

# ON THE DELETION OF ACCUSATIVE CASE MARKERS IN JAPANESE\*

*Hiroshi Minashima*

*Abstract.* The Japanese accusative case marker *o* cannot be deleted arbitrarily; rather, it seems that the deletion of *o*, that is, the use of ZERO, is governed by certain factors. For some languages, it is claimed that both animacy and definiteness play an important role in the accusative case marking system. For example, NPs that are low in animacy and definiteness tend to drop accusative markers. The purpose of the present paper is to show that NPs with ZERO are low in both animacy and definiteness in Japanese.

## 1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the deletion of the accusative case marker *o* in Japanese. The accusative case marker *o*, which is attached to a noun, is used to indicate that the noun is the direct object of the transitive verb.

- (1) Hitoshi-ga Daisaku-o koroshita.  
Hitoshi-SUB Daisaku-ACC kill: PAST  
'Hitoshi killed Daisaku.'

The accusative case marker *o* is often deleted, especially in colloquial speech.<sup>1</sup>

- (2) a. Daigishi-ni natta tsumoride, gangan  
representative-DAT became pretend eagerly  
osake-o/ZERO nonde yo.  
sake-ACC/ZERO drink EMP  
'Drink sake as if you were a Representative.'  
b. Ooi-san, dokode furansugo-o/ZERO benkyooshita no.  
Ooi-HON where French-ACC/ZERO study: PAST Q  
'Where did you learn French, Mr. Ooi?'

\* I am indebted to Christer Platzack and the anonymous referee from *Studia Linguistica* for their valuable suggestions and comments. I am also indebted my colleague at Fukui University, Bern Mulvey, for correcting my English. Finally, I would like to thank Katsumi Matsumoto for valuable advice on an earlier version of the paper. Responsibility for any surviving errors rests entirely upon the author. Abbreviations: ABS: Absolutive, ACC: Accusative, CLS: Classifier, COMP: Complementizer, COP: Copula, DAT: Dative, DEF: Definite, EMP: Empathic, ERG: Ergative, GEN: Genitive, HON: Honorific, IND: Indefinite, INT: Interjection, LOC: Locative, NEG: Negation, NOM: Nominative, O: Object, P: Patient, S: Subject, SG: Singular, SUB: Subject, TOP: Topic, Q: Interrogative particle

<sup>1</sup> ZERO is used for the deleted accusative case marker in Japanese and FULL for the undeleted one.

In some cases, however, *o* cannot be deleted freely or cannot be deleted at all.

- (3) Kyoo-wa Takeshi-o/?ZERO yobidashite asonjimau ka.  
today-TOP Takeshi-ACC/?ZERO call out will play Q  
'Shall we call Takeshi and go out with him today?'
- (4) Kimino jugyoo-ga kibishi sugiru, kimi-o/\*ZERO tenkin saserotte  
your class-SUB severe too you-ACC/\*ZERO make transfer  
denwa-ga hishobu dano jinjibu  
telephone-SUB secretarial section and personnel section  
dano-ni haitteiru rashii zo.  
and-DAT come seem EMP  
'Do you know that someone called the secretarial and personnel  
section to require your transfer since you are too demanding?'

From the examples above, it seems that the accusative case marker *o* is not deleted arbitrarily. In other words, it seems that the deletion of *o*, that is, the use of ZERO, is determined by certain factors.

In previous studies, researchers in the field of Japanese linguistics proposed some factors that govern the use of ZERO. The purpose of the present paper is, therefore, to discuss the two factors that would best account for the deletion of the accusative case marker in Japanese colloquial speech:

- (i) Animacy: NPs with ZERO are low in animacy.
- (ii) Definiteness: NPs with ZERO are low in definiteness.

I collected data from Japanese colloquial speech because the Japanese accusative case marker is more frequently deleted in colloquial speech than in literary language (Sakuma & Motofuji 1980:209). The data cited in the paper was collected from conversations in Japanese novels and comics.

The remainder of this paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 reviews major previous studies. Section 3 introduces 'Silverstein's animacy hierarchy,' which seems to be reflected in the deletion of the accusative marker in Japanese. Section 4 shows how animacy and definiteness can affect the use of accusative case markers in some languages of the world. Section 5 and 6 show, with statistical data, how animacy and definiteness can affect the use of the accusative case marker in Japanese.

