

Case variation: viruses and star wars

Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson

Lund University

February 2012

Abstract

This article discusses morphological case variation, arguing that individual cases are not syntactic objects or features but, rather, PF interpretations of a wide range of different underlying syntactic relations. Nevertheless, it turns out that case variation can, to a large extent, be analyzed in terms of only two atomic ‘ingredients’: event licensing of NPs by heads and PF marking of the licensing relation (where marking is analyzed in terms of ‘Chomskyan’ case stars). Ergative is a Voice/_{AG}*-case, whereas accusative is a v*-case, licensed under c-command by Voice/_{AG} (ergative and accusative marking thus being two sides of the same coin). Individual cases in case expanding morphological/PF case systems, it is argued, behave like viruses, striving to expand beyond their original ‘reasonable’ domain.

1. Introduction *

Case is perhaps the most intriguing and also the most widely discussed of all grammatical categories. It is fair to say that Case, more than any other category of language, highlights the fact that our understanding of language externalization and variation is limited. Many languages do not, in fact, have any overt case marking. The figures in (1) are drawn from Iggesen 2011b.

(1)	<i>Number of cases in 266 languages</i>	
a.	No morphological case marking	100 languages
b.	2 cases	23 languages
c.	3 cases	9 languages
d.	4 cases	9 languages
e.	5 cases	12 languages
f.	6-9 cases	50 languages
g.	10 or more cases	24 languages
h.	Exclusively borderline case marking	24 languages ¹
	Total	266 languages

* This article is a ‘follow up’ of sorts to the paper I presented at the Brussels *Case at the interfaces* conference (BCGL 5) in December 2010 (see Sigurðsson 2012). I would like to thank the organizers of the conference for their hospitality and the audience for helpful comments and suggestions. Many thanks also to ...

¹ In the words of Iggesen (2011b): “The feature value **exclusively borderline case-marking** refers to languages which have overt marking only for concrete (or “peripheral”, or “semantic”) case relations, such as locatives or instrumentals” [Iggesen’s emphasis].

The classification applies to ‘regular’ or ‘general’ noun-case distinctions. Thus, English counts as a 2 case language (Nom and Gen), rather than a 3 case language even though it has a 3 case distinction in parts of its pronominal system. – Actually, it would be more logical to count only marked cases; that is, to refer to languages as 0 case languages (no marked case), 1 case languages (one marked case, two distinct terms), and so on. I will return to this issue in relation to nominative case in section 2.

Blake (2001:156) suggested that there is a morphological case hierarchy or scale, such that languages ‘pick’ their cases in a specific preference order:²

- (2) Nom > Acc/Erg > Gen > Dat > Loc > Abl/Inst > others (Part, Com, Purp, Perl, ...)

The following tendencies can thus be discerned:

- (3) *Common typological case generalizations*
- a. If a language has cases, one of them is morphologically and/or functionally unmarked in relation to the other(s) and is thus likely to be called ‘nominative’ (or ‘direct’) by linguists.
 - b. The second case (the first marked one) is likely to distinguish objects (Acc) from subjects or to specifically distinguish agentive subjects (Erg) from other core arguments.³
 - c. A third case is likely to be an adnominal ‘possessor case’ (Gen).
 - d. A fourth case is likely to be an ‘additional core argument case’ (Dat, etc.).
 - e. A fifth case is likely to mark spatial relations (Loc, etc.).
 - f. Additional cases are likely to make more fine grained distinctions between arguments or NPs in general (Abl, Inst, Part, Com, etc.).

Presumably, these are 3rd factor effects in the sense of Chomsky 2005: natural options allowed for by underspecification of Universal Grammar (UG).⁴

Blake (2001:156ff) discusses a number of variously rich case systems, including the following ones (disregarding the vocative and some vestigial cases as well as complex locative case systems):

	<i>Example languages:</i>	<i>Cases:</i>
(4) a.	Tamil	Nom Acc Gen Dat Loc Abl Inst Com

² I adopt the case abbreviations used in Blake 2001, including Nom(inative), Acc(usative), Erg(ative), Dat(ive), Gen(itive), Voc(ative), Abl(ative), Inst(rumental), Loc(ative), Ill(ative), Ade(ssive), All(ative), Part(itive), Com(itative), Purp(osive), Perl(ative), Obl(ique).

³ Blake (2001) refers to absolutive case as nominative; I adopt that terminology.

⁴ On underspecification, see Roberts and Roussou 2003, Biberauer et al. 2009, Holmberg 2010.

b.	Classical Armenian	Nom	Acc	Gen	Dat	Loc	Abl	Inst
c.	Turkish	Nom	Acc	Gen	Dat	Loc	Abl	
d.	Russian, Check	Nom	Acc	Gen	Dat	Loc		Inst
e.	Latin	Nom	Acc	Gen	Dat		Abl	
f.	Ancient Greek, German	Nom	Acc	Gen	Dat			
g.	Modern Greek, Arabic	Nom	Acc	Gen				

However, this gives an idealized picture of order in a rather chaotic ‘case world’. First, many languages do not ‘fit’ into the Blake hierarchy. Modern spoken Faroese, for instance, has Dat but no Gen (see Thráinsson et al. 2004), Gaelic has Dat and Gen but no Acc, Hungarian has no Gen but Dat, Inst, etc., and Finnish has a general Gen but no inflectional Acc except for pronouns, also having Part, ‘instead of’ the higher ranked Dat, Loc, Abl and Inst. For more examples of ‘deviant’ systems, see Blake 2001, Malchukov and Spencer 2009a, 2009b.

Second, languages with identical case inventories can show various splits and asymmetries across grammatical categories, such as Person, Tense and Aspect, or across lexical categories, such as nouns and pronouns (see Iggesen 2011a). A familiar split or asymmetry of this sort is seen in a number of European languages, including English, with a general 2 case system (Nom, Gen) for nouns (and noun NPs) and a 3 case system for central parts of their pronominal systems (Nom, Acc, Gen). Even ‘simple’ systems of this sort show considerable complexities and cross-linguistic variation (see Quinn 2005 on English). And there are many more types of split case systems, including split ergative systems of various sorts.

Third, languages with the same number of cases can ‘distribute’ their cases quite differently across semantic and grammatical roles – call this *case mismatches*. Case mismatches are most easily demonstrated for 2 case languages, where various patterns can be discerned (see, e.g., Blake 2001, Arkadiev 2009, Malchukov and Spencer 2009b, Iggesen 2011a). Thus the oblique (or the ‘marked’/‘indirect’) case in nominative-oblique or morphologically unmarked-marked systems may mark various relations, as sketched in (5) for a few languages (disregarding ergative systems, which add another dimension to this case mismatching picture).⁵

Nom/Unmarked	Oblique/Marked
--------------	----------------

⁵ Abbreviations: A = subjects of transitive predicates; S = subjects of intransitive predicates (unergative, unaccusative) DO = direct objects (usually denoted as P in the typological literature); IO = indirect objects (commonly either covered by P or ignored in the typological literature); Poss = possessor.

A caveat is in place here: Typological studies do not usually aim at exhaustive descriptions and analyses of case systems, and many such studies also use varying and ill-defined notions, so the presentation in (5) has many lacunas (e.g., commonly lacking information on Poss, IO and numerous other functions, including nominal predicates). However, it serves to demonstrate that ‘simple’ 2 case systems can have various types of case mismatches.

(5)	a.	Kabardian:	S	A, Poss
	b.	Old French:	S, A	DO, IO, Poss
	c.	Chemehuevi:	S, A	DO, Poss
	d.	Amharic:	S, A, indefinite DO	Definite DO
	e.	Rumanian:	S, A, DO	IO, Poss
	f.	English (nouns):	S, A, DO, IO	Poss

The richer case inventories languages have, the less likely they are to show pervasive mismatches of this sort. That is, two languages that have, say, Nom, Acc, Gen, Dat, Loc, Inst are (naturally) less likely to show different distribution of ‘Acc’ than are two languages that have only Nom, Acc. However, even languages with identical multiple case inventories can show considerable case mismatches, an issue I will return to.

Developing some understanding of all this variation is a major challenge. As suggested by the presentation in (3) above, it presumably follows from general 3rd factor effects and principles. That is, case is not provided by or part of Universal Grammar (UG), a conclusion supported by numerous facts, for example the simple fact that having no case marking at all is highly common, not only in ‘usual’ languages, but even more so in creoles and sign languages (see Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006:23; cf. also Meir 2003).⁶ If so, it is not surprising that (UG based) parametric approaches to case variation have not been successfully developed.

