

### Exponence of case and the morphology-syntax distinction

In most linguistic descriptions, the notion *case* is understood as a morphological exponent of nominal dependency (Blake 2001: 1). To avoid the implicit reference to wordhood, Haspelmath (2005) proposed the cover term *flag* for all kinds of nominal dependent marking. A restricted notion of case still seems desirable in order to preserve important findings such as the Case Hierarchy of Blake (1994, 2001) and Arkadiev's (2009) generalizations on two-term case systems. In this paper, I argue that an unambiguous comparative concept *Case* can be defined for a subset of flags if casehood is understood in terms of paradigm structure rather than bondedness.

My point of departure is the approach of Spencer & Otaguro (2005), who propose that a morphological feature [Case] should only be recognized in a given language if it "generalizes over sets of distinct forms in some way" (Spencer 2005), a requirement they call "Beard's Criterion" (Beard 1995). This draws a distinction between "Indo-European-style" rich flexional case systems with syncretism, cumulation, and inflection classes on the one hand, and "Turkic-style" agglutinating, separative systems on the other. For Spencer and Otaguro, only the former can be called "case systems" in the proper sense. While their proposal is mainly theoretical, I suggest using it as the basis for a comparative concept of case that can lead to non-trivial cross-linguistic generalizations.

In operational terms, a language can be said to have a case system if it has case **syncretism**, **cumulative exponence** of case with other morphosyntactic features, or **lexically conditioned** case markers (i.e. inflection classes). To avoid dealing with conflicting analyses of case inventories, syncretism is understood per Baerman (2007), cumulation per Bickel & Nichols (2013), but with two types of case values excluded: first, non-autonomous cases (Zaliznjak 1967), i.e. feature values whose exponents are syncretic in every paradigm (such as the Russian "second locative"); second, values that are only distinguished for pronouns (such as the English oblique).

For the pilot typological study, I look at the correlation of case status with two parameters which are often thought to correlate with "adposition-like" and "case-like" status, respectively: (1) **group exponence** (the possibility of a flag to attach to the edge of a coordinate phrase); (2) **NP-internal agreement** in case. I use a sample of 107 languages, for the most part a subset of the union of the WALS samples of Baerman (2013) and Bickel & Nichols (2013). Using the restricted definitions above, two universals can be formulated:

- **Universal 1 (Beard  $\rightarrow$   $\neg$  Group).** Case flags cannot have group exponence under coordination.
- **Universal 2 (Agree  $\rightarrow$   $\neg$  Beard).** A non-case flag cannot trigger NP-internal agreement.

Exceptions to Universal 1 are Oromo (Cushitic), Basque, French (Romance), Kannada (Dravidian), Burushaski, Adyghe (West Caucasian), Kryz (Lezgian), East Armenian, Ossetic (Iranian). All display syncretism and/or cumulation, but still have group affixation. However, the latter is peripheral in Basque (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 860–867), while Oromo case markers are divided into "word case" and "phrase final case" (Owens 1985: 8ff.). Only the former displays syncretism, and while both can have group exponence in coordination, only word case triggers agreement on NP dependents (ibid.: 222).

Exceptions to Universal 2 are Wardaman, Southern Sierra Miwok (Utian), and Hunzib (Tsezic), which have case agreement in spite of having purely agglutinating paradigm.

Even though both universals, thus formulated, are robust tendencies, we are still left with a large number of exceptions. However, in the majority of these languages, closer analysis reveals that we are actually dealing with layered systems consisting of two case-like categories, only one of which conforms to the Beard Criterion as formulated above. If only these case features are considered, these languages cease to become exceptional. Such instances in our sample include Kryz (nom.-gen., Authier 2009: 34), Adyghe (abs.-obl.,

Ershova 2012), East Armenian (nom.-dat., Arkhangelskiy 2012), Ossetic (nom.-obl., Belyaev 2014), Kannada (nom.-gen., Schiffman 1983), and Hunzib (abs.-obl., NP-internal agreement only in obliqueness, van den Berg 1995). As an illustrative example, consider the Kryz case system. In a typical paradigm, the genitive is either syncretic with the nominative or has an irregular, morphologically conditioned suffix. Other cases use the genitive form as their base stem:

	‘village’	‘house’
ABS	kum	k’ul
GEN		k’ul-ci
ERG	kum-ur	k’ul-ci-r
DAT	kum-uz	k’ul-ci-z
INS	kum-zina	k’ul-ci-zina
...		

Kryz does allow group affixation, which seems to violate Universal 1, since there is both syncretism and the presence of inflection classes. However, both are observed only for the genitive; the rest of the case markers are completely regular. At the same time, Authier (2009: 34) shows that group affixation is only observed for non-genitive oblique cases; the genitive marker, if present, is retained under coordination:

- (1) [kasib-a sun-ci fur-a na xinib-ci] -ğar  
 poor-a one-OBL man-GEN and woman-GEN -SUPERL  
 ‘À propos d’un pauvre homme et sa femme.’ (Authier 2009: 199)

This example also shows that NP-internal agreement is only in abs. vs. obl., i.e. triggered by the use of the genitive stem. Thus, Kryz can be said to have two case-like features: a binary distinction abs. vs. gen./obl. which conforms to the Beard Criterion, and a more elaborate second-layer agglutinating system which does not conform to the Beard Criterion. Since only the former shows agreement and only the latter shows group exponence, no universals are violated.

If Kryz is excluded along with other languages with such layered case, we are left with only three exceptions to Universal 1 (Basque, French, Burushaski) and two exceptions to Universal 2 (Wardaman, Southern Sierra Miwok). While these still require additional explanation,<sup>1</sup> in a 107-language sample such a small number of exceptions shows that the universals are valid.

An additional generalization that logically follows from Universals 1 and 2 is **Universal 3 (Agree → ¬ Group)**: a case category which triggers NP-internal agreement cannot have group exponence. While it may seem trivial to some, this generalization is still interesting as it seems to be inexplicable under analyses of suspended affixation as ellipsis (Erschler 2012) or feature deletion (Kharytonava 2012).

To conclude, the notion *Case* can be given a cross-linguistically meaningful definition if it is understood according to Beard’s Criterion. However, it includes only a rather narrow subtype of nominal flags, which encode features that are almost the opposite of Corbett’s (2012) canonical definition. All other types of flagging, regardless of their degree of bondedness (affixes, clitics, full words, “group affixes”, etc.), fall into the same cross-linguistic class. This implies that the morphology-syntax distinction may have a role to play in typological research, but the domain of morphology is much more limited than traditionally assumed and is based on paradigm structure instead of relative bondedness.

1 For example, French cumulative exponence (cf. *du* ‘of the’ etc.) can probably be explained as an accidental result of complex morphonological processes. Unfortunately, the methodology of large-scale typological research does not allow us to reliably exclude such examples.