

## Two Types of Object Marking in Japanese

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*This paper discusses object marking in Modern Japanese. Modern Japanese possesses not only the canonical accusative marker that can appear with any object but also the object marker that appears only on the basis of the semantic properties of objects. I argue that the morphemes in question are equivalent to object markers found in languages that exhibit Differential Object Marking (DOM). In addition, from the perspective of the grammaticalization research on DOM, I suggest that the traditional accusative marking in Japanese is in its final stage as DOM, and Modern Japanese is about to adopt a new system of DOM. As a consequence of the discussion, I outline a universal principle concerning the motivation for languages to incorporate DOM into their grammars.*

*Keywords: differential object marking, animacy, definiteness, accusative, grammaticalization, case-marking strategies*

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background: Differential Object Marking

Differential Object Marking (henceforth DOM, a term coined by Bossong (1985, 1991) is a linguistic phenomenon that draws considerable attention in the field of linguistics. At its core, DOM encompasses the non-uniform marking of direct objects in certain languages. This non-uniformity is a pivotal aspect of DOM, highlighting how languages employ various strategies to mark particular direct objects while leaving others unmarked. For example, in Spanish, which is a representative DOM language, animacy and specificity are the most relevant factors for DOM (while definiteness is not a determining factor).<sup>1</sup> To illustrate the Differential Object marker (henceforth DO marker) *a* is obligatory with human definite direct objects, as in (1a); the sentence without the marker is ungrammatical, as in (1b).

#### (1) human definite object

- a. Vi                    a la mujer.  
   see.Pst.1sg    A the woman  
   ‘I saw the/a woman’
- b. \*Vi                    la mujer.  
   see.Pst.1sg    the woman  
   ‘I saw the/a woman’

(Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005:34))

In (1), the object *mujer* ‘woman’ is an animate noun being human and must accompany the DO marker. Additionally, the marker precedes human specific indefinite direct objects, as in (2); with human non-specific direct objects the marker is optional, but normally omitted, as in (3); DOM is ungrammatical with inanimate direct objects, as in (4).

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, "Spanish" refers to European Spanish. It has been observed that different varieties of Spanish exhibit distinct DOM systems (e.g., for American Spanish, see Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005))

(2) human indefinite specific object

Vi            **a** una mujer.  
 see.Pst.1sg **A** a    woman  
 ‘I saw a certain woman’

(Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005:35))

(3) human indefinite non-specific object

Vi            (**a**) una mujer.  
 see.Pst.1sg **A** a    woman  
 ‘I saw some ( or other) woman’

(Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005:35))

(4) inanimate specific object

Vi            (**\*a**) la/una mesa.  
 see.Pst.1sg **A** the/a    table  
 ‘I saw the/a table’

(Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005:35))

In general, objects that are involved in DOM are differentiated along two main dimensions: animacy and definiteness (Silverstein (1976), Moravcsik (1978), Comrie (1979), Croft (1988), Aissen (2003), among others). The examples (1)-(4) actually show that the Spanish objects are also affected by them. DOM languages differ as to whether just one or both of these scales determine(s) the differentiation of objects and there is some boundary between marked and unmarked. Consider the following scales.<sup>2</sup>

(5) Animacy scale:

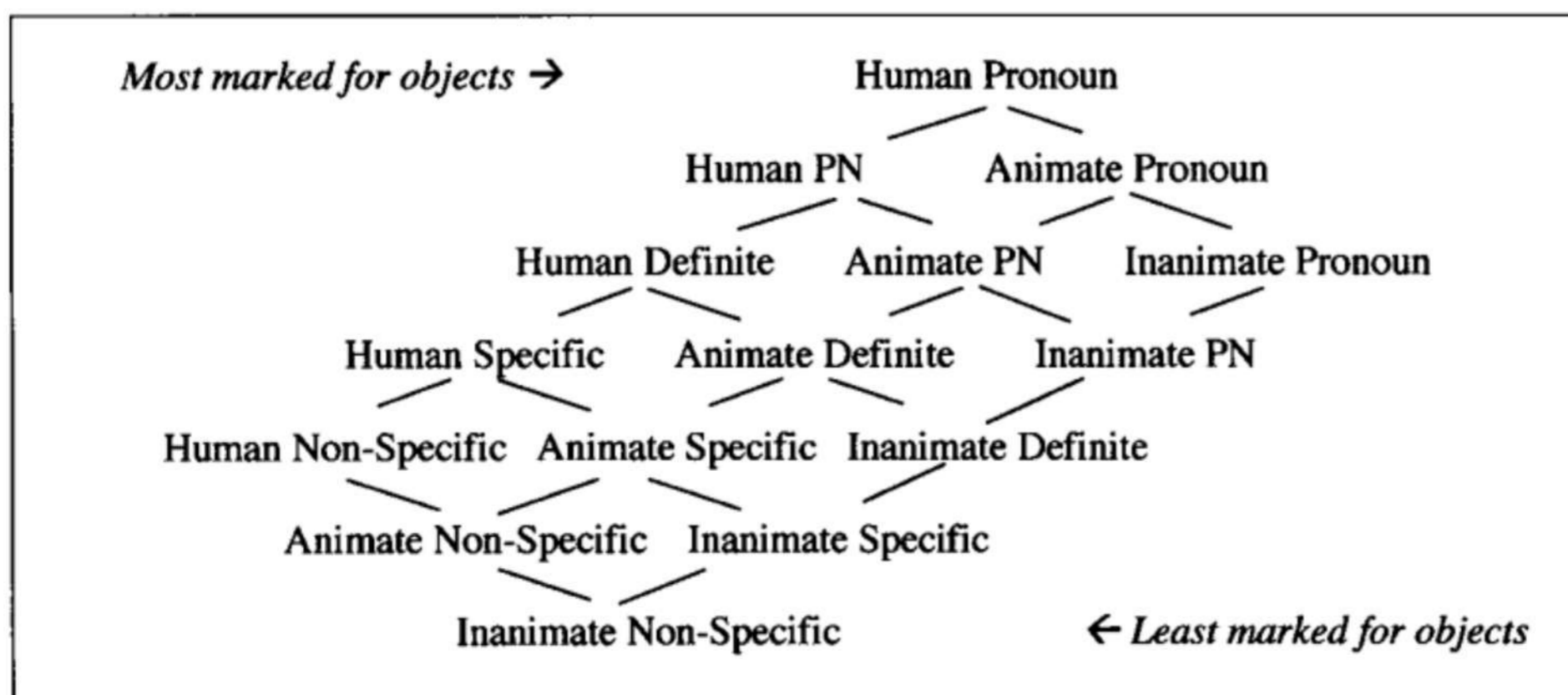
Human > Animate > Inanimate

(6) Definiteness scale:

Personal pronoun > Proper name > Definite NP > Indefinite NP > Indefinite Specific NP > Nonspecific NP

(5) and (6) mean that languages with some DO marker tend to have a higher likelihood of marking nouns when objects show the semantic properties on the left side of these scales and a lower likelihood of marking nouns when they show the ones on the right side. Importantly, Aissen (2003) synthesizes the Animacy scale and the Definiteness scale by Harmonic Alignment to a two-dimensional space with a partial order, as in (7).

(7) Two-dimensional space of Animacy and Definiteness



<sup>2</sup> “>” indicates that the left side is dominant over the right side.

(Aissen (2003:459))

Although I leave aside the details, she argues the higher category nouns belongs to, the more likely they are to undergo DOM. Furthermore building upon (7), Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005) present a simpler schema, as in (8), developing the integrated scale in Modern Spanish, as illustrated in (9).<sup>3</sup>

(8) Cross classification of Animacy Scale and Definiteness Scale:

	Pronoun>	Proper Noun>	Definite>	+Specific>	-Specific
human					
animate					
inanimate					

(Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005:39))

(9) DOM in Spanish: Animacy Scale and Definiteness Scale combined:

Spanish	Pronoun>	Proper Noun>	Definite>	+Specific>	-Specific
human	+	+	+	+	±
animate	+	+	+	+	-
inanimate	∅	±	-	-	-

(Based on Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005:40))

Von Heusinger and Kaiser claim that DOM arises based on the semantic properties of objects depicted in (9).

Another major premise on DOM is the morphosyntactic status of DO markers. Since they have a function to mark objects, it has often been claimed that they serve as accusative markers. In fact, the DO marker in Spanish behaves as an accusative marker in light of passivisation and nominalization.

Let us first consider the similarity in question under passivisation. In passive, the internal argument generally raises to become the subject. In many languages, although not all, this derivation results in the accusative case which the passivized argument originally had being lost, and the argument in question becomes the nominative subject, showing agreement with the passivized verb. Consider the following English examples.

- (10) a. They love her.  
 b. She is loved by him.

(10b) is a passive sentence deriving from the active sentence in (10a). (10b)'s passive subject *she* is assigned not accusative but nominative, and exhibits the number agreement with the copula *is*.