Saying that language variation follows from underspecification of UG and 3rd factor effects is a very general statement. It does not release linguistics from developing some coherent understanding of variation. As in any other scientific endeavour, developing such principled understanding requires not only broad overviews but also detailed analyses of specific data. In the following I will look into some of the details of Icelandic case assignment, comparing it with case assignment in some other languages, above all German–Icelandic and German having an identical case inventory: Nom, Acc, Gen, Dat. Even though the Icelandic/German 4 case system is an offspring of the Proto-Indo-European 8 case system (Nom, Acc, Gen, Dat, Loc, Inst, Abl, Voc), I will be focusing on case growth, setting case decline aside.⁷

2. Nominative

Presumably, a case system always ‘begins life’ as a 2 case system, with a marked or an oblique case and an unmarked one, commonly referred to as ‘nominative’, some such systems further developing or growing by adding further cases over time (and then potentially declining again, see Kulikov 2009). As mentioned above, it would actually be more logical to count only marked

⁶ Notwithstanding the fact that creoles have more morphology than has often been assumed, see de Graf 2001.

⁷ See Barðdal and Kulikov 2009 on some of the PF observable processes typically involved in case decline.

cases, languages, then, generally being ‘born’ as 0 case languages, then going through a 1 marked case stage, with either a marked core case (Acc or Erg) or a marked borderline case (Loc, Inst, etc.), then through a 2 marked case stage (e.g., Acc and Gen), and so on. On this view, nominative is always a non-case.⁸

However, unlike German and most other modern European-case languages, but like Latin, Icelandic has a *split marked nominative system*, in the morphological sense (rather different, it seems, from the African-systems described in König 2009). That is, it has a morphologically marked nominative form in certain declensions but an unmarked nominative form in other declensions. Icelandic has many different noun declensions – a comprehensive description minimally requires around 70 distinct paradigms (even if much morphophonological variation is disregarded).⁹ Simplifying, we can say that the so-called strong masculine declensions usually have marked nominative forms in the singular (mostly in *-ur*), while most other declensions have unmarked or not clearly marked singular nominatives. A few of the most regular patterns are exemplified in (6); the strong-weak dichotomy is a formal one (pure vowel endings in all weak singular forms), with no semantic or syntactic import or correlates.

(6) *Some Icelandic noun declensions*

	Masculine nouns			Feminine nouns			Neuter nouns	
	<i>Strong1</i>	<i>Strong2</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Strong1</i>	<i>Strong2</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Weak</i>
	‘horse’	‘way’	‘pen’	‘rose’	‘queen’	‘week’	‘house’	‘eye’
SINGULAR								
Nom	hest-ur	veg-ur	penn-i	rós	drottning	vik-a	hús	auga
Acc	hest	veg	penn-a	rós	drottning-u	vik-u	hús	auga
Dat	hest-i	veg-i	penn-a	rós	drottning-u	vik-u	hús-i	auga
Gen	hest-s	veg-ar	penn-a	rós-ar	drottning-ar	vik-u	hús-s	auga
PLURAL								
Nom	hest-ar	veg-ir	penn-ar	rós-ir	drottning-ar	vik-ur	hús	aug-u
Acc	hest-a	veg-i	penn-a	rós-ir	drottning-ar	vik-ur	hús	aug-u
Dat	hest-um	veg-um	penn-um	rós-um	drottning-um	vik-um	hús-um	aug-um
Gen	hest-a	veg-a	penn-a	rós-a	drottning-a	vik-na	hús-a	aug-na

This is the traditional analysis of the case endings. Alternatively, one could analyze the Nom.Sg forms of all weak nouns as the basic stem form, other forms being derived by vowel truncation, deleting the second of two unstressed vowels, a process that is in any case operative elsewhere in the language (/penni-a/, /vika-u/ > *penn-a*, *vik-u*, etc.). Be that as it may, it is clear that Nom is marked to a variable degree, depending on both number and declension class. Despite this

⁸ Many others have argued that Nom is “no case” in some sense, including many generative researchers (see for example Markman 2009:402ff, Asbury 2010:18).

⁹ See <http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=1024003&fileOId=2338483>

morphological split, all nominatives show parallel behavior with respect to syntactic distribution and agreement processes. That is, the marking of marked nominative forms is not syntactically triggered, instead being a purely morphological (PF) phenomenon.

Case researchers sometimes make no clear distinctions between morphological case terminology, functional case terminology and alignment case terminology. Morphologically, there is a distinction to be drawn between marked and unmarked case forms (Dixon 1979). Functionally, there is a distinction between general/common and less general/common, often referred to as marked vs. unmarked (or default) as well (see Schütze 2001). In contrast, traditional case terms, Nom, Acc, Erg, etc., are commonly used as alignment terms, indicating which case usually aligns with which semantic role (Agent, Patient, etc.) or grammatical function (subject, direct object, etc.). This is simply illustrated in (7).

- (7) Morphological distinctions: unmarked, marked (e.g., by some case suffix)
 Functional distinctions: general (unmarked/default), less general (marked)
 Alignment distinctions: subjects (agentive, nonagentive), direct objects, etc.

Commonly, the term ‘nominative’ is used to designate 1) the morphologically unmarked case form, 2) the functionally general or default case, and 3) the case of (non-ergative) subjects, but there are obviously many mismatches between morphological, functional and alignment mappings.

Mainstream generative approaches to case (Chomsky 1980 et seq.) take it that Nom is a syntactically active case, “assigned a value under agreement” with the Tense head (T) in finite clauses (Chomsky 2001:6). The assumption that Nom is the ‘responsibility’ of the finite, ϕ -complete T has commonly been taken to account for finite verb agreement in regular Nom-Acc languages, such as English and German. However, as we have seen, it is more coherent to assume that Nom in Nom-Acc systems is simply the unmarked opposite of a marked Acc or Obl form. If so, agreement enters non-null-subject grammars as an extra alignment strategy, for example along the path sketched in (8).¹⁰

- (8) Early development of some Nom-Acc systems (in non-null-subject languages):

- | | | | | |
|----|------------------------------|-----|----------------------|--------------------|
| a. | 0 case, no agreement: | NP1 | T | NP2 |
| b. | 1 marked case, no agreement: | NP1 | T | NP2 _{Acc} |
| c. | 1 marked case + agreement: | NP1 | T _{AGR/NP1} | NP2 _{Acc} |

¹⁰ Null subject grammars of roughly the Italian/Latin type have presumably always been more common than (referential) non-null-subject grammars of roughly the German/French/English type, but that does not affect the point I am making, so I put this aside.

As suggested by this presentation, agreement is commonly redundant in non-null-subject systems. When such a system develops marked nominatives, a number of patterns may emerge, including patterns with 2 marked cases. Consider the Icelandic examples in (9) (AGR = overt agreement).

- (9) a. Ólafur sér Guðrúnu. 2 marked cases + AGR
 Olaf.NOM sees.3SG Gudrun.ACC
 ‘Olaf sees Gudrun.’
- b. Ólafur sér Ólaf. 1 marked case (Nom) + AGR
 Olaf.NOM sees.3SG Olaf
 ‘Olaf sees Olaf.’
- c. Guðrún sér Ólaf. 0 marked case + AGR
 Gudrun sees.3SG Olaf
 ‘Gudrun sees Olaf.’
- d. Guðrún sér Guðrúnu. 1 marked case (Acc) + AGR
 Gudrun sees.3SG Gudrun.ACC
 ‘Gudrun sees Gudrun.’

Here, the verb form does not yield any clear alignment information (as both the subject and the object are in the 3 person singular), but it does in many other cases, for example when the subject and the object are in different numbers. In many such cases, nominative alignment (with A/S) is doubly marked, with a marked Nom + verb agreement. If the object carries a marked Acc, this yields a threefold alignment marking, where single marking (only marked Acc, only marked Nom, or only verb agreement) would be sufficient to disambiguate the NP-predicate relations.