## **2. Previous studies**

Previous studies that attempt to explain the use of ZERO can be classified into five categories. Firstly, the phonological explanation: Tsutsui (1984) states that ZERO is not natural for 'monosyllabic' objects. Mori & Givón (1987) claim that the larger the NP, the less frequently ZERO occurs.

Secondly, the morphological explanation: Watanabe (1971:171) claims that since the relationship that exists among logical cases – nominative, accusative and dative – is self-evident, the Japanese accusative case marker *o* is deleted, and its deletion will cause no confusion in communication. Thirdly, the syntactic explanation: According to Tsutsui (1984), Saito (1985), Watanabe (1986), Mori & Givón (1987), and Matsuda (1996), ZERO often occurs when the object NP is followed by the predicate of the sentence and Niwa (1989:42) claims that if an NP that is low in topicality occurs in the posterior position of a sentence, the Japanese accusative case marker is likely to be deleted. Fourthly, the pragmatic explanation: Masunaga (1988:147) claims that the Japanese accusative case marker *o* in ‘de-emphasized’ or ‘defocused’ NPs tends to be deleted, and Fujii & Ono (2000) state that *o* is used when the information indicated by the direct object NP is salient in the discourse, that is, ZERO tends to be used when the direct object NP does not indicate the discourse topic. Fifthly, the stylistic explanation: Alfonso (1966: 1198) claims that in familiar speech, especially in short expressions, the Japanese accusative case marker *o* is often omitted. Suzuki (1972:220) claims that *o* in a sentence is often deleted to make a stylistic difference between the corresponding sentence with the full accusative case marker. Sakuma & Motofuji (1980:209) state, like Alfonso (1966), that Japanese case particles, including *o*, are often deleted in informal conversations. According to Tsutsui (1984), Mori & Givón (1987), and Matsuda (1996), ZERO occurs more often in informal rather than formal speech.

Comparable statistics for the pragmatic factor, defocused (de-emphasized) NPs with ZERO, is provided below:

**Table 1.** Defocused NPs with ZERO.

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Focused	212	763	975	21.74
Defocused	231	847	1078	21.42

d.f.=1, t=0.030023, p=0.8624

Table 1 shows that there is no significant tendency for focused and defocused NPs to occur with ZERO. Comparative statistics for the syntactic factor is not provided here since Niwa (1989) does not clearly define the factor ‘posterior position of a sentence.’

As far as the author knows, it seems that there have been no explanations in terms of animacy and definiteness of NPs.

### 3. Animacy hierarchy

It is said that many languages in the world can be classified into two types according to their case marking system: (a) accusative languages, and (b)



This hierarchy shows that NPs with high animacy tend to show accusative type case marking, while NPs with lower animacy tend to show ergative type case marking.

According to the hierarchy, we might hypothesize that in Japanese, an accusative type language,<sup>3</sup> NPs in the higher position, that is, NPs that are high in animacy, tend to show accusative type case marking (with low percentage of ZERO) and NPs in the lower position, that is, NPs that are low in animacy tend to show ergative type case marking (with high percentage of ZERO):

- (6) Percentage of NPs with ZERO expected:  
 Inanimate noun > Animal noun > Human noun > Proper noun >  
 Personal pronoun [3rd person > 1st person > 2nd person]

There is great possibility that Silverstein's hierarchy is reflected in the deletion of the accusative case marker in Japanese since he claims that 'animacy' plays an important role in using unmarked direct objects, that is, ZERO.

#### 4. Animacy and definiteness that affect the use of accusative case marking

##### 4.1. *Phenomena in which animacy affects*

In section 3, we have suggested that animacy in an NP might play an important role in using ZERO in Japanese. However, the restriction of accusative marking to nouns that are high in animacy is very widespread across the languages of the world.

Even English provides relevant data here, since it has a nominative–accusative distinction with many pronouns, for example, *I* vs. *me*, whereas it does not have any comparative distinction for other noun phrases. A particularly clear set of instances is provided by the Slavonic languages, where animacy is one of the key factors determining whether a noun phrase will have a separate accusative case or not. In Russian, for instance, masculine singular nouns of the declension (Ia) have a separate

- 
- b. transitive:  
 Puer            puellam amat.  
 boy-NOM   girl-ACC loves  
 'The boy loves the girl.'

Generally, in ergative languages, absolutive has an unmarked case marking, zero and ergative are marked, while in accusative languages, nominative has unmarked case marking, zero and accusative marked (Dixon 1979:71, 1987:3) in the absolutive case.

