Animacy and spatial cases

Denis Creissels University of Lyon denis.creissels@univ-lyon2.fr http://deniscreissels.fr

1. Introduction

In this talk, I take the term *case* in its traditional meaning of inflectional categorysystem (and the individual categories or values of that system) expressing dependency relations involving NPs.¹ Case affixes are not always easy to distinguish from adpositions fulfilling a similar function, but in some way or other a distinction between more or less integrated or more or less 'heavy' ways of marking dependency relations involving NPs is crucial to the question addressed in this talk.

A spatial relation involves two percepts, a *Figure* (or *Theme*, or *Trajector*) and an *Orienter* (or *Ground*, or *Location*, or *Landmark*), the Figure being perceived as located or in motion relative to the Orienter.²

A spatial case is an inflected form of nouns or NPs distinct from the absolute form available for the extra-syntactic function of pure designation, and apt to fulfill one of the following functions without the addition of an adposition:³

- non-verbal predicate, or predicative complement of a copula, specifying the location of an entity,
- verb satellite specifying the location of an event,
- argument of motion verbs specifying the source, path, or destination of the movement.

Two semantic classes of nouns frequently have particularities in relation with spatial cases: geographical names,⁴ and nouns referring to humans.

Geographical names often have a 'lighter' spatial marking than most other nouns and tend to be more conservative in evolutions affecting the expression of spatial relations. This is quite obviously the consequence of their predisposition to represent

¹ For a discussion of the various extensions of the term *case* encountered in the literature, see Haspelmath 2008.

² Creissels 2008 provides a brief introduction to the question of spatial cases in the languages of the world. For a general approach to the study of the linguistic expression of spatial relations, see also e.g. Jackendoff 1983, Langacker 1987, Jackendoff & Landau 1992, Svorou 1994, Pederson 1995, Pederson & al. 1998, Talmy 2000. Shay & Seibert 2003 provides a collection of papers exploring the variety of the linguistic means of expressing spatial relations in typologically diverse languages.

³ The fully productive use of the absolute form of nouns in locative function without the addition of an adposition, although extremely rare, is attested in Ardesen Laz – see Kutscher 2001.

⁴ Common nouns characterizable as 'natural locations' (such as *house*, or *village*) often show the same tendencies as geographical names with respect to the expression of spatial relations.

the reference point in a spatial relation, and of the frequency of their use as spatial complements or adjuncts. In Latin, the nouns that maintained spatial uses of prepositionless ablative and prepositionless accusative were mainly town names. In Tswana, names of towns or countries have no locative form, and occur in the absolute form in contexts in which, with very few exceptions, other nouns must take the locative form. In Hungarian, some town names maintain an ancient locative ending *-ett/ött/ott* that has been eliminated from regular noun inflection.⁵

Nouns referring to humans, or more generally to animate beings, show exactly the opposite tendencies.

The talk is organized as follows. Section 2 deals with the tendency of human nouns to show a specific behavior in the expression of spatial configurations with the usual residence of an individual in orienter function. In section 3, I summarize Comrie's account of the relationship between semantic and formal markedness in the expression of location in Eastern Armenian (Comrie 1986). In the following sections, I present situations illustrating the same tendencies in the behavior of human or animate nouns with respect to the expression of spatial relationships in two languages that cannot be suspected of having any genetic or areal link with Armenian or between themselves: Nahuatl (section 4) and Basque (section 5). Section 7 puts forward some conclusions.

2. Orientation in relation to a person vs. orientation in relation to a person's usual residence

A characteristic common to humans and some animal species is the existence of places that can be characterized as the usual residence of individuals: houses, tents, nests, dens, etc. It is always possible to express spatial relationships involving the usual residence of an individual in orienter function by means of a genitive construction, as in English *I am going to [my sister's house]*. However, in many languages, at least with humans, this is not the usual way to encode spatial configurations with an individual's residence in orienter function. Languages tend to treat this kind of spatial configuration by means of constructions in which the NP referring to the person in question is not transparently constructed as the genitive dependent of a noun referring to his/her residence.

