
AN ANALYSIS OF CASE PARTICLES AND CASE FUNCTIONS IN JAPANESE: A CASE GRAMMAR APPROACH

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Abstract

The paper focuses on an aspect of grammar, specifically, case particles or postpositions in Japanese. It is based on a discussion on case forms and case functions that are discoverable through an examination of the theory of case grammar by Fillmore (1968). The main objective of the paper is to raise consciousness among teachers as well as learners of Japanese through understanding and application of the Fillmorean case grammar. A conscious effort at equipping both teachers and learners with a firm knowledge of a universal grammar is felt to go a long way in making language teaching and learning more accurate and meaningful.

Introduction

There has been challenges made to the effectiveness of the communicative and proficiency-based teaching approaches of grammar in recent years. There are also misconceptions about grammar such as: it is a collection of meaningless forms and arbitrary rules and that grammar is an area of knowledge while reading, writing, speaking and listening are the four skills needed in language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1993, 1995).

In the teaching and learning of Japanese as foreign language at the tertiary level, it is felt that there should be a more conscious effort on the part of the teacher to convince to the learners, and on the part of learner to discern the meaningfulness of grammar. In other words, the three dimensions of grammar, namely, morphosyntax, semantics and pragmatics need to be given more emphasis in a Japanese language classroom. The communicative approach may enable the learners to practice what they have learnt but through my own observation learners usually do not progress beyond repeating common expressions taught or asking simple basic questions. Even then, they still make gross grammatical errors which may be the cause for miscommunication with native Japanese speakers. One aspect of grammar which learners often find difficult to learn and use is particles, namely, case particles.

In this regard, I would like to suggest that the basic idea found in case grammar be introduced to learners of Japanese as a foreign language. The main objective is to raise consciousness among teachers and learners of Japanese of the importance of understanding Japanese grammar through a syntactical model, i.e. Case Grammar as proposed by Fillmore (1968). For this purpose, it is necessary for teachers (natives or non-natives) of Japanese to equip themselves with a firm knowledge of a universal grammar such as Case Grammar and be able to apply this knowledge in the classroom by demonstrating the basic idea of case form and case functions as indicated in the case grammar concept.

Case System in Japanese: Justification for Fillmorean Case Grammar

The Japanese case particles or *kakujoshi* can be interpreted by the Fillmorean Case Grammar. This means that one can assume a case system exists in Japanese although it is not defined as similar to the traditional case system. The term *kaku*, first of all, in Japanese refers to 'case' as given in the Oxford Dictionary, i.e. the syntactical status of noun or pronoun (i.e. subjective, objective, possessive, etc.). Case particles, however, do not merely indicate surface subject or surface object etc.. As defined by Japanese grammarians and linguists (Inoue, 1976; Kuno 1973, Uehara and Kiyose, 1974), case par-

ticles also indicate certain other relations which resemble functions found in Indo-European case tradition such as the nominative, the genitive, the dative, the locative, the ablative, the instrumental etc.. The difference lies only in the case forms that manifest these functions.

Inflected languages such as the Indo-European languages have a case system which refers to the forms existing in nouns, pronouns or adjectives. The Japanese language, however, have nouns and pronouns which do not inflect except when denoting plurality, e.g. *karera* (they) or *korera* (these). The case system in Japanese, thus, refers to the uninflected words that follow nouns or pronouns. These are postpositions or case particles as they are more commonly known.

The validity of the assumption that there is a case system in Japanese is further supported by Greenberg's (1963:96) claim:

Universal 41 If in a language the verb follows both the nominal subject and nominal object as the dominant order, the language almost always has a case system.

Dezso (1982:87) supports Greenberg's claim:

Thus in a language having SOV word order, there is generally a case system.

Japanese is an SOV language and therefore fits the typology. The Japanese case type only differs from the Indo-European case type syntactically. While the Japanese case type is manifested in the uninflected words or particles, the Indo-European type is manifested in the inflected nouns and pronouns. However, are these uninflected particles valid case markers in Japanese?

Further supporting the validity of this assumption, Uehara and Kiyose (1974:41) asserts.

In spoken Japanese, there is never a pause between a word and a following particle.

