Case and agreement

Comparing two theories of case assignment

Selected Topics in Syntax
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5   Case assignment via Agree vs. Dependent Case

- We now know in detail how two theories of case assignment work, viz. a theory where case is assigned as a reflex of Agree vs. a Dependent Case theory.
- So far, both theories are empirically equivalent, i.e. they are both able to capture the same range of data.

  ▷ Thus far, our data consisted of basic facts about ergative vs. accusative alignment.

- These theories capture these facts in very different ways, e.g. stipulation of erg as an instance of inherent case vs. parametric variation in the directionality of dependent case assignment.
- But: is there an *empirical* distinction between the two theories?

  ▷ Is there some phenomenon that teases apart an Agree-based theory vs. a configurational framework?
  ▷ Alternatively said, is there some phenomena with respect to which the two theories make different predictions?

- Yes: the empirical distinction between these two provided is going to be provided by the interaction between quirky case and the distribution of nom objects in Icelandic.

5.1   Background

- In order to appreciate the Icelandic-based argument, we need an understanding of the constructions that the discussion will be based on. This is the goal of this section.
- We will see what passivization, raising, and Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) consist of and, crucially, their *case properties*.

5.1.1   Passivization crash-course

- Roughly, passive sentences involve the "promotion" of the theme argument of a transitive verb to the grammatical subject position (viz. Spec-TP) and, simultaneously, the "demotion" of the agent
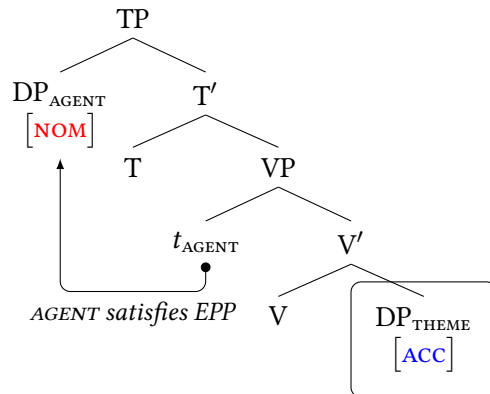
argument to an optional *by*-phrase.

▷ Passives underscore the need to distinguish between the *grammatical subject position* (i.e. Spec-TP) from the VP-internal positions where DPs are generated and where they receive a θ-role—the latter can be referred to as *semantic* subject (or object) positions.

▷ Active sentences:

   ○ Spec-VP is where the AGENT is base-generated. This is a semantic subject position.

   ○ The same DP then moves to the grammatical subject position (viz. Spec-TP), because of the EPP.

      ➟ Matching between grammatical subject and semantic subject: both occupied (at different points of the derivation) by the same AGENT).

▷ Passive sentences:

   ○ The THEME is base-generated at Compl-VP. This is a semantic opbject position.

   ○ The same DP then moves to the grammatical subject position (viz. Spec-TP), because of the EPP.

      ➟ Mismatch between grammatical subject (a promoted, passivized THEME) and semantic subject (the demoted AGENT).
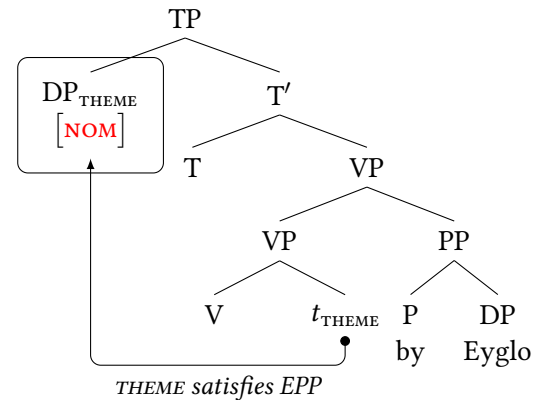

▷ The grammatical subject position can be occupied by elements that do not have semantics at all, i.e. expletives:

(1)   a. **There** is a dog in the garden.

      b. **It** has snowed heavily on Monday.