Nom is syntactically a non-case.¹¹ That is, whenever Narrow Syntax gives no specific case instructions to the morphological/phonological component, the NP in question will show up in Nom, regardless of the overt shape of the nominative elements expressed. Finite verb agreement, in turn, arises in morphology whenever the verb successfully probes a syntactically non-cased NP (be it morphologically marked or not). Thus, we have to sharply distinguish between syntactic instructions or ‘transfer messages’ leading to case marking and case realization or externalization in PF morphology. As we will see, actually, case morphology often behaves like

¹¹ Schütze (2001) argues that Acc is a default non-case in the English pronominal case system. However, Acc is a ‘multifunctional’ case in English (as in many other case systems), clearly being the marked case on, e.g., regular objects and NP predicates (Sigurðsson 2006). The intricacies of English case have long been too widely neglected (see Quinn 2005), and I cannot go into any of its details here. Let me just point out that claiming that Acc is simply and generally a default non-assigned case in English suggests that Nom is in some sense the marked case, entailing, in turn, that verb agreement is with the marked case (which would be highly exceptional for accusative systems; see Baker 2008).

a virus in morphological systems like the Icelandic one, without any clear semantic or syntactic import or correlates. Marked nominatives are just one example of such ‘PF viruses.’¹²

3. The non-nominative argument cases

Blake’s hierarchy in (2) and the related generalizations in (3) would seem to suggest that the first cases to get marked in the historical development of case systems are the ‘core cases’: First Acc or Erg, then Gen, then Dat, and so on. However, as the hierarchy is mostly based on observations on established ‘dinosauric’ case languages, it is unclear whether it reflects usual historical developments of case systems (for some observations and speculations on the development of case systems, see Blake 2001, Kulikov 2009).¹³ It is quite possible that a language develops some borderline or peripheral cases before developing Acc or Erg; 24 of the 266 languages in Iggesen 2011b have exclusively borderline case marking, including Plains Cree “whose only case-inflecting device is the locative suffix *–ehk*” (Iggesen 2011b). For expository purposes, however, I will assume that Blake’s hierarchy and the generalizations in (3) reflect at least a common case growth pattern over time.

In Derivation by phase, Chomsky (2001) suggests that Acc in regular accusative systems is the responsibility of ϕ -complete *v*, designated as *v**. In contrast, he analyzes defective *v* as not assigning or licensing any case value, thereby rendering the underlying object in defective *v*P-types accessible to Nom (as in canonical passives, unaccusatives, and anticausatives). As illustrated in (10), this yields Burzio’s Generalization (for English), that is to say, the “Acc-to-Nom conversion” typical of defective predicate types.

¹² PF case spreading of a different type is seen in various case agreement phenomena. One widely discussed phenomenon of this sort is case marking of Icelandic PRO in examples like *she asked Olaf.ACC to go just alone.ACC to the party* (see Sigurðsson 2008 and the references there). Case marking of PRO has no semantic effects, arguably involving PF percolation of an abstract morphological case feature under control, as sketched in (i).

(i) [CP ... Olaf.ACC ... [CP ... PRO ... alone.ACC ...]
 \uparrow $\uparrow\uparrow$ \uparrow
Control Agree(ment)

PF percolation (also seen in, e.g., tense agreement in Sequence of Tenses contexts) behaves like a reflex of sorts, utilizing syntactic correlations (Control/Agree) as a gateway to transmit a morphological feature in a top-down externalization process (suggesting that the PF derivation is *not* subject to the same locality and directional constraints as the syntactic derivation). Notice, in passing, that PF case percolation does not bear on the (syntactic) Movement Theory of Control (MTC), contrary to common assumptions; however, MTC has numerous other problems not discussed here (see, most recently, Wood 2012a).

¹³ In contrast to these authors, however, I will not be discussing the various PF-origins of case markers.

- | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| (10) a. | We sank <i>them</i> . | transitive v*-V: | Nom – Acc _i |
| b. | <i>They</i> were sunk. | passive v-V: | Nom _i |
| c. | <i>They</i> sank. | unaccusative v-V: | Nom _i |

Case star augmentation, then, yielding v* in addition to plain v, is involved when a language develops from a no case language to an accusative language, distinguishing Acc NPs from non-cased (Nom) NPs. In such a language, active Acc assignment in the v-system is based on the structure in (11), whereas the corresponding unaccusative and passive structures yield Nom, as sketched in (12); the arrows indicate a matching relation that gets interpreted in terms of non-nominative case in PF morphology, here Acc.¹⁴

- | | | |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (11) | ... [TP ... Voice/ _{AG} ... [NP ₂ ... v*-V NP ₁ ...]] | → NP ₁ /ACC in PF |
| | ↑ ↑ | NP ₂ /NOM in PF |

- | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (12) a. | ... [TP ... Voice/ _{PASS} ... [v-V NP ₁ ...]] | → NP ₁ /NOM in PF |
| b. | ... [TP ... Voice/ _{EXPL} ... [v-V NP ₁ ...]] | → NP ₁ /NOM in PF |

I assume that all predicates are embedded under some Voice head, passives being embedded under Voice/_{PASS}, while unaccusatives as well as anticausatives are embedded under expletive Voice, Voice/_{EXPL} (even though unaccusatives and anticausatives have different vP-internal structures). Agentive or active Voice, Voice/_{AG}, in turn, introduces the subject in active transitive structures, such as (11) (Kratzer 1996 and much related work).

In ergative systems, case star augmentation applies to Voice/_{AG}, yielding a case licensing Voice*/_{AG}, as sketched in (13).

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (13) | .. [TP .. Voice*/ _{AG} .. [NP ₂ .. v-V NP ₁ ..]] | → NP ₂ /ERG in PF |
| | ↑ ↑ | NP ₁ /NOM in PF |

Ergativity and accusativity are thus two sides of the same coin: while ergative case is directly licensed by Voice*/_{AG}, accusative is licensed by a v* under c-command of Voice/_{AG}.¹⁵

In addition to either Acc or Erg, languages with two marked cases (3 case languages) most commonly have adnominal Gen or benefactive/recipient Dat. These cases do not usually involve Voice or v, the core heads of the verbal system. Rather, the canonical Gen is adnominal, and indirect object Dat is commonly taken to be introduced by an applicative head, Appl (Marantz

¹⁴ There is a matching correlation with Voice as well, not indicated in these sketchy structures.

¹⁵ Voice and v are members of the same extended V-projection or head-chain (Voice-v-V); the highest member or the ‘head’ of the chain is the case licenser in ergative systems, while it is the lowest member or the ‘foot’ of the chain that is the case licenser in accusative systems.

[illegible]

(15)

```
graph TD
    TP --> T
    TP --> VoiceAGP1[Voice/AGP]
    VoiceAGP1 --> VoiceAG2[Voice/AG]
    VoiceAGP1 --> vP1[vP]
    vP1 --> SU
    vP1 --> vP2[vP]
    vP2 --> v
    vP2 --> vP3[vP]
    vP3 --> V
    vP3 --> DO
```

(16)

```
graph TD
    TP --> T
    TP --> VoiceAGP1[Voice/AGP]
    VoiceAGP1 --> VoiceAG2[Voice/AG]
    VoiceAGP1 --> ApplP1[ApplP]
    ApplP1 --> SU
    ApplP1 --> ApplP2[ApplP]
    ApplP2 --> Appl
    ApplP2 --> vP1[vP]
    vP1 --> IO
    vP1 --> vP2[vP]
    vP2 --> v
    vP2 --> VP
    VP --> V
    VP --> DO
```

DO, IO and SU are just convenient expository labels (instead of NP₁, NP₂, NP₃ or θ_1 , θ_2 , θ_3). The derivation of (16) starts out by introducing DO (NP₁/ θ_1) and event licensing it by v-V, then introducing IO and event licensing it by Appl, then introducing SU and event licensing it by Voice/_{AG}.¹⁶

In caseless languages none of the event licensing heads are augmented by a case star, whereas languages like German, Icelandic and Turkish have both case licensing v* heads and Appl* heads (licensing Acc vs. Dat). Ergative systems, in turn, have a case star augmented Voice*/_{AG}, as discussed above. The generalization that emerges from these observations is stated in (17).

- (17) a. NPs are event licensed by heads: Voice, Appl, v, n, a, p, ...¹⁷
 b. Event licensers of NPs may be case star augmented
 c. The augmented case star may be variably marked: *, *⁺, *⁺⁺
 d. Nom = syntactically a non-case (regardless of its overt marking)

The plus notation on case stars may be interpreted as ‘more marked’, *⁺ thus being more marked than *, *⁺⁺, in turn, being still more marked than *⁺.¹⁸ As we will see, one and the same morphological case may be variably marked depending on which structure it is licensed in; that is to say, the markedness of some particular case, say Dat, depends on whether it is an Appl-case (unmarked as compared to Acc), a v-case (more marked than Acc), and so on. – As event licensers and case stars are the basic ‘ingredients’ in case systems, I will refer to (17) as the *Case Ingredients Generalization*.¹⁹

It does not come as a surprise, of course, that argument introducing heads may also license some overt case marking. In the often cited words of Blake (2001:1), case is “a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their head.” The variable markedness generalization in (17c) is perhaps less expected, but it is corroborated by many facts, one being that indirect objects are variably marked both within and across languages. Thus, while Icelandic has more than 280 ditransitive verbs that take a dative indirect object (mostly Nom-Dat-Acc), it also has around 60 ditransitive verbs that take an accusative indirect (or ‘first’)

¹⁶ By the Inclusiveness Condition (Chomsky 1995:228) there are no “bar-levels in the sense of X-bar theory.” – I do not distinguish between high and low applicatives (the putative distinction is immaterial for my purposes, as far as I can judge).

