THE FUNCTION OF ACCUSATIVE CASE IN MONGOLIAN[*]

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1 Introduction

This paper deals with a puzzle relating to the accusative case marker *-(i)g* in Mongolian and its function, illustrated by the examples below. This case marker *-(i)g* is normally used to mark direct objects in simple transitive clauses as in (1). However, embedded subjects in complex clauses can also be marked with *-(i)g*, as shown in (2).

(1) Bi   Bold-ig   har-san.
     I   Bold-ACC   see-PST
     'I saw Bold.'

(2) Bi   Bold-ig   yav-san   gej   med-sen.
     I   Bold-ACC   go-PST   that   know-PST
     'I knew that Bold went.'

The questions arising here are: why and under what conditions can the embedded subjects take the accusative case marker? The distribution of *-(i)g*-marking addresses also a more general question: does it fulfill a particular function? In the present paper I will try to give answers to these questions by focusing on the function of the accusative case marker in association with the *argument strength scale* suggested by de Hoop & Narasimhan (2005). They propose a model where two functions of case marking, the identifying and the distinguishing, work on the basis of the argument strength and they further argue that both functions play a role cross-linguistically, but one of the functions is dominant in an individual language.

The main proposal here is that the Mongolian accusative case marker clearly has the distinguishing function, more precisely, it distinguishes i) between direct object and subject in a simple transitive clause and ii) between two subjects across subordinated clause boundaries. The arguments to be distinguished are close to each other on the argument strength scale. Consequently, I will argue that the argument strength scale should be extended so that it includes arguments across clause boundaries. The parameters to measuring the strength of the arguments in Mongolian are i) for DOM the prominence features and ii) for DSM firstly the surface linear structure and secondly the prominence features of the related arguments.

In section 2, I will give the theoretical background about two functions of the case marking and mainly focus on de Hoop & Narasimhan's (2005) model of case marking augmented with argument strength. Furthermore, I will give some suggestions to modify the argument strength based on some data from Turkish and Mongolian. Section 3 gives an overview of the two types of differential case marking in Mongolian, both Differential Object Marking (DOM), which refers to the differential marking of direct objects as in (1) and Differential Subject Marking (DSM), which refers to the differential marking of subjects in the embedded clauses. Furthermore, the factors, that trigger both DOM and DSM, will be discussed in detail. Since the conditions for DSM are not clear enough, a questionnaire was conducted to find out more about it and the results of it will be discussed in section 4. The last section 5 concludes the paper.

2   Theoretical background

The Differential Case Marking (DCM), including both DOM and DSM, works in most languages, that exhibit them, so that arguments with the same grammatical function can occur in two different forms, either with or without an overt case marker. And again, in most instances, it concerns either agents or patients, a fact, which is further associated with the case pattern systems of the languages in the world, namely ergative and accusative patterns. Independently of the fact, which argument is affected there, it is mostly a competition between the overt and covert case marking. Functional approaches (cf. amongst others, Comrie 1989; Song 2001, de Hoop & Narasimhan 2005, Malchukov 2005) argue that the differential case marking in the languages fulfills two functions: identifying and distinguishing arguments.

According to the identifying function, the overt case marking indicates some specific information about the thematic role of the arguments under consideration. For example, ergative case expresses agentivity. That is, in some ergative languages, canonical agents which are in control or volitional, which further indicates they should be more animate and more referential, get an overt case marker, whereas non-canonical agents do not get any case marker and occur in unmarked form. The same pattern shows up in the accusative languages; the accusative case marker in these languages marks in its identifying function canonical patients, which are affected by the action, for example.

Another function of case marking is to distinguish between different arguments in a clause, e.g. between the agents and patients. Overt case marking on one of these arguments is sufficient for distinguishing them. There is a need to distinguish between two arguments in a clause if they compete with each other because they have similar features in terms of referentiality or animacy. So the arguments are distinguished by overtly case marking one of them. Irrespective of the fact, which function the case marking in individual languages has, accusative languages mark the patients and ergative languages the agents.

De Hoop & Narasimhan (2005) propose a model where the two functions of case marking are associated with the notion of the argument strength. They argue that there are two ways of measuring the strength of the arguments, the one is discourse prominence, i.e. arguments, which are highly prominent in the discourse, are strong, and the other is prototypicality, i. e. arguments, which are prototypical, e.g. subjects being in control, objects being affected, are strong agents and patients. Both have the same direction: highly prominent and prototypical arguments are usually animate and referential. More precisely, arguments that are prominent in the discourse are more referential and prototypical agents being in control and affected patients are typically animate and referential. However, they also have noticed that the parameters to measure the argument strength are language-specific.

