

Notes on the (Un)realizability of Subjects in Infinitival Complements to Wager-Class Verbs in English

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<https://doi.org/10.15017/7363537>

出版情報：九大英文学．67，pp.1-14，2025-03-31．九州大学大学院英語学・英文学研究会
バージョン：
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Notes on the (Un)realizability of Subjects in Infinitival Complements to *Wager*-Class Verbs in English*

Nozomi Moritake

1. Introduction

This paper explores the distribution of DPs within infinitival complements to so-called *wager*-class verbs, such as *wager* and *allege*, in English. The syntactic characteristics of *wager*-class verbs have invoked great deal of controversy since Postal's (1974) seminal work. One notable syntactic property is that a lexical subject cannot occupy the subject position of an infinitival clause selected by *wager*-class verbs, as shown in (1) (see, e.g. Postal (1974), Pesetsky (1992), Ura (1993), Bošković (1997), Hasegawa (2003), Nishikawa and Matsumoto (2007), Lasnik (2008), Rezac (2013), Ito (2014), Carstens (2016), Omune (2018)).

- (1) a. *Sue wagered Bill to have won the race. (Pesetsky (1992: 16))
- b. *He alleged Mary to be a pimp. (Postal (1974: 304))

The ungrammaticality of (1) is mitigated when lexical subjects are passivized and displaced to Spec-T in the matrix clause, as exemplified in (2).

- (2) a. Bill was wagered to have won the race. (Pesetsky (1992: 16))
- b. Melvin was alleged to be a pimp. (Postal (1974: 304))

Additionally, *wh*-movement and topicalization can alleviate the ungrammaticality of (1). In other words, A'-movement of lexical subjects results in a grammatical sentence, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) a. Who did they allege to be a pimp? (Postal (1974: 305))
- b. Melvin, he alleged to be a pimp. (Postal (1974: 304))

Moreover, when infinitival subjects are pronominalized, sentences with *wager*-class

verbs become (completely) acceptable, as demonstrated in (4).¹

(4) a. ?We wagered him to be the winner. (Carstens (2016: 13))

b. Mary alleged him to have kissed Jane. (Bošković (1997: 58))

Furthermore, the English expletives, *there* and *it*, can occupy the subject position of the complement to *wager*-class verbs, as evidenced in (5).²

(5) a. John wagered there to have been a stranger in that haunted house.

(Bošković (1997: 77))

b. He acknowledged it to be impossible to square circles.

(Postal (1993: 361))

The aim of this paper is to incorporate the patterns observed above into a broader constraint on the distribution of DPs, proposed by Moritake (2024a, b), and provide a straightforward account of the (un)realizability of DPs in relevant constructions.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: in section 2, I review previous studies on *wager*-class verbs and discuss some problems with them. In section 3, I outline two types of nominal licensing conditions developed by Moritake (2024a, b). Building on Moritake's (2024a, b) proposal, section 4 presents an account for the distribution of DPs in sentences with *wager*-class verbs. Section 5 concludes this paper.

2. Previous Studies and Remaining Problems

Among the previous studies addressing issues related to *wager*-class verbs, Pesetsky (1992) and Bošković (1997) attempt to provide a principled explanation for the ungrammaticality of (1), arguing that *wager*-class verbs are unable to assign accusative Case to infinitival lexical subjects.³ Specifically, Bošković (1997) attributes the ungrammaticality of (1) to the failure of these subjects to satisfy the Case Filter, which was originally proposed by Chomsky (1981).

(6) Case Filter

*NP if NP has phonetic content and has no Case. (Chomsky (1981: 49))

Based on Bošković's (1997) analysis, the ungrammaticality of (1) can be analyzed as resulting from a violation of the Case Filter.

In light of this analysis, Bošković (1997) argues that the examples in (2) are fully acceptable, because the derived subjects (*Bill* in (2a) and *Melvin* in (2b)) can be given nominative Case in Spec-T in the matrix clause, so that they are in conformity with the requirement imposed by the Case Filter.

