Subject agreement in Kalmyk: Implications for nominative case assignment

Jun Jie Lim, PhD candidate,
University of California San Diego, USA

Abstract

This paper investigates the nature of nominative case assignment and its relationship to agreement and finiteness in Kalmyk Oirat (or Kalmyk), a variety of the Oirat language (Mongolic) spoken in the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia and in diasporic communities in the US and Europe. Subject agreement in Kalmyk exhibits a puzzling relationship with nominative case assignment: while φ-agreement can only be with nominative subjects, we also find nominative subjects in environments where φ-agreement is not possible. This challenges theories of case assignment which take nominative case and subject agreement to always go together as the result of a single Agree operation (Chomsky 2000, 2001). I propose that this set of facts can be accounted for under a view where nominative case assignment does not depend on Agree with finite T^0, and φ-agreement is the result of an Agree operation that is sensitive to the nominal's case value (Bobalijk 2008; Preminger 2014).

1. Introduction

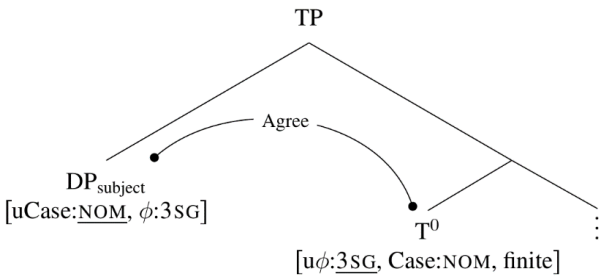
Across many theories of generative syntax, there are two dominant views as to how nominative case is assigned. The traditional view, which I will refer to as NOM-by-Agree, takes there to be an inherent connection between nominative case assignment, overt φ-agreement, and/or overt tense marking, as seen in the English examples in (1):[1]

(1) a) I believe (that) **he/*him** has played the piano for two hours.
b) I believe **him/*he** to have played the piano for two hours.

In (1a), the auxiliary in the embedded clause is inflected for present tense and 3SG agreement (i.e. *has*), suggesting that the clause contains a finite tensed T^0 that Agrees with the third singular embedded subject. According to Chomsky (2000, 2001), this Agree relationship is responsible for a bidirectional exchange of features between T^0 and the subject DP, as schematised in (2):

[1] Glossing of examples from other published sources have been adapted to align with the conventions that I adopt in this paper. The following abbreviations are used: ACC - accusative; C - complementiser; COM - comitative; DAT - dative; EXCL - exclusive; EVID.PST – evidential past; FRML - formal; FUT – future; GEN - genitive; HAB – habitual; IFML - informal; INCL - inclusive; INF - infinitive; M - masculine; NOM - nominative; NPST – nonpast; PFV – perfective; PL - plural; POSS - possessive; PRF - perfect; PST - past; PTPL - participle; REFL - reflexive; RP - reflexive possessive; SG – singular; SUCC.CVB – successive converb.

(2)



As finite T^0 bears an unvalued φ-feature, it searches its c-command domain for a suitable goal. The subject DP is an active goal as it bears an unvalued Case feature. T^0 thus Agrees with the subject DP: the subject DP's φ-features is copied onto T^0 to value its unvalued φ-features, while the unvalued Case feature on the subject DP is valued by T^0. This yields overt φ-agreement morphology, as seen on the auxiliary in (1a), and nominative case on the subject that has been Agreed with, i.e. *he*.

In (1b), the auxiliary in the embedded clause is not inflected for tense or agreement (i.e. *to have*), suggesting that the clause contains a nonfinite T^0 that does not establish an Agree relation with the third singular embedded subject. Since there is no Agree relationship, there is no overt φ-agreement morphology on T^0 and the embedded subject cannot be assigned nominative case by T^0. Instead, the embedded subject has to have its Case valued by a different goal, e.g. accusative case from matrix transitive v^0. This basic contrast has led to the proposal that nominative case is only assigned under an Agree relationship with finite tensed T^0 (e.g. Chomsky 2000, 2001).

Variations of the proposal described above, which predates Chomsky 2000, 2001, advocate for a weaker connection between finite tensed T^0 and both nominative case assignment and overt φ-agreement. For example, George & Kornfilt (1981) suggest that languages are parameterised according to whether finiteness is linked to φ-agreement and/or tense. For Turkish, they argue that finiteness is linked to φ-agreement, of which there are two kinds: a verbal paradigm in clauses that license nominative Case on the subject, and a nominal paradigm in nominalised clauses that license genitive Case on the subject. Thus, in Turkish, finiteness is not specifically linked to nominative case, but subject Case in general, which may be nominative or genitive. On the other hand, Raposo (1987) shows that in European Portuguese (3), an infinitival clause whose verb does not bear tense – suggesting that T^0 is nonfinite – still inflects for agreement with an overt third plural subject:

(3) European Portuguese

Será	difícil	[**eles**	aprovar-**em**	a	proposta].
it	difficult	3PL.NOM	to.approve-3PL	the	proposal

'It will be difficult for them to approve the proposal.'

(Raposo 1987: 86, ex.2a)

Raposo (1987) suggests that independent of finiteness, an Agree operation that yields overt φ-agreement is what truly matters for nominative case assignment.

