominative phrase by the predicate coordinator *katu* ‘and’ (Fukui & Sakai, 2003). Both conjuncts are interpreted as referring to the clause-external *ga*-phrase, *usagi-ga*, ‘rabbit-GA’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicate</th>
<th>Predicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[TP <em>usagi-ga</em> [TP <em>tiisaku</em>] <em>katu</em> [TP Ø[TP[NP <em>pro mimi</em>-ga *naga-i]]] rabbit-GA small.be and ear-GA long-Pres</td>
<td>‘It is rabbits which are small and have long ears.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondly, predicates can usually be modified by a degree adverb such as *very*. (Bresnan 1973). The following examples show that both conjuncts in (9) are indeed predicates, as they can be modified by *toto mo* ‘very’.

(10)a. *usagi-ga* *toto mo* [husahusa-site-iru]

rabbit-GA very furry-do-Pres

‘It is rabbits which are very furry.’

b. *usagi-ga* *toto mo* [mimi-ga *naga-i]*

rabbit-GA very ear-GA long-Pres

‘It is rabbits which have very long ears.’

These facts, together with the evidence from the subjecthood tests, demonstrate that a possessive *ga*-phrase is licensed by predication.

### 2.4 Further Predictions

The proposed analysis makes five further predictions. Firstly, if 0-role promotion is involved in deriving the possessive multiple nominative construction, this operation should not be limited to possessors of the subject. Any argument of the subject should be able to appear as a *ga*-phrase in a position external to the subject and receive its 0-role in that position. The following examples illustrate that this prediction is borne out.

(11) *Roma-no/ga* *hakai-ga* hisan *datta.*

Rome-Gen/GA destruction-GA horrible was

‘Rome’s destruction was horrible.’

(12) *John-no/ga* *hihan-ga* *takusan* *atta.*

John-Gen/GA criticism-GA many were

‘There were many criticisms against John.’

By contrast, an adjunct modifier of the subject should not be able to appear as a *ga*-phrase in a position external to the subject. An adjunct does not
receive a 0-role, hence there is no 0-role to promote. The following examples demonstrate that this is indeed true.7

(13) saikin-wa ame-no/*ga hi-ga ooi.
recently-Top rain-Gen/GA day-GA many-pres
‘Recently, there have been many rainy days.’
(14) huta-kire-no/*ga hamu-ga yuusyoku-ni naru.
two-slice-Gen/GA ham-GA supper-to make.up
‘Two slices of ham make up a supper.’
(modified from Saito & Murasugi, 1990:99)

Secondly, a predicate generally licenses no more than one external argument. It should therefore be impossible for more than one argument of the same subject to appear with ga externally to the subject. This prediction is correct. In Japanese, all arguments of a deverbal noun can appear in the genitive in the projection of the noun, as shown by (15a). In (15b), the agent of the deverbal noun ‘criticize’ is realised with ga, while (15c) illustrates that it is possible for a theme argument of the subject to appear externally to the subject with the agent remaining internally to the subject. However, as (15d) demonstrates, it is not possible for both the agent and the theme to be licensed externally to the subject.

(15)a. [sensee-no gakusee-no hihan]-ga hidokatta.
teachers-Gen students-Gen criticism-GA terrible-Past
‘The teachers’ criticism against the students was terrible.’
b. sensee-ga [gakusee-no hihan]-ga hidokatta.
teachers-GA students-Gen criticism-GA terrible-Past
c. gakusee-ga [sensee-no hihan]-ga hidokatta.
students-GA teachers-Gen criticism-GA terrible-Past
d. *sensee-ga gakusee-ga [hihan]-ga hidokatta.
teachers-GA students-GA criticism-GA terrible-Past

A third prediction is that since 0-role promotion is potentially a recursive operation and there is no limit on the number of specifier positions permitted in one projection, there can be an indefinitely large number of possessive ga-phrases, as long as one possessive ga-phrase modifies the immediately following ga-phrase. This is indeed true (Kuno, 1973; Tateishi, 1991; Takahashi, 1994).

7This of course raises the question of what kind of elements receive a 0-role. This issue is beyond the scope of this paper. I will therefore not discuss it here.
Fourthly, an adverb should be able to immediately follow a possessive nominative NP, but not a possessive genitive NP. An adverb may adjoin to a TP, but not to a position within an NP. As reported by Fukuda (1991), Hey-cock (199b) and C. Takahashi (1996), this prediction is borne out.