A relatively common strategy is the use of a conventionalized elliptical construction, as in English *I am going to my sister's*. In such constructions, the identification of the missing head of the genitive construction departs from the general rule according to which an antecedent must be retrieved from the context. In the presence of a human genitive, a special rule allows identifying the missing head of an NP in spatial argument of adjunct function to the residence of the referent of the genitive.

Languages may also have synchronically opaque constructions resulting from the grammaticalization of constructions in which, originally, the NP referring to the person was the genitive dependent of the noun referring to his/her residence. For

⁵ This ancient locative suffix also subsists in the inflection of spatial postpositions.

example, French has a preposition *chez* 'at someone's house, home'⁶ resulting from the reanalysis of Old French *chiese* 'house' < Latin *casa* as a preposition: in Modern French, this word has completely ceased to be used as a noun, and the construction it forms with its complement does not show the characteristics of the genitive construction of Modern French.

In many languages (Russian, Hungarian, etc.) 'at N's usual residence' constitutes a possible interpretation of a construction the basic meaning of which is 'in the vicinity of N'.

There are also languages in which 'at N's usual residence' is expressed by simply combining the noun referring to the person in question with a marker that encodes nothing more that the mere existence of a spatial relationship, without any hint at a particular type of configuration. For example, in Akhvakh (Nakh-Daghestanian) the *-g-* series of spatial cases is semantically a default series that does not refer to a particular orientation of the figure. As illustrated by ex. (1a-b), depending on the semantic nature of the orienter and of the other elements of the construction, this series of spatial cases lends itself to a variety of interpretations, and in combination with human nouns, its commonest interpretation is 'at N's usual residence' – ex. (1c). Interestingly, if the orienter is not the person's residence, but the person him/herself, a specialized orientation marker specifically encoding 'in the vicinity of' is required – ex. (1d).

(1) Akhvakh (Nakh-Daghestanian, Andic) – Author's field notes

- a. *šagi č'a-g-a b-ił-a!* pan fire-OR₁-ALL N-put-IMP 'Put the pan on the fire!'
- b. $\hbar ema$ -na $be\bar{L}$ 'o-g-a r- $i\check{s}^{w}$ -aj-a!cow-PL cowshed-OR₁-ALL N^{*}-gather-CAUS-IMP 'Gather the cows in the cowshed!'
- c. *eīo m-a?-oji di-g-a!* HORT H^{*}-gO-POT.H^{*} 1SG-OR₁-ALL 'Let's go to my place!'
- d. *w-oq'-a di-īir-a!* M-come-IMP 1sg-OR₂-ALL 'Come to me!'

This use of non-specialized spatial markers combined with human nouns to express 'at N's usual residence' can be analyzed as resulting from a mechanism of metonymy. From the perspective of this paper, it emphasizes the special status of

⁶ In addition to this meaning, *chez* is used in the expression of spatial configurations involving shops or factories in orienter function (even if they are not designated by the name of their owner), and in constructions referring to typical features of human individuals, groups of humans, or animal species (*C'est devenu une habitude chez moi* 'It's become a habit with me').

humans in the conceptualization of spatial relationships (and consequently, of human nouns in the expression of spatial relationships), since nothing similar seems to exist with other semantic types of potential orienters.

3. Eastern Armenian

 \rightarrow The data examined in this section is taken from Comrie 1986, and the comment is a summary of Comrie's comment on the same data.

Modern Eastern Armenian has three ways of expressing location: the citation form of the noun phrase, as in (2a); the locative case in *-um*, as in (2b); and use of spatial postpositions combined with the noun phrase in a non-spatial case (most often, the genitive case), as in (2c):

- (2) a. *Aprum em Yerevan*. living I-am Erevan 'I live in Erevan.'
 - b. *Aprum em Yerevan-um*. living I-am Erevan-LOC 'I live in Erevan.'
 - c. Aprum em Yerevan-i mej. living I-am Erevan-GEN in 'I live in Erevan.'

The locative case overtly indicates location, but does not specify the kind of location involved, whereas the postpositional construction specifies the precise kind of locational relation involved.

