

Structural case and dependency marking: a neo-Jakobsonian view

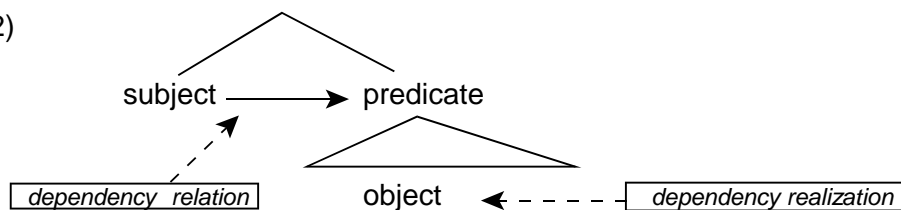
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1. Proposal

(1) Structural objective (accusative) case is the morphological reflex of a higher order dependency between the subject and its sister ('the predicate').

(2)



(3) So not: a. expression of a verb-complement dependency
b. function of construal with a functional head (AgrO)
c. function of construal with the agentive element (little v)

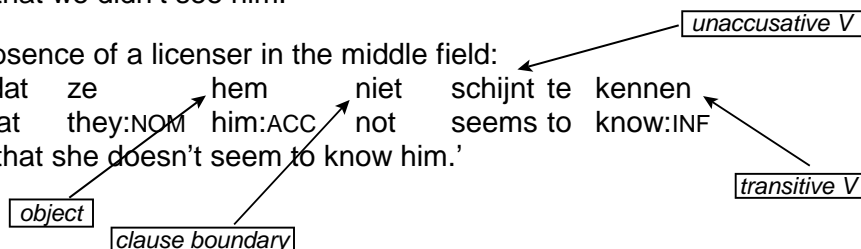
2. Why?

2.1 The notion 'object'

(4) Dissociation of thematic roles (int/ext argument) and grammatical functions (subject/object):
a. John was arrested (subject + int.arg.)
b. We saw them arrest John (object + ext.arg.)

(5) Separation of object from V (obligatory object shift = A-movement, VandenWyngaerd 1989)
..dat we hem niet zagen (Dutch)
that we:NOM him:ACC not saw
'..that we didn't see him.'

(6) Absence of a licenser in the middle field: (Dutch)
..dat ze hem niet schijnt te kennen (Dutch)
that they:NOM him:ACC not seems to know:INF
'..that she doesn't seem to know him.'



(7) Absence of a licenser in copula constructions: (Dutch)
Jij bent hem
you:NOM are:2SG him:ACC

NB, accusative is not the default nor the emphatic form

(7') Wie heeft dat gedaan? Hij/*Hem!
who did that? he:NOM/he:ACC

(8) Direct object mutation (soft mutation = SM) in Welsh:

- a. prynodd y ddynes **feic** / *beic
 bought the woman _{SM}bike / bike
 'the woman bought a bike'
- b. roedd y ddynes yn prynu **beic** / *feic
 was the woman PROG buy:INF bike / _{SM}bike
 'the woman was buying a bike'

Status quaestionis: a. restricted to direct objects and verbal nouns, hence case-marking (Zwicky 1984, Roberts 1997)
 b. triggered only in the *absence* of the verb (i.e. in VSO), hence conditioned by adjacent XP (Harlow 1989, Borsley & Tallerman 1996)

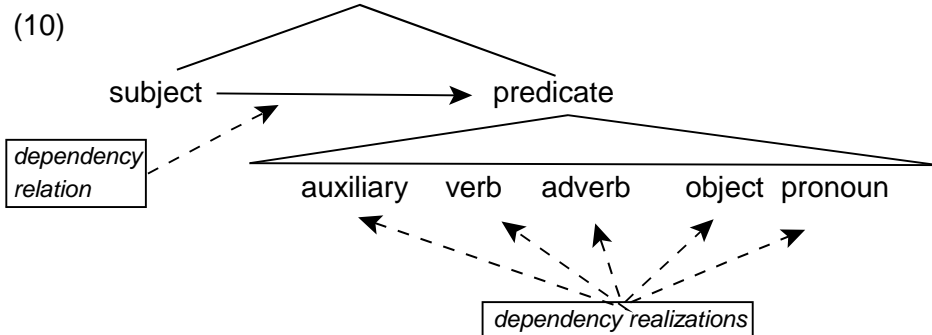
a. and b. are compatible if (1) is right: a phonological realization of case may be subject to an additional condition of adjacency of the triggering element (the subject). Hence case shows up only if the verb is out of the way.

