A neo-Jakobsonian approach to case marking

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![Diagram]

CORE IDEA
The accusative marks dependency w.r.t. the subject, not w.r.t. the verb

1. Jakobson’s view on case

(1) Case = morphology, not syntax

(2) A case has (i) a Gesamtbedeutung, (ii) a Hauptbedeutung, (iii) Einzelbedeutungen

(3) Cases are organized in marked/unmarked oppositions
   marked: sign(α), unmarked ¬(sign(α))

(4) Accusative: Gesamtbedeutung
   object of an action (marked)
   Nominative: Gesamtbedeutung
   not marked as being the object of an action or not

(5) Jakobson (1935 [1966:57])
   The meaning of the accusative is so closely associated with the action, that it may only be
governed by a verb.
   » leads to the idea that the accusative is dependent on government by the verb

(6) Jakobson (1935 [1966:60])
   The accusative by itself signifies that some element is ranked higher than it on the hierarchy
   of clause meanings, i.e. it, unlike the nominative, conveys the existence of such a hierarchy.
   » suggests that the accusative simply expresses the hierarchical subject-object opposition

(7) subject [PREDICATE verb object ]

2. Standard principles & parameters / minimalist views on case

(8) Case is assigned/checked under government/spec-head agreement

(9) Subordination of the accusative is indirect result of the syntax of the transitive clause

(10) ![Diagram]
Problem (Zwart 2001): scrambling into domain of unaccusative verb

..dat hij **haar** (niet) schijnt te kennen (Dutch)

‘..that he doesn’t seem to know her.’

» no local context for accusative case assignment/checking

3. **Neo-Jakobsonian approach**

(13) opposition NOM—ACC in *morphology*

matches

opposition SUBJ—OBJ in *syntax*

(14) object is hierarchically subordinated to a subject

(15) a. subject = predicate external
    b. object = predicate internal
    c. predicate = dependent of the subject

4. **Agreement as dependent marking** (Zwart 2004)

(16) *Dependency*

\( \alpha \) is a dependent of \( \beta \) if \( \alpha \) expresses a feature of \( \beta \)

(17) Predicate is dependent of subject, as it *agrees* with the subject

(18) Aside: agreement often characterized as head-marking, but it is in fact the morphological expression of an XP-YP dependency on the head of the dependent YP

(19) ‘dependent head-marking’ = marking of a dependent on its head = dependent-marking

(20) dat **wij** in het bos **wandel-**en (Dutch)

‘that we are walking in the forest’

(21) NP [[TP PP [VP V ]]]

1. dependent head-marking

nondependent dependent

(22) *Further aspects of dependency*

a. prosody nondependent = weak, dependent = strong
    b. order nondependent = first, dependent = second
    c. derivation nondependent is applied to the dependent (asymmetric merge)
(23) Dependency marking is subject to variation
   a. single or multiple expression (English vs. Swahili)
   b. on the head of the dependent or not (Dutch vs. Tonkawa)
   c. phonological realization (affix migration [24], floating agreement [25])

(24) a. kur-ê mezin          b. keç-a baş        (Kurdish)
    boyMASC-EZ:MASC.SG big  girlFEM-EZ:FEM.SG nice
    'the big boy'           'the nice girl'

(25) a. xinäär-en lavaš u-ne-k-sa    (Udi)
    girl-ERG bread:ABS eat-3SG-$-PRES
    'The girl EATS bread.'
    NB, $ designates the part of the stem following the clitic.

    b. xinäär-en lavaš-ne  uk-sa
    girl-ERG bread:ABS-3SG eat-PRES
    'The girl eats BREAD.'

