

Case and agreement in accusative constructions

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This paper examines evidence bearing on the "George-Kornfilt Hypothesis" (Chomsky 2001): Case and agreement are reflexes of a single operation, and an NP can only undergo this operation once. The constructions examined are those where there are two Case licensers but only one NP with structural Case, enabling in principle Multiple Case Assignment and/or Multiple Agreement. Instead, we pervasively find the lowest Case licensers responsible for the NP's Case, and default agreement on the higher Case licensers, suggesting that after the lower cycle the NP is ineligible for further Case/Agreement operations, and confirming the hypothesis. A significant auxiliary result of this investigation is that the correlation of Case licensing properties (ϕ -features) with v is not predictable from its other properties (contra Burzio 1986, Pylkkänen 1998).

1. Introduction

In this paper, I will examine a number of constructions that have the general property of having two functional heads licensing Case but only one NP with a structural Case requirement. The general configuration involved in all these constructions is as follows, where precedence = c-command:

$$1. \quad \left(\begin{array}{c} T^0 \\ [\phi-] \\ [K=NOM] \\ (EPP) \end{array} \right) (NP-P) \quad \left(\begin{array}{c} v^0 \\ [\phi-] \\ [K=ACC] \end{array} \right) \left(\begin{array}{c} NP \\ [\phi+] \\ [K-] \end{array} \right)$$

Where the functional heads T and v are responsible for Case checking of nominative and accusative respectively, NP has interpretable ϕ -features and $NP-P$ if present is outside the Case/Agreement system (implicit argument or a quirky subject). In all these constructions, NP receives accusative Case and $[\phi-]$ on T receives default agreement. I will call these constructions "accusative", in contrast to intransitives where NP is nominative (and v , by hypothesis, does not have ϕ -features).

These constructions are interesting for two reasons. First, they provide prima facie violations of one of the implications of Burzio's Generalization (BG; Burzio 1986): accusative implies the presence of an external argument or a nominative. (That the presence of an external argument does not imply the presence of an accusative (ignoring unergatives) has been known at least since Zaenen et al.'s (1985) important work on

dative-nominative verbs in Icelandic.) In turn, we will see that the v^0 's ability to license accusative (by hypothesis, presence of ϕ -features on v^0) is independent of its selectional, theta-theoretic, and inherent Case properties.

These constructions are also a paradigm configuration for Multiple Case Assignment (MCA; Taraldsen 1981, Massam 1985, Young 1988, Bejar and Massam 1999) and multiple ϕ -feature checking (Schütze 1997). I assume the Case-Agreement Hypothesis (CAH) argued for by Schütze (1997) and adopted by Chomsky (2000): Case licensing and Agreement are reflexes of the same operation. If MCA/Multiple Agreement were possible, we would expect NP in (1) to receive both accusative and nominative, and T^0 agree with NP. Instead, what we will see is that T^0 always takes default agreement if NP in a non-transitive construction is accusative, confirming CAH but suggesting an NP can enter into Case/Agreement only once. This latter result Chomsky (2001) calls the "George-Kornfilt Hypothesis" (GKH), and will be discussed more extensively in the conclusion.

I will follow the terminology and assumptions of Chomsky (2000), the relevant points of which I will now spell out. I refer to the Agr heads as T and v , although as far as I can see the choice of a theory with independent Agr heads would make no difference. The feature-checking mechanism of Chomsky (1995) is restated in terms of *valuing*: uninterpretable features, $[\phi-]$ and $[K-]$, do not have a value, which is assigned to them by interpretable $[\phi+]/[K+]$ features through the core syntactic operation mediating target-goal relations. This operation is Agree (previously Attract-F), subject to the standard locality restrictions: in a configuration $[F-] \dots [F+]_1 \dots [F+]_2$ Agree can take place only between $[F-]$ and $[F+]_1$ ¹. All operations apply cyclically.

The Case/Agreement mechanism is implemented as the valuing of uninterpretable $[\phi-]$ features through Agree(Agr, NP) where Agr=T or v , a process which also values the $[K-]$ feature of an NP. Thus, in the configuration (1), Agree will apply first between Agr₂ and NP by cyclicity, valuing the $[\phi-]$ set of Agr₂ from the $[\phi+]$ set of the NP, and assigning the value [Agr₂] to $[K-]$ on the NP. I assume that T is associated with the feature $[K=\text{nominative}]$ and v with $[K=\text{accusative}]$. (In some of these constructions T also has an EPP property which is satisfied by the highest NP with phonological content, NP-P or NP in (1).

