Review: [Untitled]

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Case by Barry J. Blake
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located in all of these. A large and useful bibliography is followed by two appendices. Appendix A, 'Humorous examples' (388–99), provides textual examples of humor.

The clearly fascinating and significant relationship between language and humor requires future research, along the lines sketched by A, as well as others. In my opinion, a full theory of language and humor must see humor as part of a nexus which integrates linguistic structuring, speech play, and verbal art, a nexus which must be studied in terms of the social and cultural contexts of language use.

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Case. By BARRY J. BLAKE. (Cambridge textbooks in linguistics.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. xvii, 229.

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Imagine that you are perched behind your office desk grading exams, skimming the pages of *Language,* playing a computer game, or involved in any of the other sundry duties of an academic. A student from your Introductory Linguistics class walks in, as students are prone to do near the end of the term, and says, 'That Finnish morphology problem we did in class was really cool, and now I'm kinda interested in knowing more about case. Could you, like, tell me about case?' After the initial shock that this statement nowhere contained the words 'grade' or 'extra credit', you pause a moment to organize a response. It quickly dawns on you that this innocuous query is of mind-boggling proportions because the issues involved in describing case are as broad as the field of linguistics itself. By case, does the student mean morphological or abstract case? Does she want to know what role case plays in formal theory? If so, which one? Does she care about where morphological case comes from, or what happens to it over time? Perhaps she is really asking the big question, why have case in language at all? Or it could be that she mostly wants to know what semantic information is encoded in case? Maybe the point of her inquiry was typological, designed to get at just how robust case systems can get. Indeed, a revealing description of case, even an introductory one, is a seemingly overwhelming task. Yet this is precisely what Barry Blake has been asked to do in his latest book, *Case,* and he completes the task admirably well. Bringing together his expertise in language description (Blake 1977), typology (Mallinson and Blake 1981) and linguistic theory (Blake 1990), B weaves together a number of diverse strands of research on case to produce an accessible and informative introduction to the topic.

This is not to say that the book is without flaw. There are many details with which to take exception, which is not so surprising given the panoramic perspective of the book. On occasion, the descriptive facts are patently wrong. For instance, in a discussion of case distribution within the noun phrase, B

states: 'In Ancient Greek the definite article would appear to be dependent..., SINCE IT CANNOT APPEAR IN A NOUN PHRASE ON ITS OWN' [emphasis mine] (102). Not true. It is actually common for Greek definite articles to be employed in isolation, though in this use they function as third person pronouns (Smyth 1920:287). At other times, the facts presented are somewhat misleading. For example, B (174) quite rightly points out that when a passive develops in languages, oblique cases are often employed to mark the logical subject. By way of example, he suggests, 'The demoted subject is expressed in the genitive in Ancient Greek'. Not fully true. The primary strategy for expressing the agent in passives is the preposition *hupo* plus the genitive, and the construction as a whole was adopted for expressing demoted subjects. Thus, contrary to B's intention, Greek does not exemplify the process of enlisting a noncore morphological case in the service of the passive construction. There are also some notable 'errors of omission'. In his list of typical functions of dative case, for instance, B (145) does not mention the marking of addressees with verbs of speaking, a rather glaring oversight. Overall, however, my sense is that erroneous claims and gaps in information are remarkably rare in this book.

Each of the chapters is largely independent of the others, except Ch. 1, 'Overview'. There B provides the basic terminology for discussing case marking. He also describes other mechanisms in language, e.g. word order and relator nouns, which partly possess the same functional burden as case. For the true case neophyte, this chapter is a must read. B is careful to exemplify each of the phenomena he introduces, and he offers a glimpse of the complexities involved in analyzing case without overwhelming the reader with too many intricacies.

The gentle pace of the introduction is largely abandoned in Ch. 2, 'Problems in describing case systems; (19–47), where B tackles the interrelated questions of how individual cases are to be identified and how the meaning of individuated cases can be described. While the presentation is still clear, the content is rather more substantive. He suggests the central problem in identifying cases is that there is not a one-to-one mapping between case forms and case functions. A single function can be marked by several case inflections, e.g. in some languages direct objects can appear in either accusative or dative case depending on the verb which governs them. This form-function mismatch becomes a particularly thorny descriptive issue when case-syncretism (a neutralization between distinct case forms for certain classes of nouns) is considered. To use one of B's examples, Latin has traditionally been ascribed six cases: nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative, and ablative. Yet for second declension neuter nouns one only finds a three way formal distinction, nominative-vocative-accusative vs. genitive vs. dative-ablative. In what sense is one justified in imposing the six traditional case categories on this subset of nouns? Against tradition, wouldn't it be preferable to have a description of case which is more closely tied to the superficial morphology of the language? Appealing to other facts about Latin, B gives the rationale for making case distinctions where none can actually be seen. In doing so, he also provides a brief tutorial in how linguists necessarily use abstraction in order to achieve maximal descriptive simplicity.