Let us now turn to Spanish examples.

- (11) a. Yo veo **a** la mujer.  
 I see **A** the woman  
 'I see the woman.'  
 b. La mujer fue vista.  
 the woman was seen.F  
 'The woman was seen'

(Bárány (2018:(1b)))

(Bárány (2018:(2b)))

<sup>3</sup> They do not provide a clear definition of the symbols, but in brief, "+" stands for the obligatory appearance of DOM, "-" denotes that the DOM does not occur or that the occurrence is highly limited, "±" is a sign of optional DOM, and "∅" represents the lack of inanimate personal pronouns (= strong pronouns).

In (11a), the transitive verb *veo* ‘see’ takes the direct object *la mujer* ‘the woman,’ which is DOM-marked. (11b) is the passived counterpart to (11a), and as is evident, the passive subject *La mujer* ‘the woman’ appears without the DO marker.<sup>4</sup>

Considering the case of nominalization also provides us with evidence for the claim that the Spanish DO marker is an accusative marker. The case marking system in the nominal phrase domain generally differs from that in the verbal domain. For instance, in English event nominalizations, the verb’s argument structure is preserved, but there is no marking of nominative and accusative on subjects and objects respectively (cf. Chomsky (1970) and Grimshaw (1990)).

- (12) a. Poirot envies Miss Marple.  
 b. Poirot’s envy of Miss Marple  
 c. \*Poirot’s envy Miss Marple

(Haegeman 1990)

In (12a), *envy*, the verb, is used; in (12b) and (12c) the noun *envy*. Under the standard assumption, (12b) and (12c) are noun phrases in which the argument relations are identical to (12a). In (12b), the external argument *Miss Marple* is assigned accusative case by preposition *of*; in (12c), unlike (12b), the preposition *of* is not inserted and the noun phrase is ungrammatical. This indicates that nouns do not have the ability to assign case to the external argument, which violates the Case Filter.<sup>5</sup> What is important for us is that accusative case is not assigned to nouns in nominal phrases.

In Spanish nominalizations as well, accusative case marking cannot be observed in noun phrases. Consider the following examples.

- (13) a. El perro capturó a Juan.  
 the dog captured A Juan  
 ‘The dog captured Juan’  
 b. La captura de Juan por el perro fue sorprendente.  
 the capture Gen Juan by the dog was surprising  
 ‘The dog’s capture of Juan was surprising’  
 c. \*La captura a Juan por el perro fue sorprendente.  
 the capture A Juan by the dog was surprising  
 ‘The dog’s capture of Juan was surprising’

(López (2018: 85-86))

In (13a), *capturó* ‘captured,’ the verb, is used; in (13b) and (13c) the noun *captura* ‘capture’ is used. If (13a) undergoes nominalization, as in (13b), DOM no longer occurs and the internal argument has to be introduced by the genitive marker *de*. As shown in (13c), the internal argument is not allowed to retain the DO marker. Based on these observations, in the literature, DO markers in languages such as Spanish are treated as a type of accusative marker.

In summary, as demonstrated with Spanish as an example, the occurrence of the DO marker is influenced by both semantic and syntactic environments. More specifically, it is affected by the animacy and definiteness of the nouns it attaches to, and they exhibit behavior consistent with that of the accusative case marker.

<sup>4</sup> According to Fábregas (2013), in Spanish passive sentences, the subject is often inanimate: human or animal nouns participating in DOM seldom undergo the passivisation.

<sup>5</sup> The Case Filter is defined as follows.

(i) Case Filter

\*NP if NP has phonetic content and has no Case.

(Chomsky (1981: 49))

## 1.2 Main Claim

In this paper, I provide the novel claim that (the standard Modern) Japanese has a DOM strategy.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, I argue that Japanese has a DO marker, utilizing a DOM system in parallel to that of DOM languages like Spanish. To illustrate, I propose that *nokoto* in Japanese should be analyzed to be a DO marker.<sup>7</sup>

- (14) Taro-ga Hanako(-**nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
Taro-Nom Hanako-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
'Taro is looking for Hanako.'

In (14), the direct object *Hanako* is marked with *nokoto*. As indicated by the parentheses, this morphological element is optional. A number of studies have begun to examine semantic and syntactic properties of the optional *nokoto* (Kuno (1976), Kurafuji (1998), Sasaguri (1999), Takano (2003), Kishimoto (2004, 2016), Hidaka (2006), Takubo (2007), Yumoto (2015) among others), but there has been little research that attempts to explain its characteristics in principle. Throughout this paper, I will argue that optional *nokoto* corresponds to DO markers observed in DOM languages, and its idea can identify the morpheme in question in more details.<sup>8</sup> Before starting the specific discussion of *nokoto*, note that there is a homophonous element different from *nokoto* in (14). For the sake of purposes, it is important to distinguish *nokoto* in (14) from *no-koto* 'Gen-thing' in (15).<sup>9</sup>

- (15) Taro-ga Hanako-\*(**no-koto**)-o hanasi-teiru.  
Taro-Nom Hanako-**Gen-thing**-Acc talk-Pst  
'Taro is talking about Hanako.' (Based on Sasaguri 1999: 162)

In (15), *no* is a genitive case maker and *koto* is just common noun (see Sasaguri (1999) and Yumoto (2015)), and the combination of *no-koto* cannot be deleted in contrast to (14). For the sake of simplicity, following Yumoto (2015)'s term, I refer to the type of *nokoto* in (14) as "optional" *nokoto* and the type of *no-koto* in (15) as "obligatory" *nokoto*.<sup>10</sup> Yumoto (2015:18) distinguishes optional *nokoto* and obligatory *nokoto* by examining whether they can be replaced with *nituite* 'about.'<sup>11</sup> Consider the following examples.

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<sup>6</sup> It has been claimed that in Old Japanese around the 8th century, the appearance of the accusative marker was limited by syntactic or semantic environments (see section 3 for relevant discussions). Furthermore, in the study of Japanese dialects, research on case particles focusing on the hierarchy of noun phrases in (5) and (6) has been extensively discussed (see Kibe, Takeuchi and Shimoji (2022) and their references).

<sup>7</sup> The morpheme *nokoto* can be divided into *no* and *koto*. Various analyses are conceivable regarding whether *no* functions as a genitive or a linker, or *nokoto* forms a single morpheme. I leave this point for future research. In this paper, for brevity of discussion, I assume that *nokoto* is a single morpheme and use the term NOKOTO in the gloss.

<sup>8</sup> With regard to this claim, one might wonder why Japanese possesses a DO marker in spite of the fact the language already has the accusative case particle *o*. I will discuss this matter in section 3.

<sup>9</sup> I gloss *nokoto* in (15) as Gen-thing based on the discussion in Yumoto (2015).

<sup>10</sup> To be more precise, there are cases where obligatory *nokoto* can be omitted, depending on the nature of the predicate (see Yumoto (2015: chapter 3) for details). Consider the following example.

- (i) Hanako-(**no-koto**)-o omoidasi-ta.  
Hanako-Gen-thing-Acc recall-Pst  
'I recalled what is about Hanako' (Yumoto (2015:33))

Therefore, the way I classify *nokoto*, even when not explicitly mentioned, is based on the grammaticality of the replacement test, as in (16) and (17), rather than whether ellipsis is possible or not.

<sup>11</sup> This difference between optional *nokoto* and obligatory *nokoto* in the replacement will be important in section 3.3.2.

(16) \*Taro-ga Hanako-**nituite** sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom Hanako-**about** seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for Hanako.’

(17) Taro-ga Hanako-**nituite** hanasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom Hanako-**about** talk-Prs  
 ‘Taro is talking about Hanako.’

(16) is the sentence where *nokoto* in (14) is replaced by *nituite* ‘about.’ That (16) is ungrammatical then indicates that replacement is not allowed, showing that *nokoto* in (14) is optional. On the other hand, (17) is the one where *nokoto* in (15) is replaced by *nituite* ‘about,’ and since (17) is grammatical, we can conclude that such a substitution is allowed, indicating that *nokoto* in (13) is obligatory.<sup>12</sup> In this paper, I consistently rely on the grammaticality of this replacement test in distinguishing the two types of *nokoto*.

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I discuss the properties of optional *nokoto*. Specifically, I identify the semantic features that the optional *nokoto* exhibits and its morpho-syntactic status within the noun phrase. In section 3, I introduce the discussion on the diachronic research of the Spanish DOM marker in the literature. Then, I discuss the language change in the Japanese object marker and argue that optional *nokoto* is being introduced into the grammar cycle as a new DO marker. Additionally, I attempt to explain the motivation for DOM to be grammaticalized. Section 4 concludes the discussion.

## 2 The Properties of the Japanese DO marker

### 2.1 Optional *nokoto* and a DO Marker

#### 2.1.1 Optional *nokoto* and the Animacy and Definiteness Scales

In this subsection, I show that the characteristics of optional *nokoto* are very similar to those of the Spanish DO marker, arguing that they fall into the same category.