The alternative view of nominative case assignment treats nominative case as an unmarked case within a dependent case framework (Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987; Marantz 1991; McFadden 2004; Preminger 2014; Baker 2015). I refer to this as the NOM-as-unmarked view. The basic idea is that, if a nominal has not been assigned a lexical or inherent case, it may be assigned a structural case in one of two ways:

(4) Configurational case assignment (based on Marantz 1991; Preminger 2014; Baker 2015)

(a) Dependent case assignment
The higher or lower of two case-unmarked nominals in an asymmetric c-command relation will be assigned ergative case or accusative case respectively, depending on the parameterised directionality of case assignment.

(b) Unmarked case assignment
If a nominal goes through the derivation without being assigned lexical or dependent case, it will be assigned an unmarked case, e.g. nominative case in a clausal domain such as TP.

An argument for NOM-as-unmarked comes from examples where nominative case continues to be available on subjects within a clause whose verb is nonfinite and does not display agreement, e.g. adjunct infinitives in Tamil (5) (see also Sundaresan & McFadden 2009).

(5) Tamil

[**naan**	poori	porikk-a]	**raman**	maavu	vaangi-n-**aan**.
1SG.NOM	poori.ACC	fry-INF]	R.NOM	flour.ACC	buy-PST-M.3SG

'Raman bought flour for me to fry pooris.'

(McFadden & Sundaresan 2011: 5, ex.7b)

In the main clause in (4), nominative case on the third singular masculine subject co-occurs with a verb that inflects for past tense and the subject's φ-features. This is expected under NOM-by-Agree. However, in the adjunct infinitive, the first singular subject bears nominative case despite the lack of φ-agreement and tense morphology on the embedded verb. This suggests that in Tamil, nominative case assignment is completely independent from finite T^0 and the Agree operation that results in overt φ-agreement. For more examples like (5) from other languages, see e.g. Szabolcsi 2009; Sundaresan & McFadden 2009; McFadden & Sundaresan 2011; Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 2021This paper investigates the nature of nominative case assignment using novel data from Kalmyk Oirat (henceforth Kalmyk), a variety of the Oirat language belonging to the Mongolic language family. Nominative case in Kalmyk displays an interesting profile as it is found on nouns in both fully finite environments that contain overt tense and φ-agreement, and nonfinite environments that lack overt tense and φ-agreement. While this indicates that nominative case is independent from finite T^0 and Agree in Kalmyk, φ-agreement is always with nominative subjects, suggesting that there is a tight correlation between nominative case and overt subject agreement. To reconcile this set of seemingly contradictory facts, I argue that, in Kalmyk, the Agree operation that yields overt subject agreement is case-discriminating in that it only targets nouns bearing unmarked nominative case (Bobalijk 2008; Preminger 2014).

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. In Section 2, I introduce some basic properties of Kalmyk, focusing on the morphosyntax of subject agreement in finite root clauses. Section 3

introduces data from embedded clauses in Kalmyk that show that nominative case is available even in environments where finite T^0 and overt subject agreement is absent. I propose to treat nominative case as being assigned as an unmarked case within a clausal domain, under a dependent case framework. Section 4 discusses additional data from finite complement clauses which show that only nominative subjects trigger φ-agreement in Kalmyk. To account for the distribution of nominative case and subject agreement in Kalmyk, I propose that subject agreement is case-discriminating (Bobaljik 2008; Preminger 2014), and that only subjects marked with unmarked nominative case are accessible for φ-agreement. Section 5 concludes.

2. Background on Kalmyk

Kalmyk is a variety of the Oirat language spoken primarily in the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia (where it is also an official language), and in diasporic communities in the US and Europe. For over 400 years, it has remained relatively isolated from other Oirat varieties spoken in western Mongolia and northwest China. As the Oirat language is relatively understudied and underdocumented, the extent of variation between different varieties is unclear, though see Birtalan 2003, 2020; Bläsing 2003 for some observations. With respect to Kalmyk, Bläsing (2003) and Birtalan (2020) further identify three dialects: Torghut, Dörbet and Buzava. The variety investigated herein is the standardised variety of Kalmyk, which is largely based on the Torghut dialect. All uncited Kalmyk data are from my own fieldwork with two Kalmyk consultants based in the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, and are represented in IPA.

Typical of the Mongolic languages, Kalmyk is a head-final, SOV language with nominative-accusative case alignment and agglutinative morphology. But unlike certain Mongolic languages, such as Khalkha Mongolian, Kalmyk displays overt subject agreement on verbs and predicate nouns and adjectives.[2] The subject-predicate agreement markers are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Subject-predicate agreement markers in Kalmyk (based on Bläsing 2003)

	SG	PL
1	-v/-b[3]	-vdn
2	-ch	-t
3	Ø	

The examples in (6)-(12) illustrate subject-verb agreement in regular transitive clauses. Note that the pronunciation of tense suffixes varies (e.g. /la^{w}/~/la/~/ læ/) due to coarticulation with the following agreement marker (see also fn.3).