▷ We know expletives do not have meaning because they cannot receive a θ-role:

(2)   a.   Eyglo worried about the snowstorm.

      b. ... **There** worried about the snowstorm.

- In a language with accusative alignment, the different positions the THEME occupies (viz. direct object vs. subject position) has consequences for the case it is marked with: ACC in the active, NOM in the passive.

(3) *Active*: Eyglo read the books.

TP
├ DP$_{\text{AGENT}}$ [NOM]
└ T′
  ├ T
  └ VP
    ├ t_{AGENT}
    └ V′
      ├ V
      └ DP$_{\text{THEME}}$ [ACC]

AGENT satisfies EPP

(4) *Passive*: The books were read (by Eyglo).

TP
├ DP$_{\text{THEME}}$ [NOM]
└ T′
  ├ T
  └ VP
    ├ VP
    │ ├ V
    │ └ t_{THEME}
    └ PP
      ├ P (by)
      └ DP (Eyglo)

THEME satisfies EPP

✒ **EXERCISE 1**

The case differences that we see between an active sentence and its passive counterpart are a textbook instantiation of Burzio's generalization. Explain why.

- Passivization in Icelandic: exactly the same properties.

(5) *Icelandic* (Germanic)

    a. Lögreglan tók **Siggu** fasta.   *active: ACC THEME*
       the.police took Sigga.ACC fast.ACC
       'The police arrested Sigga.'

    b. **Sigga** var tekin föst af lögreglunni.   *passive: NOM THEME*
       Sigga.NOM was taken fast.NOM by the.police.DAT
       'Sigga was arrested by the police .'

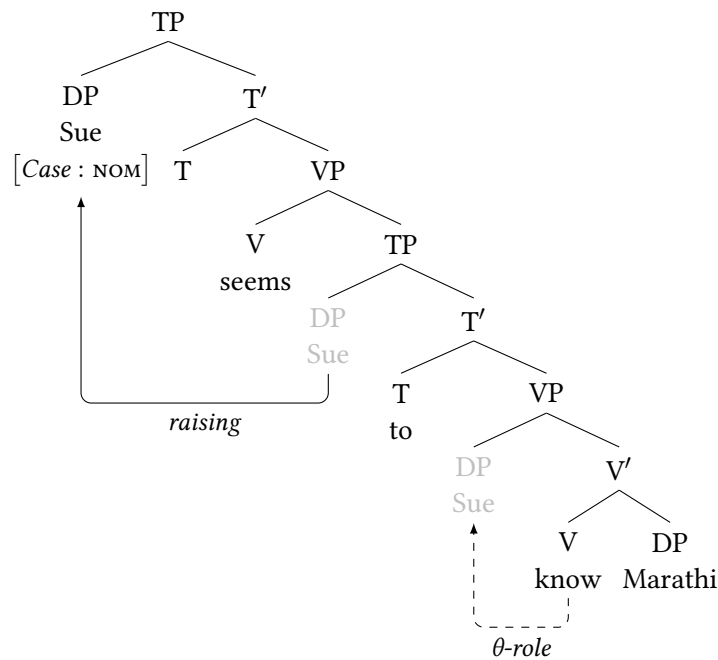### 5.1.2 Raising crash-course

- A *raising* sentence is a biclausal construction where the embedded clause is nonfinite and the subject of that clause then moves to the matrix subject position:

    ▷ This cross-clausal instance of DP movement is referred to as *raising*.

(6) Sue$_k$ seems [$_{TP}$ t_k to know Marathi].

- How do we know that *Sue* in (6) in fact raises into the matrix clause? Why can we not say that *Sue* is pronounced as the matrix subject because it is base-generated there?
- Because of **reconstruction effects**.

> 🚩 **DEFINITION 1**
>
> If a constituent α is pronounced at a position P, but interpreted at a position Q, where P c-commands Q, then α is said to **reconstruct** to Q.

