Nominative-Genitive Conversion in Japanese, Focus, and Improper Movement

Introduction

Nominative/Genitive Conversion (NGC) in Japanese, where the subject of an adnominal clause bears nominative (-ga) or genitive (-no), has a ‘focus-resistance’ property stated in (1a) (see [1], [2], [3]). This phenomenon will be accounted for in terms of a constraint that echoes the familiar ban on improper movement.

(1) a. Nominative subject can carry focus while genitive subject cannot: see (2).
   b. Both types of subject can co-occur with a focused element: see (3).

(2) Taro-dake-{ga/*no} yonda ronbun
   Taro-only-Nom/Gen read article
   ‘the article that only Taro read’

(3) Taro-dake-ni Hanako-{ga/no} okutta ronbun
   Taro-only-to Hanako-Nom/Gen sent article
   ‘the article that Hanako sent only to Taro’

Proposal

I assume with [2] that nominative case originates on C and lowers to T via Feature Inheritance (FI) (4a) whereas genitive case occurs on D and is assigned to the subject in a reduced clause, TP (4b). I also adopt [2]’s conception of focus in (5). My proposals are given in (6a) and (7). (6a) (see [4] and [5]) is corroborated by the fact that a focus particle appears DP-internally (6b).

(4) a. \[ \text{DP} \left[ \text{CP} \left[ \text{TP} \ldots \text{DP} \ldots \right] \text{T} \right] \text{C} \] \text{D} \]
   \[\text{Agree} \quad \text{FI}\]
   b. \[ \text{DP} \left[ \text{TP} \ldots \text{DP} \ldots \right] \text{T} \] \text{D} \]
   \[\text{Agree}\]

(5) In Japanese, focus feature is lowered to T from a phase head.

(6) a. Focus feature may originate on D (as well as on C).
   b. wareware-dake-no himitsu
      we-only-Gen secret
      ‘the secret between only us’

(7) When an XP has an A-property (Case) and an A-bar property (focus), the latter cannot be checked before the former.

(7) reflects an old idea about improper movement, which militates against an element moving to an A’-position before moving to an A-position.

(8) *[\text{CP} \ Who, \left[ \text{TP} \ i \right. \text{seems} \left[ \text{CP} \ i \right. \text{that} \left[ \text{TP} \ it \ was \ told \ i \text{that} \ it \text{was} \text{raining} \right]]]]}
Analysis
The nominative subject can carry focus (see (2)) because T inherits a focus feature and a case feature from C and acts as the sole probe (see (9a)), which complies with (7). For the genitive subject, the T head of the reduced adnominal clause inherits a focus feature from D (see (6a)) while D probes for case (9b). Given strict cyclicity, T probes for [Foc] before D does for [Gen], which goes against (7).

(9) a. [DP [NP [TP Taro-only read T C ] book ] D ] (nominative)  
[Foc] [Nom] [Foc] [Nom]  

b. [DP [NP [TP Taro-only read T ] book ] D ]  (genitive)  
[Foc] [Foc] [Gen]  

(3) trivially satisfies (7): the dative case is checked at the vP-level. (6b) is also accommodated: D probes for both [Foc] and [Gen].

(10) [DP [NP our-only secret ] D ]  
[Foc] [Gen]

Conclusion
This proposal is inspired by Miyagawa (2017), but it is an improvement, empirically and theoretically. Data like (3) are unexpected under Miyagawa’s analysis. Also, while Miyagawa postulates two types of focus (one for arguments and the other for non-arguments), the present analysis posits just one type of focus.

(495 words)

References