<sup>3</sup> Japanese is an accusative type language since it has an accusative case marking system; {S=A} ≠ {O}. And the subject in Japanese compound sentences, like in other accusative languages, is the target of co-NP deletion. The subject of Japanese transitive and intransitive sentences, however, does not have zero case marker, although the case marker is unmarked in terms of markedness.

accusative case (with the ending *-a*) if animate, but not otherwise (Comrie 1981:125):

- (7) a. Ja videl mal'čik-a/begemot-a.  
       'I saw the boy/hippopotamus.' [Animate]  
       b. Ja videl dub/stol.  
       'I saw the oak/table.' [Inanimate]

Such examples from Russian are not always relevant to a discussion of the accusative case marking in Japanese. However, the interesting point here is that Russian NPs that are high in animacy obligatorily take an accusative case marker, while Japanese NPs that are high in animacy tend to take an accusative case marker, both of which seem to be governed by the same parameter, animacy.

#### 4.2. *Phenomena in which definiteness affects*

In some languages not only animacy but also definiteness plays an important role in accusative case marker usage. For example, in Hindi, a human direct object takes the accusative postposition *ko*, which is used for both definite and indefinite nouns. On the other hand, an indefinite inanimate direct object does not usually take *ko* but a definite inanimate direct object usually does (Comrie 1981:126).

- (8) a. Aurat bacce ko bulā rahī hai.  
       woman child ACC calling PROGRESSIVE is  
       'The woman is calling the/a child.'  
       b. ?Aurat baccā bulā rahī hai.  
       c. Un patrō ko paṛhie.  
       those letters ACC read-POLITE  
       'Please read those letters.'  
       d. Ye patr paṛhie.  
       these letters read-POLITE  
       'Please read these letters.'  
       e. Patr likhie.  
       letters write-POLITE  
       'Write letters please.'

A somewhat similar situation is observed in Spanish, in connection with the use of *a* to mark certain direct objects. Normally, this preposition is only used for human direct objects, but such objects must moreover be high in definiteness: in particular, human objects that are non-specific occur without the preposition (Comrie 1981:126):

- (9) El director busca el carro/al empleado/a un empleado/un empleado.  
       'The manager is looking for the car/the clerk/a (certain) clerk/a clerk.'

On the other hand, in some languages, definiteness only is the determining factor in using the accusative case marker with direct objects. For example, in Turkish, only definite direct objects take the special accusative case suffix *-i* (or its vowel harmony variants), all other direct objects being of the same suffixless form as is used for subjects (Comrie 1981:125):

- (10) a. Hasan öküz-ü aldı.  
 Hasan ox-ACC bought  
 'Hasan bought the ox.'  
 b. Hasan bir öküz-ü aldı.  
 Hasan a ox bought  
 'Hasan bought an ox.'

In Persian, the suffix *-rā* is used to indicate definite direct objects (Comrie 1981:125):

- (11) a. Hasan ketāb-rā دید.  
 Hasan book -ACC saw  
 'Hasan saw the book.'  
 b. Hasan yek ketāb دید.  
 Hasan a book saw  
 'Hasan saw a book.'

The examples above suggest that it is necessary to take definiteness as well as animacy into consideration in analyzing Japanese accusative case marking. In the next section, we will examine how animacy and definiteness can affect the morphological marking of accusatives in Japanese.

## 5. Animacy that affects the use of ZERO

### 5.1. *Animacy*

In section 4, we have seen that animacy of an NP often plays an important role in using accusative markers in some languages. In this section, by showing statistical data, we will examine how animacy affects the use of ZERO in Japanese. The data was collected from 2,053 utterances in Japanese novels and comic books. The sources are listed in the references.

### 5.2. *Personal pronouns*

Japanese personal pronouns have many variants, which should be distinguished according to socio-linguistic factors. For example, the 1st person pronoun *watakushi* is far more polite than *ore*.