Conjoining the case function with the argument strength, they further argue that case marking in its identifying function predicts that strong arguments should be identified by overt case marking. Accordingly, accusative languages mark their strong patients and ergative languages mark their strong agents, as illustrated in Figure 1 (cited from de Hoop & Narasimhan 2005, p. 325, modified by the author). Strong arguments are labelled with the capital letters *A* and *P* and weak arguments are with small letters *a* and *p*.
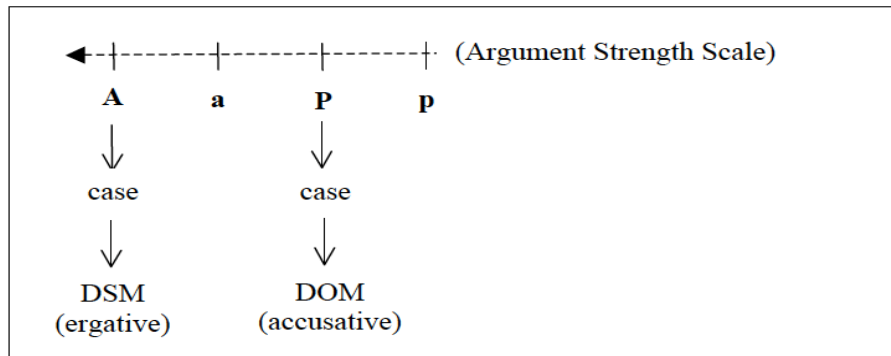

Figure 1. Argument Strength Scale – Identifying Function

Overt case marking in its distinguishing function predicts that arguments are to be differentiated if they are close to each other on the Argument Strength Scale. That is, if both arguments show similar features in terms of their referentiality and animacy, they must be distinguished by overt case marking on one of these. Accordingly, ergative languages mark weak agents, which are closer to strong patients to make a distinction between them, whereas accusative languages mark strong patients in order to distinguish them from the weak agents, as shown in Figure 2 (cited from de Hoop & Narasimhan 2005, p. 325, modified by the author).
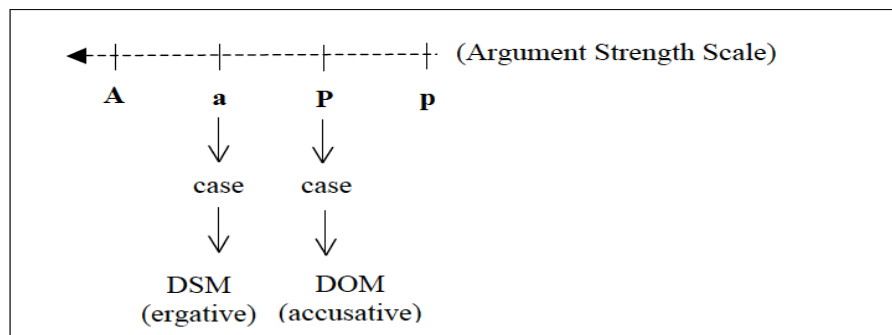

Figure 2. Argument Strength Scale – Distinguishing Function

There is a need to assume that differential case marking in one language expresses one function, irrespective of the fact whether it has either DOM or DSM or both, since it cannot be the case that an individual language develops different strategies, better to say, it follows to different functions with differentially marking of arguments. That is against the economic nature of using language. From the figures above one can see that ergative languages, if they show identifying function, mark strong agents and if they show distinguishing function they mark weak agents, whereas DOM languages always mark strong patients whatever function has the case marking. That leads to the assumption DSM in one language would give a clear indication about what function has the case marking in this language, and DOM would need for this clarity more indications in addition to marking of strong patients.

There are languages that exhibit both DOM and DSM. For instance, Hindi and Urdu show both types of the differential case marking (de Hoop & Narasimhan 2005) although it has ergative case pattern. In addition, some accusative languages such as Turkish (Kornfilt 2008), Japanese (Kuno 1976), Korean (Yoon 2007) also show DSM even though it is not exactly the same type as in the ergative languages. More precisely, DSM in these languages occurs not on the main subjects as in ergative languages, but on the embedded subjects. One example from Turkish is in (3), cited from Kornfilt (2008). In Turkish, the subjects of the embedded clause can occur either in morphologically unmarked form or in genitive case. As described in Kornfilt (2008), the overt genitive marking in (3b) indicates a specific feature of the subject, whereas in (3a), the subject is non-specific.

