# A neo-Jakobsonian approach to case marking

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## 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



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



» 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 <u>wij</u> in het bos wandel-*en* (Dutch) that 1PL:NOM in the forest walk-PL 'that we are walking in the forest'

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. | <u>kur</u> -ê<br>boy <sub>MASC</sub> -EZ:MASC<br>'the big boy'   | mezin<br>C.SG big | b.              | <u>keç</u> - <i>a</i><br>girl <sub>FEM</sub> -EZ:FEM.SG<br>'the nice girl' | baş<br>nice | (Kurdish) |
|------|----|--|-------------------|-----------------|--|-------------|-----------|
| (25) | a. | <u>xinär-en</u> lavaš u- <i>ne</i> -k-sa<br>girl-ERG bread:ABS eat-3SG-\$-PRES<br>'The girl EATS bread.'<br>NB, \$ designates the part of the stem following the clitic. |                   |                 |  |             | (Udi)     |
|      | b. | <u>xinär-en</u> lavas<br>girl-erg brea   |                   | uk-sa<br>eat-PR | RES  |             |           |

'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

step 2



(28) In step 2,  $\alpha$  is new to the derivation,  $\beta$  is the 'elder sister'

#### (29) Dependency relations

- a.  $\alpha$  is in a dependency relation with  $\beta$  iff  $\alpha$  is merged to  $\beta$
- b. when  $\alpha$  is merged to  $\beta$ ,  $\beta$  is the dependent of  $\alpha$  ( $\alpha$  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  $\langle \alpha, \beta \rangle$  created by Merge,  $\beta$  is marked for dependency w.r.t.  $\alpha$ 

#### (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-**e wy** speul-t (East Netherlandic) that-PL we play-PL
- (34) eni-r [ už-ā magalu b-āc'ru-łi ] b-iy-xo (Tsez) mother-DAT boy-ERG bread<sub>III</sub> 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 father\_{SM} her father\_{ASP}
- (37) one particular context: direct object mutation (DOM)
- a. mi welodd Megan blant (< plant) PRT saw Megan children<sub>sM</sub> '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

(42) Welsh direct object lenition shows that case-marking is an expression of subject-object dependency, not of verb-object dependency

## 6. Ergativity

- (43) Accusative case as object marking device is dependent on a morphological opposition of the structural cases nominative/accusative
- (44) Ergative = inherent case (Woolford 1997, Nash 1996)
- (45) ergative subject » dependency not expressed by case » nominative object
- (46) Predictions
  - a. coexistence of ERG/ABS case and NOM/ACC agreement [(47)-(48)]
  - b. (assuming the absence of a case opposition to be the only source of ergativity) no ergative agreement pattern (Woolford 2004)
- (47) ergative case combined with subject-verb agreement
- a. ngaju ka-rna wangka-mi (Warlpiri)
  l:ABS AUX:PRES-1SG:SU speak-NONPAST
  'I am speaking.'
  b. ngajulu-rlu ka-rna-ngku nyuntu nya-nyi
- 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 (Hunzib) a.  $m = \mathbf{b}$ -ok'o.l- $\check{\alpha}$  he $\check{\lambda}$ e
- 2SG IV-gather-PRES:1/2 walnut<sub>IV</sub>:ABS 'you gather nuts'
- b. *oλu-l* **b**-ok'o.l-Ø **he⊼e** DEM:OBL-ERG IV-gather-PRES walnut<sub>IV</sub>: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?
   yūlŋu-tu taykka-na pūyan (Dhangu)
   man-ERG woman-ACC hit
   'Man hit woman.' (Woolford 2004)
- (50) 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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