Bošković (1997) also accounts for the grammaticality of (3a) by drawing on Ura's (1993) analysis. Following Kayne (1983), Ura (1993) proposes that *wh*-phrases can receive Case in an A'-position through *wh*-movement. Leaving the details aside, Bošković (1997) adopts Ura's (1993) argument that in (3a), the *wh*-expression *who* is assigned Case as it moves up to the sentence-initial position, thereby satisfying the Case Filter (see also Pesetsky (1992) for relevant discussion). Following Pesetsky (1992), Ura (1993), and Bošković (1997), the grammaticality of (3b) can be accounted for in a way similar to (3a). Specifically, if *Melvin* undergoes topicalization, an instance of A'-movement, to the sentence-initial position, it becomes possible for *Melvin* to receive Case, thereby fulfilling the Case Filter requirement.

Additionally, Bošković (1997) addresses the grammaticality of examples (4) and (5). It has been assumed in the literature that some DPs can be incorporated into verbs, with the result that incorporated DPs are analyzed as part of verbal heads and lose their nominal properties in the process (Baker (1988), Baker and Vinokurova (2010), and Levin (2015), among others). One implication of this is that incorporated DPs do not require Case licensing in the first place since they are no longer syntactically treated as noun phrases, thereby avoiding a Case Filter violation. Bošković (1997) then postulates that pronouns and expletives in English can undergo incorporation into verbs and become part of verbal heads. As a result, these incorporated elements lose their nominal status, circumventing the Case filter.

One may conclude at this point that previous studies on *wager*-class verbs have successfully captured all the data presented in section 1, eliminating the need for an alternative analysis. However, as pointed out by Postal (1974: 305, fn. 12), lexical subjects in the complements to *wager*-class verbs can be rescued by placing extreme prosodic stress on them. To the best of my knowledge, this phenomenon has rarely been addressed in the literature on *wager*-class verbs, with the exception of Hasegawa

(2003). Notably, Hasegawa (2003) provides empirical evidence supporting Postal’s (1974) observation, as shown in the contrast in (7). The data show that the example is grammatical if and only if *George* is pronounced with extreme stress, which is indicated by capitalization.

(7) a. *Tom alleged George to have perjured himself.

b. Tom alleged GEORGE to have perjured himself. (Hasegawa (2003: 231))

Recall that Pesetsky (1992) and Bošković (1997) argue that *wager*-class verbs are unable to assign Case to infinitival subjects. Based on this, the examples in (7) provide compelling evidence that the Case Filter is insufficient to account for the (un)grammaticality of sentences with *wager*-class verbs, as the infinitival subject *George* does not differ in terms of Case assignment between (7a) and (7b). If this reasoning is on the right track, an alternative analysis may be required to adequately account for the distribution of DPs in infinitival complements to *wager*-class verbs.

3. Alternative Nominal Licensing Conditions

In the preceding section, we saw that the Case Filter, formulated by Chomsky (1981), is not enough to explain the (un)grammaticality of sentences with *wager*-class verbs. It is worthwhile noting here that the Case Filter itself has been criticized as problematic in that it fails to fully capture the distribution of DPs (Marantz (1991), McFadden (2004), Sigurðsson (2012), Levin (2015), and Moritake (2024a, b), among others). For instance, Moritake (2024a, b) points out that the Case Filter is unable to capture the distribution of DPs that are ultimately pronounced with default case. Building on Schütze’s (2001) and McFadden’s (2007) analyses, Moritake (2024a, b) treats default case as morphological case rather than abstract Case. Specifically, Moritake (2024a, b) proposes that DPs are realized with default case when their unvalued Case feature ([*uCase*]) remains unvalued at the Sensorimotor (SM) interface. Moritake (2024b) goes on to argue that the Case Filter incorrectly excludes logical subjects of existential *there*-constructions (LSETs) in English. Following Sobin (2014) and Moritake (2022b, 2023), Moritake (2024b) assumes that [*uCase*] on an LSET remains unvalued in narrow syntax and serves as an instruction for an LSET to

be pronounced with default accusative case.^{4, 5} This is evidenced in example (8), where only accusative-marked LSETs are licensed.