The first notable characteristic of optional *nokoto* is, as Hidaka (2006) points out, that it tends to co-occur with nouns referring to something that has feelings. In other words, if optional *nokoto* appears with a noun referring to something without feelings, the sentence becomes ungrammatical. Consider the following example.

(18) Taro-ga keitai(\*-**nokoto**) o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom cell.phone-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for a certain cell phone.’

In (18), the transitive verb *sagasu* ‘seek’ takes *keitai* ‘cell.phone,’ which is a thing without feelings and the sentence is ungrammatical, which shows that the occurrence of *nokoto*-phrase is also affected by its semantic properties as the direct object. What has been revealed in this paper is that the degree of the compatibility between *nokoto* and nouns seems to depend on the position of the direct object in the Animacy scale in (5). In other words, the more left side nouns occupy in the scale, the more acceptable the sentence becomes. Consider the following example.

(19) Taro-ga inu (-??**nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom dog-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for a certain dog.’

(19) is the sentence in which the direct object in (18) is replaced by the animal noun *inu* ‘dog,’ and (19) is much

<sup>12</sup> I will claim in section 3.3.2 that optional *nokoto* was derived from obligatory *nokoto*.

more acceptable than (18) and less acceptable than (14), where the direct object is Hanako, which is a human noun.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, if the direct object in (19) is supplemented with the demonstrative *kono* ‘this,’ the sentence becomes grammatical, as in (20).

- (20) Taro-ga kono inu (**-nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom this dog-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for this dog.’

The fact that (20) is more grammatical than (19) suggests that optional *nokoto* is also connected to the Definiteness scale in (6). In fact, Sasaguri (1999) observes that while a bare noun without optional *nokoto* has two interpretations, the specific (*de re*) reading or the non-specific (*de dicto*) reading, a bare noun with optional *nokoto* forces specific (*de re*) reading, as illustrated in (21).

- (21) a. Taro-ga oyomesan-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom wife-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for his wife/a marriage partner.’  
 b. Taro-ga oyomesan-**nokoto**-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom wife-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for his wife.’ (Sasaguri (1999:167))

In (21a), the direct object *oyomesan* ‘a marriage partner’ can have either the specific or the non-specific reading: the specific reading represents the situation where Taro is looking for his wife, while the non-specific reading represents the one where Taro is looking for a partner to marry in the future. Interesting for us here is the fact that (21b), where the object is marked by *nokoto*, allows only the former interpretation, suggesting that optional *nokoto* is deeply related to not only the Animacy scale and but also Definiteness scale.

In addition to the above cases, the following data from (20) to (28) demonstrate that the use of optional *nokoto* conforms to the two scales in question, and (29) is the table which summarizes the observations in this section.<sup>14,15</sup>

- (22) human pronoun  
 Taro-ga kanojo(**-nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom her-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for her.’

- (23) human definite noun  
 Taro-ga kono oyomesan(**-nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom this wife-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for this wife.’

- (24) animate proper noun  
 Taro-ga Pochi (**-nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom Pochi-**NOKOTO**-Acc sagasi-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for Pochi’

<sup>13</sup> In (19), however, the interpretation where the direct object is a non-specific dog is impossible.

<sup>14</sup> Yumoto (2015: footnote 7 in chapter 4) states that inanimate proper nouns describing countries, companies, and organizations can also co-occur with *nokoto*. This may have something to do with the fact that nouns referring to them can be treated as [+human] in a figurative sense (cf. Onea and Mardale (2020: 358-359)).

<sup>15</sup> Japanese does not have pronouns for animate nouns, so it is not possible to create the relevant examples.

(25) inanimate pronoun:

Taro-ga sore (-\***nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom it-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for it’

(26) inanimate proper noun:

Taro-ga iPhone (-\***nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom iPhone-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Tara is looking for iPhone.’

(27) inanimate definite noun:

Taro-ga kono keitai (-\***nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom this cell.phone-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for this cell phone.’

(28) inanimate specific/nonspecific noun:

Taro-ga keitai-(\***nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom cell.phone.-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for a certain cell phone.’

(29) optional *nokoto*: Animacy Scale and Definiteness Scale combined:

	Pronoun>	Proper Noun>	Definite>	+Specific>	-Specific>
human	±	±	±	±	–
animate	∅	±	±	–	–
inanimate	–	–	–	–	–

Although there is no environment in which the appearance of optional *nokoto* is obligatory, (29) indicates that the two scales are closely tied to the possibility of optional *nokoto*, which in turn supports the main claim of this paper that the optional *nokoto* has something to do with DOM.

### 2.1.2 Optional *nokoto* as an Object Marker

Given that the use of optional *nokoto* is related to the semantic properties of nouns, I then investigate whether it also behaves like an accusative case. Importantly, it is well-known that optional *nokoto* is attached only to a direct object (cf., Sasaguri (1999), Takano (2003), Kishimoto (2004, 2016), Yumoto (2015) among others): it is an object marker and never appears with a subject.<sup>16</sup> Consider the following example.

(i) Taro-ga Hanako-**nokoto**-ga suki-da.  
 Taro-Nom Hanako-**NOKOTO**-Nom fond-Cop  
 ‘Taro is fond of Hanako.’

Therefore, as a reviewer points out, we should give the definition of “object” precisely. In this paper, “object” is defined

(30) \*Taro -**nokoto**-ga Hanako-o sagasi-teiru.  
 Taro-**NOKOTO**-Nom Hanako-Acc seek-Prs  
 ‘Taro is looking for Hanako.’

In (30), optional *nokoto* is attached to the subject *Taro*, and the sentence is ungrammatical. This means that optional *nokoto* serves as an object marking morpheme. In addition, Sasaguri (1999) indicates that a passivized subject cannot be accompanied by the optional *nokoto*, as shown in (31) and (32).

(31) Taro-ga Hanako-**nokoto**-o aisit-eiru.  
 Taro-Nom Hanako-**NOKOTO**-Acc love-Prs  
 ‘Taro loves Hanako’

(32) \*Hanako -**nokoto**-ga Taro-ni aisa-re-teiru.  
 Hanako-**NOKOTO**-Nom Taro-Dat love-Pass-Prs  
 ‘Hanako is loved by Taro.’

(Sasaguri (1999: 163))

In (31), the transitive verb *aisuru* ‘love’ takes the direct object *Hanako* with optional *nokoto*, and (32) is the passive counterpart to (31). That (30) is ungrammatical suggests that the optional *nokoto* cannot co-occur with a subject, whether derived or not, showing that it exhibits the same behavior as the Spanish DO marker, as we saw in (11).

Moreover, Sasaguri (1999) observes that optional *nokoto* cannot appear within a nominalized noun phrase. In Japanese event nominalizations, like English ones, the nominative and accusative markers are not assigned to nouns (Takezawa (1994)). The arguments of the verb in nominalized phrases are expressed by the genitive marker *no*, as in (33).

(33) a. amerika-kuugun-ga bagudaddo-o hakai-si-ta.  
 U.S.Air Force-Nom Baghdad-Acc destroy-do-Pst  
 ‘The U.S. Air Force destroyed Baghdad.’

(Takezawa (1994:255))

b. amerika-kuugun-no bagudaddo-no hakai.  
 U.S.Air Force-Gen Baghdad-Gen destruction  
 ‘the U.S. Air Force’s destruction of Baghdad’

(Takezawa (1994:256))

In (33a), *hakai-suru* ‘destroy-do,’ the verb is used; in (33b) the noun *hakai* ‘destruction.’ (33b) is a noun phrase in which the argument structure is identical to the sentence in (33a). In (33b), the arguments are marked by genitive case markers: as well as English and Spanish (section 1.1), the nominative and accusative cases do not participate in nominalized phrases.

Given the above, consider the following examples (cf. Sasaguri (1999)).

(34) a. Taro-ga Hanako-**nokoto**-o kansatu-si-ta.  
 Taro-Nom Hanako-**NOKOTO**-Acc observe-do-Pst  
 ‘Taro observed Hanako.’

b. Taro-no Hanako(\*-**nokoto**)-no kansatu  
 Taro-Gen Hanako-**NOKOTO**-Gen observation

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as the internal argument of the transitive predicate (see also footnote 33). What is more, it seems that optional *nokoto* appears frequently with the object of the psychological predicate such as *suki* ‘fond,’ *kirai* ‘hate,’ and *kowai* ‘scared’ (see also Yumoto (2015)). This may be related to the claim in Melis (2018) that the initial stages of DOM grammaticalization in Spanish were strongly associated with subjectivity.

‘Taro’s observation of Hasnako’  
‘Taro observed Hanako.’

In (34a), *kansatu-suru*, ‘observe-do,’ the verb is used; in (34b) the noun *kansatu* ‘observation.’ (34b) is a noun phrase in which the argument structure is identical to the sentence in (34a). What is important for us here is that optional *nokoto* is not allowed to accompany the external argument *Hanako* in (34b), which means that optional *nokoto* cannot appear in noun phrases.