This clearly suggests that particles in Japanese merge with the nouns they follow at the phonetic level. Further, in the Japanese script, there is nothing to mark off full words from particles or even full words. Also, the fact that in spoken Japanese there are sentence divisions or *bunsetsu* which Daniels, F.J (1967) calls 'runs', and that each run is said to consist of a single word or a paradigm with or without one or more particles following it, suggests that a particle is part of a word or phrase it follows. Thus, it is clear that case particles behave like case inflections in the traditional case system.

Views on case particles by Kuno (1973) and Inoue (1976) further support the validity of case particles as markers of noun cases in Japanese. Kuno observes the occurrence of case marking particles *ga*, *o* and *ni* where he assumes within the framework generative transformational grammar that they are inserted by transformation while some particles are in the deep structure. Inoue, on the other hand, explicitly states that 'case' is denoted in the surface structure which specifically refers to case particles in Japanese. Inoue suggests that the function of an NP is determined by the type of predicate and calls this functions 'base case' Inoue seems to have favored the semantic approach of Fillmorean case grammar in her analysis of case particles in Japanese.

The case grammar model adopted in this analysis of case forms and functions is felt to be the most suitable choice of a model in terms of Japanese case particles as a semantic approach is required to understand Japanese case particle problems.

Fillmore (1968) himself suggests:

the discussion of case could be seen in somewhat better perspectives if the assignment of case forms were viewed as exactly analogous to the rules for assigning prepositions in English or postposition in Japanese.

According to Anderson (1977: 1), in the European tradition case refers to both a certain inflectional category (and the form that manifest it) and to the set of semantic distinctions carried by the forms of that category. Hence, case forms and case functions are derived. An example of a case function is the noun in the accusative form which functions as a goal. Case functions, however, can be expressed in other ways, namely, postposition, word order and morphology of the verb rather than the noun.

Thus, the general consensus for Japanese case particles seems to justify the application of the Fillmorean case grammar model in the analysis in order to explain case forms and functions.

Case Grammar: the Case for Japanese

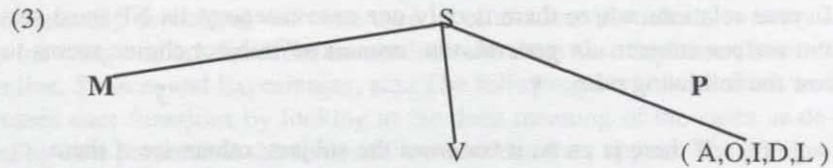
Case grammar assumes the centrality of syntax and the importance of covert categories. The notion of covert categories is semantic based and is assumed as the base components of grammar of any natural language.

The basic structure of a sentence in fillmore's framework is the 'proposition', a tenseless set of relationships involving nouns and verbs developed into a 'profound' deep structure of any sentence as,

(1) Sentence " Modality + Proposition

(2) S " M + P

and the form,



Fillmore characterizes 'P' as an array consisting of relations (cases) to the sentence. These include concepts such as the Agentive, the Objective, the Dative, the Instrumental, the Locative and the Factitive in the original theory. As the theory developed, it has been found necessary to add more cases. Fillmore himself posited the Experiencer, the Source, the Time, the path and the Result while others have suggested the need for the Comitative and the Reciprocal.

Fillmore's rule for extending 'p' is:

(4) $P \rightarrow V + C_i + \dots + C_n$

(5) $C \rightarrow K + NP$

where 'C' is a covert symbol for case concepts. "P" may be represented by any set of formulas including the following:

(6)

V + A
V + O
V + D
etc.
V + A + O
V + A + D
etc.

P

None of these cases can be interpreted as matched by the surface structure relations such as subject and object in any particular language. The assignment of case forms will be similar to the assignment of postpositions or particles in Japanese in the following rule:

(7) $C \rightarrow NP + K$

where 'K' (kasus) stands for postpositions in Japanese.

In case relations where there is only one case category, its NP must serve as the surface subject. In general, the 'unmarked' subject choice seems to follow the following rule:

- (8) If there is an A, it becomes the subject; otherwise if there is an I, it becomes the subject; otherwise the subject is O.
(Fillmore 1968:33)

For many verbs which 'take' more than one case category the one which contributes the subject is indicated by the verb itself. (ibid. 72)

In Japanese, of the verbs which are accepted into the case frame [+ S + D + O], [S] is the subject, for example, with the verb *oshieru* (to teach):

- (9) *Taroo ga Jiroo ni eigo o oshieta.*
Taro taught English to Jiro.

in which [S] is source, [D] is Dative and [O] is Objective. However, with the verb *kariru* (to borrow), [D] becomes the subject due to the peculiar specification of such verbs, i.e. 'verbs of giving and receiving' in Japanese:

- (10) *Taroo ga Jiroo ni hon o karita.*
Taro borrowed a book from Jiro.