(3) a.   [yol-dan   bir   **araba** geç-tiğ-in]-i   gör-dü-m.
          road-ABL   a   **car**   pass-FN-3SG-ACC   see-PST-1SG
          'I saw that a car (non-specific, non-referential) went by on the road.'

     b.   [yol-dan   bir   **araba-nın**   geç-tiğ-in]-i   gör-dü-m.
          road-ABL   a   **car-GEN**   pass-FN-3SG-ACC   see-PST-1SG
          'I saw that a car (indefinite, but specific) went by on the road'

The instance of Turkish would look on the argument strength scale as illustrated in Figure 3 below. As the DSM in Turkish is responsible for the specific embedded subjects, one could assume that case marking in Turkish has the identifying function and follows the same condition as DOM in Turkish (cf. von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2005). In both DSM and DOM in Turkish, specific arguments, i.e. strong arguments, get an overt case marker.
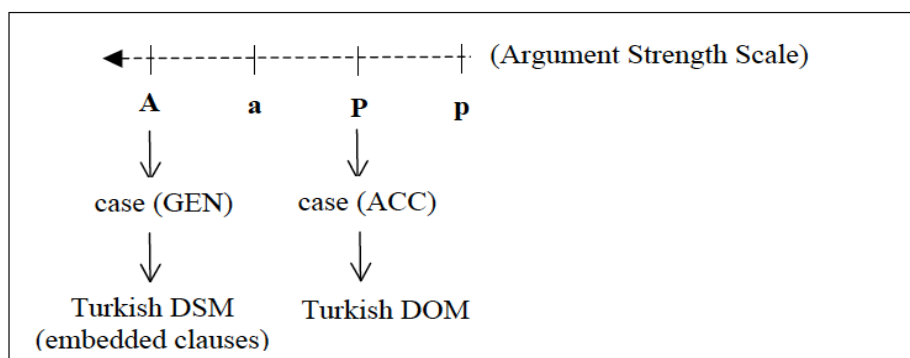

Figure 3. DCM in Turkish – Identifying Function

Mongolian also belongs to this group of languages and shows this type of DSM amongst DOM. Mongolian counterparts of (3) are given in (4). However, in the Mongolian examples, the triggering factor for the genitive marking is not the specific feature of the arguments. In both instances, the embedded subjects can be either specific or non-specific. The difference between (4a) and (4b) seems to have a structural reason which needs more investigation and I do not discuss it further here.

(4) a. Bi   zam   deer   neg   **mashin**   yav-ah-ig   har-san.
         I   road   on   a   **car**   go-INF-ACC   see-PST
         'I saw that a car went by on the road.'

    b.   Bi   zam   deer   neg   **mashin-i**   yav-ah-ig   har-san.
         I   road   on   a   **car-GEN**   go-INF-ACC   see-PST
         'I saw that a car went by on the road.'

However, in Mongolian, the embedded subjects can occur not only in the genitive but also in the accusative, the same marker for direct objects, as we have seen above in (2), repeated below, modified slightly.

(2) a. Bi   Bold   yav-san   gej   med-sen.
         I   Bold   go-PST   that   know-PST
         'I knew that Bold went.'

    b.   Bi   Bold-ig   yav-san   gej   med-sen.
         I   Bold-ACC   go-PST   that   know-PST
         'I knew that Bold went.'

Again the questions that arise here are i) what function has the differential case marking, both DOM and DSM in Mongolian, ii) how might we analyze the accusative marking of the embedded subjects in Mongolian within the framework of case function associated with the argument strength scale.

Based on this theoretical background about case function theory in association with the argument strength scale, I will propose in this paper that the accusative case in Mongolian has clearly the distinguishing function. Moreover, while DOM in Mongolian does not show clearly enough the function of the accusative case, our Mongolian data about case marking of subjects in embedded clauses show that overt case marking differentiates between two arguments across clause boundaries and supports our assumption of a distinguishing function. This will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

3 Differential Case Marking in Mongolian

As an accusative language, modern Mongolian exhibits two types of differential case marking: the one concerns the direct objects, called Differential Object Marking (DOM) and the other concerns the subjects of the embedded clauses, a special type of DSM similar to Turkish (cf. example in (3)).

In both cases, there is an alternation between the morphologically unmarked form and the accusative form with the surface case marker *-(i)g*. There are other alternation possibilities for DSM, which I will consider in detail later on.

In the following I will discuss each type in detail and show under what conditions the differential marking takes place.

3.1   Differential Object Marking

In Mongolian some direct objects of the transitive clauses are marked with the accusative case, others are not. In previous work (Guntsetseg, 2009) I have shown different factors triggering DOM in Mongolian, which I will briefly summarize in the following.

The DOM in Mongolian firstly depends on the Referentiality Scale as in (5), a modified version of Aissen (2003) and von Heusinger (2008).

(5) Personal Pronouns > Proper Names > Definite NPs > Indefinite Specific NPs > Indefinite Non-specific NPs > very weak indefinite NPs.

Direct objects which are higher on this scale i.e. which are realized as personal pronouns, proper names and definite (e.g. demonstrative) noun phrases are obligatorily marked with the accusative case marker *-(i)g*, as shown in (6).

(6) a.   Bi   **tuuniig**   / **Bold-ig**   / **ene**   **hun-ig**   har-san.
          I   3.PS.ACC   / Bold-ACC   / this   person-ACC   see-PST
          'I saw him / Bold / this person.'

   b.   * Bi   **ter**   / **Bold** / **ene**   **hun**   har-san.
          I   3.PS   / Bold / this   person   see-PST
          Int: 'I saw him / Bold / this person.'