Summarizing this section, I showed that optional *nokoto* exhibits similar behaviors to accusative case in passive and nominalization in that it cannot occur in the relevant positions in these constructions.

## 2.2 The Status of Optional *nokoto* within Noun Phrases

In this subsection, I examine the status of case markers and postpositions in Japanese, demonstrating that that of postpositions is true of optional *nokoto*.

Saito (2018) adopts the (Kase phrase) KP hypothesis proposed by Travis and Lamontagne (1992) and others, where grammatical case markers occupy a head position of KP. For example, the DP with the accusative marker in (35a) has the structure in (35b).

- (35 ) a. Taro-o  
Taro-Acc  
b. KP  
  
DP K  
  
Taro o

I claim that optional *nokoto* does not occupy a head position of KP and, for instance the DP with optional *nokoto* (and the accusative marker), in (36a), has the structure in (36b).

- (36 ) a. Taro-nokoto-o  
Taro-NOKOTO-Acc  
b. KP  
  
PP K  
  
DP P o  
  
Taro nokoto

In the following, I introduce syntactic differences between case particles and postpositions showing that optional *nokoto* behaves like postpositions.

The first difference is that while case markers cannot be followed by an additional case marker, postpositions can consider the following examples, as illustrated in (37) and (38) respectively.

- (37 ) a. watasi-wa Taro-o sasot-ta.  
I-Top Taro-Acc invite-Pst  
‘I invited Taro.’  
b. watasi-niwa Taro(-\*wo)-ga sasoi-yasukat-ta.  
I-for Taro-Acc-Nom invite-easy-Pst

‘Taro was easy for me to invite.’

- (38) a. Taro-wa yuubinkyoku-kara eki-e it-ta.  
Taro-Top post.office-from station-to go-Pst  
‘Taro went from the post office to the station.’  
b. Taro-niwa yuubinkyoku-kara-ga eki-e iki-yasukat-ta.  
Taro-for post.office-from-Nom station-to go-esay-Pst  
(Lit) ‘From the post office was easy for Taro to go to the station.’

(37b) and (38b) are tough constructions where the nominative phrase derives from (37a)’s object with the accusative case *Taro-o* ‘Taro-Acc’ and (38a)’s adjunct phrase with the postposition *yuubinkyoku-kara* ‘from the station’ respectively. The nominative phrase in (37b) is not allowed to maintain the accusative case marker. On the other hand, the one in (38b) is allowed to do so. Given these facts, the case particle and the postposition differ in that a case particle can be attached.

Secondly, a case particle in front of the coordinating conjunction *to* ‘and’ cannot be phonologically empty, whereas postpositions do not have such a restriction. Consider the following examples.

- (39) Taro-ga Hanako(-\*ni)-to Jiro-ni tegami-o oku-tta.  
Taro-Nom Hanako-Dat-and Jiro-Dat letter-Acc send-Pst  
‘Taro sent Hanako and Mariko a letter’  
(40) Taro-ga yuubinkyoku(-kara)-to konbini-kara tegami-o oku-tta.  
Taro-Nom post.office-from-and convenience.store-from letter-Acc send-Prs  
‘Taro sent a letter from the post office and the convenience store.’

In (39), the indirect objects with dative case are coordinated, and the dative case marker in the first conjunct must be phonologically null. In (40), where the adjunct phrases with postpositions are coordinated, however the postposition in the first conjunct can be overt. Given the above observations, consider the following example.

- (41) Taro-ga Hanako(-**nokoto**)-to Mariko-**nokoto**-o sagasi-teiru.  
Taro-Nom Hanako-**NOKOTO**-and Mariko-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs  
‘Taro is looking for Hanako and Mariko.’

Here, the direct objects with optional *nokoto* are coordinated and assigned accusative case. Important for us here is that optional *nokoto* in the first conjunct can be overt in the same way as (40), suggesting that *optional nokoto* is located on the head of PP.

Additionally, noun phrases with optional *nokoto* behave like locative expressions (see Watanabe 2009 and references therein for Japanese locative expressions).<sup>17</sup> Consider the following examples.

- (42) a. Taro-wa tukue{-no-mae/-no-usiro}-o too-tta.  
Taro-Top desk-no-front/-no-back-Acc pass-Pst  
‘Taro passed in front/behind of the desk.’  
b. Taro-wa tukue{-no-ue/-no-sita}-o mita.  
Taro-Top desk-no-above/-no-below-Acc see-Pst  
‘Taro looked at the top/bottom of the desk.’

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<sup>17</sup> I thank Akira Watanabe for pointing this out.

In Japanese locative expressions like (42), common nouns are accompanied by the morpheme *no* and a noun representing places, *mae* ‘front’, *usiro* ‘back’, *ue* ‘above’, *sita* ‘below,’ and also followed by the case marker.<sup>18</sup>

To sum up, the status of optional *nokoto* in a noun phrase is common to that of postpositions. Given this, it is obvious that optional *nokoto* occupies the head of PP. Recall that we saw in section 2.1.2 that optional *nokoto* exhibits behaviors as accusative cases under passivization and nominalization, repeated as here (43) and (44).

(43) \*Hanako-nokoto-ga Taro-ni aisa-re-teiru.=(32)  
 Hanako-NOKOTO-Nom Taro-Dat love-Pass-Prs  
 ‘Hanako is loved by Taro.’

(44) Taro-no Hanako(\*-nokoto)-no kansatu=(33b)  
 Taro-Gen Hanako-NOKOTO-Gen observation  
 ‘Taro’s observation of Hanako’

Although optional *nokoto* has functions as accusative marker, it works as a postposition in light of morphosyntax.<sup>19</sup> In the following section, I discuss the diachronic studies of Japanese object marker, showing that it is no surprising that optional *nokoto* behaves as a postposition.

### 3 Language Change and DOM

The discussion so far has compared optional *nokoto* with the Spanish DO marker, revealing that optional *nokoto* has many similar properties to DO markers. However, it seems that there are three apparent problems to tackle, as shown in (45).

- (45) a. Why does optional *nokoto* always appears optionally?  
 b. Why does Japanese possess the extra object marker in spite of the fact the language has a canonical accusative particle?

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<sup>18</sup> I will not comit myself to whether the morpheme *no* in locative expression is a genitive case marker or a linker.

<sup>19</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out that while postpositions can appear without a case particle, optional *nokoto* needs the accusative case particle especially in the written language, as in (i).

(i) Written Japanese

John-wa Taro-ga Hanako-nokoto-??(o) sagasi-teiru-koto-o sit-teiru.  
 John-Top Taro-NomHanako-NOKOTO-Acc seek-Prs-Comp-Acc know-Prs.  
 ‘John knows that Taro is looking for Hanako.’

However, in the spoken, the marker in question can appear alone, as in (ii).

(ii) Spoken Japanese

Taro-ga Hanakono-nokoto sagasi-teiru-ne.  
 Taro-NomHanako-NOKOTO seek-Prs-Sfp’  
 ‘Taro is looking for Hanako. isn’t he?’

In section 3, I will argue that optional *nokoto* is in the early stage of grammaticalization cycle. Under the standard assumption that spoken languages are more likely to change the systems of the grammar than written languages, the ungrammaticality of (i) and (ii) may be taken to indicate that the degrees of progress in grammaticalization of optional *nokoto* differ between the written and spoken languages.

c. Why does optional *nokoto* behaves as postpositions?

In general, some semantic/syntactic environments force DO markers to appear obligatorily (see section 1.1 for the Spanish DO marker). As in (45a), however, the occurrence of optional *nokoto* is always optional, which may make it difficult to identify the object marker in question with DO markers. In addition, as mentioned in (45b), that Japanese possesses the accusative marker becomes an obstacle when we analyze optional *nokoto* as a DO marker. If Japanese has two object markers, we must assume that the language incorporates two elements with shared grammatical roles. In light of the economy principle (Chomsky 1995), that optional *nokoto* is a DO marker becomes doubtful, since two object markings are redundant. Moreover, Lopez's (2012) claim that the DO markers, including Spanish, occupy the head of KP. As we saw in section 2.2, however, optional *nokoto* seems to be located in the head of PP, not KP. Thus, we must answer the question in (45c).

In this section, I reconcile these issues from the perspective of grammaticalization. Specifically, I claim that optional *nokoto* is in an early stage in a grammaticalization cycle, and thus the object marker in question is not yet obligatory to occur, which potentially solve (45a). Additionally, I overview how the canonical accusative marker in Japanese once behaved, suggesting that optional *nokoto* is selected as the successor to the accusative particle in question in grammaticalization cycle, which enables us to explain (45b). Furthermore, I account for (45c) based on a general trend in grammaticalization of DO markers.

