The Role of Animacy in Determining Noun Phrase Cases

in the Sinhalese and Japanese Languages

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Abstract

Previous studies (Hearth, et al., 1994; Kanduboda & Tamaoka, 2009, 2010; Tamaoka et al.,

2010) on Sinhalese language and Japanese language provided evidence that, both languages

have a number of linguistic characteristics which are identical. This study further analyzed

Sinhalese and Japanese in the usage of case markers with relation to the role of animacy. The

analysis showed three distinctive points on the usage of case markers in the Sinhalese language.

First, as previous studies (Miyagishi, 2003, 2005) have suggested, this study also re-confirmed

that Sinhalese totally lacks a nominative case marker to denote the nominate case. Second, the

Sinhalese accusative case marker has a limited usage due to animacy involvement. Third, the

Sinhalese dative case marker plays a bi-functional role in different sentences. In the nature of

case marker usage between Sinhalese and Japanese, these three points clearly distinguish both

languages. Furthermore, an additional analysis confirmed that when animacy is factored in,

usage of case markers become relatively complex in Sinhalese depending on context more so

than in Japanese. Thus, this study concluded that, although both Sinhalese and Japanese

languages are identical in that they both have case markers, Sinhalese employs a rather

complex usage compared to Japanese noticeably where animacy is concerned.

Key words: Sinhalese language, Japanese language, postpositions, case markers, animacy

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1. Introduction

Previous studies on cross-linguistic research have given various analysis on the effects of semantic information in syntactic structures. For example, the role of animacy (how sentient or alive a given noun is) which fundamentally plays a semantic role, is reported to have influence on syntactic structures in many languages (Larsen & Johansson, 2008, for Norwegian, Malayalam and Japanese, Swart et al., 2007; Willem et al., 2002, for Dutch). In some languages, animacy plays a simple role in which it possesses a simple system where all the nouns are divided into two basic categories: animate nouns (e.g. human & animal) and inanimate nouns (e.g. vehicles, trees, goods, food etc.). Furthermore, these languages do not have complex syntactic rules or structures due to animacy effects (an example of that is Japanese where all the noun phrases have an accompanying case marker regardless of the animacy involvement). On the other hand, there are some other languages where animacy provides a complex structural system. In the Sinhalese language for instance, animacy is reported to have various effects on the usage of grammatical items, namely postpositions, verbal inflections etc. (Garland, 2006; Gunasekara, 1999; Morales, 2006).

Sinhalese is one of the official languages spoken in Sri Lanka. It belongs to the Indo-Aryan language group where a number of other South Asian languages such as Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Maldivian, and Hindi also belong. Pali and Sanskrit are said to be the origins of the Sinhalese language. Previous studies (Hearth, et al., 1994; Miyagishi, 2003, 2005) on Sinhalese language and Japanese language suggest that, there are a number of linguistic characteristics which are identical. For example, according to a typological study done by Miyagishi (2003), the word order of Sinhalese and Japanese is identical in nineteen different items from the phrase level to the sentence level. Moreover, the free word order phenomena in both languages is also said to be identical (Hearth, et al., 1994).

However, despite the fact that both languages have a number of identical items, linguistic studies comparing Sinhalese and Japanese are still limited. There are many other aspects that need to be taken into account between these two languages both in syntactic and semantic features. Exploring these elements could possibly contribute to both the learners and the

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researchers of either language.

Thus, this paper is aimed at providing a descriptive analysis of case marker usage in the Sinhalese language compared to that in the Japanese language with relation to the role of animacy.

2. Post positions and case markers in Sinhalese and Japanese languages

2.1 Case markers in Sinhalese

The English language has a category of words called prepositions such as 'at', 'in', 'for' and, they occur before nouns. These words are meant to build grammatical relations with the subsequent words. The counter part of English prepositions in Sinhalese is postpositions (Dissanayaka, 2007). According to a study done by Chandralal (2010), postposition are divided in to eight different classes namely, case particles, predicate particles, highlighting particles, conjunctive particles, discourse particles, interrogative particles, quotative particles, and negative particles. Among these postpositions, this paper focuses on the role of case particles (to avoid confusion, this paper will use the term case markers from here on) with relation to animacy involvement. The following examples will provide detailed information of case markers in the Sinhalese language. Noun phrases in Sinhalese mark six basic cases namely, nominative, accusative, dative, genitive (locative), instrumental and ablative (Garland, 2006). However, not all the cases are accompanied by a case marker in Sinhalese as illustrated below.

