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. <u>Complement to V (accusative):</u>

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

    b. <u>Complement to P (accusative):</u>

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

    c. <u>Complement to N (genitive or PP):</u>

      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. <u>Complement to A (ablative or PP):</u>

      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. <u>Complement to V (NP ok):</u>
      [_{VP} wrote the book]

    b. <u>Complement to P (NP ok):</u>
      [_{PP} to Spain]

    c. <u>Complement to N (PP):</u>
      i. [_{NP} our love *(of) liberty]]
      ii. [_{NP} love *(for) their country]]

    d. <u>Complement to A (PP):</u>
      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*.)

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[1]Why 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 <u>u</u>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(α, β; F)** (read: 'α and β agree in F')

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

  a. let the value of F on α and the value of F on β be equal;

  b. if F is uninterpretable on α or β, check the feature (let uF = ~~uF~~).
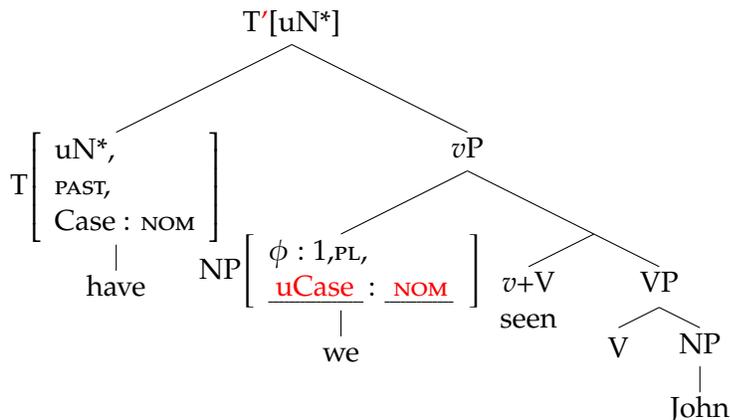
2.1 Nominative

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(<u>T</u> , <u>NP (*we*)</u> ; <u>Case</u>)
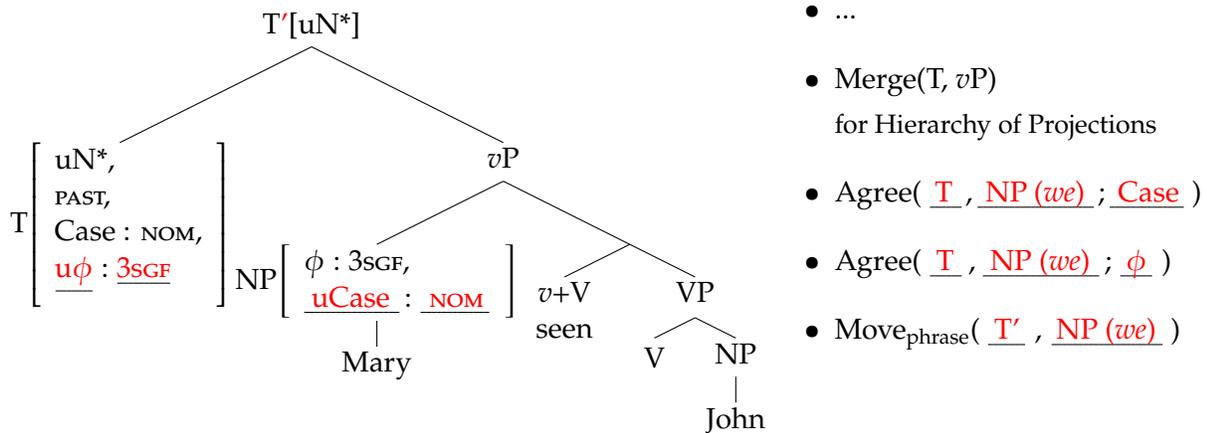- Move$_{\text{phrase}}$(<u>T′</u> , <u>NP (*we*)</u>)

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 [uϕ : ___].
Exercise:

- ...

