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Uncommon patterns of core term marking and case terminology

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Abstract

Two major patterns of core term marking are found cross-linguistically: an accusative pattern in which P is the only core syntactic role marked by a case form distinct from the quotation form of nouns or by an adposition, and an ergative pattern in which A is the only core syntactic role marked by a case form distinct from the quotation form of nouns or by an adposition. Current case terminology is adapted to the description of systems consistently following one of these two patterns, but is difficult to extend to core term marking systems characterized by alignment variations. Moreover, several minor patterns are attested, characterized by a wider use of marked case forms or adpositions, and current terminology fails to provide convenient labels for case forms or adpositions occurring in such patterns. It is argued that: (a) in languages in which nouns are inflected for case, the case form coinciding with the quotation form of nouns should be labeled in a uniform way, irrespective of the uses it may have in syntactic constructions; (b) new labels should be coined for marked case forms or adpositions used in S/A or S/P role.

Keywords: Case marking; Alignment; Markedness; Nominative; Absolutive; Accusative; Ergative; Marked nominative

Abbreviations: ACC, accusative; ANTIACC, antiaccusative (see Section 9.2); ANTIERG, antiergative (see Section 9.2); AOR, aorist; DEF, definite; DEM, demonstrative; DAT, dative; ERG, ergative; F, feminine; GEN, genitive; IPFV, imperfective; M, masculine; N, neuter; NEG, negation; OBL, oblique case; PFV, perfective; PL, plural; POSS, possessive; PRS, present; PST, past; SG, singular; TAM, tense-aspect-modality marker.

1. Introduction

In this paper, after recalling the basic notions of alignment typology (Section 2), the major types of core term marking attested in the languages of the world (Section 3), and the terminology adopted in most recent works dealing with core term marking typology (Section 4), I discuss the question of case terminology in languages showing alignment variations in core term marking (Section 5). Section 6 puts forward a distinction between morphological markedness and syntactic markedness of case forms. Section 7 presents minor types of core term marking. In Section 8, I show that case terminology as recommended in recent typological works and currently used in language descriptions cannot be extended in a

consistent way to the description of most of the minor patterns of core term marking examined in Section 7, and I argue that a possible solution is to develop an idea that inspired ancient grammarians and is still explicitly stated in some modern grammars of Latin or Greek, according to which nominative is primarily the quotation or designation form of nouns, and the use of nominative for nouns in subject role is secondary. In Section 9, I put forward a terminology for case forms used in core syntactic roles based on the same principle, but differing from the traditional case terminology in that it is not limited to languages showing a particular type of core term marking.

2. The basic concepts of alignment typology

Alignment typology investigates the cross-linguistic regularities in the similarities and contrasts between the agent A and the patient P (or O) in the basic construction of prototypical action verbs, and the sole core argument S of monovalent verbs. The fundamentals of alignment typology as developed in the last decades are exposed in works such as (Comrie 1978; Plank 1979; Dixon 1994; Lazard 1994; Palmer 1994, Chapters 1-4; Manning 1996; Kibrik 1997; Lazard 1997; Mithun & Chafe 1999).

Some of the most basic notions of alignment typology are still open to debate. Several authors have pointed to the problematic status of S. In particular, Andrews (2001) argues that, while A and P are ‘grammatico-semantic primitives’, S is not a primitive concept of syntactic structure, and Bickel (To appear) puts forward an alternative approach to the definition of core syntactic roles. Another controversial issue in alignment typology is the question how to accommodate languages in which the morphosyntactic treatment of A and P is determined by their relative ranking with respect to some hierarchy, as discussed by Zúñiga (2006). The question of “deep/syntactic ergativity” and “pivots” deserves mention here too. However, I will not address these questions further, because they have no direct connection to the aim of this paper, namely the discussion of terminological issues concerning a particular aspect of morphological alignment in languages in which the identification of morphological alignment patterns according to current definitions is not problematic.

For each behavioral or coding property contributing to the contrast between A and P, an intransitive construction may be aligned with the transitive construction in one of the following three ways: *accusative* alignment ($S = A \neq P$), *ergative* alignment ($S = P \neq A$), and *tripartite* alignment ($S \neq A$ and $S \neq P$).¹ Three types of coding properties can be taken into consideration in the recognition of types of surface alignment: *core term marking*, *argument indexation*, and *constituent order*.

Argument indexation and *core term marking* are instances of head marking and dependent marking respectively – Nichols 1986. *Argument indexation* refers to manifestations of the contrast between A, P and S at the level of the verb (verb agreement with core terms, or attachment of pronominal affixes to the verb), whereas *core term marking* refers to manifestations of the contrast between A, P and S at the level of the NPs assuming these roles (case inflection of words included in NPs assuming core syntactic roles, or presence of adpositions adjacent to NPs in core syntactic roles).² Examples (1) from Russian and (2) from

¹ Properties shared by A and P are generally shared by S as well. This is however not always the case, in particular with respect to core term marking – see section 7.5 below, the notion of “double oblique system”.

² Case marks attached to the last word of NPs are particularly common, but other patterns are attested (for example, “distributed” case marks, as in Latin or in Russian). The distinction between postpositions and case

Avar (a North-Eastern Caucasian language) illustrate the accusative and the ergative type of alignment in core term marking and argument indexation.³

(1) Russian

a. quotation form of nouns: *otec* ‘father’, *devuška* ‘girl’

b. *Otec prišel-Ø*
father come.PST-SG.M
‘The father came’

c. *Devuška prišl-a*
girl come.PST-SG.F
‘The girl came’

d. *Otec vzjal-Ø devuš-k-u*
father take.PST-SG.M girl-ACC
‘The father took the girl’

(2) Avar (elicited)

a. quotation form of nouns: *wac* ‘brother’, *jas* ‘girl’

b. *dir wac w-ač’ana*
1SG.GEN brother SG.M-come.PFV
‘My brother came’

c. *jas j-ač’ana*
girl SG.F-come.PFV
‘The girl came’

d. *dir wac-as jas j-osana*
1SG.GEN brother-ERG girl SG.F-take.PFV
‘My brother took the girl’

In Russian, A in the construction of *vzjat* ‘take’ is in the same case form (nominative) as S in the construction of *prijti* ‘come’, and is indexed on the verb in the same way, whereas P in the construction of *vzjat* ‘take’ is in a distinct case form (accusative) and is not indexed on the verb. In Avar, P in the construction of ‘take’ is in the same case form (absolutive) as S in

marks attached to the last word of NPs is often problematic, but this has no repercussion on the matters discussed in this paper.