- (i) 1st person pronouns: *watakushi, watashi, boku, ore, jibun* . . .
  - (ii) 2nd person pronouns: *anata, anta, kimi, omae, kisama* . . .
  - (iii) 3rd person pronouns: *kare, kanojo, sono hito, yatsu, aitsu, are* . . .
- (12) a. . . .chichi-wa [watashi-o]<sub>1st person</sub> isha-ni suru ka, aruiwa...  
 father-TOP I-ACC doctor-DAT make or, rather  
 ‘. . . my father wanted me to be a doctor, or . . .’
- b. . . .hitoridachishita [kimi-o]<sub>2nd person</sub> mitara, kitto  
 independent you-ACC see surely  
 yorokondekudasaru yo.  
 will be glad EMP  
 ‘. . . your father will surely be glad to see you independent of him.’
- c. Boku mo, [kare-o]<sub>3rd person</sub> urayamashii to omoukoto  
 I also he-ACC jealous COMP to think  
 arimasu yo.  
 there is EMP  
 ‘I sometimes envy him, too.’
- d. E, sensei, [aitsu-ZERO]<sub>3rd person</sub> hottoku no.  
 INT teacherhe-ZERO leave Q  
 ‘Are you going to leave him alone, ma’am?’

The number of personal pronouns was rather small, compared to other noun phrases. Moreover, in my data the number of personal pronoun with ZERO is only one. The percentage of personal pronouns with ZERO is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Personal pronouns with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
1st person	0	36	36	0.00
2nd person	0	26	26	0.00
3rd person	1	53	54	1.85
Personal pronoun	1	115	116	0.86

### 5.3. Proper nouns

The number of proper nouns itself is larger than that of personal pronouns, however, the percentage of proper nouns with ZERO is quite low – as is shown in Table 3.

- (13) a. Toshimi, anta, kyabin-o yarinagara, [Yamada-kun-o]  
 Toshimi you cabin-ACC doing Yamada-HON-ACC  
 tetsudatte choudai.  
 help please  
 ‘Toshimi, will you help Yamada as you do your jobs in the cabin?’

- b. [Yamaoka-san-ZERO] omikakeshimasen deshita?  
 Yamaoka-HON-ZERO see:PAST:NEG COP:PAST  
 ‘Haven’t you seen Mr. Yamaoka?’

**Table 3.** Proper nouns with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Proper noun	5	100	105	4.76

#### 5.4. *Human nouns*

The number of nouns denoting humans itself is a little larger than that of proper nouns but the percentage of ‘human nouns’ with ZERO is a little higher than that of proper nouns. The percentage of ‘human nouns’ with ZERO is shown in Table 4.

- (14) a. Kare-wa [geijutsuka-o] sodateruno-ga umainda.  
 he-TOP artist-ACC to raise-SUB be good at  
 ‘He is good at training an artist.’  
 b. Senkokuno [onna-ZERO] minakatta desu ka?  
 previous woman-ACC see: NEG:PAST COP Q  
 ‘Haven’t you seen the woman in question?’

**Table 4.** Human nouns with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Human noun	21	136	157	13.38

#### 5.5. *Animal nouns*

The number of nouns denoting animals is rather small. The percentage of ‘animal nouns’ with ZERO is shown in Table 5.

- (15) a. Jaa kikuga, [moudouken-o] kinai-ni mochikomu baai,  
 then ask guide dog-ACC cabin-DAT bring in case  
 inu-no taijuu-wa keiryuu-no taishou-ni naru kane.  
 dog-GEN weight-TOP measure-GEN object-DAT become Q  
 ‘Well, let me ask you, when you are going to bring a guide dog  
 into the cabin, is its weight taken into account?’  
 b. Hou, [semi-ZERO] kattemoratta noka.  
 INT cicada-ZERO buy and given Q  
 ‘Hmm, did someone give you the cicada?’

**Table 5.** Animal nouns with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Animal noun	15	78	93	16.13

5.6. *Inanimate nouns*

The number of 'inanimate nouns' is the largest of all the noun phrases. The percentage of inanimate nouns with ZERO is shown in Table 6.

- (16) a. *Mazu oyayubi to hitosashiyubi de [fooku-o] motsu.*  
 First thumb and index finger with fork-ACC have  
 'First, hold the fork with your thumb and index finger.'  
 b. *Dakedo, [dorai ais-u] irete chanto hokanshiteokimasu.*  
 but dry ice-ACC put properly keep and put  
 'However, I would put dry ice in it to keep that cold.'  
 c. *Nanda, [seifuku-ZERO] kite nai noka.*  
 INT uniform-ZERO wear NEG Q  
 'Why, you are not in your uniform now.'  
 d. *Omatsuri-no toki, [omikoshi-ZERO] katsugimasu ka.*  
 festival-GEN time mikoshi-ZERO shoulder Q  
 'Do you carry a *mikoshi* in the festival?'