Generally, however, subject selection in Japanese would follow this case ordering as given by Inoue (1976: 60).

- (11) Agentive, Source, Experiencer, Dative, Objective, Causative,
Instrumental, Locative

Therefore, in the case of frame [+ O + L], [O] becomes the subject as in the sentence:

- (12) *Taitei no kanchoo ga toshinbu ni aru.* (Inoue 1976: 61)
Most government offices are in the city

Case Particles and Case Functions

While the various particles in Japanese such as *ga, no, o, ni, to, kara, e, made*, etc. which denote the cases of the nouns which precede them are referred to as case forms, the cases that they denote such as the nominative, genitive,

accusative, locative, instrumental, dative, comitative, ablative etc. are case labels. However, it should be noted that in Japanese a case form or particle is not necessarily associated with one case label as some particles also carry a deep meaning and are therefore associated with deep case functions, such as Agentive, Source, and Experiencer, etc.. The following section describes and discusses case functions by looking at the deep meaning of the cases as denoted by case particles in the sentential context that they appear. The nominative, genitive and accusative case labels are strictly surface case labels and therefore shall not be emphasized here. Most of the data are quoted from the literature (a few with minor changes) while some are my own composition.

Particle *Ga* and its Function

According to Japanese linguists and grammarians, *ga* is a subject marker, i.e. of the nominative case. However, this nominative case is a surface case label. Other functions of *ga* are in the deep structure, for example, the Agentive *ga*:

- (13) *Taroo ga ano kuma o uchikoroshita.*
(It is) Taroo (who) beat that bear to death.

Example (13) shows that an 'ergative' subject is present, i.e. there is an initiator of the action associated with the verb, which in Fillmore's case categorical term will be the Agentive case (Anderson 1971:40).

Examples (14) and (15) below of *ga* show 'stative' subjects, the latter being an example of double-subject construction.

- (14) *Teeburu no ue ni akai ringo to aoi ringo ga aru.*
There are red apples and green apples on the table.

- (15) *Bunmeikoku ga dansei no heikin jumyoo ga mijikai.*
In the civilized countries the average life span of males is short.

In this case, the subject in (14) and the second subject in (15), both of which are in nominative positions, are said to be in the Objective case. This Objective case is not to be confused with the notion of direct object nor with the surface case synonymous with the Accusative (Fillmore 1968:25).

However, *ga* also appears in structures where the object marker *o* is expected as in the examples below:

- (16) *Watashi wa eiga ga mitai.*
I like to see a movie.

(17) *Watashi wa Mari ga suki.*
I like Mary.

(18) *Nihon ni wa onsen ga ooi.*
Japan has many hot springs.

Kuno (1973) as well as Suzuki (1977) claim that this *ga* marks the object of the action or the state of the subject. Kuno's claim is that *ga* is not only used for marking the subject but also for marking the object of all transitive adjectives and nominal adjectives and a certain class of transitive verbs (Kuno 1973:80-81). Examples of *ga* denoting the Accusative are also seen with verbs of competency such as:

(19) *Watashi wa nihongo ga dekiru.*
I am good at Japanese.

(20) *Watashi wa kanji ga yomeru.*
I can read the Chinese characters.

Verbs of non-intentional perception also takes *ga* to indicate the object:

(21) *Anata wa nihongo ga wakarimasu ka.*
Do you understand Japanese?

(22) *Koko kara wa yama ga mieru.*
I see a mountain from here

Stative verbs of possession also takes *ga* as object marking.

(23) *Ryokoo wa kane ga iru.*
Travel needs money.

(24) *Watashi wa kuruma ga aru.*
I have a car.

Suzuki (1977) notes that all intransitive verbs like *nagareru* (flow) and *atsumeru* (gather) take *ga* as object marking.

(25) *Mizu ga nagareru.*
The water flows.

(26) *Minna ga atsumeta.*
Everyone had gathered.