- (8) a. There is only me/*I in the garden. (Sobin (2014: 386))
 b. There is certainly her/*she to consider.
 (Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 462))
 c. *There's I. (Schütze (1997: 136))
 d. There are only us. (López (2007: 212))

This being the case, all existential *there*-constructions in English would be predicted to be ungrammatical under Chomsky's (1981) Case Filter, contrary to the facts, as an LSET is not marked with Case.

Given the discussion so far, Moritake (2024a, b) replaces the Case Filter with two types of nominal licensing conditions outlined in (9).

- (9) Two Types of Nominal Licensing Conditions
 a. At least one [*u*F] [unvalued feature–NM] on multiple occurrences of the same NP must be valued as [*v*F] [valued feature–NM] in order for them to be licensed.
 b. A single occurrence of an NP can be licensed regardless of whether its [*u*F] is valued. (Moritake (2024b: 125))

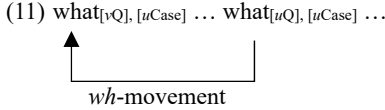
One advantage of this analysis is that DPs pronounced with default case can be licensed in two ways, depending on whether they undergo movement or remain in-situ. On the one hand, if DPs undergo movement in narrow syntax and are realized with default case, one of their [*u*F]s must be valued. On the other hand, if DPs remain in their base-generated positions, they are licensed irrespective of whether their [*u*F] receives a value. As for the existential *there*-construction in English, it is plausible to assume that an LSET occupies its first-merged position (i.e. base-generated position) in cases like those in (8). In this scenario, the LSET can be licensed even if its [*u*Case] remains unvalued, leading to the realization with default accusative case.

Of interest is that *wh*-movement of an LSET is possible, as shown in (10).

- (10) What_i is there *t_i* in the refrigerator? (Aissen (1975: 7))

Suppose that *wh*-expressions inherently bear an unvalued Q feature ([*u*Q]), which can

be valued as a valued Q feature ($[\nu Q]$) through agreement with C that possesses $[\nu Q]$, as suggested by Chomsky (2015). Then, $[uQ]$ on *what* in (10) is expected to be valued as $[\nu Q]$ in Spec-C after forming an agreement relationship with C that bears $[\nu Q]$, as roughly illustrated in (11).



In light of the nominal licensing condition in (9a), Moritake (2024b) concludes that the valuation of $[uQ]$ on the highest occurrence of *what* in (11) is sufficient to license it even though its $[uCase]$ remains unvalued throughout the derivation.

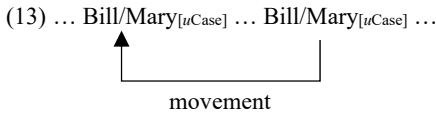
4. Analysis

In this section, adopting Moritake’s (2024a, b) two types of nominal licensing conditions, I provide an analysis for the distribution of subjects appearing in infinitival complements to *wager*-class verbs.

Let us first consider example (1), repeated here as (12), where the presence of *Bill* or *Mary* between the *wager*-class verbs and *to* appears to cause the ungrammaticality.

- (12) a. *Sue wagered Bill to have won the race. (Pesetsky (1992: 16))
 b. *He alleged Mary to be a pimp. (Postal (1974: 304))

Assuming with Pesetsky (1992) and Bošković (1997) that *wager*-class verbs do not have ability to assign Case to infinitival subjects, the ungrammaticality of (12) is reducible to the failure to satisfy the nominal licensing condition in (9a). To be more specific, $[uCase]$ on the infinitival subjects in (12) does not receive a Case value, even though they undergo movement from within vP-internal positions to their surface positions, as demonstrated in (13).

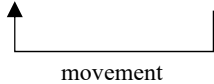


The well-formedness of examples (2)–(5), repeated here as (14)–(17), are

predicted under the present analysis.