In section 3.1, I present the discussion on the diachronic studies on the Spanish DO marker and outline how the marker has changed. In section 3.2, I introduce several arguments that the appearance of the Japanese accusative particle was once limited by semantic conditions. In section 3.3, I propose that the canonical accusative marker in Japanese has undergone the grammaticalization cycle as a DO marker. The conclusion that will be reached is that the object marking system in Japanese is in a mixed state of initial and final stage.

### 3.1 The Diachronic Research on the Spanish DO Marker

In the framework of research on DOM in Spanish, the diachronic evolution of DOM has extensively been discussed (Melis (1995, 2018), Laca (1995, 2006), Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005, 2007), Von Heusinger (2008) among others). A notable point in the discussions is the fact that Old Spanish exhibits a different distribution of DOM compared to Modern Spanish. For instance, the Old Spanish examples in (46), taken from the *Poema de mio Cid* (12th century) and its translation (by Alfonso Reyes (1976)) into Modern Spanish in (47), highlight differences in the DOM system.

#### (46) definite human objects (Old Spanish)

- a. En braços tenedes **mis** fijas tan blancas como el sol.  
 in arms have.Prs.2.pl **my** daughters as white as the sun  
 'In your arms you have my daughters, as white as the sun.' (Cid, 2333)
- b. Escarniremos **las** fijas del Campeador.  
 humiliate.Fut.1.pl **the** daughter of-the Battler  
 'We shall humiliate the Battler's daughters.' (Cid, 2551)
- c. Plega a Dios & a Santa Maria, que aun con mis manos  
 please.Prs.Sub.3.sg to God and to Saint Mary that still with my hands  
 case **estas mis** fijas  
 marry.Prs.Sub.1.sg **these my** daughters  
 'Mary God and Saint Mary grant that I myself may yet arrange marriages for these daughters of mine.'  
 (Cid, 282)

#### (47) definite human objects (Modern Spanish)

- a. teneis **a mis** hijas, tan blancas como el sol, en vuestros brazos  
 have.Prs.2.pl **A my** daughters as white as the sun in your arms

- ‘In your arms you have my daughters, as white as the sun’ (Cid, 2333)
- b. y podremos escarnecer **a** las hijas del Campeador.  
and can.Fut.1.pl humiliate **A** the daughters of-the Battler  
‘We shall humiliate the Battler’s daughters’ (Cid, 2551)
- c. Oh, plague a Dios y a santa Maria que pueda casar con  
oh please.Prs.Sub.3.sg to God and to Saint Mary that can.Prs.Sub.1.Ssg marry with  
mis propias manos **a estas mis** hijas  
my own hands **A these my** daughters  
‘Mary God and Saint Mary grant that I myself may yet arrange marriages for these daughters of mine.’  
(Cid, 282)

In both (46) and (47), all the objects are human and definite, and their definiteness is represented by the possessive *mis* ‘my’ in (46a) and (47a), the definite article *las* ‘the’ in (46b) and (47b), and the demonstrative *estas* ‘these’ in (46c) and (47c) respectively. What should be noted here is that the Old Spanish objects in (46) lack the DO marker, while the Modern Spanish objects in (47) obtain the DO marker. As mentioned in section 1.1, in Modern Spanish, animate definite objects obligatorily take the DO marker. Then, it seems mysterious that the objects in (46) do not have the DO marker, and, what is more, Laca’s (2006) examination of *Cid*’s text data reveals that only 30 percent of animate definite objects in Old Spanish are DOM-marked. This implies that in Old Spanish, DOM with definite animate objects was optional, showing observation shows a difference between the DOM system of Old Spanish and Modern Spanish.

To gain a more detailed understanding of the distribution of DO markers in Old Spanish, consider the following examples.

(48) strong pronoun (Old Spanish)

- a. Dios salve **a** nuestros amigos e **a** vós más señor  
God save.Prs.Sub.3pl **A** our friends and **A** you more lord  
‘May God save our friends and you above all, my lord’ (Cid, 3028)
- b. e ssi fuéredes vençidos, nonrebtedes **a** nós  
and if be.Prs.Cond.2pl defeated not blame.Imp.2pl **A** us  
‘but if you are defeated you are not to blame us.’ (Cid, 3566)

(49) proper noun (Old Spanish)

- a. Matastes **a** Bucar & arrancamos el canpo  
kill.Psat.2.sg **A** Búcar and tear-away.Pst.1pl the field  
‘you killed Búcar and we have won the battle.’ (Cid, 2458)
- b. con afan gane **a** Valencia  
with effort ein.Pst.1sg **A** Valencia  
‘after a great struggle I won Valencia.’ (Cid, 1635)

(50) animate indefinite (Old Spanish)

- a. Tanto traen las grandes ganancias, muchos ganados de ovejas e de vacas  
very bring.Pst.3.pl the big wealths many herds of sheep and of cows  
‘They brought such great wealth, many herds of sheep and cows’ (Cid, 480-481)
- b. yo quieroles dar axuvar tres mill marcos de valor,  
I will-them give dowry three thousand marks of value  
darvos e mulas e palafres, muy gruessos de sazón  
give-you as well mules as palfreys very thick of ripeness  
‘I wish to give them the sum of three thousand marks as a dowry, I give you mules and palfreys, study and in

prime condition.'

(Cid, 2571-2572)

As Melis (1995) notes, the strong personal pronoun objects and proper name objects are obligatory for DOM, like Modern Spanish, as illustrated in (48) and (49), respectively, and as shown in (50), animate indefinite direct objects never receive the DO marker. Recall that in section 1.1, I introduced Heusinger and Kaiser's (2005) schema which integrates the Animacy and Definiteness scales, repeated here as (51).

(51) Cross classification of Animacy Scale and Definiteness Scale =(8):

	Pronoun>	Proper Noun >	Definite>	+Specific>	-Specific
human					
animate					
inanimate					

As we saw in section 1.1, they utilize (51) and present (9), as repeated here as (52), showing the distribution of DOM in Modern Spanish.

(52) DOM in Spanish: Animacy Scale and Definiteness Scale combined =(9):

Spanish	Pronoun>	Proper Noun>	Definite>	+Specific>	-Specific
human	+	+	+	+	±
animate	+	+	+	+	-
inanimate	∅	±	-	-	-

As well as Modern Spanish, based on the observations of DOM in Old Spanish, Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005) classify the DOM patterns in Old Spanish, as indicated in (53).

(53) DOM in Old Spanish: Cross classification of Animacy Scale and Definiteness Scale

Spanish	Pronoun>	Proper Noun >	Definite>	+Specific>	-Specific
human	+	+	±	-	±
animate	+	+	±	-	-
inanimate	∅	±	-	-	-

(Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005: 42))

Comparing (52) with (53), it is obvious that the distribution of DOM regarding definite objects are different. In order to understand this evolution of DOM, Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005) refer to Melis (1995) and Laca (2006), examining the cases of definite animate objects with which the DO marker optionally appears. Specifically, Melis and Laca point out that one of the most relevant factors for the use of the DO marker in these cases is topicalization. In a study on *El Cantar de Mio Cid*, Melis observes that direct objects occurring in a postverbal position are in general not employed with DOM, but preposed direct objects are. This observation is also confirmed by Laca's study, where she notes that only a third of all the instances of human definite direct objects are preceded by the DO marker (36% or 13/36). According to Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005), 8 out of those 11 (they could not find the other two data) are cases of clitic doubling and/or preposing. Consider the following examples.

(54) Old Spanish

a. Assi **las** escarniremos **alas** **fijas** del Cmpeador

- so **them** humiliate.Fut.1.pl **A-the daughters** of-the Battler  
 ‘So we shall humiliate the Battler’s daughters’ (Cid, 2555)
- b. **A mis fijas** siruades que vuestras mugieres son  
**A my daughters** serve.Prs.2.pl that your wives are  
 ‘He gathered his daughters in his arms.’ (Cid, 2581)
- c. **A la Sus fijas** en braço **las** prendia  
**A the your daughters** in arm **them** held.Pst.3.sg  
 ‘He gathered his daughters in his arms.’ (Cid, 275)

(55) Old Spanish

- a. Plega a Dios & a Santa Maria, que aun con mis manos case **estas mis fijas**  
 pray to God and to Virgin Mary that even with my hands marry.sub **these my daughters**  
 ‘Pray to God and to Virgin Mary that I will marry my daughters with my own hands.’ (Cid, 282)
- b. En brazos tenedes **mis fijas** tan blancas commo el sol  
 in hands hold.Prs.2.pl **my daughters** so white as the sun  
 ‘You hold my daughters so white as the sun in your hands.’ (Cid, 2333)
- c. Escarniremos **las fijas** del Campeador  
 humiliate.Fut.1.pl **the daughters** of-the Battler  
 ‘We shall humiliate the Battler’s daughters’ (Cid, 2551)

In (54a), the object undergoes clitic doubling, in (54b) the object is preposed to the sentence-initial position, and in (54c) the object undergoes both clitic doubling and preposing. What is important here is that all the objects in (54) are accompanied by the DO marker. In contrast, all the objects in (55) undergo neither clitic doubling nor preposing, and they are devoid of the DO marker. Based on these observations, Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005) assume that topicality is another “facilitating” category for the extension of DOM, concluding that  $\pm$ top divides the cell for +definite NPs into two cells, as illustrated in (56).