³ Contrary to the usual conventions, but in accordance with the views defended in this paper, in the glosses of languages in which nouns are inflected for case, the absence of case indication signals a form identical to the quotation form.

the construction of ‘come’, and is indexed on the verb in the same way, whereas A in the construction of ‘take’ is in a distinct case form (ergative) and is not indexed.

3. Major patterns of core term marking

The alignment patterns of a language do not necessarily involve all of the three coding characteristics mentioned above: core term marking and indexation are not found in all languages, and the relevance of constituent order to the recognition of alignment types is limited to languages with a relatively rigid constituent order in which, in the transitive construction, the verb (or an auxiliary, in analytic verbal predication) is placed between A and P.⁴ It may also happen that, in the same construction, two different coding characteristics follow different alignment patterns (*mixed* alignment). As noted by Anderson (1976), intransitive constructions with S case-marked in the same way as P, but indexed in the same way as A, are relatively common. They are found for example in the Kartvelian language Laz (Holisky 1991).

Among the languages that have contrasts in core term marking, irrespective of the possible organization of contrasts concerning the other two coding characteristics, two patterns of core term marking are particularly common:

- the pattern illustrated in Section 2 by Russian, in which P is the only core term in a case form distinct from the quotation form of nouns, or combined with an adposition;
- the pattern illustrated in Section 2 by Avar, in which A is the only core term in a case form distinct from the quotation form of nouns, or combined with an adposition.

Each of these patterns has a variant characterized by *differential marking* of P or A. *Differential marking* is the general term for situations in which the use of a case mark or adposition with nouns fulfilling a given role is bound by certain conditions. The differential marking of P in core term marking patterns of the type illustrated above by Russian, more known under the name of *differential object marking*, is particularly common – see among others (Bossong 1985; Lazard 2001; Aissen 2003), but the differential marking of A in core term marking patterns of the type illustrated above by Avar is attested too, and differential marking is not always limited to one core syntactic term.⁵ Given the questions addressed here, it is not necessary to go into more details on this point.

The two major patterns of core term marking have in common that the form taken by nouns and NPs in an extra-syntactic function of quotation or designation is also used, without any modification or addition, for S in intransitive constructions and for one of the core terms of the transitive construction: A in core term marking systems that follow accusative alignment, P in systems that follow ergative alignment.

In other words, in the major patterns of core term marking, the form of NPs in S role can be characterized as *syntactically unmarked* (in the sense that the same form has uses in which

⁴ For example, the Mande language Manding has neither core syntactic term marking nor argument indexation, and the constituent order in Manding is APVX. Verbal predication, however, involves obligatory auxiliaries (commonly called “predicative markers”) preceding the verb, and the recognition of accusative alignment follows from the fact that auxiliaries occur between A and P in the transitive construction, and after S in intransitive constructions (Creissels, In press).

⁵ On differential subject marking, see Hoop & Swart (2008). On the differential marking of both S/A and P in Korean, see Kwon & Zribi-Hertz (2008).

it does not need to be licensed by a syntactic construction), and the same form is used for one of the two core terms of the transitive construction.

4. The terminological issue

Traditionally, in core term marking systems of the Russian type, the noun form used for quotation and for A/S function is called *nominative*, whereas the form used for nouns in P function (or the adposition accompanying nouns in P function) is called *accusative*.

The terminology used for describing systems of the Avar type shows more variation. Russian scholars of Caucasian languages extend the use of *nominative* to noun forms used for quotation and for P/S function in languages following the Avar pattern of core term marking. However, most recent descriptions of languages having a core term marking system of this type use the terminology popularized in particular by Dixon's work on ergativity, according to which the noun form used for quotation and for P/S function is called *absolute*, whereas the form used for nouns in A function (or the adposition accompanying nouns in A function) is called *ergative*.

The terminology used in most recent language descriptions is therefore characterized by the use of two different terms for the form of nouns uttered in isolation with a function of quotation or designation, according to the range of its syntactic uses: this form is called *nominative* if its syntactic uses include S and A roles, but not P; it is called *absolute* if its syntactic uses include S and P roles, but not A.

In the following sections, I will show that, in languages with a system of core term marking that does not uniformly follow one of the two major patterns, this terminological choice raises difficulties that cannot be solved in a consistent way.

5. The terminological problem in core term marking systems showing alignment variations

Many languages show variations in their alignment patterns, as discussed in various ways by Comrie (1973), Moravcsik (1978), Van Valin (1981), among others. *Split ergativity* refers to alignment variations conditioned by grammatical features of the verb (e.g. tense, aspect, etc.) or by the nature of its core arguments (e.g. 1st/2nd person pronouns vs. other nominals), whereas *split intransitivity* (Van Valin 1990) refers to the fact that verbal lexemes occurring in intransitive constructions may divide into two (or possibly more) classes differing in their alignment properties. Both types of alignment variations may combine in the same language – see for instance (Lazard 1995) on Georgian.