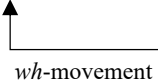
- (14) a. Bill was wagered to have won the race. (Pesetsky (1992: 16))
 b. Melvin was alleged to be a pimp. (Postal (1974: 304))
- (15) a. Who did they allege to be a pimp? (Postal (1974: 305))
 b. Melvin, he alleged to be a pimp. (Postal (1974: 304))
- (16) a. ?We wagered him to be the winner. (Carstens (2016: 13))
 b. Mary alleged him to have kissed Jane. (Bošković (1997: 58))
- (17) a. John wagered there to have been a stranger in that haunted house.
 (Bošković (1997: 77))
 b. He acknowledged it to be impossible to square circles.
 (Postal (1993: 361))

In (14), *Bill* and *Melvin* are raised to Spec-T in the matrix clause, where they are assigned nominative Case, and hence, their [*uCase*] is valued as nominative, as demonstrated in (18).

- (18) ... Bill/Melvin[*Nominative*] ... Bill/Melvin[*uCase*] ...
- 
- movement

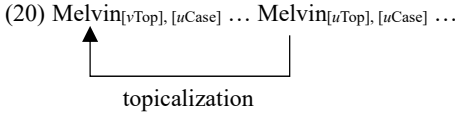
These examples are thus in compliance with the nominal licensing condition in (9a).

As for (15a), I assume that [*uQ*] on *who* can be valued as [*vQ*] after its *wh*-movement to Spec-C in the matrix clause, where it agrees with C possessing [*vQ*], as represented in (19).

- (19) *who*[*vQ*], [*uCase*] ... *who*[*uQ*], [*uCase*] ...
- 
- wh*-movement

Of significance here is that the present analysis differs from the previous analyses presented by Pesetsky (1992), Ura (1993), and Bošković (1997) by discarding Case assignment to *wh*-phrases through *wh*-movement (A'-movement). This assumption is unnecessary under the present analysis, as *wh*-expressions like *who* in (15a) can be licensed through the valuation of [*uQ*] as [*vQ*], even though no value is assigned to their [*uCase*].

The grammaticality of (15b) is given an analysis similar to (15a). Suppose that a phrase that is ultimately interpreted as a topic is introduced into the derivation with an unvalued Topic feature ($[u\text{Top}]$). This feature is valued as a valued Topic feature ($[v\text{Top}]$) as a result of movement to Spec-C and agreement with C, which possesses $[v\text{Top}]$ (Moritake (2024a, b)). If this analysis is on the right track, the grammaticality of (15b) can be explained as follows: $[u\text{Top}]$ on *Melvin* is valued as $[v\text{Top}]$ after topicalization and agreement with C that possesses $[v\text{Top}]$, as illustrated in (20). This satisfies the nominal licensing condition in (9a), although its $[u\text{Case}]$ remains unvalued.



Based on Bošković’s (1997) proposal, the grammaticality of (16) and (17) is also accounted for under the current analysis. I follow Bošković (1997) in assuming that pronouns and the expletives in English can undergo incorporation into verbs, thus avoiding the necessity of licensing nominals. Therefore, *him*, *there*, and *it* in (16) and (17) lose their nominal status after incorporation into the verbs, and this incorporation itself has the ameliorating effects on sentences with *wager*-class verbs in English.

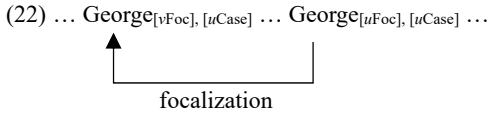
The (un)grammaticality of (7), repeated here as (21), can also be accommodated under the current analysis by adopting Moritake’s (2024a, b) approach.

(21) a. *Tom alleged George to have perjured himself.

b. Tom alleged GEORGE to have perjured himself. (Hasegawa (2003: 231))

The contrast in examples (21) is highly significant because it arguably casts doubt on Pesetsky’s (1992) and Bošković’s (1997) analyses. All other things being equal, it seems likely that a focus interpretation, derived from stress assignment, plays a crucial role in licensing the infinitival subject *George* in (21b). Here, I follow Moritake (2024a, b) in assuming that a phrase ultimately interpreted as a focus is introduced into the derivation with an unvalued Focus feature ($[u\text{Foc}]$), which can be valued as a valued Focus feature ($[v\text{Foc}]$) as a result of focalization and agreement with a head with $[v\text{Foc}]$ (e.g. C). One question that arises is where the valuation of $[u\text{Foc}]$ on

George in (21b) occurs. A hypothesis that emerges is that focalization can occur not only in the CP region but also within v^*P , as suggested by Belletti (2001, 2004), Miyagawa (2013), Maeda (2014), and Moritake (2022a).⁶ Given this hypothesis, although the technical details remain open, [*uFoc*] on *George* in (21b) can be valued as [*vFoc*] as a result of agreement with v^* , which can possess [*vFoc*], as shown in (22).