- Merge(T, vP)
  for Hierarchy of Projections

- Agree(<u>T</u> , <u>NP (*we)</u> ; <u>Case</u>)

- Agree(<u>T</u> , <u>NP (*we)</u> ; <u>ϕ</u>)

- Move$_{\text{phrase}}$(<u>T′</u> , <u>NP (*we)</u>)

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* <u>*must move to Spec,TP*</u>.

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 [$_{\text{nonfinite}}$ John to be writing a letter.]

         c.   John seems [$_{\text{nonfinite}}$ to be writing a letter.]

▶ Only *finite* T assigns nominative case.

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[2]Movement 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. <u>For active transitives and unergatives:</u>   [v, uN, Case:ACC]

    b. <u>For passives and unaccusatives:</u>   [v]

There are two advantages to this approach:

1. The ability to give accusative case and introducing a NP in Spec,vP (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.

3 Patterns of case and agreement

So far, we have discussed languages with nominative/accusative *alignment*. There are also languages with different patterns of case and agreement morphology. Which NPs are grouped together according to this morphology?

(11)

	Nominative/accusative:	Ergative/absolutive:
transitives:	subj obj	subj obj
intransitives:	subj	subj
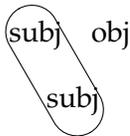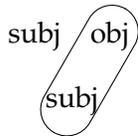
Case in Georgian

There are three case markers in Georgian: *-i* (∅ for names), *-s*, and *-m*.

(12) **Georgian series II tenses:** (Harris, 1981; Aronson, 1982 in Marantz, 1991)

    a. Nino-m gia-s surateb-i avena.
       Nino-ERG Gia-DAT pictures-ABS show$_{II}$
       'Nino showed the pictures to Gia.'   (ditransitive)

    b. Es saxl-i ivane-s auenda.
       this house-ABS Ivan-DAT built$_{II}$
       'This house was built for Ivan.'   (passive)

    c. Vano-m ipikrs marikaze.
       Vano-ERG think$_{II}$ Marika-on
       'Vano thought about Marika.'   (intransitive + PP)

- Georgian in Series II tenses (simple past and aorist) is ergative (*-m*) / absolutive (*-i/∅*).

- **But!** In (12c) the subject Vano — the only NP argument — is ergative. This is different than the passive subject in (12b). What's the difference?

▶ Ergative case is specifically associated with agents (Spec,*v*P). Case which is associated with a particular thematic role — here, ERG is for agents — is called *inherent case*.

    – <u>Aside:</u> We know that neither nominative nor accusative is inherent in English. Why?

Proposal (ergative): Transitive/(unergative) *v* in ergative languages (Georgian II) has [Case:ERG], which can only be used to assign case to its specifier (*Spec-Head*).

(13) **Georgian series I tenses:** (ibid.)

    a. Nino gia-s surateb-s avenebs.
       Nino.NOM Gia-DAT pictures-DAT show$_I$
       'Nino is showing pictures to Gia.'   (ditransitive)

    b. Es saxl-i ivane-s auendeba.
       this house-NOM Ivan-DAT built$_I$
       'This house will be built for Ivan.'   (passive)

    c. Vano pikrobs marikaze.
       Vano.NOM think$_I$ Marika-on
       'Vano is thinking about Marika.'   (intransitive + PP)

    Important fact: "In Georgian, dative and accusative morphological case have fallen together into what's called the dative case." (Marantz, 1991: 234)

- We can describe Georgian as *split ergative*: it's nominative/accusative in Series I (present, future, ...) and ergative/absolutive in Series II tenses.

▶ Note that Series I nominative is the same as Series II absolutive!

Proposal (absolutive): Absolutive is nominative. T always has [Case:NOM]; in ergative languages, we refer to nominative as absolutive.

Other possibilities

There is significant research on ergative/absolutive case and agreement systems in languages of the world.

- The idea that absolutive is nominative (assigned by T) appears not to be true for all ergative languages. In some ergative/absolutive languages, absolutive case has a different source: see Legate (2008).

- More recently, the idea that ergative case is inherent has also been challenged; see Deal (2019) and references there.

References

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