While a single function can be associated with multiple cases, the converse is of course also true: a single case may encode several different functions. The various functions, however, are not arbitrarily associated with the case that marks them, a fact which has led many scholars on quests to find the unified meaning behind the multifarious uses of a case. B dismisses the idea that cases can usefully be analyzed as having a single abstract meaning. Instead, he argues that it is more fruitful to envision the meaning of cases as a cluster of features, much as has been done for Russian by Neidle (1988). Whereas B's discussion of a feature-based approach to case meaning is cast at the appropriate level of detail, it does so to the neglect of too much important work on case semantics (Wierzbicka 1980, 1983, papers in Dirven and Radden 1987, and Van Valin 1991 come to mind). Consequently, B gives the impression that linguists generally analyze case meaning and function by way of a feature system, when in fact this option represents just one of a number of methods currently being employed.

Ch. 3, 'Modern approaches to case' (48–93), surveys a number of theoretical accounts of case: Government and Binding Theory, Case Grammar (Fillmore 1968), Relational Grammar, Lexicase Theory (Starosta 1988), and Localist Case Theory (Anderson 1971, 1977). Two basic questions are ubiquitous in this review. (1) How is the relationship between semantic roles and grammatical relations captured in these frameworks? (2) How are clause pairs which are ostensibly equivalent in meaning (e.g. active vs. passive, standard bitransitive vs. double object) related using the machinery of the various theories? By and large, B's purpose is to outline how these questions are answered from the different perspectives and not to demonstrate their shortcomings. He does, however, question the adequacy of the GB approach to case in handling some fairly typical case phenomena such as the distinction between nominative and ergative case and languages which are morphologically ergative-absolutive, yet syntactically nominative-accusative.

Ch. 4, 'Distribution of case marking' (94–118), and Ch. 5, 'Survey of case marking' (119–62), form a thematic unit. In these chapters, B gives a valuable typology of case in which he both identifies the patterns of case marking that most commonly appear in language and explicates some deviations from the norm. He uses Ch. 4 to examine, *inter alia*, case concord, double case marking, compound cases, and the locus of case within words, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

B moves from such details to case systems, as wholes, in Ch. 5. Accusative and ergative systems, which are introduced in earlier chapters, receive a more detailed treatment, and the rarer Active and Direct-Inverse systems are discussed. In addition, B describes and exemplifies the typical uses of oblique cases. He concludes the chapter by proposing a case hierarchy (159):

nominative accusative genitive dative locative ablative instrumental

For any language, the existence of one of the cases on the list implies that the language will also contain all other cases to its left. Thus, the hierarchy, which

B admits reflects only a tendency, is designed to depict the order in which case systems are 'built up' over time.

Perhaps more than any other section of the book, the combination of these two chapters is effective in alerting the reader to the richness of case marking in natural language. If our hypothetical student, the one who wanted to know all about case, were to stipulate that her thirst for knowledge was to be satisfied in one hundred pages or less, these are the pages to which I would direct her attention.

The final chapter, 'Life cycle of case systems' (163–85), focuses on the genesis and decay of morphological case. B cites examples of verbs grammaticizing into adpositions, as well as nouns and particles which have developed into case affixes. He then explains how a case inflection with a relatively specific usage can be extended to incorporate additional functions. Finally, he examines some of the factors which contribute to the loss of case, concentrating on phonological reduction and its effects on the overall case system. The book ends abruptly at this point.

B has crafted an excellent introduction to case. To my knowledge, there does not exist any equivalent piece of work. Aside from the many merits of the book, then, it is bound to become the standard reference on the topic. True beginners will benefit from the opening chapter and 12-page glossary, which provide the necessary terminological and conceptual background for understanding how case is treated in contemporary linguistics. For students of language at any level, the book furnishes a concise overview of the issues surrounding case in the voluminous literature on the topic.

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