కోతరకే శాబ్దిలి.
 jiro enduwa
 Jiro (φΝΟΜ, anim) cry (V+PST)
 Jiro cried.

- ගොඩනැගිල්ල කඩාවැටුන.
 godanegilla kadaawetuna
 building (φΝΟΜ, inam) collapse (V+PST)
 (The) building collapsed.
- 3) කලරා ලපාක ගත්ත. taro pota gatta Taro (φNOM, anim) book (φACC, inam) take (V+PST) Taro took (bought) (the) book.
- 4) කොබයම් සුසුකිව ඇද්ද.
 kobayashi susuki-wa edda
 Kobayashi (φΝΟΜ, anim) Suzuki (ACC, anim) pull (V+PST)
 Kobayashi pulled Suzuki.
- 5) කතක මුරමසට යතුර ඳුන්න.
 tanaka murase-ta yathura dunna
 Tanaka (φΝΟΜ, anim) Murase (DAT, anim) key (φΑCC, inam) give (V+PST)
 Tanaka gave (the) key to Murase.
- 6) හයපිමෙන ළමය හිහින්ආව. hayashi-ge lamaya gihinaawa Hayashi (GEN, anim) child (φΝΟΜ, anim) return (V+PST) Hayashi's child returned.

Examples 1) - 6) illustrate six different Sinhalese sentences. Examples 1) and 2) are active sentences consisting of intransitive verbs. The following examples 3) - 6) are active sentences consisting of transitive verbs. Example 1) is presented with an animate nominative (*jiro*). Next, example 2) is presented with an inanimate nominative (*godanegilla*). Despite animacy (as a

factor) both sentences have identical structures (φNOM (V+PST)). Yet, the nominative (case) in both sentences do not have an accompanying marker to denote its properties (ϕ NOM). At this point, an assumption can be made using these two sentences. Active sentences consisting of intransitive verbs in the Sinhalese language do not mark the nominative with a case marker despite animacy. Furthermore, this assumption can also be applied to the other sentences given above (active sentences consisting transitive verbs). Examples 3) to 6) are presented with animate nominatives. None of them accompany a case marker to denote the nominative. Thus, as previous studies (Dissanayaka, 2007; Noguchi, 1984) have also argued, these sentences clearly re-confirm that, the Sinhalese language lacks a case marker to denote the nominative case. Second, although examples 3) and 4) are presented with identical syntactic structure; [NOM [ACC [V+ PST]]], the accusative case marker /wa/ is used only in example 3). Accordingly, the accusative case marker can only be used when an animate noun is placed in the accusative case, but not with an inanimate noun. Third, the dative case marker /ta/ in example 4) denotes the preceding noun is the dative element in that sentence. Fourth, the genitive case marker /ge/ exemplified in 5) illustrates the relation of possessor (hayashi) and possessed (lamaya).

Over all, there are three main points on the usage of case markers in Sinhalese. First, among the postpositions, there are only three postpositions which can be considered case markers; dative /ta/, accusative /wa/ and genitive /ge/. Second, Sinhalese doesn't possess a case marker to denote the nominative in active sentences consisting of either a transitive verb or an intransitive verb. Third, although Sinhalese has an accusative case marker /wa/, its usage is limited due to the role of animacy in a given noun. Thus, this section verified three main points on the usage of case markers in Sinhalese. Japanese should also be examined the same situations by drawing out similar examples. Therefore, the next section will provide information on Japanese in the same regard.

2.2) Case markers in Japanese language

Japanese postpositions resemble that of Sinhalese. Japanese basically marks four cases: nominative /ga/, accusative /wo/, dative /ni/ and genitive /no/ (Tsujimura, 2007). These case

markers are crucial in Japanese syntax when identifying the properties of nouns in a sentence. Consider the examples below.

7) 次郎が泣いた。

jiro-ga naita

Jiro (NOM, anim) cry (V+PST)

Jiro cried.

8) 建物が崩れた。

tatemono-ga kuzureta
building (NOM, inam) collapse (V+PST)
The building collapsed.

9) 太郎が本を買った。

taro-ga hon-o katta

Taro (NOM, anim) book (ACC, inam) buy (V+PST)

Taro baought (a) book.

10) 小林が鈴木を引っ張った。

kobayashi-ga suzuki-o hippatta

Kobayashi (NOM, anim) Suzuki (ACC, anim) pull (V+PST)

Kobayashi pulled Suzuki.