¹⁷ Functional categories are not stored in Universal Grammar, instead being materialized in individual I-languages, perhaps universally so (which is not a contradiction, see Sigurðsson 2011c). They need not have any exponents in E-language (but each of the C-, T-, v-subsystems typically, perhaps universally, has at least one exponent).

¹⁸ More than three degrees of markedness is unusual, perhaps non-existent, in morphological systems. However, as markedness is a general 3rd factor phenomenon, it is not clear whether there are any principled linguistic limits to markedness.

¹⁹ For somewhat reminiscent (but also quite different) approaches, see Caha 2009 and Pesetsky 2010.

object, mostly Nom-Acc-Dat verbs (Jónsson 2000, Thráinsson 2007:173). Two examples are given in (18); as indicated, the ‘first’ object is optional, as indirect objects commonly are.

- (18) a. Peir leyndu (mig) sannleikanum.
 they.NOM concealed me.AGG tuth.the.DAT
 ‘They concealed the truth (from me).’
 b. Peir rændu (hana) töskunni.
 they.NOM robbed her.AGG bag.the.DAT
 ‘They robbed the bag (from her).’

As suggested by these examples accusative indirect objects commonly resemble Latin ablatives of separation. Presumably, they came into being as Acc ‘invaded’ the Appl-system from the v-system (perhaps in tandem with or as a consequence of the Germanic ‘Abl-death’). As these ‘ablative accusatives’ are clearly more marked in the Icelandic Appl-system than are regular dative indirect objects, we need to distinguish between Appl*, licensing dative indirect objects and Appl*⁺, licensing the ‘ablative accusatives’. Languages like English and Swedish (see Holmberg and Platzack 1995:197), with only accusative indirect objects, have only one Appl head, Appl*, whereas Gaelic has lost its Nom-Acc distinction, thus having only nominative indirect objects, licensed by plain Appl. – Thus ‘marked’ and ‘more marked’ are relative notions, depending not only on event licensors but also on languages.

Variable case marking also applies to direct objects in many languages (see, e.g., Malchukov and Swart 2009); thus, Russian has Acc, Gen, Dat, Inst direct objects (see Richardson 2007), German has Acc, Gen, Dat direct objects, Icelandic has Acc, Gen, Dat, Nom direct objects, and so on. Some of this variation is language-internally regular to some (variable) extent, but it is typically unpredictable cross-linguistically. Thus, “Maling (1996) [an unpublished work] contains a list of more than 750 [Icelandic] verbs which in at least one sense occur with a dative object ... [whereas the] corresponding number of verbs for German is approximately 140, and for Russian fewer than 60” (Maling 2002:31). There is nothing in the case systems of these languages that would lead one to expect these dramatic differences – recall that Icelandic and German have identical 4 case inventories: Nom, Acc, Gen, Dat.

The Icelandic verbs in (19) take a dative direct object:

- (19) A few Dat taking Icelandic verbs:

ausa ‘scoop’, *beina* ‘direct’, *bjarga* ‘rescue’, *bjóða* ‘invite’, *borga* ‘pay’, *bylta* ‘overturn’, *dreifa* ‘spread’, *fagna* ‘welcome’, *fleygja* ‘throw away’, *fleyta* ‘float’, *fljúga* ‘fly’ (e.g. an aeroplane), *giftast* ‘marry’, *gleyma* ‘forget’, *heilsa* ‘greet’, *hella* ‘pour’, *henda* ‘throw, throw away’, *hjúkra* ‘nurse’, *hlífa* ‘protect, spare’, *launa* ‘pay, reward’, *misþyrma* ‘torture’, *ráða* ‘decide’, *ríða* ‘ride’ (e.g. a horse), *róa* ‘row’, *sigla* ‘sail’, *snúa* ‘turn’, *stjórna* ‘control,

govern, rule’, *sökkva* ‘sink’, *tortíma* ‘exterminate’, *ýta* ‘push, shift’, *þjóna* ‘serve’, *þóknast* ‘please’

Corresponding verbs in German all take an accusative object (*auslöffeln*, *retten*, *einladen*, *bezahlen*, etc.).

The Icelandic verbs in (20) all take a genitive direct object (some of them can alternatively take a PP complement).

(20) A few Gen taking monotransitive Icelandic verbs:

afla ‘procure’, *biðja* ‘ask for’, *bíða* ‘wait for’, *geta* ‘mention’, *gæta* ‘heed; take care, look after’, *krefjast* ‘demand’, *leita* ‘look for, search for’, *minnast* ‘(be able to) remember’, *neyta* ‘consume’, *njóta* ‘enjoy’, *óska* ‘wish for’, *sakna* ‘miss’, *æskja* ‘wish for’, *þarfnast* ‘need’

Corresponding verbs in German (*bitten*, *erwähnen*, etc.) all take either an accusative object or a PP complement.

The examples in (21) and (22) illustrate this Icelandic-German dichotomy with respect to direct object case marking.

- | | | |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (21) a. | Hún kastaði boltanum /*boltann. | Icelandic <i>Dat</i> /* <i>Acc</i> |
| | she threw ball.the.DAT/*ACC | |
| b. | Sie hat den Ball /*dem Ball geworfen. | German <i>Acc</i> /* <i>Dat</i> |
| | she has the ball.ACC/*DAT thrown | |
| | ‘She threw the ball.’ | |
| (22) a. | Hún saknaði hans /*hann. | Icelandic <i>Gen</i> /* <i>Acc</i> |
| | she missed him.G/*A | |
| b. | Sie hat ihn /*seiner vermisst. | German <i>Acc</i> /* <i>Gen</i> |
| | she has him.A/*G thrown | |
| | ‘She missed him.’ | |

Importantly, there are *no* semantic differences between Icelandic *Dat*/*Gen* objects in examples like (21a) and (22a) and corresponding accusative objects in German examples like (21b) and (22b).

Case mismatches of this sort are not only found across related languages but also within individual languages. Consider the Icelandic direct object case marking contrasts in (23)–(24) (showing just a few samples of such contrasts); the verb ‘pairs’ either have similar (sometimes identical) or opposite meanings.

	DATIVE:	ACCUSATIVE:
(23) a.	<i>bifa</i> ‘(slightly) move’	<i>hreyfa</i> ‘move’
b.	<i>bjarga</i> ‘rescue’	<i>lífga</i> (<i>við</i>) ‘revive’
c.	<i>fylgja</i> ‘follow, accompany’	<i>elta</i> ‘follow, chase’
d.	<i>hjálpa</i> ‘help’	<i>aðstoða</i> ‘assist’
e.	<i>hjúkra</i> ‘nurse’	<i>lækna</i> ‘cure’
f.	<i>hrósa</i> ‘praise’	<i>lofa</i> ‘praise’
g.	<i>koma</i> ‘(manage to) move’	<i>flytja</i> ‘move’
h.	<i>ljúka</i> ‘finish’	<i>klára</i> ‘finish (up)’
i.	<i>loka</i> ‘close’	<i>opna</i> ‘open’
j.	<i>lyfta</i> ‘lift’	<i>hækka</i> ‘raise’
k.	<i>splundra</i> ‘shatter’	<i>mölva</i> ‘smash to bits’
l.	<i>snúa</i> ‘turn, wind’	<i>skrúfa</i> ‘screw’
m.	<i>sökkva</i> ‘sink’	<i>lækka</i> ‘lower’
n.	<i>þjóna</i> ‘serve (e.g., at the table)’	<i>uppvarta</i> ‘serve (at the table)’
o.	<i>tosa</i> ‘pull’	<i>toga</i> ‘pull’
p.	<i>ýta</i> ‘push’	<i>draga</i> ‘pull, draw’
	GENITIVE:	ACCUSATIVE:
(24) a.	<i>afla</i> ‘procure, get’	<i>skaffa</i> ‘procure, get’
b.	<i>biðja</i> ‘ask for’	<i>betla</i> ‘beg, ask alms’
c.	<i>geta</i> ‘mention’	<i>nefna</i> ‘mention’
d.	<i>gæta</i> ‘heed; take care, look after’	<i>passa</i> ‘look after’
e.	<i>krefjast</i> ‘demand’	<i>heimta</i> ‘demand’
f.	<i>minnast</i> ‘(be able to) remember’	<i>muna</i> ‘remember’
g.	<i>neyta</i> ‘consume’	<i>nota</i> ‘use’; <i>borða</i> ‘eat’
h.	<i>óska</i> ‘wish for’	<i>vilja</i> ‘want’, <i>þrá</i> ‘desire’
i.	<i>þarfnastr</i> ‘need’	<i>þurfa</i> ‘need’

These facts highlight two important albeit often neglected or ‘downgraded’ aspects of case variation: First, it is cross-linguistically unpredictable, even for closely related languages with identical case inventories; that is, there are no straightforward universal generalizations or ‘truths’ behind case variation. Second, also language internally there are case irregularities and mismatches; that is, even internally to individual languages variable case marking cannot be fully described in terms of regularities. This is in fact made quite obvious by historical sporadic case marking changes in otherwise stable case systems. Icelandic witnesses many such minor shifts in case use without any concomitant semantic changes (see Barðdal 2001, Jónsson and Eythórsson 2005, Thráinsson 2007). When a verb starts, say, taking a dative object instead of an accusative

one, without any meaning shift or system shift, then it cannot be the case that both historical stages (V-Acc vs. V-Dat) represent ‘the regular system’.