I propose that the licensing of *George* in (21b) succeeds by virtue of the valuation of its [*uFoc*] as [*vFoc*]. The ungrammaticality of (21a) arises from the failure to license *George*, since no [*uF*] on *George* in (21a), unlike that in (21b), receives a value in the course of the derivation.

To the extent that the analysis presented above is correct, this paper takes a step further toward a comprehensive account for the distribution of subjects in infinitival complements to *wager*-class verbs.

5. Conclusion

This paper addressed the (un)realizability of subjects in infinitival complements to *wager*-class verbs in English from the perspective of nominal licensing. I argued against Pesetsky's (1992) and Bošković's (1997) analyses, noting that their analysis cannot account for the observations made by Postal (1974) and Hasegawa (2003) that focalization of lexical, infinitival subjects in sentences with *wager*-class verbs can rescue the ungrammatical pattern. To address this, I adopted the two types of nominal licensing conditions proposed by Moritake (2024a, b), which can account for the distribution of Case-marked DPs and DPs without Case. I demonstrated that the distribution of infinitival subjects in sentences with *wager*-class verbs can be explained in a principled manner under the current analysis.

Notes

* Parts of this paper appeared in a footnote in Chapter 5 of my doctoral dissertation, submitted

¹ Note that not all researchers share the judgments of (4) with Bošković (1997) and Carstens (2016). Lasnik's (2008) judgment differs from that reported in Bošković (1997) with respect to the availability of a pronominalized subject within the infinitival complement to *allege*, as shown in (i), though Lasnik (2008) points out that many speakers find sentences like those in (i) acceptable.

- Johnson (2024) notes that a pronominalized subject is not tolerated in the infinitival complement to *wager*, as represented in (ii).

- It is then suggested that both *wager* and *allege* display interspeaker variability in allowing a pronominalized subject to be realized in the infinitival complement clause. The reason why there is interspeaker variation in the acceptability of (4), (i), and (ii) is an issue that I leave for future research.

² According to Postal (1993), *acknowledge* falls into *wager*-class verbs, with lexical noun phrases being disallowed in a subject position of an infinitival complement to *acknowledge*, as shown in (ia). In contrast, the ungrammaticality is mitigated by fronting a lexical subject to the sentence-initial position, as exemplified in (ib).

- ³ Following convention, the upper case 'Case' is used when I refer to abstract Case, while the lower case 'case' expresses morphological case.

– 10 –

effect. Although this approach has been adopted in many previous studies, some researchers have argued against it, pointing out that some conceptual and syntactic problems arise from the partitive Case assignment approach (see, e.g. Kuno and Takami (2004) and Moritake (2022b, 2024c)). Therefore, this paper does not pursue the line of analysis presented by Belletti (1988).

⁵ Moritake (2022b, 2023) assumes that an LSET cannot establish a full phi-feature agreement relationship with a probe, resulting in the inability of its [*u*Case] to be valued (see also Chomsky (2001) and Richards (2008) for relevant discussion). Therefore, an LSET is ultimately realized with default accusative case. For detailed discussion, see Moritake (2022b, 2023).

⁶ Another possibility is that focalization takes place within the subordinate clause in (21b). However, this possibility is unlikely for the following reasons: as pointed out by Hooper and Thompson (1973), Emonds (2004), Haegeman (2004), Bocci (2007), Haegeman et al. (2015), and others, focus assignment to a subject is prohibited in infinitival complements. Therefore, this possibility should be rejected, and I pursue the *v**P-internal focus assignment hypothesis in this paper.

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