11) 田中が村瀬に鍵をあげた。

tanaka-ga murase-ni kagi-o ageta

Tanaka (NOM, anim) Murase (DAT, anim) key (ACC, inam) give (V+PST)

Tanaka gave (the) key to Murase.

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12) 林の子供が帰ってきた。

hayashi-no kodomo-ga kaettekita Hayashi (GEN, anim) child (NOM, anim) return (V+PST) Hayashi's child returned.

Examples 7) - 12) are derived from 1) - 6). All four case markers are exemplified above. First, /ga/, in all examples, indicates that the preceding noun is the nominative element of the sentence. Next, /ni/ in example 11) indicates that the preceding noun is the dative element, and in examples 9) 10) and 11), the /wo/ is assigned to the accusative elements. Finally, /no/ in example 12) indicates the relation between Hayashi and kodomo (possessor and possessed).

On one hand, Sinhalese possesses three case markers to denote the dative, accusative, and genitive cases. On the other hand, Japanese possesses four case markers which in turn include the three in Sinhalese and another for the nominative case. The nominative case in Sinhalese is used without a case marker where as in Japanese, the nominative case marker /ga/ denotes the nominative element in a given sentence. In addition, although the accusative marker /wa/ in Sinhalese has a limited usage due to the animacy effects, Japanese accusative marker /wo/ seemingly has no effects in this regard. Furthermore, in Sinhalese, there is another particular usage of case marker which further distinguishes between those in Japanese. Japanese marks accusative noun phrases with the case marker /wo/ only. No other case marker replaces the role of accusative marker. Sinhalese, on the other hand, seemingly is quite different in this regard. Consider the examples below.

13) කොබයෂි සුසුකිට ගැහුව. kobayashi susuki-ta gehuwa Kobayashi (φΝΟΜ, anim) Suzuki (ACC, anim) hit (V+PST) Kobayashi hit Suzuki.

14) 小林が鈴木を殴った。

kobayashi-ga suzuki-o nagutta Kobayashi (NOM, anim) Suzuki (ACC, anim) hit (V+PST) Kobayashi hit Suzuki.

In the previous section (referring to example 4), this paper argued that in Sinhalese, the accusative noun phrase is marked by the accusative case marker /wa/. Example 13), however, provides a contradiction to this argument. Both 13) and 14) carry fundamentally same meaning of 'Kobayashi hit Suzuki'. In the Japanese sentence, the nominative and the accusative are marked appropriately as mentioned previously. Yet, in the Sinhalese sentence, the dative case marker /ta/ has seemingly replaced the role of accusative case marker /wa/. This phenomenon is called *DOM* (*Differential Object Marking*), for languages with different object markers (Aissen, 2003). According to the *DOM* phenomenon, in the case of Sinhalese, the animate accusative nouns (i.e., direct objects) can also be marked by the dative case marker /ta/. Thus, the dative case marker /ta/ in Sinhalese language clearly bi-functional. On one hand, it functions to denote the dative noun phrases as can be seen in 5). On the other hand, it also functions to denote the accusative noun phrase as an accusative case marker replacing the /wa/ as depicted in 13).

Thus far, the above sections analyzed the usage of case markers between Sinhalese and Japanese. Both languages demonstrate a similarity of having case markers in their syntax, although there is a different in their usage. The analysis showed that, Sinhalese has three main case markers; dative, accusative, genitive and, lacks a nominative case marker, whereas in Japanese, there are four case markers, namely nominative, dative, accusative and genitive. Furthermore, the accusative case marker /wa/ in Sinhalese demonstrated to have a limited usage due to animacy effects in certain sentences, while in Japanese, the accusative marker /wo/ seemingly has no effect. Nonetheless, the dative case marker /ta/ in Sinhalese has a bi-functional role while the Japanese dative /ni/ does not in this regard. Hitherto, it is evident that both languages have discrepancies on the usage of case markers. This paper assumes that 'animacy' may have an influence on the usage of case markers in Sinhalese. Therefore, the next section will further elaborate the usage of case markers with relation to the role of animacy.