Languages are of course full of forms, like, say, English *-s* and *-ed*, that correlate significantly with some semantics. Such form-semantics correlations are *grammatical coins*: By using them, the speaker ‘pays’ for accessing and activating someone else’s internal language (I-language), ‘buying’ understanding or reaction. The coins are valid currency, not because they are part of anybody’s I-language but because they relate to and activate I-languages: You need a pen or an apple and you pay with a coin because it gets you what you desire (and not because the coin *is* a pen or an apple). This understanding does not, of course, release linguists from the duty—or deprive them of the joy—of carefully analyzing form-semantics correlations in individual constructions and languages, but it ought to save them from the pitfall of analyzing such (more or less (in)accurate) relations as being part of I-language.

Let me emphasize that developing an analysis of exactly how some grammatical coin, like, say, a dative case marker (or ‘simply’ a lexical item like *pen* or *apple*), can gain currency in some linguistic community is a worthy albeit a non-trivial undertaking. Distributed Morphology (including nanosyntax), has persistently, and commendably, focused on the problem for about two decades, without, however, having been able to develop any deeper understanding of it—understandably so. The complexity of the issue cannot be overstated. Understanding it requires a theory of at least three subsystems, each of which is largely beyond present day limits of science. First, it requires a coherent understanding of the structure and nature of I-language, the linguistic thought system (there biolinguistics actually seems to be making some encouraging progress). Second, it requires an analysis of how one individual I-language can relate to another I-language via the grammar of external language (E-language) and body expressions (acoustic, facial, manual, etc.; cf. the double transfer approach in Sigurðsson 2011c). Third, it also requires a theory of how E-grammar and body expressions can establish themselves as a part of the ‘language contract’ in a community.

Regardless of how we deal with these fundamental issues, the study of language and thought is subject to the dilemma of Plato’s cave allegory: We can only access and study I-language via E-language, but E-language is merely a fluctuating shadow of I-language, the relation between the two being fundamentally and inescapably non-isomorphic.²⁰ It follows that a dative case marker, for instance, cannot really be a marker of dative case, paradoxical as that may seem. Not any more than a coin is a pen or an apple.

4 Beyond the v/n/Appl-systems

²⁰ See Sigurðsson 2011c and related work, Hinzen 2012.

The Icelandic cases are found widely outside of the core argument system. The overview in (25)-(28) is a very brief non-exhaustive sketch of the distribution of the non-nominative cases beyond core arguments (disregarding dislocated NPs and other case agreement phenomena).

(25) *Accusative*:

- a. Complements of certain prepositions
- b. Temporal and spatial adverbial NPs

(26) *Dative*:

- a. Complements of most prepositions (including agentive NPs in *af*- ‘by’ phrases)
- b. A few adnominal NPs (/she looked in eyes *me*/; /to defence *me*/ = ‘to my defence’)
- c. Complements of certain adjectives (/she was *me* kind/)
- d. Comparative and iterative/frequentative adverbial NPs

(27) *Genitive*:

- a. Complements of some prepositions
- b. Most adnominal NPs, reflecting an array of semantic/syntactic relations²¹
- c. Complements of a handful of adjectives (/she was not worthy *his*/)
- d. Some partitive NPs (/most *their*/ = ‘most of them’)
- e. NPs in various other adverbial or adverbial-like functions (see Kress 1982:228ff)

Only a few illustrative examples follow. The accusative adverbial NPs in (28a,b) are temporal, while the one in (28c) is spatial;²² as indicated to the right, other cases are excluded.

- (28) a. Hún kom **annan júlí**. *öðrum júlí.DAT, etc.
 she came second July.ACC
 ‘She came the second of July.’
- b. Hún var **mánuð** á Íslandi. *mánuður.NOM, etc.
 she was month.ACC in Iceland
 ‘She stayed for a month in Iceland.’
- c. Hún keyrði **alla leið**. *allrar leiðar.GEN, etc.
 she drove all way.ACC
 ‘She drove all way.’

²¹ That is, like most other case languages, Icelandic has many adnominal genitives, morphologically homogeneous but syntactically heterogeneous.

²² Adverbial accusatives of this sort measure out a span, temporal or spatial, getting a universal reading (reminiscent of that of universal perfects), indicating that the eventuality of the predicate holds for all subintervals of the temporal or spatial span in question. This ‘measuring property’ is not, as a rule, shared by other accusatives (but see Svenonius 2002 for a different interpretation).

The datives in (29) are iterative/frequentative, while the ones in (30) are comparative.

- (29) a. Hann söng lagið **fjórum sinnum.** *fjögurra sinna.GEN, etc.
 he sang song.the four times.DAT
 ‘He sang the song four times.’
 b. Hann spilar **einu sinni** í viku. *eitt sinn.NOM, etc.
 he plays one time.DAT in week
 ‘He plays once a week.’
- (30) a. Hún stóð **honum** framar. *hans.GEN, etc.
 she stood him.DAT further
 ‘She was more able than he (him).’
 b. Hún var **þrem árum** eldri en hann. *þrjú ár.NOM, etc.
 she was three years.DAT older than he
 ‘She was three years older than he (him).’

The adjectival complements in (31) are dative (not uncommon) and genitive (rare).

- (31) a. Hann var **börnunum** góður. *barnanna.GEN, etc.
 he was children.the.DAT kind
 ‘He was kind to the children.’
 b. Hann var verður **verðlaunanna.** *verðlaununum.DAT, etc.
 He was worthy prices.the.GEN
 ‘He was worthy of the price.’

These few examples are only meant to give an initial idea about the nature of some of the Icelandic borderline case phenomena. Similar (but only partly identical or overlapping) facts are found in many other case languages. I will not develop any detailed analysis of these facts here—they are lexically restricted with idiomatic or semi-idiomatic properties. What these facts serve to show, however, is that morphological case can behave very much like a virus, penetrating every possible corner of a language, not tolerating a single NP without some morphological case marking. As mentioned above, marked nominatives, case agreement and case percolation into PRO infinitives also illustrate this tendency to case mark nominal categories even when they are not subject to any syntactic case instructions to PF.

This virus-like behavior of morphological case is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by adpositional case. Icelandic prepositions fall into four classes with regard to case marking; simplex prepositions are listed in (32), with only their most central translations.²³

²³ There are also numerous complex prepositions or combinations of adverbial elements and propositions, but these always include one of the simplex basic prepositions in (32). Usually, the case assigned depends on the last element in such combinations, *innan úr* ‘from within’, *upp úr* ‘out of, up from’, etc., for instance assigning dative, as the

- (32) a. DATIVE:
að ‘towards, up to’; *af* ‘off, from’; *andspænis* ‘opposite, facing’; *ásamt* ‘along with’; *frá* ‘from’; *gegn* ‘against’; *gegnt* ‘opposite, facing’; *handa* ‘for’; *hjá* ‘at, with, beside’; *meðfram* ‘along’; *móti* ‘against, towards’; *undan* ‘from under(neath)’; *úr* ‘out of, from’
- b. GENITIVE:
 b1. *auk* ‘in addition to’; *án* ‘without’; *meðal* ‘among’; *milli* ‘(in) between’; *til* ‘to, towards’; *vegna* ‘because of’
 b2. *austan* ‘east of’; *norðan* ‘north of’; *sunnan* ‘south of’; *vestan* ‘west of’; *handan* ‘beyond, on the other side of’; *innan* ‘within, inside of’; *neðan* ‘under, below, beneath’; *ofan* ‘above’; *utan* ‘outside (of)’
- c. ACCUSATIVE:
gegnum ‘through’; *kringum* ‘around’; *um* ‘about, around’; *umfram* ‘beyond, besides’; *umhverfis* ‘around, nearby’
- d. VARIABLY DATIVE OR ACCUSATIVE:
 d1. *á* ‘on, in, at’; *í* ‘in, on, at’; *undir* ‘under, underneath’; *yfir* ‘above, across, over’
 d2. *fyrir* ‘for, before’; *eftir* ‘after, by’; *með* ‘with’; *við* ‘with, to, at’

All prepositions containing the phonological string /um/ take an accusative complement and any single-word preposition/adverb containing /an/ assigns genitive. Beyond these bleeding phonological relations, dative is the unmarked, general prepositional case.