A first difficulty in the use of the terms *nominative* and *absolute* according to the current definition mentioned in Section 4 arises with split-ergative languages such as the Kurmanji variety of Kurdish: in the intransitive constructions of Kurmanji, S is invariably in the so-called “direct case” (which is also the quotation form of nouns), and the verb invariably agrees with it, whereas the coding characteristics of A and P in the transitive construction depend on the tense of the verb. As illustrated by example (3), in some tenses, A in the “direct case” contrasts with P in the “oblique case”, and the verb agrees with A, whereas in other tenses, A is in the oblique case, P in the direct case, and the verb agrees with P.⁶

⁶ The transitive construction is illustrated here by a verb which is not a prototypical transitive verb, but which, in the language in question, has the same construction as prototypical transitive verbs.

(3) Kurmanji (Blau & Barak 1999)

a. *Ez Sînem-ê dibîn-im*
1SG Sinem-OBL see.IPFV-1SG
'I see Sinem'

b. *Tu Sînem-ê dibîn-î*
2SG Sinem-OBL see.IPFV-2SG
'You see Sinem'

c. *Sînem min dibîn-e*
Sinem 1SG.OBL see.IPFV-3SG
'Sinem sees me'

d. *Sînem te dibîn-e*
Sinem 2SG.OBL see.IPFV-3SG
'Sinem sees you'

e. *Min Sînem dît-Ø*
1SG.OBL Sinem see.PFV-3SG
'I saw Sinem'

f. *Te Sînem dît-Ø*
2SG.OBL Sinem see.PFV-3SG
'You saw Sinem'

g. *Sînem-ê ez dît-im*
Sinem-OBL 1SG see.PFV-1SG
'Sinem saw me'

h. *Sînem-ê tu dît-î*
Sinem-OBL 2SG see.PFV-2SG
'Sinem saw you'

Consequently, in Kurmanji, the tense illustrated in example (3) by sentences (a-d) in the triggers accusative alignment, whereas the tense illustrated by sentences (e-h) triggers ergative alignment. In such a system, there is no principled way to standardize the designation of noun case forms according to the definitions adopted in most recent typological works, since the form traditionally called direct case meets the definition of nominative in some contexts and of absolutive in some others, and similarly, the oblique case would have to be called accusative in some contexts and ergative in some others.

A possible solution for split-ergative systems of this kind would be to abandon *absolutive*, and to follow the terminology used in particular by Kibrik and other Russian Caucasologists, according to which *nominative* applies to case forms used for nouns in S role, irrespective of

the fact that the use of these forms extends to nouns in A function (contrasting with P in the accusative case) or to nouns in P function (contrasting with A in the ergative case). In a different theoretical framework, the same terminological decision is taken by Bittner & Hale (1996), who also reject the use of *absolutive* and extend *nominative* to case forms used for nouns in S/P function in case marking systems following ergative alignment. We shall return to Bittner & Hale's theory of case later, since their terminological decision follows from a conception of case that converges with the position defended in this paper in a crucial respect.

Concerning the purely terminological aspect of the question, what is important at this stage of the discussion is that the mere extension of *nominative* to any case form used in S function provides a satisfactory solution for split-ergative systems of the type illustrated by Kurmanji, but does not solve the problem of languages having an intransitivity split manifested in case marking, i.e., languages in which intransitive verbs divide into two classes selecting two different case forms of their S argument. For example, Georgian has both TAM-driven variations in the case marking of the A and P arguments of transitive verbs and a division of intransitive verbs into two classes, one with invariable case marking of S and the other with variations in the case marking of S identical to those characterizing the case marking of the A argument of transitive verbs. The result is that, in Georgian, depending on the choice of an individual intransitive verb and of a particular tense value, the S argument of intransitive verbs may appear in one of the case forms traditionally labeled nominative, ergative, or dative. There is no coherent way to standardize this terminology within the frame of any commonly accepted set of definitions, unless considerations on markedness are explicitly added to the definition of the terms used to label case forms of nouns, as discussed in Section 6.

Considerations on markedness are also crucial in the discussion of case terminology in languages that do not have intransitivity splits, but in which the form used for nouns in S role is different from that used in the extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation (see Section 7).

6. Syntactic markedness and morphological markedness

Nouns can be uttered in isolation in such conditions that there would be no justification to consider them as the elliptical realization of a syntactic construction in which all other terms would be understood and would have to be retrieved from the context. The extra-syntactic use of nouns may involve two different functions: a function of call, for which some languages have a dedicated *vocative* form of nouns, and a function of quotation or designation. The extra-syntactic use of nouns in a quotation / designation function is particularly apparent when for instance a noun is written on a box to indicate the content of this box, or when the name of a person is written on his/her passport or identity card, or on the door of his/her office. Interestingly, the form of nouns used in such contexts is not always identical to the form of nouns used in predicate function (as illustrated for example by the use of the instrumental case for nouns in predicate function in Slavonic languages), which shows that the extra-syntactic function of designation and the function of predicate in a construction expressing identification cannot be assimilated to each other.

In languages in which nouns are inflected for case, case forms that can be uttered in isolation either in vocative function or as pure labels attached to some entities present in the situation, without triggering the reconstruction of a syntactic construction the other terms of

which would be understood, will be characterized here as *syntactically unmarked*. Case forms that ignore such uses will be characterized as *syntactically marked*. Note that syntactically unmarked case forms (e.g., the nominative case of Latin nouns) available for the function of quotation / designation have syntactic uses too: in Latin, the nominative case is not only the form of nouns available for the extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation, but also the form taken by nouns in S/A role. A possible analysis is that case forms such as Latin nominative are default case forms used in contexts that do not require some syntactically marked case form. Modern grammatical theories tend to neglect the extra-syntactic use of nouns, but ancient grammarians implicitly acknowledged its theoretical significance when they chose to label one of the case forms of Greek nouns as *onomastikê ptôsis*, and to transpose this term into Latin as *casus nominativus* ‘the case used to designate’. We will return to this question later, since my claim is that, in addition to its theoretical interest, the recognition of the contrast between syntactically marked and syntactically unmarked case forms as the most basic distinction in all case systems provides a simple solution to the terminological problem raised by the existence of uncommon patterns of core term marking.