3. The role of animacy in Sinhalese and Japanese

Animacy is a salient feature in many languages when it comes to categorizing nouns. According to animacy, nouns can be divided into two main categories: animate nouns (e.g., human and animals) and inanimate nouns (things other than human or animals). Many languages have been shown to have different attributes in their syntactical structures due to the effects of animacy. Sinhalese is also said to have a complex syntactical structure due to the effects of animacy (Garland, 2006; Gunasekara, 1999). There are various aspects of animacy in Sinhalese which can be discussed. However, this paper will focus on the usage of case markers in active sentences consisting of transitive verbs with relation to animacy. In Sinhalese, these sentences can basically be categorized into three types with relation to animacy as depicted in table 1.

Table 1. Sinhalese active sentences in animacy categories

Type 1	animate noun	+	animate noun
Type 2	animate noun	+	inanimate noun
Type 3	inanimate noun	+	inanimate noun

Type 1 is a construction where both the nominative NP and the accusative NP are presented with animate nouns (e.g., 15 and 16). Following this, type 2 represents sentences where the nominative NP is an animate noun and the accusative NP is an inanimate noun (e.g., 19). Type 3 represents sentences where both the nominative NP and the accusative NP are constructed with inanimate nouns (e.g., 20).

15) අමර ලලනිට බැන්න. amara lalani-ta benna Amara (φΝΟΜ, anim) Lalani (ACC, anim) scold (V+PST) Amara scolded Lalani. 16) අමර ලලනිව ඇඳ්ද. amara lalani-wa edda Amara (φΝΟΜ, anim) Lalani (ACC, anim) pull (V+PST) Amara pulled Lalani.

The *animate* + *animate* constructions in active sentences with transitive verbs can be divided into two types depending on the usage of case markers. On one hand, some sentences have the dative case marker /ta/ followed by the accusative NP as depicted in 15). On the other hand, there are also some other sentences which have the accusative case marker /wa/ followed by an accusative NP as depicted in 16). However, despite the fact that Sinhalese uses the dative case marker to denote the accusative NPs, both *amara lalani-ta benna* and *amara lalani-wa edda* are assumed to have an identical structure of [$_S \varphi$ NOM, anim [$_{VP}$ ACC, anim [$_{VP}$ PST]]] as depicted in figure 1 and 2. Note that in Japanese, the dative and the accusative share the same predicate (verb) in some cases (e.g., *-ni noboru* & *-wo noboru*). Although in Sinhalese, the dative and the accusative are not identical in this regard. In such usage the sentence becomes grammatically ill-formed as illustrated in 17) and 18).

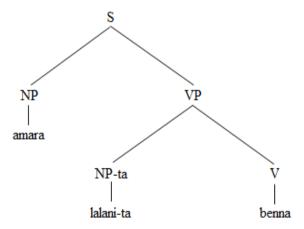


Figure 1. accusative NP with dative /ta/ in active sentence.

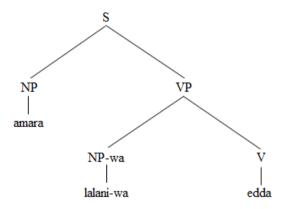


Figure 2. accusative NP with accusative /wa/ in active sentence.

- 19) අමර පොත (ක්) ගත්ත. amara pota gatta Amara (φΝΟΜ, anim) book (φΑСС, inam) take (V+PST) Amara took the (a) book.
- 20) පෘථුවිය හමඳ් හැපුතා.
 pruthuwiya hand(e-) hepuna
 earth (φNom, inam) moon (φDAT, inam) hit(V+PST)
 The earth hit the moon.

In the *animate* + *inanimate* construction, there are again two types of sentences depending on the usage of articles, but not case markers. The inanimate NPs placed in the accusative position have the distinction of defining whether a given noun is a definite noun or indefinite noun. For example, in 19), the accusative NP 'book' can be used either with (*pota-k*) or without (*pota*) the definite marker -*k*. In the *inanimate* + *inanimate* constructions, the accusative NP is usually marked with /*ee*/ which is a case inflection used only for inanimate accusative NPs. The nominative case of 'moon' in Sinhalese is '*handa*'. Consequently, when it is used as an accusative NP, '*handa*' undergoes inflection as the /*ee*/ marker must be attached. Therefore, it is then pronounced as '*handee*' as depicted in example 20). These are the three main sentence types of active sentences with transitive verbs. However, another construction of animacy can be considered as *inanimate* + *animate*. Yet, since it is used less frequently than the constructions mentioned above (Types 1 - 3), a further explanation of it is omitted. The Japanese language is also assumed to have the same types of categories mentioned in table 1. Thus, the usage of case

markers can again be observed by comparing the same type of sentences as presented below.

