

Case and agreement

1 Morphological case and abstract case

We know that nouns exhibit case (in some languages more than others) and we want to explain the distribution of case patterns. (These examples are from Pesetsky and Torrego 2011)

(1) Some cases in Latin:

a. Complement to V (accusative):

[_{VP} scripsit libr-um]
wrote book-ACC

b. Complement to P (accusative):

[_{PP} ad Hispani-am]
to Spain-ACC

c. Complement to N (genitive or PP):

i. [_{NP} amor libertat-is]
love liberty-GEN
'love of liberty'

ii. [_{NP} amor [_{PP} in patriam]]
love into country
'love for one's country'

d. Complement to A (ablative or PP):

i. urbs [_{AP} nuda praesidi-o]
city naked defense-ABL
'a city deprived of defense'

ii. [_{AP} liberi [_{PP} a deliciis]]
free from luxuries.ABL
'free from luxuries'

(2) The distribution of NPs in English:

a. Complement to V (NP ok):

[_{VP} wrote the book]

b. Complement to P (NP ok):

[_{PP} to Spain]

c. Complement to N (PP):

i. [_{NP} our love *(of) liberty]]

ii. [_{NP} love *(for) their country]]

d. Complement to A (PP):

i. [_{AP} free *(from) luxuries]

ii. [_{AP} fond *(of) luxuries]

Even though Latin clearly has case and English only shows case on personal pronouns, the distribution of where nouns can occur (specifically, nominative and accusative nouns) looks the same between Latin and English.

Idea: *Nouns need case*¹ and we can explain the distribution of nouns by explaining where and how case is assigned, even for languages where we don't see case very often. (This idea is sometimes called *abstract case*.)

¹Why do nouns need case? As Pesetsky and Torrego (2011) discuss, this is an open question.

2 Case and Agree

N all start with inflectional feature [uCase: ___]:

- It's Case because it needs to be checked: if it stays in the derivation, the result will be ungrammatical. (Traditionally, this was called *the Case Filter*.)
- The gap ___ means that it needs to receive a *value*.
- Detail: It's an *inflectional* feature, so it stays on the head and does not project higher.

(3) **Agree($\alpha, \beta; F$)** (read: ' α and β agree in F')

For any syntactic objects α and β with matching feature F, where α c-commands β :

- let the value of F on α and the value of F on β be equal;
- if F is uninterpretable on α or β , check the feature (let $uF = \checkmark F$).

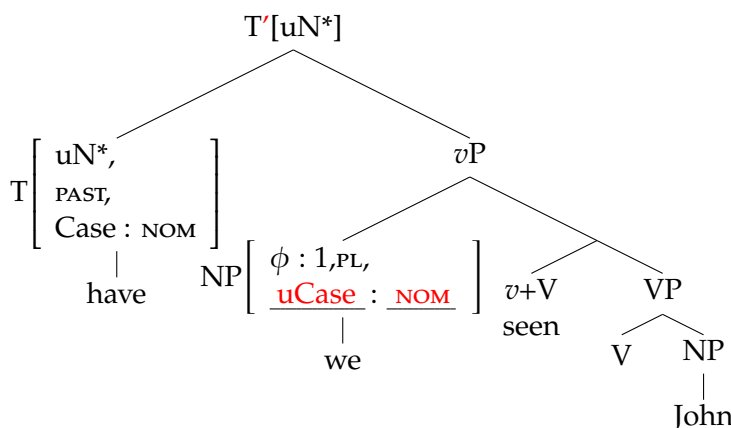
2.1 Nominative

Nominative case was one property of subjecthood. We will thus associate it with T.

- (4) a. { \checkmark We / *us} have seen John.
 b. { \checkmark I / *me} have seen John.

Proposal: T starts with [Case:NOM].