**Table 6.** Inanimate nouns with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Inanimate noun	401	1181	1582	25.35

The results from Table 2 through 6 are shown together in Table 7 below.

**Table 7.** NPs with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Personal pronoun	1	115	116	0.86
Proper noun	5	100	105	4.76
Human noun	21	136	157	13.38
Animal noun	15	78	93	16.13
Inanimate noun	401	1181	1582	25.35

d.f.=4, t=68.123031, p<0.0001

The results in Table 7 can be shown in a linear order as follows:

## (17) Percentage of NPs with ZERO:

Inanimate noun (25.35%) > Animal noun (16.13%) > Human noun (13.38%) > Proper noun (4.76%) > Personal pronoun (0.86%) [3rd person (1.85%) > 2nd person (0.00%) = 1st person (0.00%)]

The result is almost the one expected in (6) in section 3 and we can conclude as follows:

## (18) NPs that are low in animacy tend to occur with ZERO, while NPs that are high in animacy tend to occur with FULL.

## 6. Definiteness that affects the use of ZERO

### 6.1. *Definiteness*

In this section, we will examine how definiteness affects the use of the accusative case marker in Japanese. In Japanese, unlike English, the category of definiteness is not clearly shown by definite and indefinite articles since they are lacking in the language. Instead, context and demonstratives largely determine the definiteness of NPs. In this paper, we will define a definite NP as follows:<sup>4</sup>

## (19) a noun phrase that refers to an entity or group of entities whose identity is presumably known to addressee

### 6.2. *Definiteness in personal pronouns and proper nouns*

Japanese personal pronouns and proper nouns are essentially definite, in other words, there are no indefinite personal pronouns and proper nouns. Therefore, examples with personal pronouns and proper nouns are not shown here. Only the percentage of personal pronouns and proper nouns with ZERO is shown in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Personal pronouns and proper nouns with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
1st person	0	36	36	0.00
2nd person	0	26	26	0.00
3rd person	1	53	54	1.85
Personal pronoun	1	115	116	0.86
Proper noun	5	100	105	4.76

<sup>4</sup> See Kreidler (1998:299).

6.3. *Definiteness in human nouns*

Both definite and indefinite ‘human nouns’ can take ZERO. The percentage of definite and indefinite ‘human nouns’ with ZERO is shown in Table 9.

- (20) a. Mata nanika okosuto komaru node, [ano onna-o]<sub>DEF</sub>  
 again something cause in trouble as that woman-ACC  
 ekonomii-no saikoubu-ni utsusou to omoundesu yo.  
 economy-GEN last seat-DAT move COMP think EMP  
 ‘I think I will make her sit in the last seat in economy class, just in case.’
- b. [Senkokuno onna-ZERO]<sub>DEF</sub> minakatta desu ka.  
 previous woman-ZERO see:NEG:PAST COP Q  
 ‘Have you seen the woman in question?’
- (21) a. Konogoro, mitsuyu-ni-wa [onna-o]<sub>IND</sub> tsukaun  
 these days smuggling-DAT-TOP woman-ACC use  
 datte yo.  
 COP EMP  
 ‘Do you know some smugglers are women these days?’
- b. Watashi, gakkou-de ochiken-ni itandesu  
 I school-LOC comic storytelling club-LOC was  
 kedone, [obousan-ZERO]<sub>IND</sub> miruto, doushitemo  
 then Buddhist priest-ZERO see anyway  
 ‘jugemu’ tte rakugo, omoidashichaun desu yone.  
 ‘jugemu’ COMP comic-story remember COP EMP  
 ‘When I was at college, I was a member of the comic storytelling club, so Buddhist priests always remind me of a comic story “jugemu”.’

**Table 9.** Definite and indefinite human nouns with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Definite	13	104	117	11.11
Indefinite	8	32	40	20.00

6.4. *Definiteness in animal nouns*

Both definite and indefinite ‘animal nouns’ can take ZERO. The percentage of definite and indefinite ‘animal nouns’ with ZERO is shown in Table 10.