2.2 Dependency relations in general

(9) Subject agreement may be realized on a range of predicate-internal elements:

- a. *adjacent verb/auxiliary*
 Jan wandel-**t** in het bos (Dutch)
 John walk-3SG in the forest
 'John is walking in the forest.'
- b. *nonadjacent verb/auxiliary*
 John rarely walk-**s** in the forest (English)
- ..dat Jan in het bos wandel-**t**
 that John in the forest walk-3SG (Dutch)
 '..that John is walking in the forest.'
- c. *multiple predicate-internal elements*
 Juma **a**-li-kuwa **a**-ngali **a**-ki-fanya kazi (Swahili)
 Juma₁ SU₁-PAST-be SU₁-still SU₁-PROG-do work
 'Juma was still working.'
- d. *adjacent pronouns/clitics*
 u bru la? pən-yəp **u** u psñ (Bhoi Khasi)
 3SG.MASC man PAST cause-die he 3SG.MASC snake
 'The man killed a snake.'
- e. *nonadjacent pronouns/clitics*
 u bru pīnyap psəñ **u** (Nongtung Khasi)
 3SG.MASC man cause-die snake he
 'The man killed a snake.'

- f. *objects*
 na-pa-xa'm a-p-sa' apa'-m ux^wa'l' tukwe'-m xa'-pa-ču' san
 1SG-soul DEM-2AGRS sky DEM-2AGRS 2SU-SUB-carry FUT
 '(that) you will carry my soul to heaven' (Coahuilteco)



(11) Similarly with the expression of reflexivity

- a. *object*
 John saw **himself** (English)
 en tooñ-ii **koye men** (Toucouleur)
 we harm-ASP heads our
 'We have harmed ourselves.'
- abono-ra** na-noki-a-'a-ha (Paumari)
 self-OBJ CAUS-see-DETRANS-ASP-THEME
 'He sees himself.'
- b. *nonthematic element*
 das Buch liest **sich** gut (German)
 the book reads SE good
 'The book reads well.'
- c. *pronoun/clitic*
 nrâ dreghe-**nrî** fadre rroto (Tiri)
 3SG.SU injure-3SG.OB with car
 'He injured himself in a car.'
- d. *verb*
 Juma a-li-**ji**-pend-a (Swahili)
 Juma₁ 1-PAST-REFL-love-FV
 'Juma loved himself.'
- e. *auxiliary*
Yehpe nochi (Sie)
 Y-ehpe n-ocəh-i
 3SG:DISTPAST-do.reflexively NOM-see-OB:3SG
 'He/she saw him/herself.'

- f. *secondary predicate*
 Irail **pein** duhp-irail (Ponapean)
 3PL self bathe-3PL
 'They bathed themselves.'
- g. *adverb*
 Atakusa a-nö kama nia sapa **ko-pa-so-ma** (Sanuma)
 gun 3SG-INST 3SG shoot reverse:DIR return-EXT-FOC-COMPL
 'He shot himself with a gun.'

3. Jakobson on the system of cases

- (12) *Jakobson (1935)*
 a. Case is morphology, not syntax
 b. Cases are organized in marked/unmarked oppositions (*paradigm*)
 c. Cases have a *Gesamtbedeutung* (core meaning) and a *Hauptbedeutung* (principal meaning)
- (13) *Jakobson on the accusative (1935 [1966:57, 60])*
 a. The meaning of the accusative is so closely associated with the action, that it may only be governed by a verb [*Hauptbedeutung*]
 b. The accusative by itself signifies that some element is ranked higher on the hierarchy of grammatical functions [*Satzbedeutungen*], i.e. unlike the nominative, it conveys the existence of such a hierarchy [*Gesamtbedeutung*]
- (14) The accusative is the morphological expression of dependency w.r.t. the subject.
- (15) Minimalist implementation: upon merger of the subject, the predicate is marked as a dependent of the subject, which may be expressed (among other ways) by case on the object.
- (16) Since case = morphology, expression of the dependency is subject to the organization of the forms in a paradigm (there has to be a subject/object form opposition, i.e. a **structural case opposition**).

4. Consequences for ergativity

4.1 The core case

- (17) Subject: inherent case → Object default case

- (18) *Icelandic*
 a. hann lamdi hana
 he:NOM hit her:ACC
 'He hit her.'

- subject-predicate dependency
- subject has structural case → structural case opposition available
- object realizes dependency via marked structural case (accusative)

b. honum praut próttur
 him:DAT lacked strength:NOM
 'He lacked strength.'