Most of the time, in languages in which nouns are inflected for case, the syntactically unmarked form of nouns used in an extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation is also *morphologically unmarked*, in the sense that it can conveniently be taken as the input for the morphological operations (affixation or others) that give rise to the other case forms of the noun.

In the simplest cases, it is possible to describe case inflection as an affixation process in which the syntactically unmarked form of nouns used for quotation / designation is characterized by the absence of any overt case affix. The case inflection of Turkish nouns, illustrated by example (4), is an instance of the type of case inflection in which the syntactically unmarked form of nouns used for quotation / designation coincides with the stem to which the affixes characterizing syntactically marked case forms are added.

(4) Turkish: case inflection of *ev* ‘house’ and *masa* ‘table’

a. syntactically unmarked form (nominative)		Ø	<i>ev</i>	<i>masa</i>
b. syntactically marked forms:	accusative	-(y)I	<i>ev-i</i>	<i>masa-yı</i>
	genitive	-(n)In	<i>ev-in</i>	<i>masa-nın</i>
	dative-allative	-(y)A	<i>ev-e</i>	<i>masa-ya</i>
	locative	-dA	<i>ev-de</i>	<i>masa-da</i>
	ablative	-dAn	<i>ev-den</i>	<i>masa-dan</i>

However, the form of nouns used in the extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation does not always coincide with the stem to which case affixes are added. Russian illustrates a situation in which the quotation form of nouns (nominative case) may include a non-void ending, and conversely, syntactically marked noun forms (i.e., forms existing only as elements of syntactic constructions) may have a zero ending. For example, Russian nouns of the morphological type illustrated by *devušċk-a* ‘girl’ have an ending *-a* in their quotation form and a zero ending in the genitive plural. Similarly, in Icelandic, *hatt-ur* ‘hat’ has an overt ending *-ur* in its quotation form (nominative singular), and a zero ending in the accusative singular (*hatt*).

Outside the Indo-European family, a similar situation is found in the South-West Bantu languages having so-called “tone cases”: in those languages, nouns occur with their lexical tone contour in certain syntactic roles only; their quotation / designation form includes an additional high tone that must be analyzed as an inflectional mark – see in particular (Maniacky 2002) on Ngangela.

Therefore, *morphological* markedness and *syntactic* markedness do not necessarily coincide. According to the current definitions of alignment types, morphological markedness is not relevant to the characterization of core term marking systems as accusative or ergative. However, for each type (accusative and ergative) it may prove useful to make a distinction between two subtypes:

- a more common (or canonical) subtype, consistent with the general tendency towards coincidence between syntactic and morphological markedness; in this subtype (illustrated above by Turkish), the quotation form of nouns coincides with the bare noun stem;
- a less common (or non-canonical) subtype (illustrated above by Russian, Icelandic, and Ngangela) in which, in addition to the noun stem, the quotation form of nouns includes a morphological element possibly absent from certain syntactically marked forms.

Before turning to the discussion of uncommon types of core term marking, a brief comment is in order about a possible complication in the analysis of morphologically complex quotation forms of nouns. In some languages, the quotation form of nouns includes a morphological element that is part of a case inflection paradigm, but quotation forms of nouns including a definiteness marker are attested too. Definiteness markers are not relevant to the distinction between syntactically marked and syntactically unmarked forms of nouns or NPs. In principle, the identification of morphological elements included in the quotation form of nouns as cases or definiteness markers follows from the consideration of the syntactic distribution of the form in question, but it may be more or less blurred by interactions between case marking and definiteness. However, this does not affect the consistency of the system of notions put forward in this paper.

7. Uncommon types of core term marking

7.1. The ‘marked-nominative’ pattern: marked S/A vs. unmarked P

A first uncommon pattern of core term marking is the so-called “marked-nominative” pattern. It meets the definition of accusative alignment, since S and A are treated in the same way and contrast with P, but nouns in S/A role take a marked case form.

The term *marked-nominative* originates from Dixon 1994. I reproduce it here as the most widespread label for a pattern of core term marking particularly relevant to the discussion, but I put it in quotation marks in order to express my reservations about it, and the glosses in the following examples reflect the terminology proposed in Section 9 (ANTIACC = *antiaccusative* case or adposition).

As explained in Section 6, *marked* has two possible interpretations, which do not necessarily coincide. The use of *marked-nominative* is unambiguous in the case of languages in which the quotation / designation form of nouns always coincides with the bare noun stem, that is, when there is no discrepancy between morphological and syntactic markedness. But if

marked-nominative is understood as referring to morphological markedness, i.e. to situations in which the form of nouns in S/A role results from the addition of an overt morphological element to the noun stem, then languages such as Latin, Russian or Icelandic must be recognized as (partially) marked-nominative languages. Since such languages are generally not mentioned in discussions about this type of core term marking, one may conclude that, at least implicitly, *marked-nominative* as used in most recent works on alignment typology refers to syntactic markedness rather than to morphological markedness, i.e., to situations in which nouns in S/A role occur in a case form distinct from the quotation / designation form, or combine with an adposition, whereas a form identical to the quotation / designation form of nouns is used for P, as in the Cushitic language Oromo – example (5) – or in the Berber language Kabyle – example (6). In the presentation of examples (5) and (6), in accordance with the terminology proposed in Section 9, the ‘absolutive’ prefix is glossed ANTIACC (= antiaccusative).