(56) DOM in Old Spanish:

Crossclassification of Animacy Scale and Definiteness Scale, Topicality for +definite

Spanish	Pronoun>	Proper Noun >	Definite>		Indefinite
			+top	-top	
human	+	+	+	–	–
animate	+	+	+	–	–
inanimate	∅	±	–	–	–

(Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005: 44))

According to them, in Modern Spanish, the selection of DOM based on topicality has been neutralized for human definite direct objects, which means that in the context of definite human direct objects, topicality no more plays a role. As a result, the contrast between +top and –top became ineffective for definite human direct objects, and instead, the contrast between +spec and –spec has become crucial for non-specific ones in Modern Spanish.

In summary, Old Spanish was a language that employed DOM similar to Modern Spanish, but the situations in which the DO marker appears are different: in Old Spanish DOM, whether a noun is topical or not is a significant factor to regulate the appearance of the DO marker. In the evolution of DOM from Old Spanish to Modern Spanish, the nominal properties imposed on the direct object appearing with the DO marker follow the change of spreading in the right direction along the Animacy and Definiteness scales. As a consequence, in Modern Spanish, a broader range of nouns have triggered DOM.

### 3.2 The Accusative Marker in Old Japanese

This subsection is concerned with the distribution of the accusative case marker in Old Japanese. In Modern Japanese, it is well-known that the accusative marker is assigned to the direct object of transitive verbs, regardless of the noun's semantic characteristics and its syntactic positions. However, it has been claimed that, in Old Japanese, the objects with the accusative marker exhibit a complementary distribution with ones without it and are marked based on their semantic and syntactic properties (Motohashi (1989), Miyagawa (1989), Kinsui (1993, 2011), Yanagida (2006, 2018), Yanagida and Whitman (2009), Frellesvig, Horn, and Yanagida (2015), among others).<sup>20</sup>

For example, Motohashi (1989) focuses on the semantic characteristics of direct objects in Old Japanese and observes that the accusative marker appears when objects are definite/referential nouns, while indefinite/non-referential objects are morphologically unmarked. Consider the following examples.

(57) sigeyama-no                      tanipye ni      opuru yamabuki **wo** ... pikiuwete  
 wooden.mountain-Gen valley Loc grow yellw.rose **WO** transplant  
 ‘transplant the yellow-roses that grow about the valley of the wooden mountain...’                      (Manyôshû, 4185)

(58) pitomoto-no nadesikwo Ø uwe-si      sono kokoro  
 one-Gen fringed.pink plant-Pst that heart  
 ‘the heart that planted a flowering pink’                      (Manyôshû, 4070)

The object in (57) *yamabuki* ‘yellow.rose’ is definite/referential and appears with *wo*, while the object in (58) *pitomoto-no nadesikwo* ‘one-Gen fringed pink’ is indefinite/non-referential and appears without *wo*. Yanagida and Whitman (2009: 129) argue that the contrast between *wo*-marked objects and zero-marked objects should be attributed to specificity, not to definiteness, because *wh*-pronouns can appear with *wo*. Consider the following examples.

(59) sipo pwina-ba tamamo kari tum-ye      ipye-no      imwo-ga      pamaduto      kop-aba  
 tide recede-if seaweed cut gather-Imp house-Gen wife-Act shore.gift want-if  
**nani wo** simyesa-mu?  
**what WO** proffer-Mod.Adn  
 ‘If the tide has gone out, cut and gather the precious seaweed! If my wife at home asks for gifts from the shore, which (other) shall I offer her?’                      (Manyôshû, 360)

(60) maki-no itatwo wo os      piraki siweya ide kone noti pa **nani** Ø se-mu?  
 Wood-Gen door WO push open damn out come after Top **what** do-Mod.Adn  
 ‘Pushing open the door (I say) “Come out, dammit!” Then what will (I) do?’                      (Manyôshû, 2519)

In (59), the accusative case is assigned to the *wh*-phrase *nani* ‘what,’ which is specified by the expression *pamaduto* ‘gifts from the shore.’: the set of items that the speaker might offer his wife is defined. In contrast, in (60), the bare interrogative pronoun *nani* ‘what’ is used without contextual specification: the universe of things the speaker might do is completely undefined in previous discourse. From the contrast, it can be inferred that objects in Old Japanese are case-marked based on its specificity. Frellesvig, Horn and Yanagida (2015) extend Yanagida and Whitman’s

<sup>20</sup> The data of Japanese diachronic study primarily relies on Manyôshû (8th century), an anthology of Japanese verse completed in the early 9th century A.D., representing one of the earliest written records of Old Japanese. It comprises 4,516 long and short poems. Some grammarians have discovered that the particle *wo* in Old Japanese was not used only as an accusative marker. (see Hashimoto (1969), Kobayashi (1970), and Motohashi (1989, 2003)). However, here I will focus on the discussion of the function as the accusative marker.

(2009) view and reveal the distribution at more considerable length, arguing that the two classes of objects fit into a pattern of DOM.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Yanagida (2006) discovers that when the sentences are the OSV order, the objects often obtain the accusative particle. Consider the following example.

- (61) a. Aki yama-**wo** ikan-ka kimi-ga pitori kwoyu-ramu.  
autumn mountain-**WO** how-Q you-Gen alone cross-Aux  
‘How do you cross the autumn mountain alone?’ (Manyôshû, 106)

In (61), the *wo*-marked object *aki yama* ‘autumn mountain’ is moved to the left edge of the so-called *Kakari-musubi* ‘focus concord’ construction, characterized by a morphological dependency between a focus phrase *ikani-ka* and a matrix predicate *kwoyu-ramu*. Building on Watanabe’s (2001, 2002) proposal that the *ka*-marked phrase appears in Spec CP, Yanagida claims that the *wo*-marked phrase such as *yama* ‘mountain’ in (61) is located within the CP domain. To explain the syntactic structure of sentences like (61), she adopts the cartography hypothesis in Rizzi (1997). According to Rizzi, the CP domain can be represented as in (62).

- (62) [ Force [ (Topic\*) [ (Focus) [ (Topic\*) [ Finite [TP ...]]]]]]

Importantly, Rizzi assumes that a recursion of FocP is not allowed.<sup>22</sup> Given this, since the object in (61) precedes the focus phrase *ikani-ka*, it is reasonable to assume that the object in question is located in the topic projection. Moreover, Yanagida (2016) observes, as shown in (63), that objects with the case marker in Old Japanese can co-occur with a topic marker *ba*, as shown in (63).

- (63) a. kimi-**wo-ba** asu-yu yoso-ni-kamo mi-mu  
you-**Acc-Top** tomorrow-from other-Loc-Q see-Aux  
‘From tomorrow on, shall I see you as someone in the different world?’ (Manyôshû, 423)  
b. momiti-**wo-ba** torite-so sinofu  
leaves-**Acc-Top** take.up-Foc feel.alone  
‘I take up red and yellow leaves feeling alone.’ (Manyôshû, 16)

In (63a-b), the *wo-ba* phrases precede the focus phrases marked by the *kakari*-particle respectively. With regard to the sentences such as (61) and (63), Yanagida concludes that a focus phrase marked by *ka* occupies the FocusP position, and the *wo*-marked object is located in the Topic domain, as illustrated in (64).<sup>23</sup>

- (64) [<sub>TopP</sub> NP-**wo** (ba) [<sub>FocP</sub> XP-Foc [NP-ga....]]] (Based on Yanagida (2006: 48))

Given this, we can infer that syntactic discourse properties encourage objects in Old Japanese to be case-marked.

To summarize this section, it was shown that the canonical accusative marker in Old Japanese exhibits variation in its occurrence based on the semantic features, which suggests that Old Japanese actually utilize a DOM system. In the following section, I will then propose that Modern Japanese is in an early stage of renewing the DOM system employed in Old Japanese.

<sup>21</sup> They regard specificity as D(iscourse)-Linking (Pesetsky 1987) and investigate the distribution of *wo*. Here I focus attention only on the fact that the appearances of *wo* is strongly related to semantic factors.

<sup>22</sup> Kiss (1995) also argues that thenguage has a only single Focus projection.

<sup>23</sup> Yanagida (2006) also provides the examples where the objects with the accusative case marker co-occurs with the *kakari*-focus particle. Topicality is not the only relevant factor for the occurrence of *wo*.

### 3.3 Proposal

#### 3.3.1 The Grammatical Change of Japanese DOM

In this section, I will argue that the accusative marker in Modern Japanese has lost the properties as a DO marker which the accusative marker once held, and that optional *nokoto* is becoming grammaticalized as a new DO marker in the grammaticalization cycle of the Japanese object marker.