[3] The alternation between *-v* and *-b* is due to /v/ undergoing fortition when preceded by a nasal consonant, /n/ or /m/. /n/ also assimilates in place with a following labial consonant. These two processes are summarised in (i) and can be seen in (ii). The additional schwa in (ii) is due to a more general process of short-vowel epenthesis to form a CV syllable, possibly to avoid coda consonant clusters; see Indjieva 2009, p.25 for some discussion.

i) a) /v/ → [b] / [+nasal] ___
b) /n/ → [m] /___ [+labial]

ii) bi mergn̩-v → bi mergm̩bə
1SG.NOM M.-1SG 1SG.NOM M.-1SG
'I am Mergen.'

(6) **bi** t͡ʃamagə yz-**la^{w}-v**
1SG.NOM 2SG.ACC see-PRF.PST-1SG
'I saw you (sg).'

(7) **bidṇ/madṇ** t͡ʃamagə yz-**læ-vdṇ**
1PL.INCL.NOM/1PL.EXCL.NOM 2SG.ACC see-PRF.PST-1PL
'We saw you (sg).'

(8) **t͡ʃi** namagə yz-**la-t͡ʃ**
2SG.IFML.NOM 1SG.ACC see-PRF.PST-2SG
'You (casual, sg) saw me.'

(9) **ta** namagə yz-**læ-t**
2SG.FRML.NOM 1SG.ACC see-PRF.PST-2PL
'You (polite, sg) saw me.'

(10) **tadṇ** namagə yz-**læ-t**
2PL.NOM 1SG.ACC see-PRF.PST-2PL
'You (pl) saw me.'

(11) **terə** namagə yz-**læ**
3SG.NOM 1SG.ACC see-PRF.PST.3
'She/he saw me.'

(12) **tedṇ** namagə yz-**læ**
3PL.NOM 1SG.ACC see-PRF.PST.3
'They saw me.'

First person subjects trigger agreement morphology that distinguishes between the singular (6) and plural (7). The polite second person singular /ta/ (9) triggers the same subject agreement morphology as the second person plural /tadṇ/ (10), and thus it may be seen formally as a plural form that is referentially singular (Wang 2023). Third person subjects, both singular (11) and plural (12), do not trigger overt agreement on the verb. I remain agnostic as to whether the lack of overt agreement in (11)-(12) represents a total absence of agreement or null agreement morphology on the verb. However, as I discuss in Section 4, there is some indication that third person verb forms are used as default forms in the sense of Preminger 2014, that is, the form that surfaces when the φ-probe on the verb has failed to find a suitable goal to Agree with.

Finally, the nominative subject may be dropped, but subject agreement morphology on the verb is obligatory (13). It is not possible, for instance, to have default third person verb forms with first person singular nominative subjects, e.g. (14). Thus, if there is a viable target for the agreement probe on the verb, agreement must take place; there is no "gratuitous nonagreement" (Preminger 2014).

(13) (bi) t͡ʃamagə yz-la^{w}-v
1SG.NOM 2SG.ACC see-PRF.PST-1SG
'I saw you (sg).'

(14) *bi t͡ʃamagə yz-læ
1SG.NOM 2SG.ACC see-PRF.PST.3
Int. 'I saw you (sg).'

Kalmyk thus displays a tight correlation between nominative subjects and overt φ-agreement. Under a NOM-by-Agree view, this correlation is usually taken as evidence that nominative case on subjects is assigned under an Agree operation with finite T^0 that also results in the φ-features of the subject being exponed on T^0 (Chomsky 2000, 2001). While the correlation between nominative case and φ-agreement holds in finite root clauses, in the next section, I show that the correlation does not hold in nonfinite argument and adjunct clauses, where overt tense and φ-agreement are impossible but nominative subjects are still possible.

3. Subject case and agreement in Kalmyk embedded clauses

In this section, I show that the tight correlation between nominative case and subject agreement does not hold in embedded clauses. I will focus on three types of embedded clauses that may be broadly distinguished according to whether they are finite or nonfinite. I will treat finiteness as an abstract property of clauses that can only be detected via the expression of other morphosyntactic cues (see e.g. Nikolaeva 2007; Nikolaeva 2010; Nikolaeva 2012; McFadden & Sundaresan 2014; Rouveret 2023) Here, I will focus exclusively on a set of verb inflections referred to as "finite indicative" tense endings in the Mongolic literature (Bläsing 2003; Birtalan 2020), to test whether an embedded clause type is finite or nonfinite. These are shown in Table 2. I also assume the existence of a null nonpast tense ending, based on examples such as (15) which Bläsing (2003: 244) describes as having a future interpretation.

Table 2. Finite indicative tense endings in Kalmyk (based on Bläsing 2003)

Suffix	Function	Gloss
-nA[4]~-Ø	present-future	NPST
-v(ə)/-u	narrative past	PST
-lA	pluperfect	PRF.PST
-d͡ʒ(ə)	evidential past	EVID.PST

(15) bi ger talan bicg bic-x-Ø-w
1SG.NOM house to letter write-INF-NPST-1SG
'I shall write a letter home.'[5]

(modified from Bläsing 2003: 244)

As seen in (6)-(12) above, finite root clauses may contain finite indicative tense endings, e.g. the perfect past /-lA/, followed by overt subject agreement morphology for first and second person. In the embedded clause data below, I show that, while finite embedded clauses may contain finite indicative tense endings, nonfinite embedded clauses may not. This is similar to the observation by Jang (2009), who notes that the embedded clause in a relative clause may not contain finite indicative tense endings and subject agreement morphology, as well as nominative subjects (16a). Instead, as (16b) shows, the embedded clause in a relative clause may contain genitive subjects and participial suffixes such as the past participle *-sn*, which I will treat as perfective Aspect (Bläsing 2003: 241-242). Jang thus analyses relative clauses in Kalmyk as nonfinite clauses.

