Case and morphosyntactic anti-identity in Yimas

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Introduction

Dependent case (Marantz 1991): Given two case-requiring DPs within a case assignment domain:

- ERG: Assigned to the higher of the two DPs (the c-commander).
- ACC: Assigned to the lower of the two DPs (the c-commandee).

(Languages are parameterized as ERG or ACC depending on the directionality of case assignment.)

PROPOSAL: Dependent case is morphosyntactic dissimilation (cf. Baker 2015).

- Case assignment relies on the structural (c-command) relationship that holds between multiple nominals (Marantz 1991).
- Dependent case dissimilates otherwise morphosyntactically (featurally) identical objects by adding a CASE feature to one of these objects.

Novel evidence from optional clitic doubling in Yimas (Papua New Guinea):

- The doubled clitics make morphological case distinctions, but the nominals they double by adding a [CASE] feature to one of these objects.
- Key observation: Case on clitics covaries with the total number of clitics present—even when the sentence-level syntax is held constant.
- Case is thus context-dependent—with the set of clitics as the relevant context.

In Yimas, case assignment eliminates sequences of featurally indistinguishable clitics that arise from the doubling of case-invariant nominals.

Dependent case in Yimas

The distributions of the ERG and DAT are exactly as predicted under the dependent theory of case.

- However, the case-bearing elements are clitics, not nominals.

Case assignment rules in Yimas:

a. ERG: Assigned to a clitic α that cooccurs with a clitic β, where the DP doubled by α c-commands the DP doubled by β.

b. DAT: Assigned to a clitic α that cooccurs with clitics β and γ, where the DP doubled by α c-commands the DP doubled by β and is c-commanded by the DP doubled by γ.

Note: Both syntactic structure and clitic environment are relevant for dependent case assignment.

Ergative

Yimas has been taken to have an ERG-ABS alignment (e.g., Phillips 1993, 1995):

(4) pa-wat!

5SPLABS-go-perf

‘They went.’

However:

- Clitics cross-referencing transitive subjects: ERG or ABS.
- Clitics cross-referencing intransitive subjects: ABS or ERG.

Partial doubling: ERG on a subject is unidirectional unless an ABS clitic is also present.

- The clitic is ABS in the absence of another clitic (even on transitive verbs).

(6) [impram pay-cu-mpwi]

palekakap

‘He forgot to carry the basket.’

(7) [impram pay-cu-mpwi]

pahekakap

‘He forgot to carry the basket.’

Lexical case: The presence of a lexical case-marked clitic (e.g., DAT on inalienable possessors) also bleeds ERG case-assignment—unless another ABS is present.

(8) kuran na 3s-DEF be-DEF 3s-DEF-ERG-ABS-DAT

‘He killed his horse (on his own head).’

(9) nam puipul-kampurak-1-skin

skin.3sg.NOM break-3s-sg-ERG-ABS-DAT

‘They hit and broke his skin.’

Applicationization: ERG may surface on clitics cross-referencing intransitive subjects, when a structurally lower nominal is also clitic doubled.

(10) impo-na capwaka-1

3sg-REFL break-3s-sg-ERG-ABS-DAT

‘He got up with them both.’

(11) impo-na capwaka-1

3sg-REFL break-3s-sg-ERG-ABS-DAT

‘He got up with them both.’

ERGATIVE CASE IS CONTEXT-DEPENDENT.

- The data shown here reveal a dissociation between case and argument structure.
- ERG case is neither inherent nor structural.

Selected references


Imagery

No reference to 'case competition' (contra Marantz 1991).

- Caseless elements are not competing for case. An element comes to bear case if it satisfies a well-formedness condition.

Cross-cuts various views of dependent case.

- Compatible with dependent case assignment as postsyntactic (McFadden 2004) or syntax-internal (Preminger 2011, 2014).

- Offers flexibility in what types of elements may receive morphological case.

The importance of partial doubling:

- Yields a mismatch between the # of clitics on the verb vs. the total # of nominals in the syntax.
- The case patterns differ in full vs. partial doubling constructions — case is directly calculated over the span of clitics.

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Definite

Definite surfaces if there are three arguments in the syntax in total, and all three undergo clitic doubling. Otherwise, ABS.

Partial doubling: Like with ERG, DAT case assignment is bled in partial doubling constructions.

(12) ikpak ka na mi-DEF-ABS-ABS

sago pancake.3s-mas.3s-SGS-ABS-CASE-ABS-DAT-ABS

‘I made sago pancake.’

(13) irma payukun impa-na-DEF-ABS-ABS

ma-DEF-ABS-ABS

mpu-DEF-ABS-CASE-ABS-DAT-ABS

‘The women got up with the rice.’

Noun incorporation: Noun incorporation of the direct object prevents it from being clitic doubled — again, no DAT case on the indirect object clitic.

(14) impa-ni na ni-DEF-ABS-ABS

cup-in-DEF-ABS-ABS

pu-DEF-ABS-DAT-ABS-FUT-IRR

‘They are putting their backs to the fire (to warm themselves).’

DEFISIS ALSO CONTEXT-DEPENDENT.

Abstractive and anti-identity

ABS IS THE "ELSEWHERE" FORM OF A CLITIC.

- When a verb hosts a single clitic, this clitic is ABS.
- Clitics exhibit alternations with ABS: C[ABS] → ERG-ABS; C[DAT] → DAT-ABS.

Assumption: ABS is the absence of the case, the default state of an element when case cannot be assigned to it (Korffit & Preminger 2015).

(15) kapwa-1 na kapwa-1

SG-ABS-DEF-ABS

DARES-ABS-JUST-KNOW-DEF-ABS

‘Where have you gone?’ (S)

(16) kapwa-1 na kapwa-1

SG-ABS-DEF-ABS-DEF-JUST-KNOW-DEF-ABS

‘I will come up on you.’ (O)

(17) kapwa-1 na kapwa-1

SG-ABS-DEF-ABS-DEF-JUST-KNOW-DEF-ABS

‘Do you know him?’ (A)

While the Yimas clitics make multiple case distinctions, the nominals invariably resemble the ABS paradigm.

Proposal:

1. If no dissipatory process applies to a clitic, it will surface as ABS.
2. Non-ABS clitics are the result of dissipatory processes such as dependent case assignment.
   - (Exception: Lexical case, not discussed here.)
3. Dissimilation: follows from an anti-identity requirement imposed by the grammar.

Anti-identity: All elements within a given morphosyntactic domain must be featurally non-identical (cf. Richards 2010).

- Dependent case eliminates sequences of otherwise identical nominal-like elements by adding a [CASE] feature to one of these elements.
- In other words, dependent case is fundamentally dissipatory.

- In Yimas, the relevant domain is the span of clitics on C0, and anti-identity is evaluated over the doubled clitics.

(18) Schmutzization (ignoring surface morpheme order):

a. Ci-LAT-ABS → ABS-DAT-ABS

b. Ci-LAT-ABS → ERG-ABS-DAT

(One clitic remains caseless, because case-marking all but one ensures that the anti-identity requirement is satisfied.)