The choice among the three possibilities involves a correlation between the formal markedness of the locative construction and the degree of semantic markedness of the spatial configuration being described. The least marked construction, as in (2a), is restricted to the colloquial language, and is possible only if a locational verb combines with a noun phrase of place; if one replaces *aprel* 'to live' with *utel* 'to eat', the acceptability of the sentence is affected:

(3) *?Utum em Yerevan.* living I-am Erevan 'I eat in Erevan.'

The locative is preferred with noun phrases referring to places, and is interpreted as the most natural configuration involving the figure and the orienter in question. For a city, this is 'in', as in (2); for a street, the locative is synonymous with *vəra* 'on':

- (4) a. Aprum em ays $p^{h}o\gamma oc^{h}$ -um. living I-am this street-LOC 'I live on this street.'
 - b. Aprum em ays $p^{h}o\gamma oc^{h}-i$ vəra. living I-am this street-GEN on 'I live on this street.'

For nouns that are not inherently names of places, but refer to entities readily conceivable as places (typically, inanimate objects), the locative is still possible with the interpretation of the most natural configuration, but the postpositional construction is often preferred. For example, a pin can be localized in a box by using the locative, since a box is a receptacle, but 'on top of the box' can only be expressed using the postposition *vara* 'on' – ex. (5).

- (5) a. $Gandase\gamma \partial tup^h um$ e. pin-DEF box-LOC is 'The pin is in the box.'
 - b. Gəndase γ -ə tup^h-i meğ e. pin-DEF box-GEN in is 'The pin is in the box.'
 - c. Gəndase γ -ə tup^h-i vəra e. pin-DEF box-GEN on is 'The pin is on the box.'

With animate NPs in the role of orienter, only the postpositional construction is possible, as in ex. (6).

(6) Ays avazak-i mej mi k^hani lav hatkut^hyunner kan.
this brigand-GEN in some good qualities there-are
'There are some good qualities in this brigand.'

In (6), the locative *avazak-um* would be simply ungrammatical, which suggests that animate beings are the most difficult to envisage as orienters in a spatial configuration.

4. Classical Nahuatl

 \rightarrow The data presented in this section is taken from Launey 1981.

Nahuatl has two ways of encoding that the referent of a noun is conceptualized as the orienter in a spatial relation: either by means of the locative suffix -c(o), or by means of adpositions (sometimes called 'relational nouns'). In both cases, the distinction between static location, destination of movement and source of

movement is not encoded at NP level, and is apparent in the choice of the verbal lexeme only. NPs combined with the locative suffix or with adpositions have the syntactic distribution characteristic of 'locatives', a word class that includes locative interrogatives, locative adverbs, toponyms, and deverbal locatives (i.e. words derived from verbs and expressing 'place where *V-ing* occurs') – Launey 1981:52-3.

Adpositions can occur in two constructions:

- They can combine with noun stems with which they form locative compounds, as in ex. (7); such compounds, being inherently locative, do not take the locative suffix -*c*(*o*) but occur in the same contexts as NPs marked by this suffix.
- They can fulfill the role of head in a genitive construction in which the NP referring to the orienter fulfills the role of genitive dependent; exactly like in ordinary genitive constructions, the dependent NP does not occupy a fixed position relative to its head and bears no mark of its role of genitive dependent, whereas the head obligatorily takes a possessive prefix; like in ordinary genitive constructions, depending on its meaning and on the context, the dependent NP can freely be omitted ex. (8).
- (7) a. *cal-pan* house-at 'at home'
 - b. *tēc-pan* lord-at 'at a palace'
- (8) a. *ī-pan am-āltepē-uh* 3sg-at 2pL-town-POSS 'in your town'⁷
 - b. *īm-pan tētēuctin* 3PL-at lord.PL 'at the lords' place'
 - c. *no-pan* 1sg-at 'at my place'

Nahuatl illustrates the same correlation between morphological types of spatial marking and semantic markedness of the spatial configuration as Armenian. The locative suffix -c(o) does not encode a particular type of spatial configuration, and is interpreted as referring to the most natural orientation in a given context, whereas adpositions encode specific types of spatial configurations. For example, with *calli*

⁷ Note that, in this example, the possessive suffix attached to *āltepētl* 'town' does not refer to its role of dependent relative to the adposition, but to its role of head in the genitive construction 'your town'.

