Responses to Marantz

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According to Marantz, 1991, case comes in four types:

(1) Case Realisation Disjunctive Hierarchy
   1. Lexically governed case
   2. "Dependent" case (accusative and ergative)
   3. Unmarked case (environment sensitive)
   4. Default case

It is purely a morphological phenomenon; Marantz considers, and ultimately rejects, any place for case in the syntax. He argues that it is only a surface phenomenon and does not do anything deeper than that.

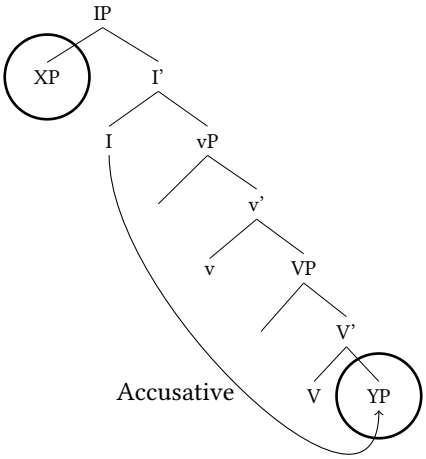
Furthermore, he splits up dependent case into two types: one that assigned upwards (ergative) and one that is assigned downwards (accusative).

(2) Dependent Case is assigned by V+I (i.e. the verb - PWS) to a position governed by V+I when a distinct position governed by V+I is:
   a. not "marked" (not part of a chain governed by a lexical case determiner)
   b. distinct from the chain being assigned dependent case.

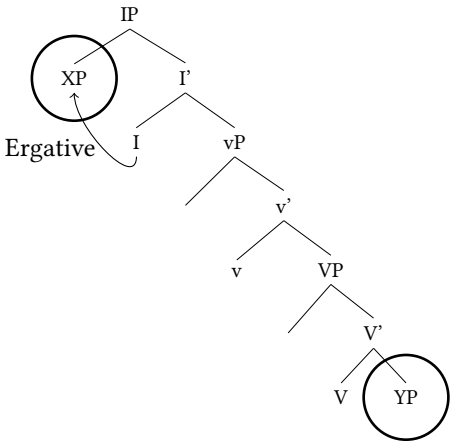
What this means is that dependent case is not assigned to a lexically governed argument (a), and can only be assigned to an argument when there is a distinct argument in opposition to it (b). (b) is a little bit complicated to read. It essentially boils down to dependent case only being assigned when there are two distinct arguments in a clause. Note it also says that lexically governed case is ignored for the purposes of dependent case.

(3) Dependent case assigned up to student = Ergative
Dependent case assigned down to object = Accusative

(4) *Where Dependent Case is Accusative*



(5) *Where Dependent Case is Ergative*



There are two immediate consequences to this analysis.

- Unmarked case conflates nominative and absolutive: they should act the same.
- Dependent case conflates ergative and accusative: they should act the same.

Both of these positions have been challenged. Legate, 2008 challenges the first. Woolford, 2006 challenges the second.

1 Absolutive ≠ Nominative

The languages of interest for Legate are languages where it is not possible to identify the properties of Absolutive with the properties of Nominative.

Note that this does not hold for every language that has an Absolutive case. The claim that she is making is that there is not really a concept of Absolutive. Rather, what has been described as Absolutive is in reality either (i) case missing altogether; or (ii) nominative being assigned downwards.

She identifies four languages for which to claim that Absolutive (in those languages) is really just the absence of case marking: Warlpiri (pama-Nyungan), Enga (Trans-New Gineau), Nieuan (Austronesian) and Hindi (Indo-Aryan).

She further identifies five properties that these languages show, which she claims show that Absolutive can be distinguished from Nominative.

1.1 Case Morphemes

In all four langugages, Absolutive is marked with the absence of a case suffix. Effectively, we can take this to mean that the morpheme for Absolutive case is phonologically null.

Legate also claims that these languages have accusative case as well.

1.2 Default Case

Complementary to the idea that Absolutive is really a morphological default, Legate notes that if syntactic case assignment were to fail for whatever reason, then we would expect Absolutive in all four languages. This appears to be borne out for the Hanging Topic Left Dislocation construction:

(6) a. Ngarnkamarda, kakalyalya ngula-ngku-ju ka
pink.cockatoo.ABS pink.cockatoo.ABS that-ERG-TOP PRES.IMPERF
nga-rni watiya-warnu – watiya-ngarnarra – miyi-ji
eat-NONPAST tree-from tree.dweller.ABS fruit.ABS-TOP
[Warlpiri]

'The pink cockatoo eats those acacia seeds.'

b. Ko e fifine ia, to fakaata: main e ia ke uta e au e
PRED ABS womain that to let DIR1 ERG she SUBJ take ERG I ABS
motoka: haana
car her
[Nieuan]

'That woman, she'll let me take her car.'

c. e-ly-á-mo dóko óngo akáli-aka
go-PRES-3SG-AUG DET.ABS DET man-EMP
[Enga]

'That is definitely a man, the one who is going.'

d. vo aurat, ali samajhte hai ki sudha-ne us-se
DEM woman.ABS Ali.ABS thinks that Sudha-ERG her-COM matter.ABS
baat kiyaa thaa
do.PERF be.PAST
[Hindi]

'That woman, Ali thinks that Sudha talked to her.'