(5) Oromo (Griefenow-Mewis & Bitima 1994)

a. quotation form of nouns: *Tulluu* (proper name), *makiinaa* ‘car’

b. *Makiinaa-n hin dhufu*
 car-ANTIACC NEG arrive.PRS.3SG.M
 ‘The car is not arriving’

c. *Tulluu-n gammada*
 Tulluu-ANTIACC be glad.PRS.3SG.M
 ‘Tulluu is glad’

d. *Tulluu-n makiinaa bite*
 Tulluu-ANTIACC car buy.PFV.3SG.M
 ‘Tulluu bought a car’

(6) Kabyle (Naït-Zerrad 2001)

a. quotation form of nouns: *aqcic* ‘boy’, *argaz* ‘man’, *tawwurt* ‘door’

b. *Yuzzel wergaz*
 3SG.M.run.PFV ANTIACC.man
 ‘The man ran’

c. *Yettru weqcic*
 3SG.M.cry.PFV ANTIACC.boy
 ‘The boy cried’

d. *Teldi tewwurt*
 3SG.F.open.PFV ANTIACC.door
 ‘The door opened’

- e. *Yeldi weqcic tawwurt*
 3SG.M.open.PFV ANTIACC.boy door
 ‘The boy opened the door’
- f. *Yewwet weqcic argaz*
 3SG.M.hit.PFV ANTIACC.boy man
 ‘The boy hit a man’
- g. *Yewwet wergaz aqcic*
 3SG.M.hit.PFV ANTIACC.man boy
 ‘The man hit a boy’

Languages with contrasts between core syntactic terms following this pattern are relatively rare at world level, but very common in Africa. Outside Africa, this type has been recognized in the Kartvelian language Mingrelian (Harris 1991), in the Yuman languages of California (Dixon 1994), and in some Oceanian languages, in particular among those spoken in New Caledonia (Moysse-Faurie & Ozanne-Rivierre 1983). In Africa, systems of this type are found in Berber languages, in South-West Bantu languages, and in East-African languages belonging to three different families: Cushitic, Omotic (both included into the Afro-Asiatic phylum) and Nilotic (included into the Nilo-Saharan phylum).⁷ König (2006, 2008) provides detailed inventories of East-African and Berber languages belonging to this type, and analyzes both their commonalities and the properties that justify the recognition of different subtypes.

Descriptions of such systems often use idiosyncratic labels (such as the labels *état libre / état d’annexion* commonly found in Berber grammars), and when they use terms traditionally used as labels for case forms of nouns or adpositions involved in core syntactic role marking, they show a particularly high degree of confusion. This is not surprising, since current terminology is not suitable for languages with a predominant pattern of core term marking contradicting the (prevailing, but not universal) principle according to which a syntactically unmarked form of nouns (that is, a form also available for the extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation) occurs without any modification or addition at least in S role.

In descriptions of “marked-nominative” languages, the case form or adposition used to mark nouns in S/A roles is often called *nominative*, but some authors prefer to call it *ergative*, or *extended ergative*. The first solution correctly reflects the range of its syntactic uses, but contradicts the traditional definition of nominative as being primarily the form of nouns in the function of designation. The second solution takes into account the syntactic markedness of the case form or adposition marking S/A, but the use of *ergative* or *extended ergative* as a

⁷ South-West Bantu Languages such as Ngangela are not typical “marked-nominative” languages, in the sense that they use for S and A the morphologically simplest form of nouns. However, as regards *syntactic* markedness, they belong to this type in the sense that the form they use for nouns in S and A roles is not the quotation / designation form. In Ngangela, the noun form used in P role is *morphologically marked* in the sense that it can be described as resulting from the addition of a H tone to the lexical representation of the lexeme, but it is *syntactically unmarked* in the sense that the same additional H tone is also present in the quotation / designation form of nouns (Maniacky 2002).

label for a case form or adposition in systems of core syntactic term marking that follow the accusative pattern of alignment can only lead to confusions.⁸

As regards the form taken by nouns in P role in “marked-nominative” languages, at least three different terms are found in the literature: *nominative*, *accusative*, or *absolute*. The choice of *nominative* is motivated by the etymology of this term (the form used in an extra-syntactic function of designation), but does not reflect the second component or its meaning (the range of syntactic uses typical for a nominative case). The choice of *accusative* is consistent with the use of this form in P role, but does not reflect its availability for extra-syntactic uses. The problem with *absolute* is more or less the same as with nominative: by virtue of its etymology, a priori, *absolute* is a good label for a noun form that does not need syntactic licensing and is available for extra-syntactic uses; however, in the terminology popularized in particular by Dixon’s work on ergativity, the use of *absolute* is restricted to extra-syntactic noun forms whose syntactic uses include S and A, but not P, which does not fit the “marked-nominative” pattern.

7.2. Marked S/A vs. marked P

Another uncommon pattern of accusative core term marking is illustrated by Japanese, which has both a marker *-o* comparable to the accusative markers traditionally recognized in systems following accusative alignment, and a marker *-ga* occurring in S and A roles, but not in the extra-syntactic use of nouns – example (7). This marker *-ga* is currently labeled *nominative*, which again correctly reflects the range of its syntactic uses, but contradicts an essential part of the traditional definition of nominative. The gloss ANTIACC is used here, in conformity with the terminology proposed in Section 9.

(7) Japanese (elicited)

a. quotation form of nouns: *isha* ‘doctor’, *hito* ‘person’, *shinbun* ‘newspaper’

b. *Isha-ga* *kita*
 doctor-ANTIACC come.PST
 ‘A doctor came’

b. *Oozei-no* *hito-ga* *kono* *shinbun-o* *yomu*
 many-GEN person-ANTIACC DEM newspaper-ACC read.PRS
 ‘Many people read this newspaper’

⁸ Moreover, (*extended*) *ergative* suggests a diachronic scenario according to which marked case forms or adpositions used for nouns in S/A roles result from the extension of the use of a case mark originally used for A only, or for A and S_A in a split intransitive system. Such a scenario is probably responsible for the “marked nominative” system of Mingrelian, but there is no reason to think that it could have played a role in the emergence of the African “marked-nominative” systems. In the particular case of South West Bantu languages, there is strong evidence that “tone cases” result from the reanalysis of a former \pm *definite* distinction, and the comparison of the “marked-nominative” languages of East Africa with the few ergative languages found in this area suggests a historical development from “marked-nominative” to ergative rather than the other way round (König To appear).