'house', *cal-co* is interpreted as 'in the house', since a house can be conceived as a container, but 'house' in the role of orienter without reference to interiority requires the use of an adposition, as in (7a). But the meaning of interiority is not inherent to the suffix -c(o), since the same suffix is found for example in *tepē-c* 'on the mountain' or *tlapan-co* 'on the roof'.

The relationship between spatial marking and animacy is similar to that observed in Armenian too. In Nahuatl, animate nouns can fulfill the role of orienter in a spatial configuration in combination with adpositions, but are incompatible with the locative suffix -c(o).

5. Basque

 \rightarrow This section has been prepared in collaboration with Céline Mounole Hiriart-Urruty.

Basque shows variations in the form of spatial cases readily attributable to the tendency to use more morphological material to encode semantically marked configurations, and here again, the behavior of animate nouns suggests that animate beings are the most difficult to conceptualize as orienters in spatial configurations.

In Basque, case inflection of NPs as described in recent grammars of the standard language (*euskara batua*) includes three spatial cases that interact with the ending of noun stems and with definiteness and number marking as illustrated in (9).

(9) The spatial cases of Basque (ordinary nouns)

a. Stems ending with a vowel other than a (mendi 'mountain')

	indef.	def.sg.	def.pl.
locative	mendi-tan	mendi-an	mendi-etan
ablative	mendi-tatik	mendi-tik	mendi-etatik
allative	mendi-tara	mendi-ra	mendi-etara

b. Stems ending with a (hondartza 'beach')

	indef.	def.sg.	def.pl.
locative	hondartza-tan	hondartz-an	hondartz-etan
ablative	hondartza-tatik	hondartza-tik	hondartz-etatik
allative	hondartza-tara	hondartza-ra	hondartz-etara

b. Stems ending with a consonant (zuhaitz 'tree')

	indef.	def.sg.	def.pl.
locative	zuhaitz-etan	zuhaitz-ean	zuhaitz-etan
ablative	zuhaitz-etatik	zuhaitz-etik	zuhaitz-etatik
allative	zuhaitz-etara	zuhaitz-era	zuhaitz-etara

Toponyms have shorter variants of the spatial case suffixes – ex. (10), whereas animate nouns have longer variants – ex. (11).

(10) The spatial cases of Basque (toponyms)

	Bilbo	Eibar	Irun
locative	Bilbo-n	Eibarr-en	Irun-en
ablative	Bilbo-tik	Eibar-tik ~ Eibarr-etik	Irun-dik ~ Irun-etik
allative	Bilbo-ra	Eibarr-era \sim Eibarr-a	Irun-era ~ Irun-a

(11) The spatial cases of Basque (animate nouns)

a. Stems ending with a vowel other than *a* (*gazte* 'young')

	indef.	def.sg.	def.pl.
locative	gazte-rengan	gazte-a(ren)gan	gazte-engan
ablative	gazte-rengandik	gazte-a(ren)gandik	gazte-engandik
allative	gazte-rengana	gazte-a(ren)gana	gazte-engana

b. Stems ending with a (neska 'girl')

	indef.	def.sg.	def.pl.
locative	neska-rengan	nesk-a(ren)gan	nesk-engan
ablative	neska-rengandik	nesk-a(ren)gandik	nesk-engandik
allative	neska-rengana	nesk-a(ren)gana	nesk-engana

c. Stems ending with a consonant (mutil 'boy')

	indef.	def.sg.	def.pl.
locative	mutil-engan	mutil-a(ren)gan	mutil-engan
ablative	mutil-engandik	mutil-a(ren)gandik	mutil-engandik
allative	mutil-engana	mutil-a(ren)gana	mutil-engana

d. Proper names

	Edurne	Miren
locatif	Edurne-(ren)gan	Miren-(en)gan
ablatif	Edurne-(ren)gandik	Miren-(en)gandik
allatif	Edurne-(ren)gana	Miren-(en)gana

Morphologically, the spatial case suffixes for animate nouns include a formative *-gan-* followed by one of the three formatives $-\emptyset$ (locative), *-dik* (ablative) or *-a* (allative), and preceded (sometimes optionally) by a formative identical to the

genitive suffix -(r)en. Consequently, an alternative analysis is possible,⁸ according to which animate nouns do not have spatial cases at all, and can only fulfill the function of orienter in a construction in which they constitute the complement of a postposition $-gan-\emptyset/a/dik$ governing the genitive or the absolutive case. This postposition does not encode a specific configuration; its only function is to license the use of animate nouns as locational orienters.

