

# Marked Nominative Systems

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There are two systems that we have not looked at in detail so far. Firstly, Active-Statative systems.

The second type of alignments that we haven't seen so far are Marked Nominative systems.

marked nominative alignments are rare cross-linguistically



Figure 1: Languages with marked nominative alignment in full noun phrases

There are reports of other languages in addition to the above, not listed in Wals.

König, 2008 notes that “[...] they constitute the most widespread type of case systems in Africa” and that “[...] they are an almost unique African phenomenon.”

A marked nominative alignment is more or less the same as a nominative–accusative alignment, with the exception being that the nominative argument is marked by a special case marker, with the accusative forming the default form.

## 1 Tennet

In Tenneset (König, 2008), in regular transitive clauses, we can see that the A argument and the S argument are marked by a suffix *-i*.

- (1) ákát      Lowór-i      Yomá  
PFV.spear Lowor-NOM Yoma.ACC



Figure 2: Languages with marked nominative alignment in pronouns

‘Lowor speared Yowor.’

- (2) ɔ́ mányúdí-i mgínaatì  
go.PFV squirrel-NOM there  
‘Squirrel went there.’

Accusative does not just mark the O argument, but in fact is used for most other functions in the language. In (3), accusative marks the recipient:

- (3) i-ttón-ék Lókori-i Yomá kavíyák  
PFV-send-APL Lokor-NOM Yoma.ACC news.ACC  
‘Lokori sent news to Yoma.’

And in (4), accusative is used in what is arguably a clitic left dislocation construction.

- (4) Lokúli cí á-rúh Lohâm  
Lokuli.ACC AM IPV-beat Loham.ACC  
‘It is Lokuli who is beating Loham.’

## 2 Oromo

Baker, 2015 discusses Oromo as a language that is marked nominative.

- (5) Sárée-n adii-n nî iyyi-f-i  
dog-MNOM white-MNOM FOC bark-F-IMPF  
‘The white dog is barking.’  
(6) D’axáa-n maná duubá: b-bu’e  
rock-MNOM house behind LOC-fell  
‘The rock fell behind the house.’

- (7) Húrée-n arká d’olki-t-i  
 fog-MNOM sight.ABS prevent-F-IMPF  
 ‘Fog reduces visibility.’

### 3 Properties of Nominative and Accusative case in marked nominative languages

In languages that have a nominative–accusative alignment, and are not marked nominative, we see that the nominative case is generally the case with the wider distribution. Accusative may have alternate functions other than simply marking the O argument (Akkustaive der Zeit in German, lexical accusative in Icelandic), but it is generally the case that nominative is used in more environments than where accusative is.

In marked nominative systems, this is the reverse. It is the accusative forms that appear to have a wider distribution (all tables from König, 2008):

Case	Function
Nom	S argument A argument
Acc	O argument Nominal predication Subject (S and A) if it is preverbal Possessor Peripheral participants (eg. applicatives)

Table 1: Nominative and Accusative case functions in Tennesse

Case	Function
Nom	S argument after the verb A argument after the verb Subject in copula clauses
Acc	O argument Citation form Nominal predication Subject (S and A) if it is preverbal Possessor Peripheral participants (eg. applicatives) Patient of a passive

Table 2: Nominative and Accusative case functions in Turkana

Whilst it is tempting to give these languages the same treatment as nominative–accusative languages, with the qualification that their morphology only decides to spell out NOMINATIVE, rather than ACCUSATIVE, Baker notes that the wider distribution of the accusative suggests that this is not correct.

Case	Function
Nom	S argument A argument Subject in copula clauses After the preposition <i>ká</i> if expressing instrument
Acc	O argument Citation form Nominal predication Subject (S and A) if it is preverbal Possessor Peripheral participants (eg. applicatives) Patient of a passive After the preposition <i>kòtèré</i> and <i>ká</i> Experiencer

Table 3: Nominative and Accusative case functions in Toposa

Case	Function
Nom	S and A argument if not focused, topicalised or modified Subject in copula clauses
Acc	O argument Citation form Nominal predication Focused, topicalised or modified participants (including S and A arguments) Possessor Peripheral participants (eg. applicatives) Patient of a passive Possessee Nouns after prepositions

Table 4: Nominative and Accusative case functions in Dhaasanac

Case	Function
Nom	S and A argument if not focused, topicalised or modified
Acc	O argument Citation form Nominal predication Possessor Indirect Object Possessee Indirect Objects

Table 5: Nominative and Accusative case functions in Maale

He argues that they can be assimilated into his dependent case theory by use of negative c-command specifications.

- (8) Assign NP1 marked nominative if there is no other NP, NP2 in the same domain WP as NP1, such that NP2 c-commands NP1.

The above condition, and the corresponding one that Baker formulates for marked absolutive languages means that NP1 will get a case marking if it *isn't* c-commanded by another NP. This has the effect that *marked nominative* is a dependent case, and should not be viewed as an overt form of nominative in, say, English and German.

Therefore, we don't expect marked nominative case to show up in instances where the noun does not form a dependency relationship with other nouns:

- (9) Kata-sh      apa-tok?  
      who-MNOM eat-PAST  
      'Who ate it?

- (10) John-at      apa-tok  
      John-MNOM eat-PAST

- (11) John (\*John-at)

## References

- Baker, Mark C. (2015). *Case: Its Principles and Parameters*. Vol. 146. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
König, Christa (2008). *Case in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.