We will see that the constructions (1) have the following properties, whose implications will be taken up in section 5. (1) Agr₁ does not enter into Case/Agreement with NP₂, and receives default agreement. We will argue that this provides independent support for Chomsky's claim that $[\phi-]$ features cannot if the source of $[\phi+]$ features has already been assigned Case, against the possibility of multiple Case assignment. (2) Default agreement is always available for Agr₁, and uninterpretable $[\phi-]$ features therefore cannot crash the derivation. We will nevertheless see that the availability of default agreement can be suitably constraint and uninterpretable features can still drive cyclic derivation in accordance with Chomsky (2000). (3) The presence of $[\phi-]$ features does not correlate with other properties of the head which selects them, including selection, θ -role assignment, and inherent Case assignment.

¹ The conditions for equidistance will never be met in this paper.

2. The Icelandic unaccusative

In this section we will contrast the Icelandic unaccusative construction, which has the configuration (1), with the passive construction which has the properties Burzio's Generalization would lead us to expect. The object of Icelandic transitive constructions can receive either a structural accusative Case or an inherent dative/genitive Case, depending on the verb. There are two constructions where the object of a transitive can appear (promoted) as the subject of an intransitive construction: passive and unaccusative². In both, if the transitive object has inherent Case, it is preserved in the intransitive construction. A considerable body of literature (Zaenen et al. 1985, Sigurðsson 1989, etc.) has shown that such promoted objects pass all the subjecthood tests that diagnose them as being in [Spec, TP]. The two alternations are exemplified in the following example ((2.b.) and (2.c.) from Zaenen and Máling 1990:139); the passive contains an implicit agent which license an agent-oriented adverb and passive morphology, while the unaccusative has neither³:

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|----|----|---------------|----------|-------------|----------------|-----------|
| 2. | a. | Skipstjórinn | hvolfdi | bátnum | (transitive) | |
| | | the.captain-N | capsized | the.boat-D | | |
| | b. | Bátnum | var | hvolft | viljandi | (passive) |
| | | the.boat-D | was | capsized | on.purpose | |
| | c. | Bátnum | hvolfdi | (*viljandi) | (unaccusative) | |
| | | the.boat-D | capsized | on.purpose | | |

When the promoted object does not have inherent Case, appearing as accusative in the transitive, passive and unaccusative treat it differently: in the passive the NP takes nominative Case and agrees with the verb, while in the unaccusative it takes accusative Case and the verb takes default agreement (3rd.sg.neut.nom./acc.). In both constructions, it must move to [Spec, TP] to satisfy the EPP:

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|---------------|------|---------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| 3. | a. | Stormurinn | blés | stropinn | af | húsinu | (transitive) |
| | | the.storm-N | blew | the.chimney-A | off | the.house | |
| | b. | Strompurinn | var | blásinn | af | húsinu | (passive) |
| | | the.chimney-N | was | blown | off | the.house | |
| | c. | Stropinn | blés | af | húsinu | (unaccusative) | |
| | | the.chimney-A | blew | off | the.house | | |

² See Zaenen and Máling (1990) for evidence that the unaccusative construction discussed here is syntactic. There is also another construction where a promoted object appears as a nominative even if inherently Case-marked in the transitive; Zaenen and Máling argue that this alternation is lexical.

³ N nominative, A accusative, D dative.

The framework adopted here has only one possible source for the difference: the presence of an object Case assigner in the unaccusative, which I take to be a light verb⁴. The unaccusative thus exemplifies (1). *v* selects no external argument; the passive light verb selects an implicit agent as its external argument which can control agent-oriented adverbs and bind a *by*-phrase⁵. The Icelandic unaccusative has three relevant properties: (1) T/Agr₁ does not agree with or assign (nominative) Case to any NP; (2) T takes default agreement; (3) [Spec, TP] is filled by the closest NP which is the accusative, even though T enters into no Case/Agreement relationship with it. The passive behaves as expected of intransitive constructions: T agrees, assigns nominative, and raises the nominative NP to [Spec, TP]. The passive/unaccusative difference raises the question whether the selection of an external argument plays a role *v* having [ϕ -] features; on the Basis of Burzio's generalization, we would expect a *v* without an external argument not to⁶. This will be addressed in the following section, where it will be demonstrated that no correlation obtains.

3. Impersonal *se* in Czech and Italian

Both Czech and Italian have an two impersonal constructions with the 'reflexive' clitic Cz. *se*, It. *si* that provides crucial evidence bearing on the matter. The impersonal SE qualifies as NP-P in (1), and forms both a non-transitive construction (1) (non-agreeing) and a standard intransitive construction (agreeing). I will first briefly justify an analysis, and then present the argument. The data in this section is drawn from Czech, but point-by-point references are given to Burzio (1986) for Italian.