[4] I use uppercase A to represent vowels that undergo vowel harmony.

(16) a) *[ətskyldur mini/**bi** ___xuldg av-**la-v**] masi-m
yesterday 1SG.GEN/1SG.NOM purchase take-PRF.PST-1SG] car-1SG.POSS
b) [ətskyldur mini___ xuldg av-sn] masi-m
yesterday 1SG.GEN purchase take-PFV] car-1SG.POSS
'The car that I bought yesterday.'

(Jang 2009: 31, exx.5-6)

In line with Jang's (2009) observations, a prediction under the NOM-by-Agree approach would be that nominative case can be assigned to the embedded subject if the embedded clause contains a finite indicative tense ending, i.e. finite T^0, and overt subject agreement. This prediction is borne out, as seen in finite embedded clauses containing the overt complementiser /gid͡ʒə/ in (17)-(18):

(17) [maŋdurtan **bi** badma-la xarɣa-**na^{w}-v** gid͡ʒə] mand͡ʒə kel-læ
tomorrow 1SG.NOM B.-COMmeet-NPST-1SG C M.NOM say-PRF.PST.3
'Manj said that I will meet with Badma tomorrow.'

(18) [**t͡ʃi** œtsk̄uldur kemæ-læ xarɣa-**la-t͡ʃ** gid͡ʒə] bajərta mand͡ʒə-də ke-ləv
2SG.NOM yesterday K.-COM meet-PRF.PST-2SG C B.NOM M.-DAT say-PST.3
'Bayrta told Manj that you met with Kema yesterday.'

In (17), the embedded clause contains the nonpast tense ending and 1SG agreement on the verb, and its subject appears in the nominative case. In (18) as well, the embedded clause contains the finite perfect past tense ending with 2SG agreement on the verb, and its subject appears in the nominative case. The correlation between finite tense, subject agreement and nominative case thus appears to hold in finite embedded clauses.

When we turn to nonfinite embedded clauses, however, the correlation comes apart. (19) shows a nonfinite complement clause lacking the overt complementiser /gid͡ʒə/ selected by the matrix verb /yz-/ 'to see'. We see that while the embedded clause in (19) cannot contain the finite perfect past tense ending and subject agreement, its subject may still appear in the nominative case.

(19) [**bi** badm-igə t͡sok{-s/***-la^{w}-v**}] -igə mand͡ʒə yz-læ
1SG.NOM B.-ACC hit{-PFV/*-PRF.PST-1SG} -ACC M.NOM see-PRF.PST. 3
'Manj saw that I hit Badma.'

The same dissociation between nominative case and subject agreement can be seen in converbial adjuncts, a type of nonfinite subordinate adjunct clause that modifies the main clause (Janhunen 2012). Like the nonfinite complement clause in (19), converbial adjuncts lack the overt complementiser /gid͡ʒə/. (20) shows a converbial adjunct headed by the successive converb /-xla/, which represents an action or event that is happening simultaneously or successively (Bläsing 2003: 244). Crucially, the verbal predicate in the converbial adjunct cannot bear subject agreement, but its subject may still appear in the nominative case.

(20) kema [**bi** dektṛ umʃ-d͡ʒa{-xla/***-xla^{w}-v**}] bit͡ʃik bit͡ʃ-d͡ʒæ-læ
K.NOM 1SG.NOM book read-PROG{-SUCC.CVB/*-SUCC.CVB-1SG}letter write-PROG-PRF.PST.3
'When I was reading a book, Kema was writing a letter.'

For concreteness, I will assume that nonfinite embedded clauses, e.g. in (19) and (20), contain a nonfinite, defective version of T^0 that does not agree with their clausemate subjects. I will also assume that nonfinite T^0 is null in argument clauses like (19), while it is occupied by converbial endings such as /-xla/ in converbial adjuncts like (20).

Table 3 summarises the patterns of nominative case on subjects, finite tense and subject agreement that we have seen across five different environments:

Table 3. Relationship between nominative case on subjects, finite tense and subject agreement

Clause type	Nominative subject	Finite tense ending	Subject agreement
Finite root clause	✓	✓	✓
Finite complement clause	✓	✓	✓
Nonfinite complement clause	✓	✗	✗
Converbial adjunct	✓	✗	✗
Relative clause (Jang 2009)	✗	✗	✗

While we do find a strong correlation between nominative case, finite tense and subject agreement in finite clauses, the fact that nominative case is available in nonfinite complement clauses and converbial adjuncts *without* finite tense and subject agreement suggests that the relationship is not causal. This suggests that NOM-by-Agree may not be the correct approach to nominative case assignment in Kalmyk.