  ▷ Schematically:

(7)
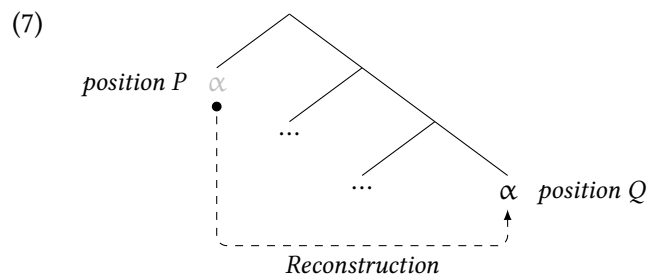
- Evidence indicates that the raised subject (viz. *Sue* in (6)) is base-generated inside the embedded clause, where it receives a θ-role, and only then does it raise into the matrix clause.
- Such evidence is, thus, based on the fact that the raised subject has to be *reconstructed* into the embedded clause for the purposes of θ-role interpretation.

(8) a. ... The cat seems to be out of the bag.   *idiom preservation*
     b. ... The cat tried to be out of the bag.

(9)   a.   ... It$_{\text{EXPL}}$ seems to be snowing.   *expletive subject*

       b.   ... It$_{\text{EXPL}}$ is trying to snow.

(10)   a.   ... The rock seems to have rolled down the hill.   *θ-restrictions*

           ... The child seems to have rolled down the hill.

       b.   ... The rock tried to roll down the hill.

           ... The child tried to roll down the hill.

➟ These data indicate that the DP that linearly precedes a raising predicate such as *seem* is, in fact, base-generated inside the embedded clause, where the embedded predicate imposes semantic restrictions on it. The raising verb itself imposes no such restrictions.

     ○ A raising predicate is, in fact, as instance of unaccusative predicate.

> ✒ **EXERCISE 2**
>
> Focusing on the case of the DP undergoing raising, how would the two theories of case assignment under discussion model the derivation of a raising sentence such as (6)?

- Raising in Icelandic: exactly the same properties.

(11)   a.   **Ólafur**   er bóndi.   *monoclausal baseline:* NOM *subject*
           Olaf.NOM is a.farmer.NOM

           'Olaf is a farmer.'

       b.   **Ólafur**$_k$ virðist [$_{\text{TP}}$ t_k vera gáfaður   ].   *embedded subject raises to* NOM
           Olaf.NOM seems   to.be intelligent

           'Olaf seems to be intelligent.'

5.1.3   EXCEPTIONAL CASE MARKING CRASH-COURSE

- ECM also consists in a biclausal construction where the embedded clause is nonfinite.
- While raising involve a movement dependency between the embedded subject and the matrix clause, ECM involves case assignment across the two clauses.[1]

(12)   The DA proved/believed [the defendants/them to have committed a crime].

     ▷ What is "exceptional" about a sentence such as (12) is that case assignment takes place across clauses.

     ▷ Implied here is a contrast with case assignment that is restricted to a monoclausal domain, like all the sentences we have investigated thus far.

- In (12), the embedded subject is assigned ACC, as indicated by the pronominal form *them*.
- But how do we know that *them* in (12) is indeed an embedded subject?

     ▷ By applying reconstruction and θ-role assignment-based diagnostics, similar to those employed for raising sentences.

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[1]Raising to object is a related phenomenon. As the name suggests, this construction involves both movement and case assignment:

(i)   I believe Neisi/her with all my heart [__ to be the best candidate for the job].

(13)　a.　... I believe there$_{\text{EXPL}}$ to be a dog in the garden.　　*expletive subject*

　　　b.　... I convinced there$_{\text{EXPL}}$ to be a dog in the garden.

(14)　a.　... I believe the rock to have rolled down the hill.　　*θ-restrictions*

　　　b.　... I convinced the rock to roll down the hill.

✎ **EXERCISE 3**

Based on these data, what conclusion can we draw from where the θ-role of the DP that linearly follows the ECM predicate comes from?