Se forms three apparently monadic constructions with verbs that also have regular transitive constructions⁷. They may be distinguished by their semantic and syntactic properties: unaccusative, non-agreeing impersonal, and agreeing impersonal (Burzio 1986:36-53). Consider the following alternation:

- | | | | | |
|----|----|---|--|---|
| 4. | a. | Naše flotila potopila our fleet-N sank-3.sg "Our fleet sank the ships." | ledoborce ship-A.pl.masc. | (transitive) |
| | b. | Ledoborci ship-N.pl.masc "The ships sank." "We sank the ships." | se SE potopily sank-3 rd .pl.masc. | (unaccusative) (agreeing impersonal) |

⁴ Note that an inherent accusative is ruled out by the fact that the promoted object does get nominative in the passive.

⁵ Accusative assignment is *prima facie* evidence for *v*/Agr₂ in the unaccusative. We will see constructions below where the passive must have a light verb; which seems independently needed to select the agent. I accordingly follow Harley (1995), Legate (1998) in having light verbs in all intransitive constructions.

⁶ Pytkänen (1998) argues that a passive light verb can assign Case.

⁷ It is also a reflexive pronoun and an "inherent" lexicalized morpheme.

- c. Ledoborce se potopilo
 ice-breaker-A.pl.masc. SE sank-3rd.sg.neut. (non-agreeing impersonal)
 "We sank the ships."

In the unaccusative and (impersonal) agreeing *se* constructions the sole NP agrees with the verb and takes nominative, while in the (impersonal) non-agreeing *se* construction it takes accusative and the verb takes default agreement (3rd.sg.neut.). The difference between the unaccusative and the two impersonals (of which the agreeing is surface-identical to the unaccusative) is in the reading they receive: the impersonal construction has an implicit agent, while the unaccusative one does not. Consequently, the impersonal construction can control PRO in an infinitival adjunct and take an agent-oriented adverbial (cp. Burzio 1986:79, ft. 42).

The unaccusative and agreeing *se* can be differentiated in an infinitival clause⁸, which blocks the impersonal reading (Burzio 1986:50-53; Burzio argues from this and the fact that impersonal *si* can undergo NP-movement that in passives, unaccusatives, and raising constructions (p. 44-48), that *si* requires nominative Case⁹). We can now compare (5.a.), where we get the impersonal reading, with (5.b.) where only the unaccusative construction is possible¹⁰:

5. a. Ledoborec se (jim) naschvál potopil
 icebreaker SE (them-dat.) on.purpose sank
 "We sank the icebreaker on purpose."
 b. Viděl jsem ledoborce se (*naschvál) potopit
 saw am-I icebreaker-acc. SE (*on.purpose) sink

With these preliminaries, consider the structure of the two three constructions. Impersonal *se* constructions have an implicit agent that can control PRO and license agent-oriented adverbs¹¹, showing that the light verb here selects an external argument (perhaps *se* itself), which unaccusative *se* does not. The two impersonal constructions are differentiated solely by whether the NP enters into the Case/Agreement system or not. In the agreeing *se* construction (as well as in the unaccusative) it does do so, triggering agreement and receiving nominative; in the non-agreeing *se* construction it does not, receives accusative, and the verb taking default agreement. The latter thus shows properties (1) and (2). The two constructions are otherwise identical, differing only in that the non-agreeing variant has an extra accusative assigner which leads to these properties. I will again assume this is an impersonal light verb with [ϕ -], selecting the impersonal agent as an external argument. We have the following two structures:

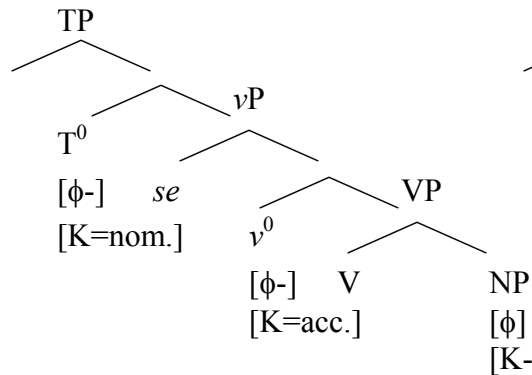
⁸ Here I abstract from the Control/Restructuring complication, and use a perception verb complement for Czech.

⁹ The NP-movement argument is more difficult to evaluate in Czech, but on the face of it, it holds for unaccusatives and raising constructions, but not for passives.