This uncommon pattern is also found in Korean, a language sharing many typological features with Japanese. Note in particular that the Japanese and Korean systems of core term marking have in common not only the use of marked case forms both for A/S and P, but also differential function marking both for S/A and P.

7.3. The ‘marked-absolutive’ pattern: marked S/P vs. unmarked A

Most works on ergativity do not mention the existence of core term marking patterns following ergative alignment, but with nouns fulfilling A role in the quotation / designation form (without the addition of any adposition), and nouns fulfilling S/P role in a case form distinct from the quotation / designation form, or combined with an adposition.⁹ However, this pattern is attested by Nias, an Austronesian language of Sumatra (Brown 2001) and a few other Pacific languages: Moyse-Faurie (2003) mentions Waris (Papuan) and Roviana (Oceanic; Solomon Islands). In Nias – example (8), the form occurring in S/A role differs from the quotation form by the addition of a nasal prefix or an initial consonant mutation which probably constitutes the reflex of a former nasal prefix. In the presentation of example (8), in accordance with the terminology proposed in Section 9, the ‘absolutive’ prefix is glossed ANTIERG (= anti-ergative).

(8) Nias (Brown 2003)

a. quotation form of nouns: *ama* ‘father’, *si’ila* ‘village advisor’

b. *mofanö n-ama-gu*

leave ANTIERG-father-1SG.POSS

‘My father is leaving / left’

c. *i-tolo zi’ila ama-gu*

1SG.REALIS ANTIERG.village_advisor father-1SG.POSS

‘My father is helping/helped a/the/some village advisor(s)’

d. *la-tolo n-ama-gu si’ila*

3PL.REALIS ANTIERG-father-1SG.POSS village_advisor

‘The village advisors are helping/helped my father’

7.4. Marked S/P vs. marked A

Tongan – example (9) – and some other Polynesian languages illustrate another uncommon pattern of ergative core term marking, in which nouns in A role are marked by an ergative preposition, and nouns in S/P role are marked (at least under certain conditions) by an ‘absolutive’ preposition (glossed here ANTIERG, in conformity with the terminology proposed in Section 9).

⁹ Dixon (1994:11): “There are a few well-attested instances where accusative has zero realization, while nominative involves a positive affix, but none where ergative has zero form and absolutive is non-zero.”

(9) Tongan (Churchward 1953)

a. quotation form of nouns: *Tolu* (proper name), *talavou* ‘boy’

b. *Na’e lea ‘a Tolu*
TAM speak ANTIERG Tolu
‘Tolu spoke’

c. *Na’e lea ‘a e talavou*
TAM speak ANTIERG DEF boy
‘The boy spoke’

d. *Na’e taamate’i ‘a e talavou ‘e Tolu*
TAM kill ANTIERG DEF boy ERG Tolu
‘Tolu killed the boy’

e. *Na’e taamate’i ‘a Tolu ‘e e talavou*
TAM kill ANTIERG Tolu ERG DEF boy
‘The boy killed Tolu’

7.5. Others

7.5.1. The “double oblique” pattern

No language seems to have A and P in the quotation form contrasting with S in a syntactically marked case form. The use of the same syntactically marked case or adposition for A, P and S seems to be equally unattested. By contrast, the use of the same syntactically marked case for A and P contrasting with S in the quotation form, known as “double oblique system”, although extremely rare, is attested in Rošani and a few other Iranian languages. The case marking pattern found in middle Iranian languages in clauses headed by verb forms based on the past stem of the verb is a typical ergative pattern with A in the so-called “oblique” case and P and S in the absolute form. Starting from that, Rošani has generalized the use of the oblique case for P, irrespective of the TAM value of the verb, without however modifying the oblique case marking of A in past tenses, resulting in the “double oblique system” (Payne 1980:153-161).

7.5.2. The tripartite pattern

A *tripartite* system of core term marking, with S in a form identical to the quotation form and two different marked case forms for A and P, is attested in the Sahaptian language Nez Perce (Rude 1985) and in a few Australian languages, e.g. Wankumara (McDonald & Wurm 1979) and Kala Lagaw Ya (Ford & Ober 1991). The Iranian language Yazgulyam provides another illustration of this pattern. Starting from the typical Middle-Iranian ergative pattern of case marking, Yazgulyam has preserved the oblique case marking of A and at the same time grammaticalized a preposition as P-marker, resulting in distinct marking for A, P and S (Payne 1980:173-176).

More complex tripartite systems are also attested, for example in the Nakh-Daghestanian language Udi (Schulze 2001, Harris 2002). In Udi, none of the three core syntactic roles is

characterized by a unique possibility of case marking, but each of them shows a different pattern of differential marking, so that no alignment can be recognized, either between A and S or between P and S.

8. Discussion

The difficulties in choosing convenient labels for case forms of nouns or adpositions involved in uncommon patterns of core term marking originate in the fact that *nominative* and *absolute*, which etymologically are equally convenient labels for noun forms used in an extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation, irrespective of the possible range of their syntactic uses, have specialized in a way that makes each of them suitable for languages with a particular type of core term marking only. Consequently, it would be useful to revise case terminology as proposed in typologically oriented works in a way that should permit a consistent labeling of cases or adpositions in the description of various patterns of core term marking, and not only in the description of those belonging to one of the two commonest types.