- 21) アマラがララニを叱った。
 amara-ga rarani-o shikatta
 Amara (NOM, anim) Lalani (ACC, anim) scold (V+PST)
 Amara scolded Lalani.
- 22) アマラがララニを引っ張った。
 amara-ga rarani-o hippatta
 Amara (NOM, anim) Lalani (ACC, anim) pull (V+PST)
 Amara pulled Lalani.
- 23) アマラが本をとった。 amara-ga hon-o totta Amara (NOM, anim) book (ACC, inam) take (V+PST) Amara took the (a) book.
- 24) 地球が月にぶつかった。
 chikyu-ga tsuki-ni butsukatta
 earth (Nom, inam) moon (DAT, inam) hit(V+PST)
 The earth hit the moon.

The above sentences provide ample evidence that Japanese marks all noun phrases regardless to the role of animacy. Japanese nominative marker /ga/ always accompanies the nominative NPs in all the above examples. Similarly, in 21), 22) and 23), the accusative marker /wo/ marks the accusative NPs. It should be noted again that the Japanese dative marker /ni/ only accompanies the dative NP while the Sinhalese dative case marker /ta/ can also be assigned to accusative NPs. In other words, the Japanese dative marker /ni/ is not bi-functional as the Sinhalese dative marker /ta/.

4. Discussion

This paper discussed the usage of case markers and involvement of animacy in the Sinhalese and Japanese and Japanese languages (a general view on the usage of case markers on Sinhalese and Japanese is presented in table 2). Although, previous studies have suggested a number of similarities between the two languages, the present analysis showed that Sinhalese and Japanese have a quite different usage of case markers, noticeably, where animacy is concerned. For example, as previous studies (Noguchi, 1984; Gunasekara, 1999) have also confirmed, active sentences consisting of transitive/intransitive verbs in Sinhalese, the nominative NP is always unmarked regardless of the animacy. On the other hand, the nominative case marker /ga/ in Japanese always accompanies the nominative NPs in this regard. Although both Sinhalese and Japanese have corresponding case markers for dative and accusative cases, Sinhalese dative and accusative showed difference with that in Japanese. First, the dative case marker in Sinhalese also functions as an accusative case marker in certain sentences. Second, the accusative case marker /wa/ in Sinhalese again showed limited usage due to animacy.

Table 2. Sinhalese & Japanese case markers with relation to animacy

Animacy
Sinhalese
Japanese

NOM		DAT		ACC		GEN	
animate inanimate		animate inanimate		animate inanimate		animate inanimate	
×	×	ta	ta	wa/*ta	wa	ge	×
ga	ga	ni	ni	wo	wo	no	no

^{*} dative ta has an exceptional usage

NOM = Nominative, DAT = Dative, ACC = Accusative, GEN = Genitive

Usage of case markers showed rather more complexity in Sinhalese where animacy is concerned. Active sentences in both Sinhalese and Japanese are categorized into three types according to animacy. The first types are sentences with *animate* + *animate* constructions. The second types are sentences with *animate* + *inanimate* constructions. The third types are sentences with *inanimate* + *inanimate* constructions. These sentences further confirmed the different usage of case markers in Sinhalese with that of Japanese. Japanese has its case markers /ga/, /wo/, /ni/, /no/ followed by the nominative, accusative, dative genitive NPs (respectively) regardless of animacy. However, in Sinhalese case markers showed different usage due to animacy effects. For example, on one hand, if the accusative NP is an animate noun, accusative marker /wa/ or, the dative marker /ta/ (Miyagishi, 2003; Noguchi, 1984)) is

placed immediately after the noun. On the other hand, if the accusative NP is an inanimate noun, always the case marker is omitted; amara (ϕ NOM, anim) pota (ϕ ACC, inam, DEF) iruwa (V+PST) meaning "Amara torn the book".

This paper dealt with two linguistic features that are prominent both in Sinhalese and Japanese. Although, the existence of case markers is identical in both languages, further analysis showed that usage of case markers distinguishes Sinhalese from Japanese. On one hand, the role of case markers is crucial in Japanese syntax despite the role of animacy. On the other hand, the role of animacy in Sinhalese syntax can be considered rather vital in many grammatical aspects. Yet, further studies would be necessary to reveal the in-depth relations between the Sinhalese and the Japanese languages.

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