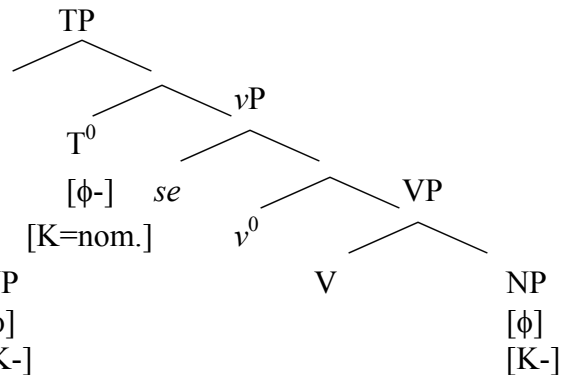
¹⁰ Non-agreeing *se* has the same possibilities in root clauses (5. In infinitives all three varieties of *se* are homophonous since the matrix verb determines the Case of the subject (accusative) and the infinitive does not show agreement.

¹¹ I will assume for simplicity that *se* spells out this external argument.

6. a. Non-agreeing:



b. Agreeing:



These constructions are important because they exemplify that the non-transitive/intransitive contrast is independent of the selectional properties of v . In Icelandic, it was the unaccusative which formed the non-transitive, and the passive which formed the intransitive. Here, both constructions select an external argument, one which like the implicit agent of the passive does not enter into the Case/Agreement system. The difference resides solely in the $[\phi-]$ properties of the relevant v , which takes both options within a single language¹². In the next section, we will see one final accusative/intransitive contrast where v also assigns inherent Case to its external argument.

4. Psych-verbs in Icelandic and Faroese

Both Icelandic (Sigurðsson 1996) and Faroese (Barnes 1986)¹³ have dative-nominative psych-verb constructions where the dative is the experiencer and raises to [Spec, TP], while the nominative is the theme and stays in-situ (one instance of the 'quirky subject' construction). Following standard analyses (e.g. Schütze 1993), I take the dative not to enter into the Case/Agreement system, being the NP-P of (1).

Icelandic and Faroese contrast in their treatment of the theme and of agreement. In Icelandic, the theme NP is nominative, and the verb agrees with it; in Faroese, it is accusative¹⁴, and the verb has default agreement. In both Icelandic and Faroese the closest

¹² Passives in Ukrainian (Sobin 1985) parallel impersonal *se* constructions exactly:

| | | | | | |
|------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------------|
| (i) | Cerkva | bula | zbudovana | v 1640 roc'i | (agreeing passive) |
| | church-nom.fem. | was-3 rd .sg. | built-fem.sg. | in 1640 year | |
| (ii) | Cerkvu | bulo | zbudovano | | (non-agreeing passive) |
| | church-acc.fem. | was-3 rd .sg. | built-neut.sg. | | |

Here, again language-internally, a passive light verb differs solely in having/not having $[\phi-]$, with the former having the expected implication: default agreement on T.

¹³ Passives of ditransitive NDA verbs also get DN in Icelandic. Faroese has two classes, one which gets DA, the other ND/DN (Barnes 1986:35).

¹⁴ Arguments that the accusative here is structural, not inherent, are given in Schütze (1997:156ff.).

NP, the dative NP-P which does not enter into Case/Agreement at all, raises to [Spec, TP].

7. a. Henni bötneuðu/*batnaði verkirnir (Icel.)
 she-D recovered.from-3.pl/*3.sg the.pain-pl.
 "She recovered from the pains."
- b. Honum nýtist fleiri bókahillar heima hjá sær (Fa.)
 he-D need-3.sg. more bookshelves-A.pl.at.home with self
 "He needs more bookshelves in his home."

The variation precisely parallels that found in the impersonal *se* and Ukrainian passives constructions, except that here the $[\phi-]$ /non- $[\phi-]$ variation is found in two different languages¹⁵. Clearly, $[\phi-]$ feature presence of v^0 does not correlate with θ -role or inherent Case assignment.

5. Discussion

All told we have provided four alternating constructions which show the non-transitive/intransitive variation: passive vs. unaccusative, agreeing vs. non-agreeing impersonal *se*, agreeing vs. non-agreeing passive, and quirky subject constructions with nominative vs. accusative theme. All show the property that T does not enter into the Case/Agreement system, taking default agreement, when the only NP in a monoclausal construction receives accusative. By implication, v here has ϕ -features. Apparently, this last property does not correlate with any of its other properties: external argument selection, θ -role assignment, or inherent Case assignment. In this section I will discuss the theoretical implications of the observations made above.

