

Study of Quirky and Null Cases in Khoibu

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Abstracts: This article is an attempt to study two cases of Khoibu in terms of Minimalist Syntax of Generative Grammar. Since an enormous amount of research interest has been recently shown in the study of Quirky and Null Cases, the main focus of this article is on these two cases as overt and covert case markings of this language. The two cases are analysed as specific cases of human language available in other languages as in German, Russian and Icelandic etc.

Keywords: Quirky Case, Null Case, Null Complementiser, Semantic function, Semantic property, Genitive subject, Tense Phrase (TP) etc.

1. Introduction

This article is an extensive and indebt analysis of Quirky and Null Cases of Khoibu, a Tibeto – Burman language spoken mainly in Khangshim And Nungourok areas of Chandel District of Manipur, which are about 40 kms. and 43 kms. away respectively from Imphal, the capital town of Manipur. As in other Tibeto – Burman languages, Khoibu also makes use of a number of case markers with their secondary functions (Saratchandra Singh N. 2000, 2003 and Nirmola Sana RK. 2008). As in other Tibeto – Burman languages again, Khoibu makes use of certain verbs as case assigner of Quirky Cases and specific Null Case.

2. Methodology

In this analysis we are adopting the kind of methodology peculiar to Generative Syntax in which null elements are also analysed as active syntactic categories which are sensitive to grammatical rules. In such study the null subject element of a control clause is supposed to have carried a covert case as null grammatical element. Case is further analyzed not as a property of language which is available during the process of generating nouns or pronouns. Rather, case is referred to as an assigned property of a language when arguments are in certain syntactic constructions. If case is considered as an assigned property, then we may study a variety of cases, which are typical to minimalist syntax such as Structural Case, Inherent Case, Quirky Case and Null Case as given below –

- 1) Structural Case: Case assigned by structural position of a position of a given clause.
- 2) Inherent Case: Case assigned by semantic function of a constituent.
- 3) Quirky Case: Case assigned by semantic property of a specific verb.
- 4) Null Case: Case assigned to a null subject pronoun known as PRO.

Analysis on Quirky and Null Cases have been shown below. At first, let us consider Quirky Case in Khoibu. At the outset, Quirky Case in Khoibu is analysed as a grammatical property of a genitive subject. Examples (1) and (2) have been shown to illustrate this case.

- 1) tombə - nə laylik khəy kə - lu

Tomba – nom. Book one v.pref – buy.
'Tomba bought a book'

2) tombə - əy laylik khəy kə - ləy
Tomba – gen. Book one v.pref – have.
'Tomba has a book.'

In (1) above subject pronoun *tombə* 'Tomba' is a constituent which is case marked by the nominative suffix 'nə'. This type of case marking is in relation to a specific structural position of the subject pronoun. However, in (2) again *tombə* 'Tomba' is case marked by the genitive suffix 'əy' in contradiction to (1) above. Following (1) this genitive subject is to be assigned nominative case. However, if nominative case is assigned to the genitive subject of (2) the sentence will go wrong as shown in (3) below-

3) *tombə - nə laylik khəy kə - ləy
Tomba – nom. Book one v.pref – have.
'Tomba has a book.'

The sentence in (3) above is ungrammatical because the subject pronoun *tombə* 'Tomba' has been assigned nominative case. However (2) illustrates that the sentence is grammatical if *tombə* 'Tomba' receives genitive case. Then the question comes – how can we account for the grammaticality of the sentence in (2)? For these we may suggest *tombə* 'Tomba' receives genitive case not nominative case in (2) above is by virtue of the idiosyncratic semantic property of the particular verb *kəlay* 'have'. If this view is correct then we are on a surer ground to suggest that the verb *kəlay* 'have' is a verb which requires a genitive subject in Khoibu language as a Quirky case.

This use of genitive quirky case in subject position of a TP is like that of dative quirky case in subject position of a TP in Icelandic language. This type of assignment of the Quirky case by semantic property of a particular verb is to be a part of a lexical entry which is to be learned as idiosyncratic property of the particular verb. For example the property of genitive quirky case of the subject pronoun of the verb *kəlay* 'have' in Khoibu language is to be shown in its lexical entry.

The genitive quirky case shown above may be referred to as canonical in that a number of other languages like Russian, Icelandic and German etc. make use of it as usual. The

specialty of the Quirky is that no other canonical case can be assigned in its particular structural position. However there are instances in which more than one case markers are used alternately for some verbs of Tibeto – Burman languages like Manipuri and Khoibu. The following is an instance of such alternate use of accusative and dative cases in Khoibu –

- 4.a) ənu - nə ə - ca - ti kə - tən
 Mother – nom. her – child – acc. v.pref – beat
 ‘The mother beats her son/daughter.’
 b) ənu - nə ə - ca - nən kə - tən
 Mother – nom. her – child – dat.. v.pref – beat
 ‘The mother beats her son/daughter.’

It is evident from (4) above that the verb *kətən* ‘beat’ has assigned accusative case in (4a) and dative case in (4b) to its object NP *əca* ‘her son/daughter’. The matter does not end here the following is another instance of alternate use of instrumental case maker *nə* and locative case marker *rə* in Khoibu.