In all languages, nouns (and noun phrases) differ from other categories in that they can be uttered in isolation as labels for entities present in the context in which they are uttered, and the only contrast that can be found in all case systems is the contrast between a case form available for this function and case forms that must be licensed by a construction in which they fulfill a particular role. Consequently, this contrast deserves to be taken into account in a terminology designed to be applied to the description of typologically diverse case systems. It is interesting to observe that, in spite of the fact that typological considerations certainly played no role in this choice, this is precisely what ancient grammarians did when they coined the Greek term *onomastikê ptôsis* and its Latin equivalent *nominativus* (from *nominare* ‘designate’). This conception of the nominative case has subsequently been more or less blurred by the scholastic tradition of teaching Latin, but it is still present in modern Latin grammars. For example, Collart (1966) defines the nominative case as “le cas-pancarte” (‘the placard case’), and explicitly argues that the use of the nominative case for subjects is not the basic function of this case, but rather a “natural” consequence of its more basic value of designation form. Similarly, Ernout & Thomas (1951) insist that nominative is “le cas du nom considéré en lui-même ... une sorte de cas-zéro auquel se mettait tout substantif qui se trouvait isolé dans la phrase par rupture de construction” (‘the case of the noun considered in itself ... a kind of zero case used for every substantive isolated in the sentence by a break in the construction’).

The theory of case assignment developed by Bittner & Hale (1996) in a generative framework seems to be based on the same intuition. Crucially, nominative (which in Bittner & Hale’s terminology includes the form used for nouns in S/P function in case marking systems following ergative alignment) is characterized as “the *unmarked* structural Case”:

Case-binding also constrains the unmarked structural Case—i.e., the nominative—which we analyze as Case-less. For a nominative argument, the constraint is that it must not be Case-bound

(Bittner & Hale 1996:4)

However, the notion of markedness used by Bittner & Hale is not entirely clear. Its empirical basis is not discussed. No reference is made to the quotation form of nouns, in spite of the fact

that, once the existence of a case-less form of nouns is posited, the extra-syntactic use of nouns should precisely constitute the most typical context for the occurrence of such a form, since it excludes the presence of a case assigner. Moreover, the only illustrations of accusative case systems Bittner & Hale explicitly mention are English and Japanese, which are rather atypical: in English, morphological case is restricted to pronouns, and in Japanese, so-called nominative, according to the definitions adopted in this paper, is a marked form, both morphologically and syntactically.

More generally, most modern linguists, even among those who acknowledge the special status of nominative in the type of core term marking system illustrated by Latin, tend to underestimate the (practical as well as theoretical) importance of the extra-syntactic use of nouns as pure labels for concrete entities present in the situation, which has no equivalent for other categories, and to restrict the extra-syntactic functions of nouns to quotation.¹⁰ But the designation form of nouns is not only the form arbitrarily selected by lexicographers to represent nominal lexemes or given by speakers in answer to the question ‘How do you say *X* (*X* a noun) in your language?’ More generally, it is the form speakers spontaneously utter (or write) in isolation as a pure label.

It follows from the data examined in Section 7 that, in spite of the fact that two patterns are particularly common, there is no universal constraint on the range of core syntactic relations that can involve the use of case forms different from the quotation / designation form of nouns, or the presence of adpositions.

Consequently, the only way to develop a terminology not limited to languages with particular patterns of core term marking is to start from terms reflecting nothing more than the contrast between noun forms that can be uttered or written in isolation as pure labels, and noun forms that must be licensed by a syntactic construction, without any additional reference to the range of syntactic contexts in which the designation form can be used as a kind of default form. More precisely, the following two conditions are crucial in order to eliminate any risk of confusion:

(a) the use of labels like *accusative* or *ergative*, traditionally reserved to case forms of nouns that must be syntactically licensed, should not be extended to forms available for an extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation;

(b) labels the etymology of which suggests the possibility of an extra-syntactic function (*nominative*, or *absolute*) should not be used for case forms of nouns that must be syntactically licensed, or for adpositions.

9. Proposals

9.1. *Absolute (or default, or designative) case vs. integrative cases*

By virtue of their etymology, *nominative* as well as *absolute* are possible labels for noun forms used in the extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation, irrespective of their distribution in syntactic contexts. However, in current practice, each of them has specialized to systems in which a syntactically unmarked form of nouns assumes a particular range of syntactic uses. Moreover, their use in some (relatively recent) descriptive traditions is in total

¹⁰ This attitude may well be a consequence of the structuralist approach, the principles of which were hardly compatible with the acknowledgement of the importance of a use of nouns that quite obviously does not lend itself to an analysis based on possibilities of commutation in identical contexts.

contradiction with their original meaning, since they are sometimes used as labels for syntactically marked noun forms or adpositions. Therefore, the proposal to give them back their original meaning would probably meet incomprehension, and could be a source of misunderstandings.

In spite of the risk of confusion with ‘absolute’, a possible solution would be to generalize *absolute form* (or *absolute case*, in languages in which nouns have morphological case) for the form taken by nouns in the extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation, without any hint at the range of syntactic roles which may trigger the use of other case forms or the presence of adpositions. Other possibilities would be *default form/case*, or *designative form/case*. *Designative form/case* would have the advantage of resuming the etymological motivation of *nominative* in quite a transparent way. One could also think of *zero form/case*, or *unmarked form/case*, but I prefer to exclude such terms because of the risk of confusion between morphological and syntactic markedness: as already commented in Section 6, syntactic markedness and morphological complexity do not always coincide.