Consider the first two: in the configuration (1), (1) $[\phi-]$ on Agr_1 cannot enter into Case/Agreement with the NP, and (2) $[\phi-]$ then gets default values. Observation (1) supports the conclusion of Chomsky (2000:123): an uninterpretable Case feature renders an NP goal *active*, able to enter into Agree with an uninterpretable $[\phi-]$ set of a target. Chomsky's conclusion is based on George and Kornfilt's (1981) evidence that agreeing infinitival complements in Turkish are opaque to agreement and Case assignment from their governor, while NPs non-agreeing infinitivals depend on the matrix clause for these properties. In a similar vein, McGinnis (1998) reduces the Tensed-S condition to the GKH. Consider the following paradigm:

8. a. *John seems it was told t_{John} that ... (Specified Subject Condition/Locality)
 b. *It seems t_{it} was a nice day. (Tensed-S Condition/GKH)
 c. *There seems it was told John that ... (Case filter/Locality)

¹⁵ Barnes reports that Faroese also had the Icelandic pattern for some verbs, and it still persists as an archaism. Similarly the Faroese pattern is possible for some Icelandic speakers (Sigurðsson 1991). As Schütze (1997:158, ft. 92) notes, in either case agreement tracks the nominative only.

the matrix clause and using a chain-formation algorithm to connect it with the resumptive; cp. Manzini (1998) for a similar account of weak island violations.

Observation (2) shows that when $[\phi-]$ features on Agr_1 cannot be valued by an interpretable $[\phi+]$ set, they receive default agreement. This is a more radical departure from the theory. In Chomsky (1995), uninterpretable features are the trigger for syntactic operations, and cause crash if they are not checked. In Chomsky (2000) their central role in syntactic computation is increased due to the adoption of a single syntactic cycle instead of separate pre- and post-Spell-Out cycles. The role of uninterpretable features in triggering syntactic operations is now sufficient to derive cyclicity of the syntactic computation if we adopt Chomsky's (2000:132, ex. 53)¹⁹:

10. Properties of the probe/selector α must be satiated before new elements of the lexical subarray are accessed to drive further operations.

If uninterpretable $[\phi-]$ features can always be "rescued" by default agreement, the role of uninterpretable features is jeopardized.

However, the principle in (10) can be restated in an equivalent way that allows for but highly constraints default agreement, and seems consistent with all the evidence:

11. Properties of the probe/selector α must trigger associated syntactic operations before new elements of the lexical subarray are accessed to drive further operations.

Here, "associated" pairs uninterpretable features with Probe (which initiates Agree if possible), and selectional features and the EPP with Merge. Principle (11) requires that $[\phi-]$ features on Agr trigger Probe and make every attempt to receive a value. It is only if Agree fails, either because there is no NP or because it already has Case, that default agreement is possible. Whether default agreement is formulated as a syntactic or morphological operation depends on the role uninterpretable features are still required to play at LF; it may be that (11) can derive all the facts that interpretability derived before by causing an LF crash²⁰.

Finally, consider conclusion (3), the independence of having properties that enter into the Case/Agreement system ($[\phi-]$ features) from other properties of a functional head. Burzio's Generalization attempts to make one such dependency, by making the presence of $[\phi-]$ features on v dependent on the selection of an external argument. The existence of quirky subject constructions requires that it be further added that the external argument be an NP with a $[K-]$ feature. In that guise, Burzio's Generalization holds true, as a characteristic of transitive constructions. However, so much is required purely for convergence purposes: given two NPs with a $[K-]$ feature, we require two Agr heads with $[\phi-]$ features in order for Case to be checked and the derivation to converge. Therefore

¹⁹ See Frampton and Gutmann (1999) and Collins (Forthcoming) for related views of cyclicity (the probe/selector is the *pivot* in the former and the *locus* in the latter).

²⁰ For example, while (8.c.) might be ruled out because John does not get Case, it might also crash because of the Definiteness Restriction, in which case appeal to an LF crash is unnecessary.

the pairing of external NP_[K-] selection and [ϕ -] features on the transitive v does not reflect any "deep" property, such as a relation between subjects and objects.

Without such a pairing, dyadic constructions which do not assign inherent θ -related Case to one of the NPs, or select it in a PP, would never converge²¹. The pairing is thus what Chomsky (2000) calls a "design condition": a formal property of language required for (a certain subclass of) linguistic expressions to be generable. The constructions surveyed here show that [ϕ -] feature selection is independent of the other selectional, thematic, and inherent Case assignment properties of a functional head.

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²¹ Presumably, these options are restricted by UG and by historical development: only certain θ -roles can develop an inherent dative (experiencers, goals, benefactors) and while historical development might introduce arbitrariness by which a direct semantic-morphological connection is lost, it tends to be maintained through various mechanisms such as loss of dative Case-marking when the dative is no longer of the appropriate θ -role (cp. Eyþórsson 2000, Jónsson 2000).

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