I argue that the NOM-as-unmarked approach more straightforwardly accounts for the distribution of nominative subjects in Kalmyk. Under this approach, nominative case does not depend on the same Agree operation between the subject DP and finite T^0 which yields φ-agreement morphology on the T^0. Instead, nominative is assigned as an unmarked case within the clausal domain to DPs that have not already been assigned a lexical or dependent case. This explains why even in environments such as nonfinite complement clauses and converbial adjuncts, where finite tense endings and subject agreement morphology is impossible, do we find nominative subjects.

4. Subject agreement as case-discriminating agreement in Kalmyk

Further examination of finite complement clauses reveals that it is not possible to have full subject agreement on the embedded verb with non-nominative subjects. Like many other Mongolic languages (see e.g. Janhunen 2003, 2012), Kalmyk displays differential subject marking, where the case on embedded subjects may alternate between nominative and accusative case. While, to my knowledge, differential argument marking has not been studied in detail for Kalmyk,[6] Serdobolskaya (2009, 2012) argues that accusative subjects occupy a position at the left periphery of the embedded clause. For example, in (21), the subject of the embedded clause is an accusative-marked reflexive anaphor which is coreferential with the

[6] However, differential argument marking has been extensively studied for Khalkha Mongolian, the standardised variety spoken in Mongolia. See Guntsetseg 2016; von Heusinger, Klein & Guntsetseg 2011; Klein, Guntsetseg & von Heusinger 2012.

matrix subject. Assuming that the embedded clause is a CP, and that it constitutes a phase boundary, this suggests that the accusative-marked reflexive anaphor has raised to the phase edge, i.e. Spec,CP, where it remains visible to the matrix clause for the purposes of anaphor binding.

(21) [**bijän** nöör-t-än jov-dg-an giqäd] bi soŋs-la-v
REFL.ACC sleep-DAT-RP walk-HAB-RP C 1SG.NOM hear-PRF.PST-1SG
'I've heard that I walk in my sleep.'

(Serdobolskaya 2012: 2, ex.11)

The exact details of how accusative case is assigned in Kalmyk is not important for my present purposes.[7] Crucially, while it is possible for the embedded subject in a finite complement clause to surface with accusative case, this *bleeds* overt agreement morphology on the embedded verb, as seen in (22)-(23) cf. (17)-(18). In place of the agreeing 1SG and 2SG forms of the embedded verb, the default third person form appears.

(22) [maŋdurtan **namagə** badma-la {xarɣa-na/***-naʷ-v**} gid͡ʒə]
tomorrow 1SG.ACC B.-COM {meet-NPST.3/*-NPST-1SG} C
mand͡ʒə kel-læ
M.NOM say-PRF.PST.3
'Manj said that I will meet with Badma tomorrow.'

(23) [**t͡ʃamagə** œt͡skuldur kemæ-læ {xarɣa-la/***-la-t͡ʃ**} gid͡ʒə]
2SG.ACC yesterday K.-COM {meet-PRF.PST.3/*-PRF.PST-2SG} C
bajərta mand͡ʒə-də ke-ləv
B.NOM M.-DAT say-PST.3
'Bayrta told Manj that you met with Kema yesterday.'

The data in (22)-(23) is puzzling when compared to (17)-(18). Under a NOM-by-Agree approach, the co-occurrence of accusative case on the embedded subject and the lack of overt agreement morphology on the embedded verb in (22)-(23) may be seen as support for the view that nominative case is assigned via Agree with finite T^0 (George & Kornfilt 1981; Raposo 1987; Chomsky 2000, 2001). However, in the previous section, we also saw that nominative case is possible on subjects in nonfinite clauses where overt subject agreement on the verb is impossible, suggesting that nominative case is not assigned via the same Agree operation that yields φ-agreement morphology.

However, the abovementioned data is only puzzling if one assumes that nominative case is assigned under Agree with finite T^0. I argue for an alternative view of the relationship

[7] There is some evidence that favours the view of accusative case as a dependent structural case in Kalmyk, assigned to the lower of two DPs in a local c-command relationship (Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987; Marantz 1991; McFadden 2004; Baker 2015). For example, Serdobolskaya (2012) shows that accusative subjects are not assigned case by matrix transitive v^0 in Kalmyk. In (i), the embedded subject in a converbial adjunct may still be marked accusative when the matrix predicate is intransitive:
(i) bi dur-ta-v [**čamagə duul-xla**]
1SG.NOM love-COM-1SG 2SG.NOM sing-SUCC.CVB
'I love it when you sing.' (lit. 'I'm with love when you sing.')
(Serdobolskaya 2012: 3, ex.23; literal translation mine)
Relatedly, many analyses of accusative subjects in Khalkha Mongolian also treat accusative case as a dependent structural case (see e.g. Aravind 2021; Gong 2023a; Gong 2023b; Lim 2022; Peters 2020; Peters 2024) However, see Fong 2019 for NOM-by-Agree analysis of accusative subjects in Khalkha Mongolian.

between case and agreement, where the Agree operation that yields φ-agreement morphology is sensitive to the case of a nominal. This view is also known as *case discrimination* (Bobalijk 2008; Preminger 2014). Under a case-discriminating view of agreement, φ-agreement targets nominals according to a case accessibility hierarchy (also known as the Revised Moravcsik Hierarchy) (Bobalijk 2008) (24), where cases on the left represent more unmarked cases while cases on the right represent more marked cases:

(24) Case Accessibility Hierarchy (Bobalijk 2008)
Unmarked Case > Dependent Case > Lexical/Oblique Case

The idea behind (24) is that, if overt φ-agreement in a language is able to target one of the more marked cases, e.g. dependent case, then φ-agreement in this language is also possible with the more unmarked cases on the left, e.g. unmarked case. It predicts that we will not find a language where φ-agreement is possible with arguments bearing unmarked case and lexical case, but not possible with arguments bearing dependent case. For example, Icelandic is a language in which only arguments bearing unmarked nominative case can be targeted for φ-agreement:

(25) Icelandic

(a) Mér **virðist**/?*virðast [**Jóni** vera taldir líka **hestarnir**].
Me.DAT seemed.SG/?*PL JON.DAT be believed.PL like horses.NOM
'I perceive Jon to be believed to like horses.'

(b) Jóni **virðast**/?*virðist [vera taldir líka **hestarnir**].
Jon.DAT seemed.PL/?*SG be believed.PL like horses.NOM
'Jon seems to be believed to like horses'

(Schütze 1997, cited in Bobalijk 2008: 319, ex.33)

In (25a), the dative experiencer embedded subject *Jóni* is not eligible for φ-agreement and blocks the matrix predicate from agreeing with the embedded nominative object *hestarnir* 'horses'. Thus, the matrix predicate surfaces with default third singular agreement. In (25b), the dative experiencer subject raises to matrix subject position, and φ-agreement between matrix predicate and the embedded nominative object becomes possible. In this case, the matrix predicate surfaces with third plural agreement.

I propose that the same state of affairs holds in Kalmyk. Given that nominative case is assigned as an unmarked case (NOM-as-unmarked) in Kalmyk, as discussed in Section 3, we can make sense of the data in (17)-(18) and (22)-(23) if we assume that only arguments that bear unmarked nominative case are accessible for φ-agreement. Consider for example, (18) and (23), repeated below. The reason why the nominative embedded subject in (18) triggers φ-agreement on the embedded verb, and the accusative embedded subject in (23) does not, is simply due to the fact that in Kalmyk, subject agreement is *only* possible with arguments that bear unmarked nominative case.[8] I propose that the default third person form of the verb in (23) represents the absence of agreement when the φ-probe on T^0 has failed to find a suitable goal to Agree with (Preminger 2014).

[8] Kornfilt & Preminger (2014) similarly argue that φ-agreement in Turkish and Sakha is better understood as case-discriminating agreement that targets subject DPs bearing unmarked nominative case.

(18) [**t͡ʃi** œt͡skuldur kemæ-læ xarɣa-**la-t͡ʃ** gid͡ʒə] bajərta mand͡ʒə-də ke-ləv
2SG.NOM yesterday K.-COM meet-PRF.PST-2SG C B.NOM M.-DAT say-PST.3
'Bayrta told Manj that you met with Kema yesterday.'

(23) [**t͡ʃamagə** œt͡skuldur kemæ-læ xarɣa{-la/***-la-t͡ʃ**} gid͡ʒə]
2SG.ACC yesterday K.-COM meet{-PRF.PST.3/*-PRF.PST-2SG} C
bajərta mand͡ʒə-də ke-ləv
B.NOM M.-DAT say-PST.3
'Bayrta told Manj that you met with Kema yesterday.'

Interestingly, while accusative subjects in Kalmyk are ineligible for φ-agreement, they may be overtly agreed with in Sakha (26) (Baker & Vinokurova 2010).[9] Further, Kornfilt (2003, 2006) reports that in Turkish (27), for all speakers, nominative subjects must co-occur with local agreement on the embedded predicate, while for some speakers, accusative subjects may but need not co-occur with local agreement on the embedded predicate.[10]

(26) Sakha
Min [**ehigi/ehigi-ni** bügün kyaj-yax-**xyt** dien] erem-mit-im.
1SG.NOM you.NOM/youACC today win-FUT-2PL that hope-PTPL-1SG
'I hoped that you (pl.) would win today.'
(Baker & Vinokurova 2010: 615, ex.39a)

(27) Turkish
a. *(for all speakers)*
[**Sen** dün opera-ya git-ti*(**-n**)] san-dı-m.
you.NOM yesterday opera-DAT go-PST-2SG believe-PST-1SG
'I believed you to have gone to the opera yesterday.'
a. *(for some speakers)*
[**Sen-i** dün opera-ya git-ti(**-n**)] san-dı-m.
you-ACC yesterday opera-DAT go-PST-2SG believe-PST-1SG
'I believed you to have gone to the opera yesterday.'
(Kornfilt 2006: 143-144, ex.3)

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an account of the variation in case-agreement patterns in Sakha and Turkish vs. Kalmyk, I will present some ideas offered by other authors, leaving a fuller investigation to future research. Kornfilt (2003, 2006) suggests that in Turkish embedded clauses where accusative subjects co-occur with overt subject agreement on the embedded verb, it is a silent (non-accusative) copy left behind by the raised accusative subject that the verb agrees with. Under the assumption that only arguments with unmarked nominative case are accessible to φ-agreement in Turkish, and that nominative case is simply the absence of any case in Turkic (Kornfilt & Preminger 2014), this implies that the silent copy does not bear any case at all. An alternative view of the facts in (26)-(27) comes from Kornfilt & Preminger (2014). The authors argue that accusative subjects may co-occur with subject agreement in Sakha because the embedded verb first agrees with the nominative subject, before it subsequently raises to the edge of the embedded clause, where it is assigned

[9] It is unclear from the discussion in Baker & Vinokurova 2010 whether agreement on the embedded verb is obligatory or optional when the embedded subject is accusative marked.

