A Constraint-Based Typology of Case Systems

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by

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Abstract

This dissertation proposes an Optimality-Theoretic [**OT**] (Prince and Smolensky 1993) account of case systems and explores its typological scope, with a particular focus on four accusative languages, Korean, Japanese, Icelandic, and Imbabura Quechua. There are three major claims to be made here. First, the typological variation of case systems is derived from re-ranking of a small number of individually simple constraints which conflict with each other (cf. Legendre et al. 1993). Second, cases (including oblique ones) may best be licensed with reference to a two-tiered system of semantic roles, thematic relations and macroroles, developed within the framework of **Role and Reference Grammar** [**RRG**] (Van Valin 1993, Van Valin and LaPolla in press). Third, the OT-RRG account may not only handle regular case frames, but also irregular ones displayed by those four languages mentioned above. The latter two claims are improvements over Legendre et al. (1993), the first OT account of case systems.

The bulk of the dissertation follows in Chapters 3-6 after an introduction to OT and RRG in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 is devoted to making the first and second claims, while Chapters 4-6 substantiate the third claim on the basis of Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 proposes a universal set of constraints for nominative, accusative, ergative, and dative case assignment after a critical examination of the previous RRG literature, Van Valin (1991) and Van Valin and LaPolla (in press), and defines the major case systems, e.g. accusative, ergative, active, in terms of their ranking. It is also shown in Chapter 3 how to extend the proposal from those four basic cases to oblique cases with a particular focus on instrumental case in English, Russian, Japanese, and Korean. Chapter 3 closes with a discussion of how to restrict the range of constraint ranking.

Chapters 4-6 apply the OT-RRG case theory outlined in Chapter 3 to a selected set of constructions in Japanese, Korean, Icelandic, and Imbabura Quechua whose irregular case frames have presented a serious challenge to contemporary syntactic theories. Chapter

4 shows that the asociation between thematic relations and macroroles serves as the basis for case assignment of psych verbs in Japanese, in support of the claim made in Chapter 3 that cases are licensed with reference to a combination of thematic relations and macroroles.

Chapter 5 focuses on "case spreading" and "case stacking" in the four languages. It is proposed that they all involve a multiple association between thematic relations and macroroles, which follow the same set of principles employed in non-linear phonology (see Archangeli 1984 and Goldsmith 1990, for example) and that these two phenomena are also amenable to the OT-RRG case theory.

Chapter 6 investigates case alternations exhibited by a variety of constructions which fall under the label of raising/ascension, i.e. subject-to-object raising and subject-to-subject raising constructions in Icelandic and possessor raising and light verb constructions in Korean. Specifically, it is proposed that possessor raising and light verb constructions involve more than one logical structure (to which thematic relations are assigned) that is associated with a single set of macroroles. This multiple association explains why more than one NP may receive the same case, nominative, accusative, or dative case in those two constructions in Korean.

Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation, noting three areas for further research, accusative/nominative cases marking adverbial NPs which express path, duration, and frequency, case frames exhibited by complex predicate constructions, particularly causative constructions, and a detailed analysis of ergative and active case systems.

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Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