- (22) a. Shirimasen kedo, chuunen-no josei-no takushii de,  
 know-NEG but middle-aged female-GEN taxi COP  
 shikamo tonari-ni [inu-o]<sub>DEF</sub> nosete irundesu.  
 also next-DAT dog-ACC let ride there is  
 ‘I don’t remember exactly, but the taxi driver is a middle-aged  
 woman with a dog next to her.’
- b. Ukkari [konna kuso hirame-ZERO]<sub>DEF</sub> okyakusan-ni  
 carelessly such terrible flatfish-ZERO guest-DAT  
 dashichimattara dou sunda yo, ee!!  
 have served how do EMP INT  
 ‘What would we do if we carelessly served such terrible flatfish to  
 our guests, eh?’
- (23) a. Pari-ni onna-no takushii-wa nanbyaku-dai to  
 Paris-LOC female-GEN taxi-TOP hundreds-CLS COMP  
 imasuyo. [Inu-o]<sub>IND</sub> noseteru takushii mo onajide,  
 there is dog-ACC let ride taxi also same  
 nanbyaku-dai ja kicanaikamosirenai na.  
 hundreds-CLS then work:NEG:maybe EMP  
 ‘There are hundreds of women taxi drivers in Paris. There are  
 also hundreds of taxis with a dog in the side seat and I can’t tell  
 you the exact number, may be more than a thousand.’
- b. Kyaa, atashi [sakana-ZERO]<sub>IND</sub> tsuru-no hajimete nandesuu!!  
 INT I fish-ZERO to fish-GEN first COP  
 ‘Wow, it’s the first time I have fished for a fish!’

**Table 10.** Definite and indefinite animal noun with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Definite	4	58	62	6.45
Indefinite	11	20	31	35.48

### 6.5. *Definiteness in inanimate nouns*

Both definite and indefinite ‘inanimate nouns’ can take ZERO. The percentage of definite and indefinite ‘inanimate nouns’ with ZERO is shown in Table 11.

- (24) a. [Kono wagon-o]<sub>DEF</sub> kumitateta-no-wa, dare da  
 this wagon-ACC set up:PAST-GEN-TOP who COP  
 ‘Who set up the wagon?’
- b. [Sono ryoken-ZERO]<sub>DEF</sub> kaeshite yo.  
 that passport-ZERO get back EMP  
 ‘Get the passport back to me.’

- (25) a. Mai asa [kagami-o]<sub>IND</sub> mitara, kanarazu warattemi-ro.  
 Every morning mirror-ACC see then surely smile and see  
 ‘Every morning, every time you look at a mirror, try to smile.’  
 b. Ore, ofukuro-ni [kane-ZERO]<sub>IND</sub> morattekitanda.  
 I mom-DAT money-ZERO get and came  
 ‘I’ve got some money from my mom.’

**Table 11.** Definite and indefinite inanimate nouns with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Definite	222	1006	1228	18.08
Indefinite	179	175	354	50.56

The results from Table 8 through 11 are shown together in Table 12 and 13 below.

**Table 12.** Definite NPs with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Personal pronoun	1	115	116	0.86
Proper noun	5	100	105	4.76
Human noun	13	104	117	11.11
Animal noun	4	58	62	6.54
Inanimate noun	222	1006	1228	18.08

d.f.=4, t=40.771510, p<0.0001

**Table 13.** Indefinite NPs with ZERO

	ZERO	FULL	Total	Percentage
Personal pronoun	*	*	*	*
Proper noun	*	*	*	*
Human noun	8	32	40	20.00
Animal noun	11	20	31	35.48
Inanimate noun	179	175	354	50.56

d.f.=2, t=15.149816, p=0.0005

The examples above show that ZERO occurs with both definite and indefinite NPs. This is what is different from Turkish and Persian whose accusative case markers are obligatorily attached to definite objects. The results from Table 12 and 13 can be shown in a linear order as follows:

- (26) a. Percentage of definite NPs with ZERO:  
 Inanimate noun (18.49%) > Human noun (11.11%) > Animal

- noun (6.54%) > Proper noun (4.76%) Personal pronoun (0.86%)  
 [3rd person (1.85%) > 2nd person (0.00%) = 1st person (0.00%)]
- b. Percentage of indefinite NPs with ZERO:  
 Inanimate noun (50.56%) > Animal noun (35.48%) > Human  
 noun (20.00%)

This shows that there is a great possibility that definiteness plays an important role in using ZERO. From the results in (26), it seems that there are two tendencies towards the use of ZERO:

- (27) a. Indefinite NPs are more likely to occur with ZERO than definite NPs.  
 b. Both definite and indefinite NPs that are low in animacy are likely to occur with ZERO.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined whether or not the animacy and definiteness of an NP can be crucial factors in using ZERO accusative case markers in Japanese. From the observations and statistics above we can conclude as follows:

- (28) a. NPs that are low in animacy tend to occur with ZERO, and NPs that are high in animacy tend to occur with the full accusative case marker; *o*.  
 b. NPs that are low in definiteness (and also in animacy) tend to occur with ZERO.