In section 3.2, we confirmed that the accusative marker in Japanese functioned as a DO marker. As is evident from diachronic studies of the Spanish DO marker (section 3.1), given that DO markers gradually spread along the Animacy and Definiteness scales, the current Japanese accusative marker, since it is allowed to co-occur with any direct object noun, can then be considered to be in the final step in the grammatical evolution of the DO marker.

It is worth noting here that Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005:38) state (65).

(65) “...It is not clear whether Kalkatungu and Japanese are ‘good’ DOM-languages since they do not show DOM contrasts; however, they might be first stage (Kalkatungu) or last stage (Japanese) in the evolution of DOM.”

Given this, considering that the Old Japanese accusative marker behaves like a DO marker, I argue that Modern Japanese should be categorized as a DOM language and that the traditional accusative marker has undergone language change in a similar way to the Spanish DO marker. To be more specific, I propose that the Japanese DOM system has gone through the following stages.<sup>24</sup>

(66) the language change of Japanese

Old Japanese → ... → Stage X → ... → Stage Y → ... → Modern Japanese

(67) Stage X: The canonical accusative marker reached the last stage as the DO marker, and can be attached to any type of direct objects.

(68) Stage Y: Japanese enters a stage of incorporating the new DOM system into its grammar: Japanese adopts optional *nokoto* as a new DO marker.

Regarding (67), Sadler’s (2002) research reveals that the accusative marker underwent such a change from the medieval to the pre-modern period. She utilized the text data from *Genji monogatari* written in the 11th century (Genji 1), its translation in 1723 (Genji 2), and another translation in 1964 (Genji 3) to compare the occurrence rates

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<sup>24</sup> “→” represents a rightward shift in language change.

of the accusative case.<sup>25</sup> The results are as follows..<sup>26</sup>

(69) Animacy

	human	non-animal
Genji 1	100%(10/10)	67.2%(41/61)
Genji 2	93.7%(15/16)	78.7%(85/108)
Genji 3	100%(10/10)	95.9%(93/97)

(Based on Sadler (2002: 263))

(70) Referentiality

	referential	non-referential
Genji 1	86.3%(44/51)	40.9%(9/22)
Genji 2	93.4%(85/91)	50.0%(19/38)
Genji 3	100%(72/72)	89.7% (35/39)

(Based on Sadler (2002: 261))

As indicated in (69) and (70), the newer the text becomes, the more frequently the accusative case appears in light of the Animacy and the Referentiality. I then propose that having undergone such a language change, the accusative marker has reached the last stage as the DO maker, meaning that it can now appear with any type of direct objects.

Let us then consider the stage Y in (68), which I claim is the phase where Japanese is attempting to reintroduce a new DO marker into its' grammar. In the diachronic studies of language change and grammaticalization, it has been pointed out that grammar exhibits cyclical patterns (Roberts and Roussou (2003), Van Gelderen (2009, 2011, 2016, 2017), Bouzouita, Breitbarth, Danckaert, and Witzenhansen (2019), Roberts (2022) among many others). More concretely, in the cyclical nature of language change, when one element loses its grammatical function, another element is incorporated into the grammar in a way that the new one compensates for the old one. The new one tends to follow a similar process to the old one in grammar change (especially for cases related to grammatical changes of DOM, see Bossong (1991), Hopper and Traugott (1993), Harris and Campbell (1995), Havas (2008), Sinnemäk

<sup>25</sup> The details of the text data are as follows:

- (i) *Genji monogatari* (Genji 1) is the original work, which was written by Murasaki Shikibu in the eleventh century. The text is from the *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* series, and is based on the shahon ('manuscript copy') called *Sanetaka aobyoshi shooon*, from the 14th century.
- (ii) *Shibun ama no saezuri* (Genji 2) is an incomplete translation by Hanshichi Taga in 1723, and only consists of the first two chapters of The Tale of Genji. The text is from the *Chinsho kankoo kai soosho vol. 1* ['Rare book publishing association'].
- (iii) *Shin-shin-yaku Genji monogatari* (Genji 3) is Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's third translation made in 1964. As he writes in the preface (1964:2), the content of the translation has not changed since his second translation (1959), but he made some orthographical changes (from old Japanese characters to new ones) in this new version.

(Sadler (2002:254))

<sup>26</sup> Sadler provides data on not only humans and non-animate object but also objects referring to body parts. However, due to the significantly limited quantity of data on them and the lack of relevance to the current discussion, I created the table (69), excluding that category.

(2014)). Given this, I argue that the grammar of Japanese accusative marking has undergone such a typical cyclic change during the transition from Old Japanese to Modern Japanese.<sup>27</sup> Specifically, while the canonical object marker *wo*, as mentioned above, is in the final stage as a DO marker, the optional *nokoto* has been adopted as a new DO marker.

What is relevant to the above claim is that many DOM languages recruit a morpheme which already exists in the language as a DO marker (see Bossong (1991) and Bárány (2018, 2021) and references therein). Van Gelderen (2011), noting that many DO markers are derived from adpositions, presents the following reanalysis of DO markers.

(71) DOM Cline

P > inherent Case > DOM

(Van Gelderen (2011: 178))

Recall that in section 2.2 I demonstrated that optional *nokoto* displays the behaviors like postpositions. Given that a DO marker is inclined to drive from an adposition before it is fully grammaticalized as DOM, I suggest that optional *nokoto* is an early step in grammaticalization of a DO marker: the appositional phase in (71).

### 3.3.2 Why was *nokoto* selected as a next DO marker?

In this subsection, I investigate why *nokoto* has been chosen as a new DO marker.

As I mentioned in section 1.2, the optional *nokoto* is a homonym for the obligatory *nokoto*. The typical examples of optional *nokoto* and obligatory *nokoto* are repeated in (72) and (73) respectively.

(72) Taro-ga Hanako(-**nokoto**)-o sagasi-teiru.=(14)

Taro-Nom Hanako-**NOKOTO**-Acc seek-Prs

‘Taro is looking for Hanako.’

(73) Taro-ga Hanako-\*(**no-koto**)-o hanasi-teiru.=(15)

Taro-Nom Hanako-**Gen-thing**-Acc talk-Pst

‘Taro is talking about Hanako.’

Yumoto (2015) claims that the optional *nokoto* is derived from obligatory *nokoto*. She focuses on the semantic function of *koto* ‘thing’ in obligatory *nokoto*. I support her claim from a different perspective. Specifically, I will emphasize topicality/specificity that obligatory *nokoto* possesses, suggesting that optional *nokoto* inherits obligatory *nokoto*’s properties.<sup>28</sup>

Firstly, as I mentioned in section 1.2, obligatory *nokoto* with the accusative particle can be replaced by *nituite* ‘about.’

(74) Taro-ga Hanako- {**nokoto-o** / **nituite**} hanasi-teiru.

Taro-Nom Hanako-**NOKOTO-Acc** / **about** talk-Prs

‘Taro is talking about Hanako’

Here, *nituite* corresponds to ‘about,’ ‘as to,’ and ‘with regard to’ in English. Interestingly, according to the hypothesis proposed by Pensado (1995), the Spanish DO marker has its origin in the Latin *ad*, which means ‘with regard to’ or

<sup>27</sup> As a reviewer mentions, my argument is implicitly based on the premise that DO markers are essential for the syntactic computation, although some languages do not have DOM systems. I will leave this matter for future research.

<sup>28</sup> In the context of DOM, as I have already presented the Spanish case study in section 3.1, topicality in object nouns is a significant factor to decide whether a DO marker is attached to an object (see Bossing (1985), Laca (1995), Von Heusinger and Kaiser (2003, 2005), Leonetti (2004), Von Heusinger (2008), Iemmolo (2010), Dalrymple and Nikolaeva (2011), Melis (2018), Onea and Mardale (2020), among many others).

‘as to,’ and this hypothesis has been widely accepted in the studies of Spanish DOM (Torrego Salcedo (1999), Leonetti (2004), Iemmolo (2010) among others). If optional *nokoto* derives from obligatory *nokoto*, we can provide a further commonality between the Spanish and Japanese DO markers in that both of them have their origins as markers related to topic.

Next, nouns with obligatory *nokoto* yield a specific interpretation in the same way as the ones with optional *nokoto*. Consider the following example.

- (75) Taro-ga   gakusei-**no-koto**-o   hanasi-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom   student-**Gen-thing**-Acc   talk-Prs  
 ‘Taro is talking about a student.’

Here, *gakusei* ‘student’ with obligatory *nokoto* must be interpreted in a specific reading. This means that obligatory *nokoto* possesses a characteristic of compelling a specific interpretation of the noun, which I take to the claim that the optional *nokoto* has inherited the semantic constrain.

Finally, it is noteworthy that obligatory *nokoto* appears in the prolepsis construction in Japanese.<sup>29</sup> Consider the following example.