4. Dependency as a function of Merge

(26) Merge transfers elements one at a time from a resource (the pool of elements eligible
    for inclusion in the derivation) to a work space (the current derivation)

(27) step 1

    WORK SPACE   RESOURCE

    β

    α

step 2

    WORK SPACE   RESOURCE

    β

    α

(28) In step 2, α is new to the derivation, β is the ‘elder sister’

(29) Dependency relations
   a. α is in a dependency relation with β iff α is merged to β
   b. when α is merged to β, β is the dependent of α (α is the ‘nondependent’)

(30) The core dependency relations
   a. head-complement: the complement is the dependent of the head
   b. subject-predicate: the predicate is the dependent of the subject

(31) Generalization
    For each ordered pair <α,β> created by Merge, β is marked for dependency w.r.t. α
(32) Some problems for agreement
a. complementizer agreement: nondependent marking? cf. (33)
b. long distance agreement: not a function of sisterhood? cf. (34)

(33) dat-Ø wy speul-t
that-PL we play-PL

(34) eni-r [ už-ā magalu b-āç’ru-li ] b-iy-xo
mother-DAT boy-ERG bread III-eat-PART/NOM III-know-PRES
'The mother knows the boy ate the bread.'
NB gender agreement only with absolutive, not with ergative

5. Empirical evidence for the neo-Jakobsonian view of case

(35) Lenition (soft mutation) in Welsh
voicing p/t/k > b/d/g
spirantization b/d/g > v/ð/-
among other cases

(36) variety of contexts, usually clearly dependent marking
a. ei dad (< tad) b. ei thad (< tad) [= aspiration]
his fatherSM her fatherASP

(37) one particular context: direct object mutation (DOM)
a. mi welodd Megan blant (< plant)
PRT saw Megan childrenSM
'Megan saw children.'
b. mae Megan wedi gweld plant
AUX Megan ASP see children
'Megan has seen children.'

(38) two approaches
a. DOM = (accusative) case [Zwicky 1984, Roberts 1997]
b. DOM = triggered by adjacent XP [Harlow 1989, Tallerman 1990, Borsley 1999]

(39) third way [Hudson p.c. in Tallerman 2005]
c. DOM = marking of dependency of an absent V (cf. (37))

(40) Evaluation
a. it looks like case: only on object NPs and nonfinite verbs ('verbal nouns')
b. it looks like XP-YP dependency (many other cases bear this out)
c. it is a phonological process
d. why would absence of the verb matter?

(41) Solution
a. DOM = expression of subject-object dependency on the object (= accusative case)
b. being a phonological expression, its realization is dependent on adjacency with the nondependent » fed by verb movement, blocked in Aux-S-V-O orders
Welsh direct object lenition shows that case-marking is an expression of subject-object dependency, not of verb-object dependency.

6. Ergativity

Accusative case as object marking device is dependent on a morphological opposition of the structural cases nominative/accusative.

Ergative = inherent case (Woolford 1997, Nash 1996)

Ergative subject » dependency not expressed by case » nominative object.

Predictions

a. coexistence of ERG/ABS case and NOM/ACC agreement [(47)-(48)]
   no ergative agreement pattern (Woolford 2004)

b. (assuming the absence of a case opposition to be the only source of ergativity)

(47) ergative case combined with subject-verb agreement

a. ngaju ka-rna wangka-mi (Warlpiri)
   I:ABS AUX:PRES-1SG:SU speak-NONPAST
   'I am speaking.'

b. ngajulu-rlu ka-rna-ngku nyuntu nya-nyi
   I-ERG AUX:PRES-1SG-2OB you:ABS see-NONPAST
   'I see you.'

(48) combination of (nom/acc) person and (erg/abs) gender agreement

a. me b-ok'o.l-čo hečhe (Hunzib)
   2SG IV-gather-PRES:1/2 walnut iv:ABS
   'you gather nuts'

b. oλu-l b-ok'o.l-čo hečhe
   DEM:OBL-ERG IV-gather-PRES walnut iv:ABS
   '(s)he gathers nuts'

» perhaps North Caucasian gender agreement is a form of (topic) case

(49) Remaining question: what about accusative objects in ergative constructions?

Dhangu

Man-ERG woman-ACC hit
'Man hit woman.' (Woolford 2004)

Restricted to tripartite case systems (i.e. S = NOM); perhaps ERG/NOM are alternative realizations of a single structural case here, having to do with agency.

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References