This paper is not an exhaustive discussion of the deletion of the accusative case marker, that is, the use of ZERO in Japanese. From the viewpoint of linguistic typology, however, we have shown that both animacy and definiteness can be the determining factors when using ZERO.

## References

- ALFONSO, A. 1966. *Japanese language patterns*, vol. 2. Tokyo: Sophia University L.L. Center of Applied Linguistics.
- COMRIE, B. 1978. Ergativity. *Syntactic typology: Studies in the phenomenology of language*, ed. W. P. Lehmann, 329–94. Texas: University of Texas Press.
- COMRIE, B. 1981. *Language universals and linguistic typology*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press.
- DIXON, R.M.W. 1979. Ergativity. *Language* 55, 59–138.
- DIXON, R.M.W. 1987. Studies in ergativity: Introduction. *Lingua* 71, 1–16.
- DIXON, R.M.W. & BLAKE, B.J. eds. 1979. *Handbook of Australian languages*, vol. 1. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- FUJII, N. & ONO, T. 2000. The occurrence and non-occurrence of the Japanese direct object marker *o* in conversation. *Studies in Language* 24, 1–39.
- KREIDLER, C.W. 1998. *Introducing English semantics*. London: Routledge.
- MASUNAGA, K. 1988. Case deletion and discourse context. *Papers from the second*

- international workshop on Japanese syntax*, ed. W.J. Poser, 145–56. Tokyo: Center for the Study of Language and Information.
- MATSUDA, K. 1996. Variable zero-marking of (o) in Tokyo Japanese. Ph.D. diss. University of Pennsylvania.
- MORI, T. & GIVÓN, T. 1987. Zero object-marking in colloquial Japanese: The pragmatics of ‘optional deletion’. Ms., U. of Oregon.
- NIWA, T. 1989. Mujosi kaku no kinou: Shudai to kaku to gojun (Function of the zero case: Topic, case and word order). *Kokugo Kokubun (Japanese Language and Literature)* 58, 38–57.
- SAITO, M. 1985. Some asymmetries in Japanese and their theoretical implications. Ph. D. diss., MIT.
- SAKUMA, K. & MOTOFUJI, F.T. 1980. *Advanced spoken Japanese: Tonari no shibafu (Neighbor’s lawn)*. Tokyo: Institute of East Asian Studies.
- SILVERSTEIN, M. 1976. Hierarchy of features and ergativity. *Grammatical categories in Australian languages*, ed. R.M.W. Dixon, 112–71. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- SUZUKI, S. 1972. *Nihongo bunpou keitairon (Japanese grammar and morphology)*. Tokyo: Mugi Shobou.
- TSUTSUI, M. 1984. Particle ellipses in Japanese. Ph.D. diss., U. of Illinois.
- WATANABE, M. 1971. *Kokugo koubunron (Japanese syntax theory)*. Tokyo: Hanawa Shoten.
- WATANABE, Y. 1986. Two kinds of ellipsis in Japanese discourse: A quantitative text study. *Studies in Language* 10, 337–51.

## Data

- AIHARA, K. 1987. *Koujien (Japanese dictionary)*, vol. 1, 2, 3. Tokyo: Shougakkan.
- FUKADA, Y. 1983. *Suchuwaadesu monogatari (Stewardess story)*. Tokyo: Shinchousha.
- HIRAIWA, Y. 1981. *Hana no kage (The shade of flowers)*. Tokyo: Bungei Shunjuu.
- KARIYA, T. & HANASAKI, A. 1985. *Oishimbo (The gourmet)*, vol. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Tokyo: Shougakkan.
- MURAMATSU, E. 1992. *Shikouseijo (Supreme sacred place)*. Tokyo: Fukutake Shoten.
- YUMEMAKURA, B. 1985. *Akumu tenrankai (Exhibition of nightmares)*. Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten.

Received April 12, 2000

Accepted December 21, 2000

Hiroshi Minashima  
Faculty of Education and Regional Studies  
Fukui University  
3–9–1 Bunkyo, Fukui-shi, 910–8507  
Japan  
minasima@edu00.f-edu.fukui-u.ac.jp