In addition to -gan-O/a/dik, the Eastern dialects of Basque have a postposition baita-n/ra/tik (governing the genitive case) with а similar function. Like $-gan-\emptyset/a/dik$, it does not encode any concrete type of spatial configuration, and can be used just to compensate the impossibility to attach the standard spatial case endings to animate nouns.⁹ In particular, both postpositions are found in constructions in which spatial cases have no concrete spatial content, as in ex. (12a) from Lafitte 1962:170 and its standard equivalent (12b), where the locative case is required by *sinetsi* 'believe' – compare with (12c).

2011	es-ten dut eve-IPF PRES.3SG.1SG ¹⁰ elieve in God.'	<i>Jainkoa baitha-n.</i> God <i>BAITHA-</i> LOC	(Navarro-Labourdin)
beli	es-ten dut eve-IPF PRES.3SG.1SG elieve in God.'	<i>Jainkoa-gan.</i> God- <i>GAN</i> (LOC)	(Standard)
belie	es-ten dut eve-IPF PRES.3sg.1sg elieve in democracy	<i>demokrazi-an.</i> democracy-sg.loc .'	

It seems probable that, originally, *baita-n/ra/tik* specifically referred to the usual residence of a person, like the French preposition *chez*. In the dialects that have *baita-n/ra/tik*, this postposition constitutes the usual way to express 'at N's usual residence (N a person)', and *baita* is frequent as the second formative of oiconyms, which might suggest reconstructing **baita* 'house'. There is however no direct evidence of the use of *baita* as a noun (Trask 1997:208).

In the case of $-gan-\emptyset/a/dik$, it must first be noted that, contrary to baitan/ra/tik, $-gan-\emptyset/a/dik$ cannot be used to encode 'at N's usual residence'.¹¹ Several

⁸ Note that this alternative analysis is found in particular in Lafitte's grammar of the Navarro-Labourdin dialect (Lafitte 1962).

⁹ As usual with semantically driven grammatical distinctions, there are apparent exceptions to the rule according to which *-gan-Ø/a/dik* must be used with animate nouns and cannot be used with inanimates, but they seem to lend themselves to a straightforward explanation in terms of depersonification of animate nouns and personification of inanimate nouns. On this question, see Azkue 1923-25:301-304, Euskaltzaindia 1985:348-352. Examples from 16th century texts provided by Céline Mounole show that, on this point, the situation was not very different from that observed in the modern language, with however a few attestations of spatial cases attached directly to animate nouns that would be considered incorrect now.

¹⁰ *Sinetsi* 'believe' belongs to a subclass of intransitive verbs that are conjugated like transitive verbs with an expletive 3rd person P marker, and assign the ergative case to their S argument.

etymological hypotheses can be found in the literature. For example, Trask 1997:202 analyzes *-gan* as resulting from the grammaticalization of the locational noun gain 'top'. According to this hypothesis, *-gan-\emptyset/a/dik* would be cognate with *gaine-an/ra/tik* 'on top of'. However, none of the hypotheses on the etymology of *-gan* has gained wide acceptance. This question is complicated by the fact that, more generally, the reconstruction of the spatial cases remains a particularly controversial question among scholars of Basque.

6. Conclusion

Not all languages exhibit the tendencies observed in the previous sections. However, it is significant that, whenever human or animate nouns differ from other semantic groups of nouns in spatial case marking, their specificity involves incompatibility with a type of spatial case marking that can be characterized as relatively light either from a formal or from a semantic point of view, or both.