- With the semantic/thematic properties of ECM out of the way, we now turn to case.
- That ACC comes from a matrix source is evidenced by the fact that, if such matrix case source is absent, the embedded subject has to rely on some other alternative for case assignment.

  ▷ Agree-based theory: no V$_{\text{TRANS}}$ that is a Probe that Agrees with some DP, so that the latter is assigned ACC as a reflex.
  ▷ Dependent Case theory: no matrix case competitor.

- This claim is supported by the fact that *passivization* has the same effect in monoclausal sentences and in ECM constructions.

(15)　a.　Jeynaba praised them.　　　　　　　　　　*active: THEME assigned ACC*

　　　b.　They/*Them were praised __.　　　　　*passive: ACC no longer available to THEME*

> ⇢ As discussed above, a signature property of passivization is that V$_{\text{TRANS}}$ loses its ability to assign ACC.

- As we saw above, (15) is an instantiation of Burzio's Generalization.
- The same effect is seen when the an ECM predicate is passivized:

(16)　a.　The DA proved [them to have committed a crime].　　　　*active*

　　　b.　They/*Them were proved [__ to have committed a crime].　　　*passive*

✎ **EXERCISE 4**

Spell out what there is in common between (15) and (16).

✎ **EXERCISE 5**

Focusing on the case of the embedded subject (i.e. the ECM-ed subject), how would the two theories of case assignment under discussion model the derivation of an ECM sentence such as (12)?

- ECM in Icelandic: exactly the same properties.

(17)   a.   **Ólafur**   er bóndi.   *monoclausal baseline: NOM subject*
            Olaf.NOM is a.farmer.NOM

            'Olaf is a farmer.'

       b.   Ég tel   [TP **Ólaf**   vera bónda   ].   *ECM: ACC subject*
            I   believe   Olaf.ACC to.be a.farmer.ACC

            'I believe Olaf to be a farmer.'

5.1.4   NONFINITENESS AND CASE ASSIGNMENT

- A similarity worth emphasizing between raising and ECM is that both involve embedded clauses that are nonfinite.

(18)   a.   Sue$_k$ seems [TP t_k ⌐to⌐ know Marathi].
       b.   The DA proved [TP them ⌐to⌐ have committed a crime].

- Contrast the finite counterpart of the same constructions:[2]

(19)   a.   … Sue$_k$ seems [CP that t_k knows Marathi].
       b.   … The DA proved [CP that them have committed a crime].

> ✒ **EXERCISE 6**
>
> Empirically, there is a distinction between biclausal sentences where the embedded clause is nonfinite and those where the embedded clause is finite. How does each of case assignment theory under investigation incorporate this distinction?

5.2   QUIRKY CASE IN ICELANDIC

- With this background in place, we can go back to the empirical distinction between an Agree-based theory of case assignment and a Dependent Case theory.
- Icelandic has accusative alignment:

(20)   a.   þeir   löguðu hana.   (*Icelandic*)
            3PL.NOM mended it.ACC

            'They mended it.'

       b.   þeir   fylltu bátinn.
            3PL.NOM filled boat.the.ACC

            'They filled the boat.'

       c.   Glasið   rann   yfir   borðið.
            glass.the.NOM slid.STRONG across table.the

            'The glass slid across the table.'

- Nonetheless, certain verbs can assign lexical DAT to one of their arguments, e.g. its object:

(21)   a.   Hún stýrði **skipinu**.   (*Icelandic*)
            she steered ship.the.DAT
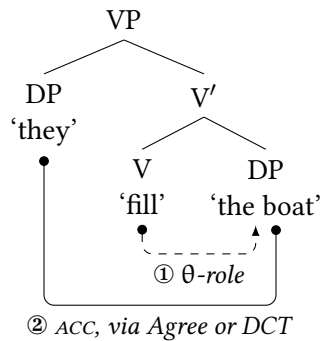
            'She steered the ship.'