The indefinite direct objects with *neg* 'a/one' are marked optionally with the accusative case marker. This optionality seems to depend firstly on animate and specific features of the direct objects, as illustrated in (7), similar to Turkish (Enç 1991, von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2005). More precisely, in (7b), the overt accusative case marker requires a specific interpretation; it is a certain student who is looked for by the speaker, whereas in (7a), it is ambiguous in terms of the specificity, i.e. it can have both a specific and non-specific reading. This shows that the indefinite specific direct objects are not obligatorily marked with the accusative case marker. That means, the overt accusative case marker indicates a definitely specific reading, otherwise it is unclear whether the sentences have a specific or non-specific reading.

(7) a.   Bi   **neg**   **oyutan**   hai-san.
          I   a   student   search-PST
          'I looked for a student.'   *specific and non-specific*

   b.   Bi   **neg**   **oyutn-ig**   hai-san.
          I   a   student-ACC   search-PST
          'I looked for a certain student.'   *specific*

The question would be when do speakers use the overt case marker. This seems to lead to other secondary factors such as verb semantics (von Heusinger & Kaiser 2007) and discourse persistence (von Heusinger & Chiriacescu 2009), which I do not discuss here further.[1]

In Mongolian, there is another type of indefinite direct object without *neg* 'a/one' to which I refer as very weak indefinite NPs, realized by bare nouns, sometimes with additional adjectival modifiers. They are very weak indefinites in the sense that either the action in which they occur is more prominent and their argumental status is overshadowed or they are semantically incorporated, called also pseudo-incorporated, into the verb (cf. Dayal 2003, Öztürk 2005). Marking such very weak indefinite direct objects is ungrammatical, as shown in (8).

> (8) a. Bi **nom** unsh-san.
>   I   book   read-PST
>   'I read a book.' or 'I did book-reading.'
>
>   b. * Bi **nom-ig** unsh-san.
>   I   book-ACC   read-PST
>   Int: 'I read a book.' or 'I did book-reading.'

The summary of DOM in Mongolian is presented in Table 1 below. We can see that indefinite specific direct objects are not obligatorily marked with the accusative case marker, (cf. highlighted box and (7)). As (7b) shows, only the overt case marker indicates the specific reading.

Personal Pronouns	Proper Names	Definite (e.g. demonstrative) NPs	Indefinite NPs with ***neg***		Very weak indefinite NPs
			+spec	-spec	
+			+ / -	-	-

Table 1. Summary of the DOM in Mongolian

DOM in Mongolian does not reveal clearly enough the function of *-(i)g*-marking whether it has an identifying or distinguishing function. Firstly, the cut-off point between the strong and weak patients are not clearly differentiated by case marking, since indefinite specific direct objects, i.e. strong patients, are not obligatorily marked with the accusative case marker. Secondly, DOM in both identifying and distinguishing functions marks strong patients, as we have seen from Figure 1 and 2. Marking the strong patients is not enough to reveal the function of differential case marking in individual languages. That means, one needs other, clearer indications. If an individual language has not only DOM but also DSM, one could find out by means of DSM what function has differential case marking in this language. As the situation in Mongolian the same, we will turn now to DSM in Mongolian in order to find out more about the function of differential case marking in Mongolian.

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[1] For more information about other possible factors for DOM in Mongolian please refer to Guntsetseg (2009).

3.2   Differential Subject Marking

In Mongolian, while the subjects of the main clauses occur always in unmarked nominative form, the subjects of the embedded clauses can occur either in unmarked nominative form or they can be marked with different case markers depending on the type of embedded clauses. For instance, subjects of embedded object clauses can be marked either with the genitive or accusative or they can occur just in unmarked nominative form, as illustrated in (9), without having any meaning differences.

(9) Bi   ene hun /   ene hun-i   / ene hun-ig   yav-sn-ig   med-sen.
     I   this person / this person-GEN / this person-ACC   go-PST-ACC know-PST
     'I knew that this person went.'

As illustrated in (9), the accusative marking on *ene hun* 'this person' is not obligatory. If, however, the direct object is in a main clause it must be marked with the accusative suffix (cf. in (6)), since it is a demonstrative NP.

   Such differential marking of subjects is found not only in the embedded object clauses, but also in other types of embedded clauses such as adverbial, conditional and relative clauses. One example from adverbial clauses is illustrated in (10), where the embedded subjects can alternate between the two forms, either in unmarked nominative or in accusative form, but not in the genitive.[2]

(10) Bi   ene   hun / ene hun-ig   yav-sn-i   daraa ir-sen.
     I   this   person / this person-ACC   go-PST-GEN after   come-PST
     'I came after this person went.'

The main interest of this paper is on this alternation between the unmarked form and the accusative form, since there always seems to be a competition between these two forms, as we have seen also in DOM.