- subject-predicate dependency
- subject has inherent case → no structural case opposition available
- object does not realize dependency, gets unmarked case (nominative)

(19) *Inuit*

a. Qimmi-p angut kii-v-a-a
 dog-ERG man:ABS bite-IND-TR-3SG.3SG
 'The dog bit the man.'

b. Angut qungujup-p-u-q
 man:ABS smile-IND-INTR-3SG
 'The man smiled.'

(20) The ergative is an inherent case (Nash 1995, Woolford 1997, Legate 2003)
 → no structural case opposition available
 → object realized in the default case (absolutive = nominative)

(21) What is special about ergativity is the (quite general) use of an inherent subject case, the object case-marking follows a regular pattern.

(22) Other ways of subject-predicate dependency marking still available:

a. *agreement*
 ngajulu-rlu ka-rna-ngku nyuntu mya-myi (Warlpiri)
 I-ERG AUX:PRES-1SG.SU-2SG.OB you:ABS see-NONPAST
 'I see you.'

b. *reflexivity*
 ngarrka-ngku ka-nyanu nya-nyi (Warlpiri)
 man-ERG PRES-REFL see-NONPAST
 'The man sees himself.'

(23) *Why* and *when* the subject has inherent/ergative case is a separate matter.
 (common factors: transitivity, agentivity)

4.2 Tripartite case systems

(24) yūlnu-ṭu taykka-ṅa pūyan (Dhangu)
 man-ERG woman-ACC hit
 'The man hit the woman.'

cf. taykka yat'ṭuwan
 woman:NOM screamed
 'The woman screamed.'

(25) the accusative appears with [+animate] or [-abstract] entities only (Schebeck 1976:544 note 5)

(26) The tripartite system appears in a subset of the languages with NP-split ergativity

- (27) *NP-split ergativity*
 Sensitive to [animacy]: (PERSON) 1 > 2 > 3/DEM > proper N > common N
 [human > animate > inanimate]
- (28) *Dyirbal: full NPs (from Dixon 1994:10, noun markers omitted)*
 a. η uma banaga-n^yu
 father:ABS return-NONFUT
 'Father returned.'
 b. η uma yabu- η gu bura-n
 father:ABS mother-ERG see-NONFUT
 'Mother saw father.'
- (29) *Dyirbal: pronouns (from Dixon 1994:14)*
 a. η ana banaga-n^yu
 we all:NOM return-NONFUT
 'We returned.'
 b. n^yurra η ana-na bura-n
 you all:NOM we all:ACC see-NONFUT
 'You all saw us.'
- (30) Combination of [high animacy] with [low animacy] participants yields hybrid system.
- (31) *Kham*
 a. ge:- \emptyset em-tə mi:-rə- \emptyset ge-ma-ra-dəi-ye
 we-NOM road-ON person-PL-ABS 1PL-NEG-3PL-find-IMP
 'We met no people on the way.'
 b. gē:h-ye η a-lai duhp-na-ke-o
 ox-ERG I-ACC butt-1SG-PERF-3SG
 'The ox butted me.'
- (32) System of object marking in split-NP languages (+ = 'high', - = 'low'):
 a. [+animate] marks dependency regardless the status of the subject
 b. [-animate] marks dependency only if
 (i) subject has structural case (the ergative mechanism) *and*
 (ii) subject is in the same animacy class
- (33) Jakobsonian principle: dependency marking is sensitive to paradigm membership
 paradigms = (i) structural vs. inherent; (ii) high vs. low animate
- (34) *Partial split system: Waga-Waga*
 a. bugin^y-du (η)i-na iya:-u
 dog-ERG thou-ACC bite-FUT
 'The dog will bite you.'
 b. η a-d^yu η unam-ma n^ya- η i guyum-ba
 I-ERG children-ACC see-PAST camp-LOC
 'I saw the children in the camp.'

- (35) [+animate] = pronouns, proper names, human beings, some other living beings
- (36) Transitive subject *a/ways* gets inherent (ergative) case; object case assignment not affected → (32)
- (37) *Generalizations*
- a. the nature of the verb plays no role in the ABS/ACC-choice for the object
 - b. ABS/ACC-choice depends solely on the question whether subject and object are in the same paradigm (structural/inherent) or animacy class

5. Conclusion

- (38) Structural case within the clause
- a. nondependent element (subject): NOM
 - b. dependent element (predicate): ACC, realized on an NP-term of the predicate

Sources and references

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