The variation in (32d) is to an extent semantically predictable and similar phenomena are found in other Indo-European languages (see Libert 2002). Generally, however, the case licensing properties of prepositions are clearly not decided by their semantics. Thus *að* ‘towards, up to’ and *af* ‘off, from’ have roughly opposite meanings, and so do *gegn* ‘against’ and *handa* ‘for’ as well as, e.g., *frá* ‘from’ and *hjá* ‘at, with, beside’, and, yet, all these prepositions obligatorily take a dative complement. Similarly *auk* ‘in addition to’ and *án* ‘without’ have roughly opposite meanings, both nevertheless taking genitive complements (*án* variably took Acc, Dat or Gen in Old Norse).

Again, a comparison between Icelandic and German is instructive (inasmuch as such a comparison is possible and plausible). There are a number of roughly synonymous prepositions that assign the same case in both languages, such as dative assigning German *bei* and Icelandic *hjá*, both meaning ‘by, at’, accusative assigning German *durch* and Icelandic *gegnum* meaning ‘through’, and so on. However, there are also many prepositional case mismatches between the languages. Recall that they have identical case inventories, and, yet, we find differences like the ones listed in (33).

simplex *úr*. The exception is the *-an* adverbs/prepositions in (32b2), taking accusative instead of genitive when combined with *fyrir* ‘of’: *fyrir sunnan landið* ‘south of the country.ACC’, vs. *sunnan landsins* ‘south of the country.GEN’.

	German	Icelandic
(33) a. ‘facing’	<i>angesichts</i> + Gen	<i>andspænis</i> + Dat
b. ‘in addition to’	<i>ausser</i> + Dat/Acc	<i>auk</i> + Gen
c. ‘against’	<i>gegen</i> + Acc	<i>gegn</i> + Dat
d. ‘alongside’	<i>längsseits</i> + Gen	<i>meðfram</i> + Dat
e. ‘without’	<i>ohne</i> + Acc	<i>án</i> + Gen
f. ‘below’	<i>unterhalb</i> + Gen	<i>undir</i> + Dat
g. ‘between’	<i>zwischen</i> + Dat/Acc	<i>milli</i> + Gen
h. ‘towards’	<i>zu</i> + Dat	<i>til</i> + Gen

The case literature contains numerous suggestions that inherently case-marked NPs are actually part of larger structures, PPs or KPs (with a silent K(ase) head that is responsible for the case assignment, functioning much like an overt adposition). See for instance Emonds 1987, Bittner and Hale 1996, Bayer et al. 2001, McFadden 2004, Asbury 2010 for a number of different versions of this basic idea. Demotion (from a case marked NP to an adpositional complement) and patterns like Dative Shift (give the book to X, vs. give X the book) are commonly taken to lend support to this view.

There are four basic combinations of case markers and adpositions, as simply sketched in (34), where NP₀ and NP_C stand for a non-case marked NP vs. case marked NP, and where P denotes ‘adposition’ (i.e., postpositions as well as prepositions).

(34) a.	NP ₀	English:	They stayed a month .
b.	NP _C	Icelandic:	Þeir voru mánuð /*mánuður. they were month.ACC/*NOM (i.e., ‘stayed a month’)
c.	P + NP ₀	English:	I bought three bottles <u>of</u> water .
d.	P + NP _C	Icelandic:	Ég keypti þrjár flöskur <u>af</u> vatni /*vatn. I bought three bottles of water. DAT/*NOM

Some so-called case markers can be successfully analyzed as adpositions in some constructions in some languages; this seems for instance to be true of various locative markers in Finno-Ugric languages, for instance the inessive and the terminative markers in the Hungarian examples in (35) (from Asbury 2010:5).

(35) a.	Géza olvas a kert- ben . Geza reads the garden.INESS ‘Geza is reading in the garden.’
b.	Kovácséknál voltam két hét- ig . Kovavacs stayed.1SG two week-TERM ‘I stayed with the Kovácses for two weeks.’

However, even though it seems profitable to analyze the Hungarian elements *ben* and *ig* in (35a, b) as postpositions rather than genuine case makers, and to analyze the adverbial NPs in constructions like the ones in (34a, b) as PPs or KPs with a zero head (see McFadden 2004, *inter alia*), there is no gain in analyzing inherently case marked NPs in the Latin/Icelandic/German type of languages as always being PPs or KPs; such an analysis would force us to assume an empty P or K even in the presence of an overt P, as in (34d).

Adverbial NPs like the ones in (34a, b) do have similar distributional and semantic properties as certain PPs, but inherently case marked objects commonly have properties that are quite distinct from those of PPs. Thus, Icelandic dative and genitive objects raise to subject in numerous construction types (passives, etc.), whereas full-fledged PPs never do, as illustrated in (36) vs. (37).

- (36) a. Hún hélt bókinni.
 she held book.the.DAT
 ‘She kept the book.’
 b. Var bókinni haldið? *NP movement passive*
 was book.the.DAT kept
 ‘Was the book kept? / Did they keep the book?’
- (37) a. Hún hélt á bókinni.
 she held on book.the.DAT
 ‘She held/carried the book.’
 b. *Var á bókinni haldið?
 was on book.the.DAT held
 c. *Var bókinni haldið á?
 was book.the.DAT held on
 d. Var haldið á bókinni? *Impersonal passive*
 was held on book.the.DAT
 ‘Was the book held/carried?’

As suggested in Sigurðsson 2011a, an overt preposition arguably blocks T_ϕ from probing propositional objects (in Icelandic). That is, prepositions introduce both structural and semantic information that is otherwise absent.

On a *general* PP or KP analysis of ‘inherently’ case marked NPs, one would presumably expect the $P + NP_C$ type in (34d) to be exceptional in case languages, as compared to the $P + NP_\theta$ type in (34c). The opposite is true: Typological research suggests that most case languages do indeed have case marked complements of adpositions, and, conversely, that non-case marked complements of adpositions are highly exceptional (see Libert 2002).

Observations of this sort indicate that morphological marking, even in the simplest and most regular morphological systems, is an unnecessary ‘quirk’ that languages really can do without—suggesting, in turn, that morphological variation is a sociobiological phenomenon rather than a strictly linguistic one.

5. Viruses and star wars

Recall from section 3 that case star augmentation, yielding v^* in addition to plain v and Voice/_{AG}* in addition to plain Voice/_{AG} is involved when a language develops from a no case language to either an accusative or an ergative language, distinguishing Acc or Erg NPs from non-cased (Nom) NPs. Case star augmentation (and case star deletion) is a general phenomenon in case systems.

Recall also the Case Ingredients Generalization in (17), repeated here.

- (17) a. NPs are event licensed by heads: Voice, Appl, v , n , a , p , ...
 b. Event licensors of NPs may be case star augmented
 c. The augmented case star may be variably marked: $*$, $*^+$, $*^{++}$
 d. Nom = syntactically a non-case (regardless of its overt marking)

Accordingly, little v , for instance, comes in several flavors in individual case languages, as v , v^* , v^{*+} , v^{*++} , and so on (Sigurðsson 2012). Thus, the v -case system in nominative-accusative/genitive/dative languages can be described as in (38), where the arrow reads as ‘yields’ (in PF morphology).

- (38) a. v^{*++} -V → Gen
 b. v^{*+} -V → Dat
 c. v^* -V → Acc
 d. v -V → Ø (Nom)

As mentioned before, Icelandic, of course, arrived at its 4 case system by decline from the 8 case system of Proto-Indo-European. Another way of arriving at (38) is by gradual case growth: 0 case > 1 marked case > 2 marked cases > 3 marked cases.

The case star approach has one thing in common with KP approaches, namely that it explicitly states that a cased NP is licensed in a more marked or informative structure than is a non-cased (Nom) NP, the more so the more oblique the case. Importantly, however, the augmented markedness or complexity is morphological and not syntactic. That is, *syntactically*, Icelandic is just like caseless languages, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, etc., in having only a

general object-licensing v , the v^* -flavors being activated in the externalization process, as (abstract) language-specific PF interpretations.

Presumably, both Dat and Gen usually ‘begin life’ as non- v cases, Gen as an adnominal n^* -case and Dat as an Appl*-case. Subsequent introduction of both Dat and Gen into the v -system can be seen as the result of two ‘virus invasions’ or ‘star attacks’. Gen is commonly more oblique or peripheral than Dat within the v -system (cf. Haspelmath and Michaelis 2008), thus being licensed by a more marked v type head than both the other v -cases, as indicated in (38). That suggests, in turn, that Dat invaded the v -system before Gen did. Thus, nominative-accusative / n -genitive / Appl-dative / v -dative / v -genitive case systems might (for instance) come into being along the lines sketched in (39).