   Furthermore, one could ask, whether there exists a subject-to-object-raising construction as proposed both in English (cf. Postal 1974) and in Japanese (cf. Kuno 1976). Following von Heusinger et al. (submitted), I assume that *ene hun-ig* in (10) is not an instance of a subject-to-object-raising construction based on the following reasons. Firstly, as we have seen above, accusative embedded subjects can occur in the adverbial clauses, where the main verb can be intransitive as shown in (10). Such intransitive verbs cannot have direct object and accordingly, the accusative embedded subjects remain as constituents of the embedded clauses. Secondly, direct objects should be able to be passivized and causativized, but the Mongolian accusative embedded subjects are not able to do that. Finally, in von Heusinger et al. (submitted), it is shown that accusative embedded subjects do not have the same binding properties as the direct objects.

   Having outlined that there is no subject-raising-to-object construction, the remaining questions are firstly, under what conditions do embedded subjects take the accusative case marker and secondly what is the reason to mark them differentially. In order to answer these questions and to have a better understanding of it at all, three experimental studies were

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[2] The instances with the genitive subjects seem to have other structural conditions, which should be investigated more in detail in separate work.

conducted in the form of a questionnaire. After discussing the summarized results of the first two pilot studies in the following, I will deal in section 4 with the final study and its results.

The results of the first two pilot studies (for detailed information consider Guntsetseg & Klein, 2009, Klein et al, to appear), which are designed on the basis of the introspective data, have shown two main triggering factors for differential marking of the embedded subjects. The first factor is the surface structure, namely the adjacency of the main and embedded subjects. The second factor is relative referentiality of the two subjects. In the following, I will illustrate the relevance of these factors.

Adjacency. The unmarked basic word order of Mongolian is Subject-Object-Verb. (cf. Poppe 1955, Binnick 1979). In a complex clause, the embedded clause occurs always before the main verb, but either after the main subject or before it, as shown in (11). Consequently, if the embedded clause occurs after the main subject (S_M), as in (11a), both main and embedded subjects (S_E) are immediately in adjacent position. If, however, the embedded clause occurs before the main subject as in (11b), the subjects are not adjacent. As the results of the first two studies indicate that embedded subjects are marked more likely with the accusative case marker, if both subjects are in immediately adjacent position as in (11a) and (12a). And, if they are not adjacent as in (11b) and (12b), the accusative marking of the embedded subjects is dispreferred. That means adjacency of the subjects leads to preferences the accusative case marking of embedded subjects, whereas non-adjacency does not.

(11) a. S_M [S_E (O_E) V_E] V_M
     b.   [S_E (O_E) V_E] S_M V_M

(12) a.   Bi   ?chi   /   chamaig   yav-sn-ig   med-sen.
          I   you   /   you.ACC   go-PST-ACC   know-PST
          'I knew that you went.'

     b.   Chi   /   chamaig   yav-sn-ig   bi   med-sen.
          You   /   you.ACC   go-PST-ACC   I   know-PST
          'I knew that you went.'

Relative referentiality. As the referentiality feature of the arguments plays a crucial role for the DOM in Mongolian, it is assumed that it may also be an important factor for the DSM in Mongolian, which we have tested in the first two questionnaires. The results of them have confirmed this assumption. More precisely, if both subjects are adjacent and if the embedded subjects are higher on the referentiality scale than the main subjects, the accusative case marking of the embedded subjects is preferred by the informants, as shown in (13a). However, this preference disappears if the embedded subjects are lower on the referentiality scale than the main subjects as in (13b), even though both subjects are adjacent.

(13) a.   Ene   hun   ?bi   /   namaig   yav-sn-ig   med-sen.
          this   person   I   /   I.ACC   go-PST-ACC   know-PST
          'This person knew that I went.'

     b.   Bi   ene hun   /   ene hun-ig   yav-sn-ig   med-sen.
          I   this person   /   this person-ACC   go-PST-ACC   know-PST
          'I knew that this person went.'

Based on the results of the first two questionnaires, a final questionnaire was conducted in the summer of 2008 in Mongolia. In this final study, some additional points were included which were not considered in the first two questionnaires, but are crucial for the following reasons in the final study. Firstly, in the first studies there was only one lexicalization for test sentences. Since the multiplicity of lexicalization is important for the significance, in the final study, the lexicalization of the test sentences was increased up to 15. Secondly, in the earlier studies, we have only tested one type of embedded clause, namely, embedded object clause. In the final study, adverbial clauses were also tested, in order to check whether there is a difference between the two types, object and adverbial clause, whether the embedded clause type plays a role. And the last reason concerns the factor of the relative referentiality. From the first studies, it was not clear enough whether it was the relative referentiality feature of both subjects or the absolute referentiality of the embedded subjects. For these reasons, the last questionnaire was conducted and in the next section, the design and the results of it will be presented.

