Towards a 'Minimalist' Theory of Case

Howard Lasnik

I. Case and Government

1. α governs β if every XP dominating α also dominates β and vice versa: XPs are 'barriers' to government.

2. Case assignment requires government.

3. a The object of a transitive verb is Accusative.
   b The subject of a finite clause is Nominative.

4. V governs its complement

5. VP
   | V'
   / \ V NP
   admire Mary

6. 'Infl' governs its Specifier.

7. John will win

8. IP
   / \ NP I'
   / \ I VP

9. On the 'split Infl' hypothesis, with Tense and Agreement each heading its own projection:

10. AgrP
    / \ NP Agr'
    / \ Agr TP
    | T'
    / \ T VP

II. Questions about Government

11. The subject of the infinitival complement of certain verbs is Accusative. IP, unlike other XPs, is not a barrier to government. V 'exceptionally' governs into IP:

12. ... believe Mary to be a genius

13. VP
   | V'
   / \ V AgrP
   believe / \ NP
   Mary

14. Configuration of Accusative checking: V-Complement

15. Configuration of Nominative checking: SPEC-AGR

16. Configuration of 'Exceptional Case Marking': ???

III. A 'Minimalist' Answer

17. Another 'split' in Infl: In addition to subject agreement (AGR_s), object agreement (AGR_o). Then ECM can, via NP movement, also be assigned in a SPEC of AGR configuration:

18. AgrP
   / \ SPEC Agr'
   / \ Agr TP
   / \ (SPEC) T'
   / \ T AgrP
   / \ SPEC Agr'
   / \ Agr_o VP
   | V'
   / \ V AgrP
   / \ NP

19. But now we can do even better: If ECM is SPEC-head, standard Accusative can be as well (and should be, since there is no known morphological or other difference between them).
We have seen a good conceptual argument for this approach, and in a minute, we will see powerful empirical evidence for it. But first, we have to deal with a seemingly devastating empirical problem.

Two possible solutions:

a. The NP moves, but in LF, so you can't hear the movement (like QR, or WH-movement in Chinese).

b. The NP moves, and the V moves to a still higher position.

One additional 'split', the 'split VP hypothesis' could make solution (b) work.

IV. Evidence for the AGR\textsubscript{0} Theory

A. C-command phenomena

\begin{enumerate}
\item Y is in the domain of X only if Y is c-commanded by X.
\item X c-commands Y iff the first branching node dominating X also dominates Y.
\end{enumerate}
(45) AGR_P
   \ /     \\
 NP  AGR_P'
Mary   \ /     \\
   AGR_T  TP
   \ /     \\
    (SPEC) T'
    \ /     \\
     T  VP
     \ /     \\
      will  V'
      \ /     \\
       V  AGR_P
       \ /     \\
        SPEC  AGR_P'
        \ /     \\
         AGR_T  VP
         \ /     \\
          V  NP
         \ /     \\
          V  accuse
         \ /     \\
          NP  Susan