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[2]More about the finite vs. nonfinite distinction in the next topic, phases and long distance agreement.

b. Ég mun sakna **hans**.
    I   will miss   him.GEN
    'I will miss him.'

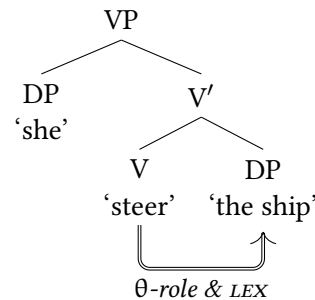- Recall the difference between the two types of case and their relationship with θ-role assignment:

(22) *Canonical ACC assigned to object*

þeir   fylltu bátinn.
3PL.NOM filled boat.the.ACC
'They filled the boat.'

```
              VP
           ╱      ╲
        DP          V′
      'they'      ╱    ╲
                 V       DP
               'fill'  'the boat'

              ① θ-role
       ② ACC, via Agree or DCT
```

(23) *Quirky DAT assigned to object*

Hún stýrði **skipinu**.
she steered ship.the.DAT
'She steered the ship.'

```
              VP
           ╱      ╲
        DP          V′
      'she'       ╱    ╲
                 V       DP
               'steer' 'the ship'

              θ-role & LEX
```

- What do we know of the obligatoriness of lexical case assignment in Icelandic?

> **✎ EXERCISE 7**
>
> Describe the data below and, based on your description, formulate a generalization about the obligatoriness of lexical case in Icelandic.
>
> (24) a. Hún kastaði **steininum**   / *steininn.
>   she threw   stone.the.DAT   stone.the.ACC
>   'She threw the stone.'
>   b. Hún stýrði **skipinu**   / *skipið.
>   she steered ship.the.DAT   ship.the.ACC
>   'She steered the ship.'

�th Generalization: …

- In the previous examples, lexical case was assigned to the object. It can also be assigned to subjects.

(25) a. **Barninu**   batnaði   veikin.   (*Icelandic*)
          child.the.DAT recovered disease.the.NOM
          'The child recovered from the disease.'
      b. **Henni**   leiðist bókin   sín.
          she.DAT bores the.book.NOM self's
          'She finds her own book boring.'

   ▷ Schematically:

(26)

θ-*role* & LEX
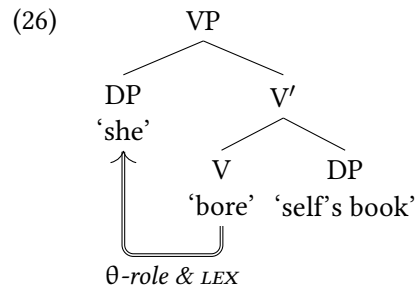
▷ (25b) is a particularly relevant example because it shows us that the dative DP is indeed a subject: it binds the anaphor contained in the object position.

> 📌 (27)   a. *Condition A*: an anaphor must be bound in its Binding Domain.
>
> b. If α binds β, then α and β are coindexed, and α c-commands β.

> 📌 (28)   *An antecedent must c-command the anaphor it binds*
>
> a.   ... Faatu_k betrayed herself_k.
>
> b.   ... $[\text{Faatu}_k\text{'s father}]$ betrayed herself_k.

- When the subject is assigned lexical case, something happens to the case of the object.

> ✒ **EXERCISE 8**
>
> Compare the case frame in (20) with that in (25). What is the correlation between the case of the subject and the case of the object?

➡ Generalization: ...

- We saw in §5.1 that passivization, raising, and ECM constructions have very distinctive case properties, summarized in (29).

> (29)   a. Passive: THEME is marked with NOM (and not with ACC).
>
> b. Raising: embedded subject that undergoes raising is marked with NOM.
>
> c. ECM: embedded subject is assigned ACC.

- *Lexical case in Icelandic is preserved in these environments, overwriting their particular case properties.*

> (30)   **Quirky case**: an instance of lexical case (in Icelandic) that is preserved in the DP assigned that case, irrespective of the particular case of the environment where that DP is found.