4.   Questionnaire

4.1   The design of the questionnaire

The study was designed in a form of a written questionnaire. The participants had to read the test sentences and to judge how good they sound. The judgment scale consists of 4 points from 1 (very bad) to 4 (very good).[3] The acceptability judgment is therefore the dependent variable of this study. The independent variables were as follows.

Case. The embedded subjects of the test sentences were either in unmarked nominative form or in accusative form: NOM vs. ACC.

Adjacency. The test sentences were constructed so that either both subjects are in immediately adjacent position or they are far from each other: Adjacent vs. Non-Adjacent.

Clause type. To check whether the differential marking of the embedded subjects is dependent of the embedded clause type, we had chosen two types of embedded clauses, the one refers the type of embedded object clause like in (9), the other the type of embedded adverbial clause like in (10): Object clause vs. Adverbial clause.

Referentiality. The test sentences are constructed so that both subjects are different in the referentiality feature. If one wants to check every possible combination of this relation the extent would be very large. Therefore, the following four combinations as stratified sampling were tested: PRO – DEF; PRO – PRO; DEF – DEF; DEF – PRO. PRO stands for the personal pronouns and DEF for the definite noun phrases. The first one refers to the referentiality of the main subjects; the second one refers to the embedded subjects.

Altogether, there were 32 conditions. Each condition was realized in the test sentences by 15 different lexicalizations. Accordingly, 480 test sentences were built, which are divided into 30 different questionnaires. The test sentences in each questionnaire were ordered in 4 different orders. 720 native speakers of Mongolian were asked; that is, 24 judgments for each test sentence respectively for each lexicalization. That is, there were 360 judgments for one condition. This study about the DSM was combined with the study of the DOM so that the sentences worked as fillers for one another. Furthermore, control sentences were involved; by means of it

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[3] This judgment scale was chosen similarly to the traditional school marks ranking in Mongolia.

wrong participants could be excluded. The test sentences and the control / filler sentences were at a ratio of 1:1.

4.2   The results of the study and their interpretation

In the following, the main important results will be presented. In figure 4, it shows whether there is an interaction between the differentially case marking of the embedded subjects and adjacency of both subjects. The judgment means are in the vertical line and the horizontal line refers to the adjacency feature of the test sentences. Figure 4 shows that the accusative case marking of the embedded subjects are always judged better irrespective of adjacency. The only difference concerns the unmarked nominative form of the embedded subjects. If the subjects are adjacent the test sentences with the unmarked embedded subjects are judged much lower. If the subjects are not adjacent, the sentences are judged better. This shows that the participants prefer the accusative case marking of the embedded subjects if both subjects are adjacent. This preference neutralizes if the subjects are not adjacent.
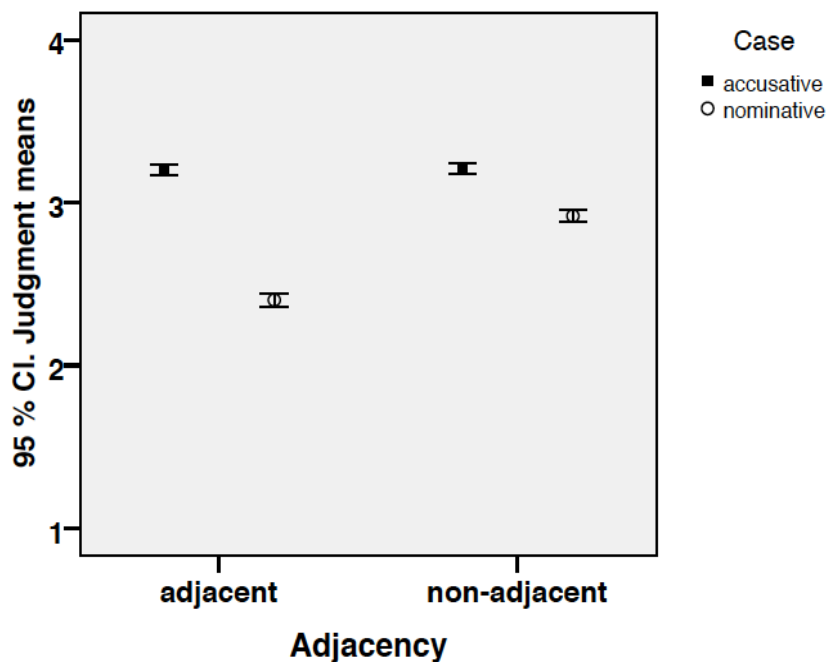