- (76) Taro-ga   Hanako<sub>i</sub>-**no-koto**-o   [pro<sub>i</sub> tensai-da]-to                   omot-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom   Hanako-**Gen-thing**-Acc   genious-Cop.Prs-Comp think-Prs  
 ‘Taro thinks about Hanako<sub>i</sub> that she<sub>i</sub> is genious.’

Here, *Hanako-nokoto* is in the matrix object position and the coindexed *pro* occupies the embedded subject position. That the *nokoto* here can be replaced by *nituite* as in (77) indicates that it is an obligatory type.<sup>30</sup>

- (77) Taro-ga   Hanako<sub>i</sub>-**nituite**   [pro<sub>i</sub> tensai-da]-to                   omo-teiru.  
 Taro-Nom   Hanako-**about**                   genious-Cop.Prs-Comp   think-Prs  
 ‘Taro thinks about Hanako<sub>i</sub> that she<sub>i</sub> is genious.’

As for the prolepsis constructions, Mihara (1994) and Takano (2003) state that “aboutness” relation (Reinhart (1981)) is established between the matrix object and the embedded clause. Following Laca (1987), Leonetti (2004) proposes that the morpheme *a* in Modern Spanish functions as a topic marker in the aboutness sense, i.e., as an anchor for new assertion. Namely, both Japanese *nokoto* and Spanish *a* are morphemes relevant not only to direct object marking but also to topic marking.<sup>31</sup>

To sum up the discussion so far, I have claimed that optional *nokoto* in Modern Japanese is replacing the canonical accusative case particle *o*, which is in the final stage in the grammaticalization cycle. Given that DO markers typically is derived from adpositions, since optional *nokoto* behaves like a postposition in noun phrases, we can conclude that it has been incorporated into the Japanese grammar relatively recently. Then, I have argued that optional *nokoto* has been selected as a new DO marker on the ground that obligatory *nokoto* has appropriate characteristics to be that candidate. To be more specific, obligatory *nokoto* exhibits the relevant features to topicality/specificity. Most important of all is that *nokoto* in Japanese and *a* in Spanish share a number of key features, suggesting that they should be classified into the same category.

<sup>29</sup> The prolepsis construction in Japanese is also called the Major Object construction. See Saito (1983), Hoji (1991), Mihara (1994), Oka (1998), Takano (2003), among others.

<sup>30</sup> As I mentioned earlier in footnote 10, *nokoto* in (76) is viewed as the obligatory type on the basis of the replacement test.

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Onea and Mardale (2020) claim that DO marker *pe* in Romanian has its roots in the usage of aboutness topic, like *nokoto* in (76).

Recall now that I presented three apparent problems in (45), repeated here as (78).

- (78) a. Why does optional *nokoto* always appears optionally?  
b. Why does Japanese possess the extra object marker in spite of the fact the language has a canonical accusative particle?  
c. Why does optional *nokoto* behaves as postpositions?

If my discussion is on the right track, all these questions are explainable. The optionality of *nokoto* in (78a) is based on the assumption that optional *nokoto* is not yet fully grammaticalized as a DO marker; that optional *nokoto* behaves as a postposition is a clear indication that it is in the first stage in the general grammaticalization cycle of DOM. In other word, the status of optional *nokoto* regarding (78c) is no longer problematic even if the standard DO markers occupy the head of KP; instead it is one piece of empirical evidence that Japanese have incorporated a new DO marker. (78b) is also answered by my proposal that Japanese is a DOM language, and the early stage and the final stage of DOM co-exist in the language temporarily. Now, we can be fairly certain that optional *nokoto* is a DO marker.

#### 4 The Motivation for Incorporating a DO Marker

The main concern of this section is the motivation for languages to incorporate DOM to the grammar system. If the standard Modern Japanese has attempted to incorporate a new DO marker into the grammar, one might wonder what makes the Japanese grammar system do so. Even though many cycles of grammaticalizations can be observed in a wide variety of phenomena, the motivation for them should be accounted for.<sup>32</sup> Regarding this issue, I would like to propose an explanation in light of de Hoop and Malchukov's (2008) case-marking strategy. The hypothesis mentions that two basic functions of case marking can be distinguished, the identifying function and the distinguishing one: while the former encodes internal properties of the arguments, the latter crucially depends on the relation between the arguments, as in (79) and (80), respectively. General constraints imposed by the two functions can be formulated as follows:

(79) IDENTIFY

Encode internal argument properties.

(De Hoop and Malchukov (2008: 568))

(80) DISTINGUISHABILITY

The two arguments of a transitive clause should be distinguishable. (De Hoop and Malchukov (2008: 570))

In orthographic transitive constructions, the object is less animate/definite than the subject (Aissen 2003). Therefore, if the object is animate/definite, it is *marked* (as an object) and as a result is likely to be case-marked. In other words, in cases where the unmarkedness is violated, the identifying function in (79) comes into play, so that marking is done on object in line with (79).<sup>33</sup> The important point here is that (79) is a strategy related to internal arguments and has nothing to do with external arguments: identifying marking is motivated by the properties of internal arguments. On the other hand, the distinguishing strategy is a more specific strategy that is used for distinguishing the two core arguments of a transitive clause, that is, the subject and the object.

Given the discussion above, I propose the following motivation for DOM to be incorporated within the grammar of a language.

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<sup>32</sup> I thank Chizuru Nakao for bringing my attention to this point.

<sup>33</sup> De Hoop and Malchukov (2008:567) notes that there is much more variation in the patterns of differential subject marking found cross-linguistically. The discussion here is limited to object case marking.

(81) The early stage in DOM

A DO marker appears when the identifying function is activated in a language, and the language begins to show DOM.

This hypothesis means that languages start to incorporate DOM into the grammar due to the function in (79).<sup>34</sup> When a DO marker occurs in a language, the object becomes morphologically and phonologically explicit, and as a result can be easily distinguished from the subject. In other words, it follows that the distinguishing function, at least in DOM, is merely a result of the principle in (79) at work. Then, I propose that after the incorporation of a DO marker within a language grammar that language undergoes the following stage.

(82) The middle stage in DOM

The DO marker gradually loses the identifying function through language change. In this stage, more nouns are subject to DOM than in the earlier stage.

As we have seen a diachronic change in DOM in section 3, nouns involved in DOM gradually start to be marked by a DO marker regardless of their semantic characteristics, meaning that the DO marker gradually loses its identifying function by undergoing language change. In other words, as a DO marker undergoes language change, it becomes a “mature” case marker for the distinguishing function. As an endpoint of language change, I offer the following suggestions.

(83) The final stage in DOM

Through further grammatical changes, the DO marker completely loses its identifying function and becomes a unified case marker that acts only as a distinguishing function.

Japanese is an empirical case of a language that has undergone the grammatical changes from (81) to (83) and is about to repeat the sequence once again. Under the current analysis, it follows that the canonical accusative marker in Modern standard Japanese has completely lost their identifying function through language change and has only a distinguishing function, so that it is now difficult to express saliencies of the internal argument overtly. Therefore, Japanese is motivated to incorporate a marking element with an identifying function into its grammar and has chosen

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<sup>34</sup> With regard to the relation between a DO marker and internal arguments, it may be worth pointing that the DO marker in Spanish is homophonous with a dative case marker. Consider the following examples.

(i) Spanish

Yo le doy el libro a la mujer.

I cl.Dat give the book **Dat** the woman

‘I give the woman the book.’

(Bárány (2018:(1c)))

Interestingly, the occurrence of optional *nokoto* is also not limited to ordinal objects. It can appear with nominative objects, as illustrated in (ii).

(ii) Japanese

Taro-ga Hanako-**nokoto**-ga suki-da.

Taro-Nom Hanako-**NOKOTO**-Nom fond-Cop

‘Taro is fond of Hanako’

These facts may imply that DO markers bear some relation to the nature of internal arguments.

*nokoto* as a candidate.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

In this work, by comparing *nokoto* in Japanese with the DO marker *a* in Spanish, I have demonstrated that it is a type of DO marker. Nouns that allow *nokoto* to follow are, like nouns that are accompanied by the DO marker in Spanish, are closely related to the scales of Animacy and Definiteness. This parallelism naturally makes it plausible that *nokoto* is classified in the same category as DO markers. Based on the diachronic variation of the Spanish DO marker, I have argued that the Japanese traditional accusative marker *o* is in the final stage in the cycle of linguistic change as DOM. Japanese has at some stage chosen *nokoto* as the successor to that DOM cycle. I have also proposed that the motivation for incorporating DOM into the grammar is the universal human language system's principle of encoding internal arguments. I hope that the discussion in this paper has shed a light on the controversy, facilitating future research on the Japanese case system and Modern Japanese will bring new innovations in DOM research.

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<sup>35</sup> There is a remaining issue as to why the identifying function was activated in spite of the fact that the Japanese accusative case marker has not completely disappeared. This may be related to the fact that Japanese frequently allows the accusative marker to drop especially in the spoken language.

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