- (39)
- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| a. | $v > v, v^*$ | yielding the Nom-Acc distinction in the v -system |
| b. | $n > n^*$ | introducing Gen into the n -system |
| c. | $\text{Appl} > \text{Appl}^*$ | introducing Dat into the Appl-system |
| d. | $v, v^* > v, v^*, v^{*+}$ | adding Dat to the v -system |
| e. | $v, v^*, v^{*+} > v, v^*, v^{*+}, v^{*++}$ | adding Gen to the v -system |

Similarly, Dat can invade the n -system, yielding adnominal datives, such datives being more marked than Gen within the n -system, thus licensed by n^{*+} .²⁴ Also, as mentioned in section 3, Acc has invaded the Appl-system from the v -system (presumably at least partly as a consequence of the loss of ablative in the prehistory of Germanic), thus being more marked than Dat within the Appl-system (licensed by Appl^{*+}), even though it is less marked than Dat within the v -system.²⁵ In addition, both the adjectival (a) and the prepositional (p) subsystems, discussed in section 4, have developed case licensing a- and p-heads.²⁶ Thus, (much of) the Icelandic case system can be described as in (40) (where Nom is disregarded).

(40)

		*	* ⁺	* ⁺⁺
a.	v -system	Acc	Dat	Gen
b.	Appl-system	Dat	Acc	
c.	n -system	Gen	Dat	
d.	p-system ²⁷	Dat	Acc	Gen
e.	a-system	Dat	Gen	

²⁴ German (and similar Icelandic) *Ich sah ihm in die Augen* ‘I saw him.DAT in the eyes’, etc.

²⁵ Other historical developments than the ones described here are of course possible. My ambition is not to reconstruct the case history of any particular language, but rather to outline how a four case system can develop from a non-case system.

²⁶ On little p as distinct from lexical Ps , see Svenonius 2007.

²⁷ Recall that Dat is the unmarked p -case. I assume that Gen is more marked than Acc as a p -case (but nothing important hinges on that assumption).

The five subsystems thus make use of only three ‘common’ cases to mark 12 distinct relations. Other languages sometimes take different routes, introducing specific cases for (or limiting them to) some of the subsystems (dative for instance being confined to prepositional complements in Scottish Gaelic). Subsystem-specificity of this sort can yield systems with many more cases than the Icelandic one (an interesting factor that is nevertheless largely disregarded here).

A parallel sketch for English is given in (41).

(41)		*
a.	v-system	Acc
b.	Appl-system	Acc
c.	n-system	Gen
d.	p-system	Acc

The cases are evidently not unitary building blocks. That is, applicative dative is not the ‘same’ case as verbal dative, adnominal genitive is not the not the ‘same’ case as verbal genitive, and so on. Not surprisingly, the traditional view that individual cases are primitives yields recalcitrant puzzles. Thus, it has been a well-known but a mysterious fact (see Holmberg 1991:143; see also Thráinsson 2007:173ff and the references there) that Icelandic has genitive direct objects but no genitive indirect objects. The simple explanation under the present approach is that Gen has invaded the v-system as opposed to the Appl-system. Another fact illustrating that the cases are not unitary is that Appl-datives differ from v-datives in being retained in the anticausative *-st*-construction (see below).

So-called ‘inherent’ case marking of objects is structural rather than lexical (*pace* Woolford (2006) and many others). That is, the case is not the ‘direct responsibility’ of the lexical V root, but of the particular v type that combines with V to make up a full-fledged verb (and similar considerations apply to the other lexical categories). The v-selection of V, however, is commonly idiomatic or ‘fossilized’, such that a particular V may only select one particular v-type, seemingly yielding a ‘lexical’ case marking relation. As one would expect, though, many Vs may select more than one v type. Thus, to mention only one type of such variation, some Icelandic verbs make a distinction between dative objects (commonly benefactive) and accusative objects (commonly affected), yielding minimal pairs like ‘comb the child.DAT’ vs. ‘comb the hair.ACC’ (for more observations of this sort for Icelandic, see Barðdal 2001, Maling 2002, Svenonius 2002, Jónsson 2003, 2005, Thráinsson 2007; more generally, Malchukov and Swart 2009 and the references there).

Actually, the so-called ‘inherent’ or ‘lexical’ cases may be erased in certain Voices. Thus, the expletive Voice head in the anticausative *-st*-construction, triggers deletion of v-datives, as opposed to Appl-datives. This is illustrated in (42)

- (42) a. Við lokuðum **gluggunum**. Active Nom-**Dat_i**
 we closed windows.the.DAT
 d. **Gluggarnir** lokuðust. Anticausative **Nom_i**
 windows.the.NOM closed-ST
 ‘The windows closed.’
- (43) a. Pétur bauð **mér** vinnu. Active Nom-**Dat_i-Acc**
 Peter offered me.DAT job.A
 b. **Mér** bauðst vinna. Anticausative **Dat_i-Nom**
 me.DAT offered-ST job
 ‘I got a job opportunity / a job offer.’

The generalization behind these facts is that Voice_{EXPL} erases all v-case stars as opposed to the Appl-case star, the latter triggering applicative dative marking (for a more detailed discussion of these and related facts, see Sigurðsson 2011a, 2012, Wood 2012b).

The ‘final’ case of an argument, thus, is not only decided by the initial case licenser, such as v* and v*+, but also by Voice type, a fact which shows, again, that the individual morphological cases are not simplex unitary building blocks, neither across languages nor language internally. Rather, they are morphological entities that interpret a wide variety of underlying syntactic structures, with extensive variation both internal to and across languages.

6 Concluding remarks

The Blake hierarchy in (2) represents a long tradition in the study of language, where overt markers are taken to be largely unitary and uniform building elements, both language-internally and across languages, each with canonical functional properties. This way of thinking of easily observable variation in some surface form as being linked in some more or less one-to-one like fashion to a deeper and a more general system has been widely abandoned in the natural sciences, but it is still the prevailing view in linguistics. Call it the *animistic view* (avoiding the term ‘realism’): it is animistic in the sense that it ascribes some deeper sense to observable objects, such as case markers.

If the animistic view of case could be upheld—even only some very weak version of it—we would expect a parametric approach to case variation to be basically successful. However, no such approach has ever been developed. Symptomatically, Baker (2001) mentions only one putative case parameter in his ambitious attempt to construct a ‘periodic table of languages’, the ‘ergative case parameter’.

However, recall the Case Ingredients Generalization in (17), repeated here.

- (17) a. NPs are event licensed by heads: Voice, Appl, v, n, a, p, ...
 b. Event licensors of NPs may be case star augmented
 c. The augmented case star may be variably marked: *, *⁺, *⁺⁺
 d. Nom = syntactically a non-case (regardless of its overt marking)

In view of the extensive case variation observed within and across languages the ingredients of case systems are amazingly limited: only a number of event licensing heads and a few variably marked case stars. These atomic elements readily lend themselves to relatively simple ‘parametric’ statements, as we already saw in section 3 in relation to ergativity and accusativity, the former arising as a consequence of case star augmentation of Voice/_{AG} itself, the latter as a consequence of case star augmentation of little v c-commanded by Voice/_{AG}. Similarly, as we saw, case star augmentation of Appl yields specific case marking of indirect objects, invasion of n*-case into the v-system yields a grammar with some genitive objects, and so on.²⁸

However, statements of this sort are not UG anchored. Markedness is a general 3rd factor phenomenon and syntactic heads are arguably materialized in I-language (out of general ‘concept material’) rather than pre-stored in UG (Sigurðsson 2011b, 2011c). That is, the statements in question are 3rd factor externalization generalizations and not UG parameters in the traditional Principles and Parameters sense. In view of the fact that UG parametric approaches cannot be upheld (Berwick and Chomsky 2011, Boeckx 2011, Sigurðsson 2004, 2011b, 2011c, 2012), it is interesting, even uplifting, that language variation, nevertheless, can be systematically analyzed.

References

- Arkadiev, Peter. 2009. Poor (two-term) case systems: limits of neutralization. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, ed. by Andrej Malchokov and Andrew Spencer, 686–699. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Asbury, Anna. 2010. *The Morphosyntax of Case and Adpositions*. Doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University.
- Barðdal, Jóhanna. 2001. *Case in Icelandic: A synchronic, diachronic and comparative approach*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Barðdal, Jóhanna and Leonid Kulikov. 2009. Case in decline. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, ed. by Andrej Malchokov and Andrew Spencer, 470–478. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

²⁸ Actually, the issues are more complex than this would seem to indicate. First, Voice and v seem to be the only head types that are full-fledged independent event licensors (other event licensors must enter a matching relation with either v or Voice, it seems, but I have to put this aside here). Second, as mentioned above, I am largely disregarding the fact that some languages develop subsystem-specific cases rather than tolerating extensive case invasions/overlaps of the Icelandic sort.