In languages in which nouns have morphological case, it may also prove useful to have a generic term for syntactically marked case forms of nouns, that is, a general term for noun forms that must be syntactically licensed, whatever their distribution. I propose to call them *integrative cases*. This term would be particularly useful in the description of binary case systems, that is, case systems in which a unique integrative case contrasts with the absolute / default / designative form of nouns. A binary case contrast is found for example in Old French, Kurmanji, Maasai, Berber languages, South-West Bantu languages, etc. In such systems, the syntactically marked case (the integrative case, in the terminology proposed here) often has a relatively broad (and sometimes atypical) syntactic distribution which makes it particularly difficult to choose among the terms traditionally used to label cases by reference to syntactic uses considered prototypical. For example, in the Kurmanji variety of Kurdish (see example (3) above), depending on the TAM value of the verb, the case form traditionally called “oblique case” may occur (among others) in A or P role, which excludes designating it by a term referring to a specific syntactic role.¹¹

9.2. *Antiaccusative and antiergative*

As regards the inventory of possible labels referring to the syntactic distribution of integrative case forms or adpositions used to mark core syntactic terms, *accusative* can be retained for integrative case forms encountered in P role, or for adpositions accompanying nouns in P role, but not in S or A role, and similarly, *ergative* is a convenient label for integrative case forms encountered in A role, or for adpositions accompanying nouns in A role, but not in S or P role.

In core term marking systems characterized by an intransitivity split (i.e., in languages in which the S argument of some intransitive verbs is marked like A, and the S argument of some others like P), the use of *accusative* and *ergative* can be extended in the following way: (*extended*) *ergative* can be used as a label for integrative case forms or adpositions used for A and S_A, but neither for P nor S_P, and (*extended*) *accusative* can be used as a label for integrative case forms or adpositions used for P and S_P, but neither for A nor S_A. For

¹¹ For a typological survey of binary case systems, see (Arkad’ev 2006).

example, in Basque, the ergative case is used not only for NPs in A role, but also for the single argument of a minor subclass of intransitive verbs.

Tripartite systems of core term marking are relatively rare, but from the point of view of terminology, at least in their simplest form, they do not constitute a problem either, since the integrative verb forms involved in tripartite systems of core term marking are used for nouns in A and P function, but not for nouns in S function, and consequently can conveniently be labeled *ergative* and *accusative* respectively.

New terms must however be coined for integrative cases or adpositions involved in the types of core term marking presented in Sections 7.1 to 7.4:

- in systems using the same integrative case form or adposition for S and A, but not for P (Sections 7.1 & 7.2), I propose the label *antiaccusative* for the integrative case form or adposition common to S and A; the motivation of this term is that it applies to integrative cases that are found in core term marking systems following accusative alignment, but have a distribution complementary to that of an accusative case;
- in systems using the same integrative case form or adposition for S and P, but not for A (Sections 7.3 & 7.4), I propose the label *anti-ergative* for the integrative case form common to S and P; the motivation of this term is that it applies to integrative cases that are found in core term marking systems following ergative alignment, but have a distribution complementary to that of an ergative case.¹²

10. Conclusion

In the preceding sections, I have proposed the following definitions:

- In languages having contrasts in core term marking, the noun form used in the extra-syntactic function of quotation / designation is labeled *absolute* (or *default*, or *designative*) *case*, whatever its distribution in syntactic contexts, and irrespective of the fact that it coincides with the stem to which other case marks are added or not.
- *Integrative case* is a generic term for noun forms that must be syntactically licensed, in the sense that their occurrence is limited to particular roles in particular constructions.
- *Ergative* primarily applies to integrative case forms or adpositions found in A role but not in S/P roles; in split-intransitive systems, *ergative* can be used for integrative case forms or adpositions used not only for A, but also for the single argument S_A of a subclass or intransitive verbs.
- *Accusative* primarily applies to integrative case forms or adpositions found in P role but not in S/A roles; in split-intransitive systems, *accusative* can be used for integrative case forms or adpositions used not only for P, but also for the single argument S_P of a subclass or intransitive verbs.
- *Anti-ergative* applies to integrative case forms or adpositions found in S/P roles but not in A role.

¹² A possible objection to the use of this term is that it has already been applied by Comrie (1975) to a pattern of differential object marking found in Finnish, by which accusative case is replaced by nominative case when an A argument is missing. However, recent literature on differential function marking has not retained this use of *anti-ergative*, so that its introduction as a label for marked case forms used in S/P function should not be a source of confusion.

- *Antiaccusative* applies to integrative case forms or adpositions found in S/A roles but not in P role.

Starting from these definitions, the 6 possible patterns of core term marking that follow either accusative or ergative alignment can be characterized as follows. Types (1a), (1b) and (1c) have in common the grouping S/A vs. P characteristic of accusative alignment, whereas types (2a), (2b) and (2c) present the grouping S/P vs. A characteristic of ergative alignment. Bold print signals the two patterns most commonly encountered in the languages of the world:

(1a) *absolute S/A vs. accusative P* ;

(1b) *antiaccusative S/A vs. absolute P* (“marked-nominative”) – see Section 7.1;

(1c) *antiaccusative S/A vs. accusative P* – see Section 7.2;

(2a) *absolute S/P vs. ergative A*;

(2b) *anti-ergative S/P vs. absolute A* – see Section 7.3;

(2c) *anti-ergative S/P vs. ergative A* – see Section 7.4.

The logical possibilities for core term marking systems showing an intransitivity split can be characterized as follows:

(3a) *absolute A/S_A vs. (extended) accusative P/S_P* ;

(3b) *(extended) ergative A/S_A vs. absolute P/S_P* ;

(3c) *(extended) ergative A/S_A vs. (extended) accusative P/S_P* .

(3a) can be illustrated by Latin or Russian, if one accepts analyzing impersonal constructions involving an accusative NP as an instance of split intransitivity, with a minor class of intransitive S_P verbs in otherwise predominantly accusative languages. (3b) can be illustrated by Basque, a predominantly ergative language with a minor class of intransitive S_A verbs. I am not aware of any possible illustration of type (3c).

The proposals put forward in this paper do not pretend to solve all problems of case terminology. In particular, they leave entirely open the terminological questions raised by the possible use of the same case forms in core syntactic roles and in other types of roles (oblique dependents of verbs, complements of adpositions, genitival dependents of nouns, etc.). They nevertheless could contribute to bring some clarification in a domain in which terminological inconsistencies are particularly widespread.

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