[10] I thank a reviewer for helping to clarify the judgements reported in Kornfilt 2006.

accusative case under local case competition with the matrix subject. This gives rise to the illusion that accusative subjects are also accessible for φ-agreement in Sakha.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the asymmetric distributions of nominative case on subjects and subject agreement in Kalmyk. While nominative case on subjects systematically co-occurs with subject agreement on the verb in finite clauses, we also find nominative case on subjects in nonfinite clauses where finite tense endings and subject agreement is impossible. This goes against theories of case assignment which take nominative case to be assigned under Agree with finite T^0 (e.g. Chomsky 2000, 2001) or an Agree operation that yields φ-agreement morphology (e.g. Raposo 1987) .

I have proposed that the distribution of nominative case in Kalmyk is more straightforwardly captured under a configurational view of case assignment, where nominative is assigned as an unmarked case to nominals that have not already been assigned a lexical or dependent case (Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987; Marantz 1991; McFadden 2004; Preminger 2014; Baker 2015). Under this view, nominative case is not assigned via the same Agree operation that yields φ-agreement. This accounts for why we find nominative subjects in both agreeing and non-agreeing nonfinite clauses in Kalmyk. To account for the fact that subject φ-agreement is possible only with nominative subjects and not accusative subjects in embedded clauses, I have proposed that subject agreement in Kalmyk is sensitive to a nominal's case value (Bobaljik 2008; Preminger 2014), and that only unmarked nominative arguments are accessible for φ-agreement according to the Case Accessibility Hierarchy (Bobaljik 2008).

References

Alexiadou, Artemis & Elena Anagnostopoulou. 2021. Rethinking the nature of nominative case. In András Bárány, Theresa Biberauer, Jamie Douglas & Sten Vikner (eds.), *Syntactic architecture and its consequences III: Inside syntax*, 69–93. Berlin: Language Science Press. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.4680302.

Aravind, Athulya. 2021. Successive Cyclicity in DPs: Evidence from Mongolian Nominalized Clauses. *Linguistic Inquiry* 52(2). 377–392. https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00373.

Baker, Mark. 2015. *Case: Its Principles and its Parameters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295186.

Baker, Mark C. & Nadya Vinokurova. 2010. Two modalities of case assignment: case in Sakha. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 28(3). 593–642. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-010-9105-1.

Binnick, Robert I. 2012. *The past tenses of the Mongolian verb: meaning and use* (Empirical Approaches to Linguistic Theory 1). Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Birtalan, Ágnes. 2003. Oirat. In Juha Janhunen (ed.), *The Mongolic Languages*, 210–228. London: Routledge.

Birtalan, Ágnes. 2020. Oirat and Kalmyk, the Western Mongolic languages. In *The Oxford Guide to the Transeurasian Languages*, 350–369. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198804628.003.0023.

Bläsing, Uwe. 2003. Kalmuck. In Juha Janhunen (ed.), *The Mongolic Languages*, 229–247. London: Routledge.

Bobalijk, Jonathan David. 2008. Where's phi? Agreement as a post-syntactic operation. In Daniel Harbour, David Adger & Susana Béjar (eds.), *Phi theory: phi-features across modules and interfaces* (Oxford Linguistics 16), 295–328. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Chomsky, Noam. 2000. Minimalist inquiries: The framework. In Roger Martin, David Michaels & Juan Uriagereka (eds.), *Step by step: Essays on minimalist syntax in honor of Howard Lasnik*, 89–155. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by Phase. In Michael Kenstowicz (ed.), *Ken Hale: A life in language*, 1–52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Fong, Suzana. 2019. Proper movement through Spec-CP: An argument from hyperraising in Mongolian. *Glossa* 4(1). 30. https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.667.

George, Leland M. & Jaklin Kornfilt. 1981. Finiteness and boundedness in Turkish. In Frank Henry (ed.), *Binding and Filtering*, 105–129. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Gong, Zhiyu Mia. 2022. *Issues in the Syntax of Movement: Cross-Clausal Dependencies, Reconstruction, and Movement Typology*. Cornell University PhD dissertation. https://hdl.handle.net/1813/111960. (28 January, 2023).

Gong, Zhiyu Mia. 2023a. Case in Wholesale Late Merger: Evidence from Mongolian Scrambling. *Linguistic Inquiry* 1–43. https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00494.

Gong, Zhiyu Mia. 2023b. A/Ā-Operations at the Mongolian Clausal Periphery. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 32(4). 413–457. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10831-023-09268-4.

Guntsetseg, Dolgor. 2016. *Differential Case Marking in Mongolian*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc770sp.

Heusinger, Klaus von, Udo Klein & Dolgor Guntsetseg. 2011. The case of accusative embedded subjects in Mongolian. *Lingua* 121(1). 48–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2010.07.006.