1.3 Non-finite clauses

Legate notes that her proposal predicts that we might expect to see Absolutive internal differences in the four languages, since they are not really the same case. The case assigned to an intransitive subject (S) comes from T (and is in effect Nominative), whilst the Absolutive case assigned to the O argument is accusative, and comes from T.

Therefore, if there is suppression of case assignment by T in some context, then we might expect S absolutives to be disallowed, but O absolutives should be allowed, a predication that is apparently borne out

(7) Warlpiri

a. * Kurdu-lpa manyu-karri-ja [ngati-nyanu
child.ABS-PAST.IMPERF play-stand-PAST [mother-ANAPH.ABS
jarda-nguna-nja-rlarni]
sleep-lie-NONFIN-OBV.C]
'The child was playing while his mother was asleep.'

b. Ngarrka-patu-rlu ka-lu-jana puluku
man-PAUC-ERG PRES.IMPERF-3PL.SUBJ-3PL.OBJ bullock.ABS
turnu-ma-ni, [karnta-patu-ku/karnta-patu-rlu miyi
group-CAUSE-NONPAST [woman-PAUC-DAT/woman-PAUC-ERG food.ABS
purra-nja-puru]
cook-NONFIN-TEMP.C]
'The men are mustering cattle while the women are cooking the food.'

Enga shows the same pattern. Absolutive is fine for the O argument. In order for an A to show Absolutive, then the clause must be finite.

(8) Enga

a. Baa-mé [yólé nyá-la-nya] kalái pi-ly-a-mó
he-ERG [wages.ABS get-INFIN-DESID] work.ABS do-PRES-3SG.SUBJ-PRT]
'He works to get wages.'

b. Namba-mé [émba Wápaka pú-p-í lá-o] másí-ly-o
I-ERG [you.ABS Wabag go-PAST-2SG utter-COMP think-PRES-1SG
'I want you to go to Wabag.' (lit. 'I want that you go to Wabag.')

Hindi shows the Warlpiri pattern: non-finite clause are nominalised, and the case on the S argument must be genitive. However, A arguments are fine in Absolutive.

(9) a. [raam-ke baiThne]-par mãã-ne usko khaanaa diyaa
[Ram-GEN sit.NONFIN]-LOC mother-ERG him.DAT food.ABS give.PERF
'When Ram sat down, Mother gave him food.'

b. ilaa-ne [raam-ke darvaazaa kholne]-par anu-ko DããTaa
Ila-ERG [Ram-GEN door,ABS open.NONFIN]-loc Anu-DAT scold.PERF
'Ila scolded Anu on Ram's opening the door.'

1.4 Other DPs

Legate makes the prediction that for any argument that bears an abstract case morpheme, but which doesn't have an exponent for that case, it should look like it has Absolutive. Thus, there ought to be the possibility of multiple absolutives.

(10) a. Namba-mé énda dóko mená dóko maí-y-ó
I-erg woman det.abs pig det.abs give-past-1sg.subj
[Enga]
'I gave the pig to the woman.'

b. Ne tohitohi a Sione [aki e pene]
past writing abs Sione [with abs pen]
[Nieuan]
'Sione was writing with a pen.'

c. ravii kelaa khaa rahaa thaa
Ravi.abs banana.abs eat prog be.past
[Hindi]
'Ravi was eating a banana.'

d. Ngaju ka-rna yankirri nya-nyi
I.abs pres.imperf-1sg.subj emu.abs see-nonpast
[Warlpiri]
'I see an emu.'

1.5 Case/Agreement Interaction

Finally, it is well known that case and agreement interact closely. Marantz's theory predicts that all absolutives should act the same regarding agreement (a point taken up in Bobaljik, 2008). However, Legate shows that in the four languages under discussion, the S and O arguments differ with respect to agreement.

(11) a. Ngajulu-rlu-rna-ngku nyuntu nya-ngu
I-erg-1sg.subj-2sg.obj you.abs see-past
'I saw you.'

b. Ngaju-rna parnka-ja
I.abs-1sg.subj run-past
'I ran.'

c. Nyuntulu-rlu-npa-ju ngaju nya-ngu
you-erg-2sg.subj-1sg.obj I.abs see-past
'You saw me.'

In Enga, O arguments do not show agreement at all.

(12) a. Namba-mé énda dóko mená dóko maí-y-ó
I-erg woman det.abs pig det.abs give-past-1sg.subj
'I gave the pig to the woman.'

b. Nambá p-e-ó
I.abs go-past-1sg.subj
'I went.'

c. Baá nambá kand-e-á-mo-aka
he I.ABS see-PAST-3SG-AUG-CONCESS
'Although he saw me …'

In Niuean, S arguments control agreement, but O arguments do not:

(13) a. Ma-mate tuai a laua
PL-die PERF ABS they.DUAL
'They are dead.'

b. Kua tā he tama e tau fakatino
PERF draw ERG child ABS PL picture
'The child has been drawing pictures.'

Finally, Hindi looks like an exception to Legate's approach.

(14) a. ravii roTii khaaegaa
Ravi.M.ABS bread.F.ABS eat.FUT.M.SG
'Ravi will eat bread.'

b. ravii-ne roTii khaayii
Ravi.M-ERG bread.F.ABS eat.PERF.F.SG
'Ravi ate bread.'

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