Finally, the word order among ga-phrases should be fixed, since predication requires c-command and each ga-phrase is the subject of the clause to its right. The ungrammatical example in (18) shows that the order between the two possessive ga-phrases cannot be reversed (modified from Takahashi, 1994: 399).

In sum, various properties of the possessive multiple nominative construction seem to fall out more naturally from an explicit theory of predication, namely in terms of 0-role promotion. In particular, an argument of a subject can appear with ga, but not an adjunct modifier of a subject, since only the former receives a 0-role from the subject. Furthermore, it is not possible for more than one argument of the same subject to appear with ga externally to the subject. This is because a predicate usually assigns no more than one external 0-role. I now turn to the adjunct multiple nominative construction.

3 Adjunct Multiple Nominative Construction

3.1 Ga on an adjunct ga-phrase is interpreted as a focus marker

Although the particle ga is generally regarded as the nominative case marker
in Japanese, it seems unlikely that its presence on an adjunct is motivated by case requirements. It is well known that adjuncts do not usually require case in Japanese. Since an adjunct ga-phrase must always be interpreted as focused, I argue that ga attached to an adjunct functions as a focus marker. A further argument for this claim comes from the observation that an adjunct bearing ga can have the form PP-ga. Since PPs do not generally require case, the presence of ga on an adjunct must be motivated by reasons other than case.

The adjunct in (2) can be realised with the postposition de 'at' instead of ga, as shown in (19a). When it appears with the postposition, it is not obligatorily focused and may follow the subject ga-phrase as illustrated in (19b).

(19)a. ano mise-de/ga gakusee-ga hon-o yoku kau.
   that shop-at/GA student-GA book-Acc often buy
   ‘It is at that shop that students often buy books.’

b. gakusee-ga ano mise-de/*ga hon-o yoku kau.
   student-GA that shop-at/GA book-Acc often buy

Interestingly, ga can appear following the postposition de, if another element such as dake ‘only’ intervenes.

(20) ano mise-de-dake-ga gakusee-ga hon-o yoku kau.
    that shop-at-only-GA student-GA book-Acc often buy
    ‘It is only at that shop that students often buy books.’

Given the data in (19) and (20), it seems reasonable to assume that the adjunct ga-phrase is not really an NP followed by ga, but rather a PP followed by ga.

This point is further supported by an oft-employed diagnostic for determining whether a given particle is a postposition or a case marker. An NP

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Tateishi (1991) cites the following example as grammatical, where the subject nihonzin-ga ‘Japanese-GA’ precedes an adjunct ga-phrase ano ziko-ga ‘that accident-GA’. The quantifier takusan ‘many’ has floated out of the subject.

(i) nihonzin-ga ano ziko-ga takusan sinda.
    Japanese-GA that accident-GA many died
However, the subject seems to be left-dislocated here, as it cannot appear in this position with the quantifier takusan ‘many’, making it non-specific.

(ii) (*takusan-no) nihonzin-ga ano ziko-ga sinda.
    many-Gen Japanese-GA that accident-GA died
Takahashi (1994:399) also argues that the subject may precede an adjunct ga-phrase. However, her example seems to involve left-dislocation of what I consider in this paper to be a possessive ga-phrase. See Vermeulen (to appear) for further discussion.
followed by a case marker allows a floating quantifier, while an NP followed by a postposition disallows it (Miyagawa, 1989). (21) demonstrates that de is indeed a postposition and that the adjunct ga-phrase is not simply a nominative NP, since no floating quantifier is permitted.

\[(21)\] \[\text{NP(ano) mise]-de/ga 2tu gakusee-ga hon-o yoku kau.} \]
\[\text{that shop-at/GA 2-CI student-GA book-Acc often buy} \]
\[\text{‘It is at (those) two shops that students often buy books.’} \]

I conclude from the data in (20) and (21) that the adjunct ga-phrase in (2) is a PP followed by ga with the postposition being optionally deleted.

Note that a possessive ga-phrase can host a floating quantifier, indicating that it is a nominative NP.

\[(22)\] \[\text{John-ga tomodati-ga 2ri se-ga takai.} \]
\[\text{John-GA friends-GA 2-CI height-GA tall-Pres} \]
\[\text{‘It is John whose two friends are tall.’} \]

3.2 The structure of the adjunct multiple nominative construction

The conclusion that an adjunct ga-phrase can be a PP followed by ga strongly supports the claim that ga attached to an adjunct is not motivated by case requirements, since PPs do not require case. The sole motivation for its presence must therefore be to focus the adjunct. In order for ga to be interpreted as a focus marker, it must be licensed in the configuration described by the focus generalisation in (4). This has the effect that an adjunct ga-phrase must appear as the highest ga-phrase in TP, yielding a structure like the following for (2).

\[(23)\]
This approach explains the ungrammaticality of the order subject-
adjunct-ga. In principle, it is possible to base-generate the subject in a position
higher than the adjunct ga-phrase, as shown below.