Indjieva, Elena. 2009. *Oirat Tones and Break Indices (O-Tobi): Intonational Structure of the Oirat Language*. University of Hawai'i at Manoa PhD dissertation.

Jang, Youngjun. 2009. Relative clauses in Kalmyk. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal* 17(3). 25–37.

Janhunen, Juha. 2003. *The Mongolic Languages*. London: Routledge.

Janhunen, Juha. 2012. *Mongolian*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Janhunen, Juha. 2020. The differential diversification of Mongolic. *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 6(2). 20190014. https://doi.org/10.1515/jhsl-2019-0014.

Klein, Udo, Dolgor Guntsetseg & Klaus von Heusinger. 2012. Case in Conflict: Embedded Subjects in Mongolian. In Monique Lamers & Peter de Swart (eds.), *Case, Word Order and Prominence* (Studies in Theoretical Psycholinguistics), vol. 40, 43–64. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1463-2_3.

Kornfilt, Jaklin. 2003. Subject Case in Turkish nominalized clauses. In Uwe Junghanns & Luka Szucsich (eds.), *Syntactic Structures and Morphological Information*. Berlin, Boston: DE GRUYTER. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110904758.129.

Kornfilt, Jaklin. 2006. Agreement: The (unique and local) syntactic and morphological licenser of subject Case. In João Costa & Maria Cristina Figueiredo Silva (eds.), *Studies on agreement* (Linguistik Aktuell = Linguistics Today v. 86), 141–171. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins.

Kornfilt, Jaklin & Omer Preminger. 2014. Nominative as no case at all: An argument from raising-to-accusative in Sakha. In Andrew Joseph & Esra Predolac (eds.), *Proceedings of the 9th Workshop on Altaic Formal Linguistics* (MIT Working Papers in Linguistics 76). Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, MIT.

Lim, Jun Jie. 2022. Dependent accusative case in Khalkha Mongolian: Evidence from converbal adjuncts. Poster at LSA 2022. Poster, Washington D.C.

Marantz, Alec. 1991. Case and Licensing. In German Westphal, Benjamin Ao & Hee-Rahk Chae (eds.), *Proceedings of the 8th Eastern States Conference on Linguistics (ESCOL 8)*, 234–253.

McFadden, Thomas. 2004. *The position of morphological case in the derivation*. University of Pennsylvania PhD dissertation.

McFadden, Thomas & Sandhya Sundaresan. 2011. Nominative case is independent of finiteness and agreement. Manuscript.

McFadden, Thomas & Sandhya Sundaresan. 2014. Finiteness in South Asian languages: an introduction. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 32(1). 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-013-9215-7.

Nikolaeva, Irina (ed.). 2007. *Finiteness: theoretical and empirical foundations* (Oxford Linguistics). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Nikolaeva, Irina. 2010. Typology of Finiteness. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 4(12). 1176–1189. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2010.00253.x.

Nikolaeva, Irina. 2012. Unpacking finiteness. In Dunstan Brown, Marina Chumakina & Greville G. Corbett (eds.), *Canonical Morphology and Syntax*, 99–122. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199604326.003.0005.

Peters, Andrew. 2020. Scrambling for case: Accusative in Mongolian. In Angelica Hernández & M. Emma Butterworth (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2020 Annual Conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association*, 1–15. Online.

Peters, Sable Andrew. 2024. Dependent Case for Mongolian: Unifying accusative subjects. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 9(1). https://doi.org/10.16995/glossa.8842.

Poppe, Nicholas. 1960. *Buriat grammar* (Uralic and Altaic Series). Vol. 2. Bloomington: Indiana University Publications.

Preminger, Omer. 2014. *Agreement and its failures* (Linguistic Inquiry Monographs). Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: The MIT Press.

Raposo, Eduardo. 1987. Case Theory and Infl-to-Comp: The Inflected Infinitive in European Portuguese. *Linguistic Inquiry* 18(1). 85–109.

Rouveret, Alain. 2023. *Nonfinite Inquiries: Materials for a Comparative Study of Nonfinite Predicative Domains*. De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110769289.

Schütze, Carson Theodore Robert. 1997. *INFL in Child and Adult Language: Agreement, Case and Licensing*. Cambridge, MA: MIT PhD dissertation.

Serdobolskaya, Natalia. 2009. Towards the typology of raising: A functional approach. In Patience Epps & Alexandre Arkhipov (eds.), *New Challenges in Typology*, 269–294. Mouton de Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110219067.4.269.

Serdobolskaya, Natalia. 2012. Raising in Altaic languages: Syntactic criteria. Handout presented at the Syntax of the World's Languages V, University of Zagreb, in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

Sundaresan, Sandhya & Thomas McFadden. 2009. Subject Distribution in Tamil and Other Languages: Selection vs. Case.

Szabolcsi, Anna. 2009. Overt Nominative Subjects in Infinitival Complements Cross-linguistically: Data, Diagnostics, and Preliminary Analyses. *NYU Working Papers in Linguistics* 2. 1–55.

Wang, Ruoan. 2023. Honorifics without [hon]. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 41(3). 1287–1347. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-022-09563-0.

Yip, Moira, Joan Maling & Ray Jackendoff. 1987. Case in Tiers. *Language* 63(2). 217. https://doi.org/10.2307/415655.