Figure 4. Interaction between Case and Adjacency

Figure 5 below shows the results of the fact whether the referentiality feature of both subjects plays a role for the differential marking of the embedded subjects. This evaluation concerns only the cases where both subjects are adjacent. Again, sentences with the accusative subjects are judged higher in all combinations of referentiality. The only difference shows up in the cases with the unmarked embedded subjects. More precisely, if the embedded subjects are realized by personal pronouns, the unmarked nominative form of them is judged much lower, i.e. the accusative marking is preferred by the participants in these cases. On the other hand, if the embedded subjects are realized by a definite NP, the unmarked nominative form of them is judged better than those instances with the unmarked pronominal subjects. That is, only

pronominal embedded subjects are marked preferably with the accusative case marker and this does not depend on whether the main subjects are lower on the referentiality scale, since there is no judgment difference between PRO – PRO and DEF – PRO. This indicates that not the relative referentiality plays a role but rather the absolute referentiality.
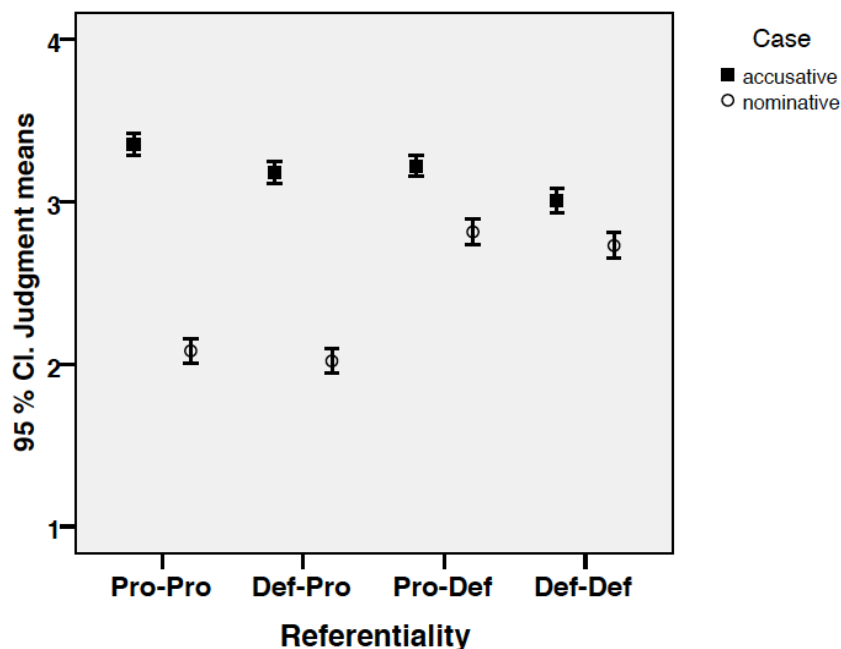

Figure 5. Interaction between Case and Referentiality

To sum up so far, as the results indicate, the accusative case marking of the embedded subjects are judged better in all instances. The only judgment differences show up in the instances with the unmarked embedded subjects. If both subjects are adjacent and the embedded subjects are realized by the personal pronouns, the unmarked form of the embedded subjects is hardly acceptable (judgment means 1.9), so that the accusative case marker is highly (judgment means 3.2) required. In all other instances, the judgment difference between the unmarked form and the accusative form of the embedded subjects is minimal so that both forms can be substituted even though there is a slight preference for the accusative case marking.

Figure 6 shows that the differential marking of the embedded subjects does not depend on the embedded clause type, since there is no judgment difference between the two clause types, object and adverbial clause. That is, DSM works identically irrespective of the fact whether there is an embedded object clause or an adverbial clause.
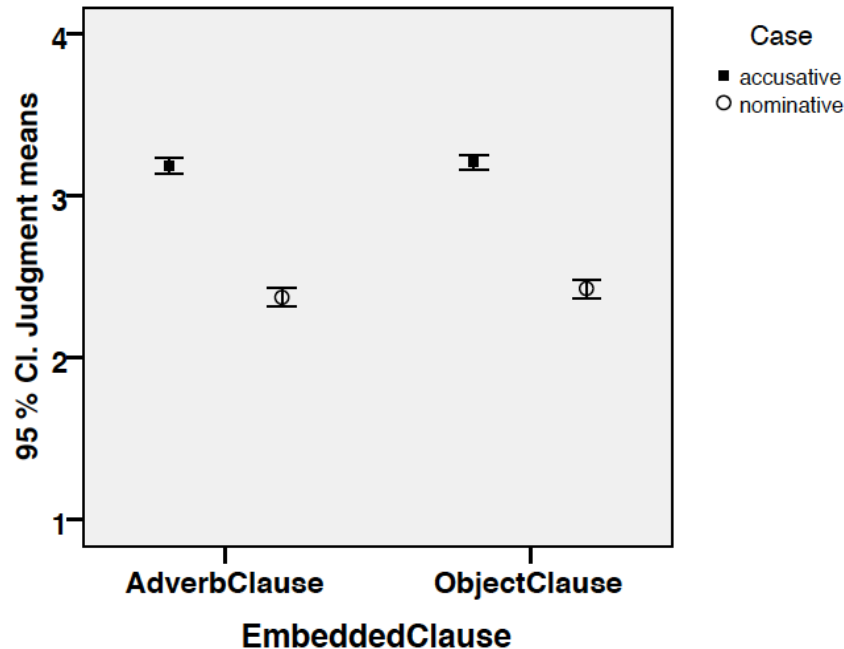
Figure 6. Interaction between Case and Clause Type