Exercise: Complete this derivation:



- ...
- Merge(T, vP)
for Hierarchy of Projections
- Agree(T , NP (we) ; Case)
- Move_{phrase}(T' , NP (we))

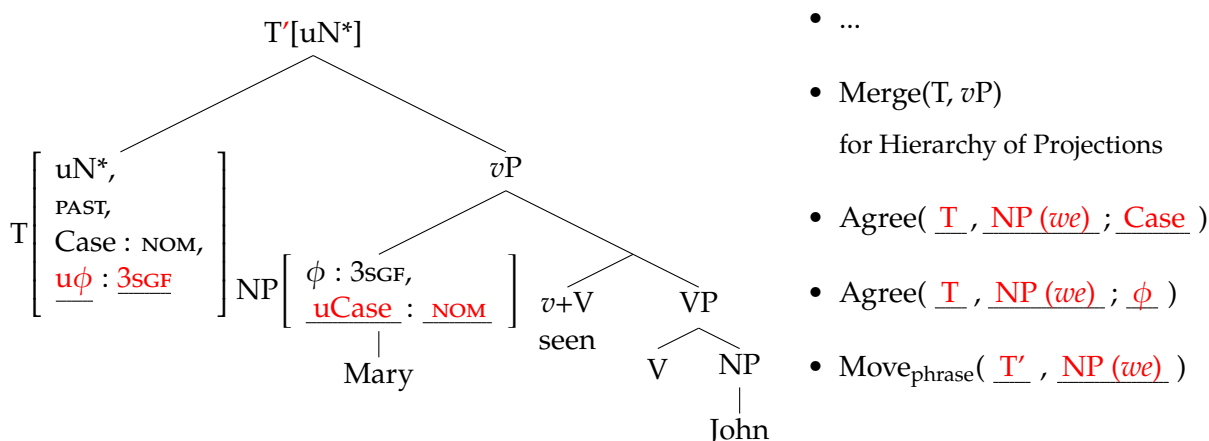
2.2 Subject-verb agreement

We can also take care of another subject property at the same time: *subject-verb agreement*.

- (5) a. We { \checkmark have, *has} seen John.
 b. Mary { \checkmark has / *have} seen John.

Proposal: Let's also have T start with $[u\phi : _]$.

Exercise:



The pronunciation of T will be sensitive to ϕ -features on it at the end of the derivation.

Does nominative case always cooccur with satisfaction of the EPP (uN^*)? Consider passives:

- (6) a. The book was put ___ under the table.
 b. *It was put the book under the table.
- (7) a. [_{CP} That the world is round] was believed ___ by the ancient Greeks.²
 b. It was believed by the ancient Greeks [_{CP} that the world is round].

► In English, if a NP receives nominative case from T, it must move to Spec,TP.

Later we will discuss constructions with embedded clauses. Consider the following contrast:

- (8) a. It seems [_{CP} that John is writing a letter.]
 b. *It seems [_{nonfinite} John to be writing a letter.]
 c. John seems [_{nonfinite} to be writing a letter.]

► Only *finite* T assigns nominative case.

²Movement of the sentential subject (CP) somehow satisfies the EPP.

2.3 Accusative

As we saw above, complements of verbs and prepositions receive a special case, which is accusative. It is tempting, then, to give all V [Case : ACC].

Proposal: Instead, put [Case : ACC] on transitive *v*.

(9) **Two little *vs*:**

- a. For active transitives and unergatives: [*v*, uN, Case:ACC]
- b. For passives and unaccusatives: [*v*]

There are two advantages to this approach:

1. The ability to give accusative case and introducing a NP in Spec,*v*P (an agent by UTAH) go together. This naturally captures Burzio's generalization:

(10) **Burzio's Generalization (Burzio, 1986):**

If a verb licenses accusative case, it has an agent.

2. The ability to give accusative disappears in passives.

But it is not necessarily passive of the "local" verb that matters. See the discussion of German "long passives" in Pesetsky and Torrego 2011.

Exercise: Derive the following sentences. Which little *v* will you use?

- (11) Sarah has eaten salad.
- (12) Nick has arrived.
- (13) The water has frozen.
- (14) We were arrested.

(We will derive the correct tense and verb forms later.)

After recess week: Quiz, and other patterns of case and agreement

References

- Burzio, Luigi. 1986. *Italian syntax: A Government-Binding approach*. Springer.
- Pesetsky, David, and Esther Torrego. 2011. Case. In *Oxford handbook of linguistic minimalism*, ed. Cedric Boeckx. Oxford University Press.