To explain how *ga* is understood as being in the Dative case as indicated in example (27), Inoue's view (1976) is again considered (refer to the case ordering in example 11).

- (27) *Watashi ga tomodachi ni hyaku doru o karita.*
I borrowed a hundred dollars from a friend.

The ordering in this arrangement complies with the element in the predicate which determines the case on the most left hand side as the subject of the sentence. For example, if an array of cases is [+ S + D + O], the NP in the [S] case will be the subject as indicated in the sentence which is determined by the verb *kasu* (to lend).

- (28) *Watashi ga tomodachi ni hyaku doru o kashita.*
I lent a hundred dollars to a friend.

The same principle applies to the verb *oshieru* (to teach) as shown in example (9). However, in (27) where *watashi* is in the Dative case and *tomodachi* in the Source case, one cannot specify *tomodachi* the Source as the subject due to the nature of the verb *kariru* (to borrow) which designates the Dative case as the subject of the sentence (see also example 10). Other verbs that take a dative subject are *morau* (to receive), *narau* (to learn) etc..

Particle *O* and its Case Functions

The particle *o* is commonly known as the object marker but it clearly has more than one case function. The most common function of *o* is to indicate the object of the transitive action as opposed to *ga* the object of the intransitive action as seen in the section on particle *ga*. In this case, *o* is the Accusative case marker as seen in the examples below:

- (29) *Kanojo ga senmenki ni mizu o nagashita.*
She let the water flow in the sink.

- (30) *Sensei ga jugyoo o hajimeta.*
The teacher began the class.

Some verbs of motion take *o* as object markings, with the motion designated by the verbs covering the entire dimension of the space continuously and unidirectionally (Kuno 1973: 96-101, Suzuki 1977: 59-53) making it the path of motion. In this case, *o* is the Path marker, for example:

(31) *Kare ga koosaten o watatta.*
He crossed the junction.

(32) *Watashi ga michi o aruku.*
I walk along the street.

Particle *Ni* and its Functions

The particle *ni* also has varied functions. *Ni* indicates the target of the action designated by the verb commonly understood as the indirect object as seen in (2) which gives the Dative case to *haha* (mother) i.e. the recipient of the action *dasu* (send).

(33) *Watashi ga issjukan ni ichido gurai haha ni tegami o dasu.*
I send a letter to my mother once a week.

The Source marking *ni* is seen in *tomodachi* (friend) in example (27) which can be replaced by the particle *kara*, hence:

(34) *Watashi ga tomodachi kara hyaku doru o karita.*
I borrowed a hundred dollars from a friend.

On the other hand, example (35) below implies that a subject moves physically and psychologically towards the goal, *tomodachi* and there is no reciprocal action from the goal. Hence this is a Goal marking *ni*.

(35) *Kare ga kinoa tomodachi ni atta.*
He met a friend yesterday

The particle *ni* also indicates the psychological attitude of the subject towards a thing or person, causing the thing or person to become the reason for such an attitude or emotion. This is the Causative case marker *ni*.

(36) *Kare ga benkyoo ni akiru to rekoodo o kiku.*
He listens to records when he gets tired of studying.

(37) *Kanojo ga okaasan ni amaete iru.*
She is spoiled when with her mother.

With stative verbs, the particle *ni* indicates location as in.

(38) *Watashi ga kyoo zutto uchi ni iru.*
I will be at home all day today

This Existential Locative marker *ni* also appears in sentences with nominal adjectives as in example (18).

The particle *ni* clearly also indicates a specific point in time which will be understood as the Temporal case marker.

- (39) *Kanojo ga maishuu nichiyooobi ni joringgu o suru.*
She jogs every week on Sunday

Meanwhile, the result of a change either of an intransitive, eventive verbs of changing or that of transitive active types is also indicated by *ni* rendering the Factitive case (Fillmore 1968: 25). In Japanese it appears as.

- (40) *Watashi ga musuko o isha ni suru.*
I will make my son a doctor

- (41) *Kare ga shuushokusaki o ginkoo ni kimeta.*
He decided to work in a bank.

Finally, *ni* denotes the meaning 'by' as in a passive construction.

- (42) *Sono uchi ga doroboo ni hairareta.*
That house was entered by a thief

This function of *ni* indicates that the initiator of the action is in the base structure, i.e. *doroboo ga uchi ni haitta* (the thief entered the house) and is thus an Agentive marker.