The only possible explanation is that humans are relatively reluctant to conceptualize spatial relations with animate entities in the role of orienter, and prefer expressing such spatial relations in an indirect way, either through a genitival construction ('at N's place') or through relativization ('at the place where N is'). Comrie's comment about this difficulty to envisage animate beings as places is that "the relevant parameter is people's conceptualization of the real world, rather than actual properties of the real world: physically, animate beings make just as good receptacles, or locational orienters, as inanimate objects, but it turns out that people do not think of animate beings in this way." By way of a conclusion, I would like to argue that this reluctance to conceive animate beings as places is perhaps not so arbitrary as this quotation suggests, since optimal locational orienters occupy a fixed position in space, and animate beings are typically more mobile than inanimate objects. An advantage of this explanation is that it accounts not only for a general tendency to use more marked constructions to encode spatial relations with animate beings in the role of orienter, but also for the fact that, as illustrated in section (2) by Akhvakh, a marker that encodes the existence of a spatial relationship without providing any additional specification, if compatible with human nouns, may lend itself to a semantic shift by which the entity interpreted as the orienter is not the human individual, but his/her residence, that is, an element of the individual's personal sphere that at the same time has a particularly intimate link with the individual and occupies a fixed position in space.

Abbreviations

ALL: allative / CAUS: causative / DEF: definite / GEN: genitive / H⁺: human plural / HORT: hortative / IMP: imperative / INDEF: indefinite / IPF: imperfective / LOC: locative / M: masculine / N: non-human (neuter) / N⁺: non-human plural / OR:

¹¹ The dialects of Basque that do not have the postposition *baita-n/ra/tik* commonly express 'at N's usual residence' via the ellipsis strategy (see section 2 above): *Amaia-ren-ean* |Amaia-GEN-LOC| is the literal equivalent of English 'at Amaia's', and is described in Basque grammars as resulting from the reduction of *Amaia-ren etxe-an* 'at Amaia's house'.

orientation marker / PL: plural / POSS: possessive / POT: potential / PRES: present / SG: singular

References

- Azkue, Resurección María de. 1923-25. *Morfología vasca*. Published in fascicles in Euskera. [Reprinted in 3 vol., 1969, Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca].
- Comrie, Bernard. 1986. Markedness, Grammar, People, and the World. In Eckman, Fred R., Edith A. Moravcsik & Jesica R. Wirth, *Markedness*. 85-106. New York: Plenum Press.
- Creissels, Denis. 2008. 'Spatial cases.' In Malchukov, Andrej & Andrew Spencer, *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 609-625.
- Euskaltzaindia [Academy of the Basque Language]. 1985. *Euskal Gramatika: Lehen Urratsak-I*. Iruñea: Euskaltzaindia.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2008. 'Terminology of case.' In Malchukov, Andrej & Andrew Spencer, *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 505-517.
- Jackendoff, R. 1983. Semantics and cognition. Cambridge : MIT Press.
- Jackendoff, R. & B. Landau. 1992. Spatial language and spatial cognition. In Jackendoff, R., *Languages of the mind: Essays on mental representation*. 99-124. MIT Press.
- Kutscher, S. 2001. Nomen und nominales Syntagma im Lasischen: Eine deskriptive Analyse des Dialekts von Ardeşen. München: Lincom Europa.
- Langacker, R. 1987. Foundations of cognitive grammar, Volume 1: Theoretical prerequisites. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Launey, Michel. 1981. Introduction à la langue et à la littérature aztèques, tome 1 : grammaire. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Pederson, E. 1995. Language as context, language as means: spatial cognition and habitual language use. *Cognitive linguistics* 6 (1). 33-62.
- Pederson, E., E. Danziger, D. Wilkins, S. Levinson, S. Kita & G. Senft. 1998. Semantic typology and spatial conceptualization. *Language* 74. 557-89.
- Shay, E. & U. Seibert (eds.). 2003. *Motion, direction and location in languages*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Svorou, S. 1994. The grammar of space. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Talmy, L. 2000. Towards a cognitive semantics (2 vol.). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Trask, R.L. 1997. The history of Basque. London / New York: Routledge.