- "Help" in Icelandic is idiosyncratically specified as being able to assign lexical (more precisely, quirky) DAT to its object.

(31)   Ég hjálpaði **þeim**.   *(Icelandic)*
       I   helped   them.DAT

       'I helped them.'

- This case is preserved when this verb is passivized (32a), raised (32b), or assigned ACC in an ECM configuration (32c):

(32)   a.   Var   **þeim**   ekki hjálpað   __?   *passive preserves* DAT
            was.DFT them.DAT not   helped.DFT

            'They were helped.'

       b.   **þeim**/*þeir   virtist   [TP ekki hafa   verið hjálpað   __].   *raising preserves* DAT
            them.DAT/*NOM seemed.DFT [not   have.INF been   helped.DFT   ]

            'They did not seem to have been helped.'

       c.   Við   töldum   [TP **þeim**/*þá   ekki hafa   verið hjálpað   ].   *ECM preserves* DAT
            we.NOM believed.1PL [them.DAT/*ACC not   have.INF been   helped.DFT]

            'We did not believe them to have been helped.'

- As we saw in §5.1, without quirky case, the raising DP is assigned NOM and an ECM subject is assigned ACC, as expected.

(33)   a.   **Sigga**   var tekin föst   af lögreglunni.   *passive:* NOM THEME
            Sigga.NOM was taken fast.NOM by the.police.DAT

            'Sigga was arrested by the police .'

       b.   **Ólafur**$_k$ virðist [TP t_k vera gáfaður   ].   *embedded subject raises to* NOM
            Olaf.NOM seems   to.be intelligent

            'Olaf seems to be intelligent.'

       c.   Ég tel   [TP **Ólaf**   vera bónda   ].   *ECM:* ACC *subject*
            I   believe   Olaf.ACC to.be a.farmer.ACC

            'I believe Olaf to be a farmer.'

5.2.1   Quirky subject sentences

- Now that we know what quirky case is, we can focus on other properties that sentences with quirky *subjects* exhibit.
- First, as we saw above, for transitive verbs in Icelandic, there is a correlation between the availability of quirky case to the subject and the case that the object is marked with.

(34)   a.   þeir   fylltu bátinn.   *"Standard:"* NOM/ACC *frame*
            3PL.NOM filled boat.the.ACC

            'They filled the boat.'

       b.   Henni   leiðist bókin   sín.   *Quirky subject:* DAT/NOM *frame*
            she.DAT bores the.book.NOM self's

            'She finds her own book boring.'

> ⍰ How does the object come to be marked with NOM, a case that is otherwise found in subjects?

> ✒ **EXERCISE 9**
>
> How is NOM assigned in a theory based on Agree? What about a Dependent Case frame-
> work?

- Second, Icelandic exhibits the so-called subject–verb agreement:

(35)   a. Við   ⌈lásum⌉ / *las   bókina.
             we.NOM.PL read.1PL read.3SG book-the.ACC.SG
             'We read the book.'

         b. Þið   ⌈lásuð⌉ / *las   bókina.
             you.NOM.PL read.2PL read.3SG book-the.ACC.SG
             'You read the book.'

(36)   Við   ⌈klæðumst⌉ / *klæðist dýrum   fötum.
        we.NOM.PL wear.1PL   wear.3SG expensive clothes.DAT.PL
        'We wear expensive clothes.'

   ▷ However, in sentences where the subject is assigned quirky DAT, the verb that would agree
      with the subject now has default morphology, even though the subject is e.g. [3PL].

(37)   a. ⌈Var⌉   þeim   ekki hjálpað   __?
             was.DFT them.DAT not   helped.DFT
             'They were helped.'

         b. þeim   ⌈virtist⌉   [$_{TP}$ ekki hafa   verið hjálpað   __].
             them.DAT seemed.DFT [not   have.INF been helped.DFT   ]
             'They did not seem to have been helped.'