Particle *De* and its Functions

With motional verbs *de* indicates that the motion designated by the verbs takes place in a location within the dimension of the space not necessarily continuously or unidirectionally (Kuno 1973:97).

- (43) *Kodomotachi ga umi de oyoida.*
The children swam a sea.

Besides motional verbs, transitive action verbs such as *taberu* (to eat), *yomu* (to read), *miru* (to see, to look) etc. take *de* to indicate the location where the action takes place.

- (44) *Kanojo ga toshokan de hon o yonde iru.*
She is reading a book at the library

Even the stative verb *aru* (to exist) may take *de* when it suggests an event rather than existence, thus the Eventive case marker *de* as in.

- (45) *Konban watashi no uchi de paati ga aru.*
There is a party at my house tonight.

The particle *de* also denotes the Instrumental case as in the examples below each with the intrinsic meanings of 'means of transportation', 'tool', 'method' and 'material', respectively.

- (46) *Watashi ga Tokyo kara Sapporo made hikooki de itta.*
I went to Sapporo from Tokyo by plane.

- (47) *Kono tensen no tokoro o hasami de kitte kudasai.*
Please cut along the dotted line with scissors.

- (48) *Nihongo de setsumei shite kudasai.*
Please explain in Japanese.

- (49) *Kanojo ga kami de ningyoo o tsukutta.*
She made dolls out of paper.

Finally, the particle *de* indicates a cause or reason, thus the Causative case marker as in.

- (50) *Watashi ga saikin no bukkadaka de kakeihi o fuyasanakereba naranai.*
I have to increase my household expenditure due to the recent price hike.

Particle *To* and its Functions

In Japanese there are action verbs that require two or more complements such as *soodan suru* (to discuss, to consult), *au* (to meet), *hanasu* (to talk), *kekkon suru* (to marry), etc., hence giving the following functions for the particle *to*.

When it is implied that the participants are equally and reciprocally involved in the action designated by the verb then the verb takes the particle *to* as a Reciprocal marker.

- (51) *Taroo ga Hanako to soodan suru.*
Taro consults with Hanako.

When the participants imply togetherness, the verb then takes the particle *to* as a Comitative marker.

- (52) *Taroo to Hanako ga atta.*
Taro and Hanako met.

Particle *Kara* and its Functions

- (53) *Watashi ga Tokyo kara Osaka e itta.*
I went to Osaka from Tokyo.

Kara in (53) shows *Tokyo* to be the source where the motional verb *iku* (to go) begins. This is defined as 'the motion from the exterior' which the Ablative case denotes (Anderson 1971:4).

Kara may also replace *ni* with verbs of receiving such as *kariru* (to borrow) or *itadaku* (to receive) to indicate the Source case as in.

- (54) *Sensei kara kono omiyage o itadaita.*
I received this gift from the teacher.

Kara also specifies the beginning of the point in time of an action as in.

- (55) *Gakkoo wa gozen 8-ji kara hajimaru.*
School begins at 8.00 am.

Particle *E* and its Function

The particle *e* indicates the direction of motion and has one case function only: the Allative case, i.e. indicating 'motion to the exterior'

- (56) *Watashi ga Nihon e benkyoo ni itta.*
I went to Japan to study

Particle *Made* and its Function

The particle *made* has the meaning of 'up to', 'as far as', or 'until'. It also has one case function only: the Limitative case. The Limitative case denotes boundary of motion as well as boundary of time as shown in the examples below.

- (57) *Kachoo ga Tokyo kara Osaka made shinkansen ni notta.*
Department chief took the bullet train from Tokyo to Osaka.

- (58) *Watashi ga 9-ji kara 5-ji made hataraku.*
I work from 9.00 until 5.00.

Conclusion

In this article, Japanese case particles and case functions have been analysed at the sentence level using a case grammar explanation. However, this analysis is basic in nature and there is a need to expand it beyond the sentence level to a discourse level in future studies. Nonetheless, the present analysis is deemed sufficient as an introduction for those involved in the teaching of Japanese as foreign language. Teachers of Japanese should encourage learners to learn the language with a holistic awareness of the logical relations inherent in its grammar. In this way, learning the language and its grammar can be both accurate and meaningful.

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