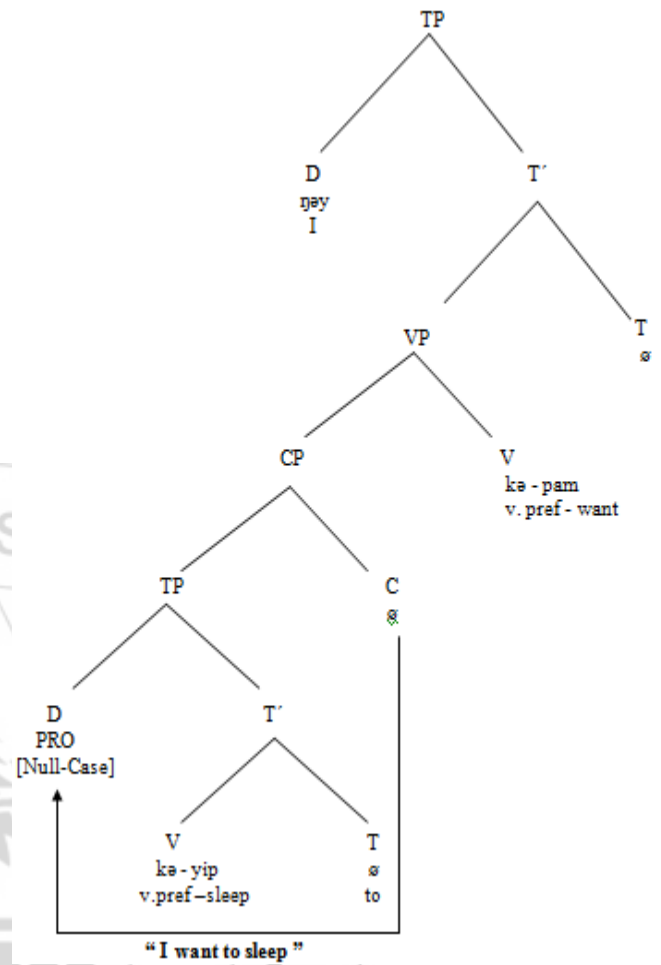
- 5.a) a bas - nə kəw - mən
 He/she bus – ins. v.pref – come
 ‘he/she came by bus.’
 b) a bas - rə kəw - mən
 He/she bus – loc. v.pref – come
 ‘he/she came by bus.’

It is evident again the semantic function of *kəwmən* ‘come’ has assigned instrumental case in (5a) and locative case in (5b) to the adjunct NP *bas* ‘bus’.

Further the examples in (4) and (5) are extremely interesting to note that in case of certain verbs like *kətən* ‘beat’ and *kəwmən* ‘come’ the object NP may receive accusative case as canonical and dative case as quirky case or the adjunct NP may receive instrumental case as canonical and locative case as quirky case. These kinds of dative quirky case and locative quirky case are different from genitive quirky case discussed above. In the case of genitive quirky case no other canonical case can be assigned in its structural position whereas in the case of dative quirky case and locative quirky case other canonical case may also be assigned in their structural position. These types of Quirky Case dative quirky case and locative quirky case are may be referred to as peculiar in that they are used as marked counterpart of canonical quirky case available in Russian, German and Icelandic etc. We may now take up another case which is totally invisible called Null Case.

A null case is covert case assigned to a null case subject pronoun PRO. That is to say that a null pronoun PRO carries what is known as a null case. For this we have to look at Sigurdsson’s analysis of floating quantifiers of Icelandic ((See Sigurdsson 1991 : 331). If PRO carries a case Chomsky and Lasnik (see Chomsky and Lasnik 1995 : 119-20) suggest that it is no other than a Null Case. Their strength of argument lies in the fact that PRO is unpronounced because of the morphological effect of null case. In the same way a third person masculine singular pronoun in English is pronounced as he and him because of the morphological effect of the nominative and accusative cases. If PRO has a null case – what should be its case

assigner? A null non-finite complementiser assigns null case to PRO. This is true to the Khoibu language as well. How a null non-finite complementiser assigns null case to PRO in Khoibu is illustrated in (6) -



The non-finite complementiser, the assigner of Null Case in example (6) is an intransitive as well as null. This complementiser is intransitive as it cannot assign accusative case on the other hand transitive complementiser like *for*, transitive verb like *see* and transitive preposition like *with* are all accusative case assigner. Under such analysis we may note that there is a dichotomy of transitive and intransitive complementisers . Since the null intransitive non-finite complementiser is the null case assigner, it assigns a Null Case to the subject pronoun PRO in (6) above.

3. Conclusion

From above it can be stated that there may be cases as a property of human language. A particular language may make use of a specific type of Quirky Cases for example, Khoibu language makes use of Quirky Genitive Case in addition to Quirky Dative and Quirky locative cases which are peculiar to this language. Such peculiar instances of Quirky cases are highlighted in our analysis of Khoibu case. This suggests that other Tibeto-Burman languages have cases peculiar to them as well.

4. Abbreviations

- v.pref. – Verbal Prefix
 acc. - Accusative.

dat. - Dative
nom - Nominative.
loc. - Locative.
ins. - Instrumental.
TP - Tense Phrase

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