

A neo-Jakobsonian approach to case marking

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PIONIER Workshop on Case and Agreement, Nijmegen, Sept 14, 2005

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: $\text{sign}(\alpha)$, unmarked $\neg(\text{sign}(\alpha))$

(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

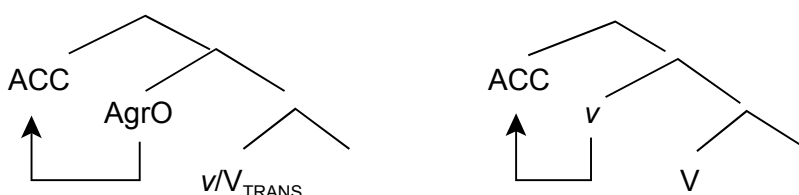
(7) subject [PREDICATE verb object]

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)



(11) Problem (Zwart 2001): scrambling into domain of unaccusative verb

(12) ..dat hij haar (niet) schijnt te kennen (Dutch)
 that he her-ACC not seems to know-INF
 ‘..that he doesn’t seem to know her.’

accusative NP unaccusative V transitive V

clause boundary

» 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*
 α is a dependent of β if α expresses a feature of β

(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 1PL:NOM in the forest walk-PL
 ‘that we are walking in the forest’

(21)

NP [_{TP} PP [_{VP} V]]

↑ ↑ ↑

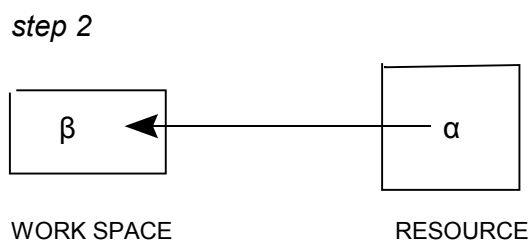
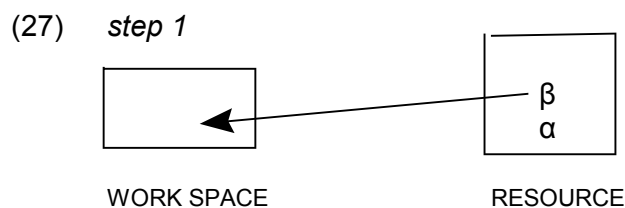
nondependent dependent dependent head-marking

- (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
- single or multiple expression (English vs. Swahili)
 - on the head of the dependent or not (Dutch vs. Tonkawa)
 - phonological realization (affix migration [24], floating agreement [25])
- (24) a. kur-ê mezin b. keç-a baş (Kurdish)
 boy_{MASC}-EZ:MASC.SG big girl_{FEM}-EZ:FEM.SG nice
 'the big boy' 'the nice girl'
- (25) a. xinâr-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. xinâr-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)



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

(29) *Dependency relations*

- α is in a dependency relation with β iff α is merged to β
- when α is merged to β , β is the dependent of α (α is the 'nondependent')

(30) *The core dependency relations*

- head-complement: the complement is the dependent of the head
- subject-predicate: the predicate is the dependent of the subject

(31) *Generalization*

For each ordered pair $\langle \alpha, \beta \rangle$ created by Merge, β is marked for dependency w.r.t. α

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