- Baker, Mark. 2008. *The Syntax of Agreement and Concord*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bayer, Josef, Markus Bader, and Michael Meng. 2001. Morphological underspecification meets oblique case: syntactic and processing effects in German. *Lingua* 111:465–514.
- Berwick, Robert C. and Noam Chomsky. 2011. The biolinguistic program: The current state of its development. In *The Biolinguistic Enterprise: New Perspectives on the Evolution and Nature of the Human Language Faculty*, ed. by Anna Maria Di Sciullo and Cedric Boeckx, 19–41. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Biberauer, Theresa, Anders Holmberg, Ian Roberts, and Michelle Sheehan. 2009. *Parametric Variation: Null Subjects in Minimalist Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bittner, Maria and Ken Hale. 1996. The structural determination of case and agreement. *Linguistic Inquiry* 27:1–68.
- Blake, B. J. 2001. *Case*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boeckx, Cedric. 2011. Approaching parameters from below. In *Biolinguistic Approaches to Language Evolution*, ed. by Anna Marie Di Sciullo and Cedric Boeckx, 205–221. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Caha, Pavel. 2009. The nanosyntax of Case. Doctoral dissertation, University of Tromsø.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1980. On binding. *Linguistic Inquiry* 11:1–46.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by phase. In *Ken Hale: A life in language*, ed. by Michael Kenstowicz, 1–52. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2005. Three factors in language design. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36:1–22.
- Cuervo, María Cristina. 2003. Datives at Large. Doctoral dissertation, MIT.
- de Graf, Michael. 2001. Morphology in creole genesis: linguistics and ideology. In *Ken Hale: A life in language*, ed. by Michael Kenstowicz, 53–121. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Dixon, R. M. W. 1979. Ergativity. *Language* 55:59–138.
- Emonds, Joseph. 1987. The invisible category principle. *Linguistic Inquiry* 18:613–632.
- Haspelmath, Martin and Susanne Michaelis. 2008. *Leipzig fourmille de typologies*: Genitive objects in comparison. In *Case and Grammatical Relations: Studies in Honor of Bernard Comrie*, ed. by Greville G. Crobett and Michael Noonan, 140–166. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Hinzen, Wolfram. 2012. Narrow syntax and the language of thought. *Philosophical Psychology* (available online 31 Jan 2012 25).
- Holmberg, Anders. 1991. On the Scandinavian Double Object Construction. In *Papers from the Twelfth Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics*, 141–152. Reykjavik: Institute of Linguistics.
- Holmberg, Anders. 2010. Parameters in minimalist theory: The case of Scandinavian. *Theoretical Linguistics* 36:1–48.

- Holmberg, Anders, and Christer Platzack. 1995. *The Role of Inflection in Scandinavian Syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Iggesen, Oliver A. 2011a. Asymmetrical case-marking. In *World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, ed. by Matthew S. Dryer and Martin Haspelmath, chapter 50. <http://wals.info/chapter/50> (2012-01-28).
- Iggesen, Oliver A. 2011b. Number of cases. In *World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, ed. by Matthew S. Dryer and Martin Haspelmath, chapter 49. <http://wals.info/chapter/49> (2012-01-28).
- Jónsson, Jóhannes Gísli. 2000. Case and double objects in Icelandic. *Leeds Working Papers in Linguistics* 8:71–94.
- Jónsson, Jóhannes Gísli. 2003. Not so quirky: on subject case in Icelandic. In *New Perspectives on case Theory*, ed. by Ellen Brandner and Heike Zinsmeister, 127–163. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Jónsson, Jóhannes Gísli. 2005. Merkingarhlutverk, rökliðir og fallmörkun [Thematic roles, arguments, and case-marking]. In *Íslensk tunga III: Setningar*, ed. by Höskuldur Þráinsson, 350–409. Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið.
- Jónsson, Jóhannes Gísli, and Thórhallur Eythórsson. 2005. Variation in subject case marking in Insular Scandinavian. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 28:223–245.
- König, Christa. 2009. Marked nominatives. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, ed. by Andrej Malchukov and Andrew Spencer, 535–548. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kratzer, Angelika. 1996. Severing the external argument from the verb. In *Phrase structure and the lexicon*, ed. by Johann Rooryck and Laurie Zaring, 109–137. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Kress, Bruno. 1982. *Isländische grammatik*. Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie.
- Kulikov, Leonid. 2009. Evolution of case systems. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, ed. by Andrej Malchukov and Andrew Spencer, 439–457. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Libert, Alan R. 2002. On the range and variety of cases assigned by adpositions. In *Language Universals and Variation*, ed. by Mengistu Amberber and Peter Collins, 131–154. Westport: Praeger.
- Malchukov, Andrej and Andrew Spencer. 2009a (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Malchukov, Andrej and Andrew Spencer. 2009b. Typology of case systems: parameters of variation. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, ed. by Andrej Malchukov and Andrew Spencer, 651–667. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Malchukov, Andrej and Peter de Swart. 2009. Differential case marking and actancy variations. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, ed. by Andrej Malchukov and Andrew Spencer, 339–355. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Maling, Joan. 2002. Það rignir þágufalli á Íslandi [‘It rains dative in Iceland’]. Verbs with dative objects in Icelandic. *Íslenskt mál og almenn málfræði* 24:31–105.

- Marantz, Alec. 1993. Implications of asymmetries in double object constructions. In *Theoretical Aspects of Bantu Grammar*, ed. by Sam Mchombo, 113–150. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Markman, Vita G. 2009. On the parametric variation of case and agreement. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 27:379–426.
- McFadden, Thomas. 2004. The Position of morphological case in the derivation: A study on the syntax-morphology interface. Doctoral dissertation, UPenn.
- McGinnis, Martha. 2001. Variation in the phase structure of applicatives. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 1:105–146.
- Meir, Irit. 2003. Grammaticalization and modality: the emergence of a case marked pronoun in Israeli Sign Language. *Journal of Linguistics* 39:109–140.
- Pesetsky, David. 2010. Russian-case morphology and the syntactic categories. Ms., MIT (accessible on Lingbuzz).
- Pylkkänen, Liina. 2008. *Introducing arguments*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Quinn, Heidi. 2005. *The Distribution of Pronoun-case Forms in English*. John Benjamins: Amsterdam.
- Richardson, Kylie R. 2007. *Case and Aspect in Slavic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roberts, Ian and Anna Roussou. 2003. *Syntactic Change: A Minimalist Approach to Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sandler, Wendy and Diane Lillo-Martin. 2006. *Sign Language and Linguistic Universals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schäfer, Florian M. 2008. *The syntax of (anti-)causatives: External arguments in change-of-state contexts*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Schütze, Carson T. 2001. On the nature of default case. *Syntax* 4:205–238.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 2004. Meaningful silence, meaningless sounds. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 4:235–259.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 2006. The Nom/Acc alternation in Germanic. In *Comparative studies in Germanic syntax*, ed. by Jutta Hartmann and Laszlo Molnarfi, 13–50. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 2008. The case of PRO. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 26:403–450.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 2011a. On the New Passive. *Syntax* 14:148–178.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 2011b. On UG and materialization. *Linguistic Analysis* 37:367–388.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 2011c. Uniformity and diversity: A minimalist perspective. *Linguistic Variation* 11:189–222.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 2012. Minimalist C/case. *Linguistic Inquiry* 43/2.
- Svenonius, Peter. 2002. Icelandic case and the structure of events. *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 6: 197–225.

- Svenonius, Peter. 2007. Adpositions, particles and the arguments they introduce. In *Argument Structure*, ed. by Eric Reuland, Tanmoy Bhattacharya and Giorgos Spathas, 63–103. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Thráinsson, Höskuldur. 2007. *The Syntax of Icelandic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thráinsson, Höskuldur, Hjalmar P. Petersen, Jogvan i Lon Jacobsen, and Zakaris Svabo Hansen. 2004. *Faroese. An overview and reference grammar*. Tórshavn: Foroya Fróðskaparfelag.
- Wood, Jim. 2012a. Against the Movement Theory of Control: Another argument from Icelandic. *Linguistic Inquiry* 43/2.
- Wood, Jim. 2012b (in progress). Icelandic morphosyntax and argument structure. Doctoral dissertation, NYU.
- Woolford, Ellen. 2006. Lexical case, inherent case, and argument structure. *Linguistic Inquiry* 37:111–130.