   ▷ This means that, in Icelandic, DPs that have been assigned quirky case cannot be agreed with,
      even when they are subjects, this language otherwise requiring subject–verb agreement (35–
      36).

   ▷ Importantly, if there is additional DP **object** that is NOM, then the verb can agree with it:

(38)   a. **Henni** ⌈líkuðu⌉ hestarnir.   *DAT/NOM frame ↔ OBJ agreement*
             her.DAT liked.3PL the.horses.NOM
             'She liked the horses.'

         b. **Mér**   ⌈finnast⌉ skot   af brennivíni bragðgóð.
             me.DAT find.3PL shots.NOM.PL of Brennivín tasty
             'I find shots of Brennivín tasty.

> ⑦ What is the nature of the correlation between NOM vs. quirky case, and subject
> vs. object agreement in Icelandic?

- Next: a comparison between how our two theories of case assignment answer these two questions.

5.3   Case assignment via Agree

- We can finally turn to data that crucially distinguishes between the Agree and the configurational models of case assignment.
- Starting with the basics of an Agree-based theory, how does it account for sentence with a quirky subject (i.e. sentences with a DAT/NOM frame)?

✒ **Exercise 10**

     A. Provide a derivation of (38a) that is based on the operation Agree.
     B. How does an Agree-based theory account for the correlation between NOM assignment and agreement?
     C. How is the object assigned NOM?

- Now, on to the prediction that this theory makes regarding the availability of NOM in different types of clauses

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✒ **Exercise 11**

According to an Agree-based theory, only a finite T can be a probe that Agrees with some DP, which then results in the latter being assigned NOM. Would an Agree-based theory predict (39) to be grammatical or ungrammatical? Explain your reasoning.

(39)   Ég   tel   [TP Jóni   hafa   batnað   veikin   ].
      I.NOM believe [John.DAT to.have recovered disease.the.NOM]
      'I believe John to have recovered from the disease.'

(39) is an example of an ECM sentence where the predicate of the embedded clause is a verb that is able to assign quirky DAT to its external argument.

🛈 The actual facts about (39) are on the next page.

5.4   A CONFIGURATIONAL VIEW OF CASE ASSIGNMENT

- (39), repeated below is, in fact, perfectly grammatical, despite the **absence** of a finite T that can agree with *veikin* 'disease,' thereby assigning NOM to it.

(39) Ég   tel   [$_{TP}$ Jóni   hafa   batnað   veikin   ].
      I.NOM believe [John.DAT to.have recovered disease.the.NOM]
      'I believe John to have recovered from the disease.'

> ✎ **EXERCISE 12**
>
> Can a Dependent Case theory account for the occurrence of NOM in (39)? Provide a derivation for this sentence following the tenets of this framework.

5.5   INTERIM CONCLUSION

- We have examined and compared two theories of case assignment:
  - ▷ Case assigned as a reflex of the operation Agree: Crucially, in this theory, there is a head that triggers Agree (e.g. finite T or V$_{\text{TRANS}}$), i.e. a probe.
  - ▷ Dependent case framework, where case assignment does *not* directly rely on some head like T or V$_{\text{TRANS}}$. Rather, dependent case is calculated in terms of the configuration where a DP is found, as determined by the Disjunctive Case Hierarchy.
- We also saw that there is an empirical difference between the two theories, in that only the Dependent Case theory is able to account for NOM objects in Icelandic, which persist even in nonfinite clauses.
- But: we just saw that, in Icelandic, the verb can agree with either the subject or the object, as long as it is NOM.
  - ▷ What is the *empirical* relationship between case and agreement (above and beyond how it is *modeled* in the Agree and configurational theories of case assignment)?
  - ▷ What is agreement sensitive to?
    - ○ Grammatical function, as implied in terms such as 'subject–verb agreement'?
    - ○ Case (i.e. agreement with any DP that has a particular case, e.g. NOM)?

To be continued …

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