(24)*[TP subject-ga [TP adjunct-ga [TP VP T]]]

However, ga on the adjunct cannot be interpreted in this position. It cannot
function as a case marker or be identified as a focus marker by the focus
generalisation. Its presence thus violates the principle of Full Interpretation,
rendering the derivation ungrammatical.

3.3 Predictions

I consider in this section three predictions made by the proposed analysis.
Firstly, an adjunct ga-phrase, unlike a possessive ga-phrase, should not have
a subject-predicate relation with the clause to its right, since no predication is
involved in deriving this construction. For independent reasons, however, the
subjecthood tests listed in section 2.3 are not applicable to an adjunct ga-
phrase. For the ECM/control type of constructions, the embedded predicate
must be either an adjective or of the form ‘nominal + copula’ (Kuno, 1973).
It is difficult to obtain an example with such a predicate with an adjunct be-
ing the focus of the sentence. The difficulty with applying the remaining
subjecthood tests is that they require the phrase in question to refer to a per-
son. Such an example is again hard to obtain, since adjuncts do not usually
refer to a person.

On the other hand, the two predicate-hood tests can be applied. Firstly,
if the clause in question were a predicate, it should be possible to conjoin it
with another predicate with the predicate coordinator katu ‘and’. This results
in ungrammaticality, as shown below, suggesting that it is not a predicate.

(25)*ano mise-ga
that shop-GA
[totemo ookiku] katu [gakusee-ga hon-o yoku kau]
very big and student-GA book-ACC often buy

Intended: ‘It is that shop which is very big and [it is at that shop that]
students often buy books.’

Secondly, although predicates can usually be modified by a degree ad-
verb, the clause in question cannot be.
Although the subjecthood tests cannot be applied to an adjunct ga-phrase, the fact that the clause to its right does not behave like a predicate suffices to show that an adjunct ga-phrase is not licensed by predication.

Secondly, Saito (1985) and Takezawa (1987) argue that PP-pro is not available in island contexts in Japanese. Accordingly, if the adjunct ga-phrase in (2) is indeed a PP followed by ga, moving it out of an island in violation of the CED should result in ungrammaticality and no overt pro corresponding to the adjunct should be allowed. These predictions are borne out. (27) illustrates that a pro associated with an adjunct ga-phrase cannot be realised. (28) shows that extracting an adjunct ga-phrase out of a relative clause results in ungrammaticality.

Finally, a clause should not be able to contain more than one adjunct ga-phrase. Placing an adjunct ga-phrase above another renders the ga attached to the lower adjunct uninterpretable. It cannot function as a case marker or be interpreted as a focus marker in such a position. (29a) illustrates that the prediction is correct. The sentence becomes grammatical, if ga attached to one of the adjuncts is replaced by an appropriate postposition, as shown by (29b) and (29c).
c. ohiru-zikan-ga gakusee-ga ano mise-da hon-o yoku kau.
lunch-hour-GA student-GA that shop-at book-Acc often buy

4 Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have attempted to show that the two types of multiple nominative constructions must be distinguished, in contrast to the standard analysis, which treats all ga-phrases as nominative NPs or DPs. I have proposed that a possessive ga-phrase is a nominative NP, while ga attached to an adjunct ga-phrase is interpreted as a focus marker. The particle ga functions as a case marker whenever it marks an NP bearing a 0-role. However, it is also interpreted as a focus marker, if the constituent to which it is attached appears as the first ga-phrase in a sequence of multiple ga-phrases. The proposed analysis can capture various observed properties of the two constructions, which are difficult to capture on the standard approach. In particular:

(i) A possessive ga-phrase can be construed as an argument of the following ga-phrase, but an adjunct ga-phrase cannot;
(ii) the first ga-phrase in both constructions is obligatorily focused;
(iii) a possessive ga-phrase can host a floating quantifier but an adjunct ga-phrase cannot;
(iv) pro associated with a possessive ga-phrase can be overtly realised, but pro associated with an adjunct ga-phrase cannot;
(v) a possessive ga-phrase has a subject-predicate relation with the clause to its immediate right, but an adjunct ga-phrase does not;
(vi) there can be an indefinitely large number of possessive ga-phrases, but only one adjunct ga-phrase in a clause;
(vii) the word order among ga-phrases is fixed in both constructions.

References


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