1 Introduction

1.1 Preliminaries 1

1.2 The Organization of Lexical Information 2

1.3 Typology of Case Systems: Parametrization and Constraint Ranking 3

1.4 Overview 5

Notes to Chapter 1 7

2 The Framework

2.1 Introduction 8

2.2 Optimality Theory 9

2.3 Role and Reference Grammar

2.3.1 Projection Grammar 14

2.3.2 Constituent Structure: Simple Clause and Noun Phrase 15

2.3.3 Operator Projection 19

2.3.4 Complex Sentences: A Typology of Clause Linkage 24

2.3.5 Semantic Structure

2.3.5.1 Verbs and Their Arguments 32

2.3.5.2 Adjuncts 47

2.3.6 Semantic/Syntactic Pivot 51

2.3.7 The Syntax-Semantics Interface

2.3.7.1 General Considerations 56

2.3.7.2 Linking in Simple Sentences 59

2.3.7.3 Linking in Complex Sentences 63
2.4 Summary 73
Notes to Chapter 2 74

3 The Case System
3.1 Introduction 79
3.2 Review of Van Valin (1991) and Van Valin and LaPolla (in press)
3.2.1 Accusative Case Systems 82
3.2.2 Ergative Case Systems 86
3.2.3 Active Case Systems 89
3.3 Problems in Van Valin (1991) and Van Valin and LaPolla (in press)
3.3.1 Conceptual Problem: What Do Case Systems Share Universally? 90
3.3.2 Empirical Problem 1: Non-Macrorole ≠ Nominative Case? 91
3.3.3 Empirical Problem 2: Multiple-Nominative/Accusative Case Frames 92
3.3.4 Empirical Problem 3: PRO Must be Case-Marked 95
3.4 Proposal: Simple Setences
3.4.1 Universal Constraints 97
3.4.2 Case Features vs. Case Forms 102
3.4.3 Default Ranking 113
3.4.4 A New OT Typology of Case Systems 116
3.5 Extension: Complex Sentences
3.5.1 Control Constructions 117
3.5.2 Raising Constructions 123
3.6 Oblique Cases: The Case of Instrumental/Comitative
3.6.1 Problems with Oblique Cases 129
3.6.2 English 131
3.6.3 Russian 134

3.6.4 Japanese 138
3.6.5 Korean 140
3.6.6 Extension: Allative, Ablative, and Locative 144
3.7 Deriving Individual Case Systems 148
3.8 Typological Extensions
3.8.1 Typology in Optimality Theory 156
3.8.2 Markedness Reversal in Dyirbal 158
3.8.3 What Causes Markedness Reversal? 161
3.8.4 How to Restrict Constraint Ranking 165
3.9 Conclusion 167
Notes to Chapter 3 168

4 Psych Verb Constructions
4.1 Introduction 176
4.2 Configurational Account: Takezawa (1987) 178
4.3 Proposal: Japanese Psych Verbs 181
4.4 Evidence: Quantifier Floating and Control 186
4.5 Extension: Halkomelem 188
4.6 A Semantic Typology of Psych Verbs 191
4.7 Conclusion 194
Notes to Chapter 4 196

5 "Case Spreading" and "Case Stacking"
5.1 Introduction 198
5.2 Data: Korean, Japanese, Icelandic, and Imbabura Quechua 199
5.3 Previous Accounts
5.3.1 Relational Grammar Accounts: Gerdts (1986) and Gerdts and Youn

(1988) 203
5.3.2 Case Tier Hypothesis: Yip et al. (1987) and Maling (1993) 206
5.3.3 Incorporation Account: J.-S. Lee (1992) 208
5.4 "Case Spreading" and "Case Stacking" in Korean
5.4.1 Proposal 213
5.4.2 Evidence: Passivization and Quantifier Floating 219
5.4.3 Semantic Change 225
5.5 Extension
5.5.1 "Case Spreading" in Japanese and Icelandic 226
5.5.2 "Case Spreading" in Imbabura Quechua 236
5.6 What Triggers Macrorole Spreading?
5.6.1 Ditransitive Constructions 242
5.6.2 Double-Nominative Constructions 246
5.7 Conclusion 254
Notes to Chapter 5 255

6 Raising Constructions
6.1 Introduction 263
6.2 Data
6.2.1 Subject-to-Subject Raising and Subject-to-Object Raising Constructions 263
6.2.2 Possessor Raising and Light Verb Constructions 269
6.3 Subject-to-Subject Raising and Subject-to-Object Raising Constructions
6.3.1 Previous Account: Yip et al. (1987) 285
6.3.2 Proposal 290
6.4 Possessor Raising Constructions
6.4.1 Previous Accounts 296

6.4.1.1 Choe (1987) 297
6.4.1.2 Yoon (1990) 300
6.4.1.3 Y.-J. Kim (1990) 302
6.4.1.4 Chun (1986) 304
6.4.2 Proposal
6.4.2.1 Possessor Raising Constructions 307
6.4.2.2 Adversative Passive Constructions 317
6.5 Light Verb Constructions
6.5.1 Previous Accounts 319
6.5.1.1 Monoclausal Account: Choi (1988) 320
6.5.1.2 Biclausal Account: K.-S. Lee (1991) 321
6.5.2 Proposal 323
6.6 Conclusion 326
Notes to Chapter 6 328
Appendix A: Constituent Structures in Possessor Raising Constructions 335
Appendix B: Case Mismatches in Possessor Raising Constructions 338

7 Conclusion
7.1 Summary 342
7.2 Areas for Future Research 343
Notes to Chapter 6 351

References 354