Summarized, DSM in Mongolian depends firstly on the adjacency of both subjects, which has a superficial nature and secondly on the absolute referentiality, i.e. the referentiality feature of the embedded subjects. So far I have shown the triggering factors for DSM in Mongolian. These findings lead to the following inferences. If both subjects are close to each other not only at the surface structure, i.e. both subjects are adjacent but also on the argument strength scale, i.e. the embedded subject is highly referential and therefore a strong argument, then the embedded subject should be marked with the accusative case marker. The fact that overt case marking of embedded subjects stands in relation to main subjects, especially in terms of the surface structure, indicates that the DSM in Mongolian has the distinguishing function. More precisely, it distinguishes between the two subjects in a complex clause, because they are close to each other at the argument strength scale provided both subjects are adjacent at the surface structure.

5. Conclusion

In the previous sections we have seen that in Mongolian, direct objects as well as the subjects of the embedded clauses can occur either in unmarked nominative form or they can be marked with the accusative case marker *-(i)g*. The question was: what is the function of this differential marking of one and the same arguments in a sentence? More precisely, what function does the overt accusative case marker fulfill? To find this out we have examined each of them in detail.

While the differential marking of the direct objects does not reveal what function has the accusative case, DSM in embedded clauses gives, based on the results from the questionnaire, a clear indication of the distinguishing function of it. In other words, there is a need to distinguish between two subjects across clause boundaries if they are closer on the surface structure, called adjacency and if the embedded subject is highly referential, which, in turn, shows that both subjects are closer to each other on the argument strength scale. As mentioned above, differential

case marking in one language should express one function; I assume that differential case marking in Mongolian has the distinguishing function. More precisely, it distinguishes i) between the direct object and the subject and ii) between the main and embedded subjects in a complex clause under the condition that both arguments are close to each other on the argument strength scale. Having said this, let us see now, the argument strength scale for Mongolian instances below in Figure 7. Strong embedded agents (A_E) are closer to weak main agents (a_M), therefore such embedded agents are marked with the accusative case marker in order to be not confused with the weak main agents, provided both subjects are adjacent on the surface structure. And strong patients (P) are marked with the accusative case marker in order to be not confused with the weak embedded agents.
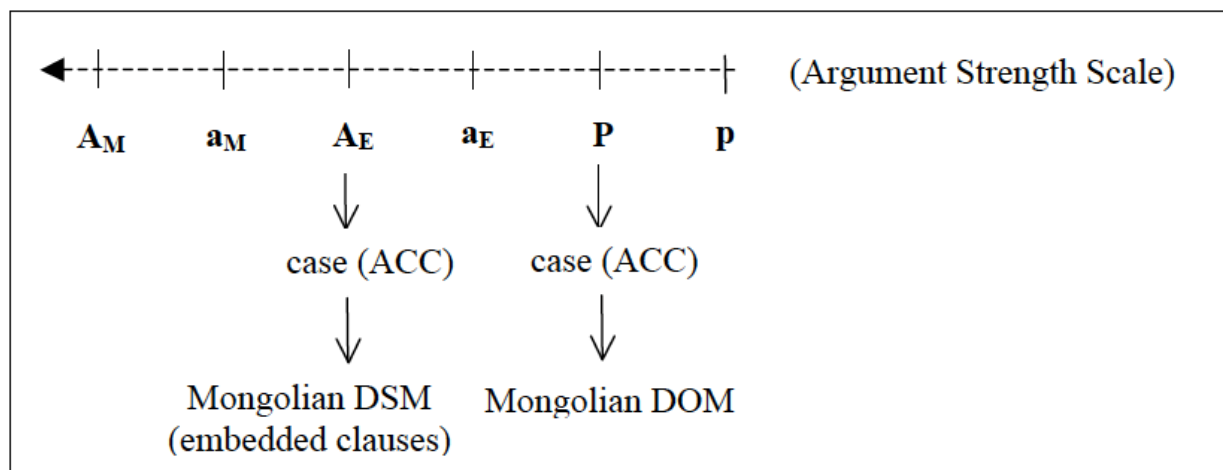

Figure 7. DCM in Mongolian – Distinguishing Function

To sum up, the function of the accusative case marker in Mongolian is clearly distinguishing function.

The data from Mongolian and Turkish show that the argument strength scale should be extended so that it includes arguments across clause boundaries.

Furthermore, it is necessary to further investigate the instances with the genitive subjects, which seem to have a rather structural condition. In the final questionnaire, the embedded clauses of the test sentences were intransitive clauses. Therefore, there is a need to examine how it would look if the embedded clauses are transitive ones and if the embedded direct objects are marked with the accusative case. That means, how do DSM and DOM interact within the embedded clauses? This point should be investigated further.

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