Case and morphosyntactic anti-identity in Yimas*

Michelle Yuan, MIT (yuanm@mit.edu)
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1 Introduction

Baker (2015): Dependent case → a generative ‘sharpening’ of the intuition that morphological case differentiates nominals from one another (see e.g. Comrie, 1978).

(1) Dependent case: Given two case-requiring DPs within a case assignment domain,
   a. Ergative case is assigned to the higher of the two DPs (the c-commander) (2a)
   b. Accusative case is assigned to the lower of the two DPs (the c-commandee) (2b)
   → Languages are parametrized as ERG or ACC depending on the directionality of case assignment.¹
   c. Dative case is assigned to the intermediate DP among three DPs (both c-commander and c-commandee) (2c)
      (Marantz, 1991; Podobryaev, 2013)

(2) a. Ergative:  b. Accusative:  c. Dative:

→ Unlike other theories of case, dependent case assigned to a given nominal relies on its relationship to other nominals.

Main claim: Dependent case is morphosyntactic dissimilation (Baker, 2015).

■ Dependent case dissimilates otherwise morphosyntactically (featurally) identical objects by adding a [CASE] feature to one of these objects (Richards, 2010; Nevins, 2012).

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

■ The doubled clitics make morphological case distinctions, but the nominals they double are case-invariant.

■ 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.

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¹Though see Deal (2010) on tripartite case in Nez Perce.
# 2 Background

All of the data in this talk is from Foley’s (1991) fieldwork-based grammar of Yimas.²

Yimas generally encodes grammatical relations on verbal inflectional morphology, organized into the paradigms given in (3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Absolutive</th>
<th>Ergative</th>
<th>Dative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1sg      | ama        | ka-      | n[^2]- |³
| 1dl      | kapa       | n[^2]-ka-| n[^2]-ka- |
| 1pl      | ipa        | k[^2]-ka-| n[^2]-    |
| 2sg      | mi         | n[^2]-   | n[^2]-  |
| 2dl      | kapwa      | n[^2]-ka-| n[^2]-k[^2]- |
| 2pl      | ipwa       | n[^2]-ka-| n[^2]-k[^2]- |
| 3sg      | na         | n[^2]-   | n[^2]-(n[^2])|
| 3dl      | impa       | n[^2]-mpi| n[^2]-mpi|
| 3pl      | pu         | n[^2]-mpu| n[^2]-mpu|

Proposal: These morphemes are doubled clitics (see Yuan (in prep) for various arguments).

- The clitics are optional; as a result, we find variation in the degree of clitic doubling:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. num-n mat Kampramanan wapal-cap mpi villager-PL place name climb-CMPL-IRR  ‘The villagers all climbed Kampramanan.’ (no doubling) (F471)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. m-n impa-tay-mpi-kwalca-k paympan DEM-SG 3DL.ABS-see-SEQ-rise-IRR eagle ‘He, the eagle, saw them both and took off.’ (partial doubling) (F453)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. kacmpt payum ya-mpu-yamal-wat canoe.VIII.PL man.PL VIII.PL.ABS-3PL.ERG-carve-HAB ‘The men usually carve the canoes.’ (full doubling) (F228)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assumption: Clitics are generated within a Big DP prior to movement (Uriagereka, 1995; Arregi & Nevins, 2012, a.o.).

- Doubled clitics are D⁰ elements generated within a complex DP, and receive the φ-features of the doubled nominal via Agree (6).
- These clitics then move out of the DP and adjoin to finite C⁰ (§3).⁵

* The importance of partial doubling:

- Partial doubling yields a mismatch between the number of clitics on the verb and the total number of nominals in the syntax.
- The case patterns differ in full vs. partial doubling constructions, revealing that case is directly calculated over the span of clitics after clitic doubling takes place.

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²Citation convention: (F[pg.#]).
³The ABS is the only paradigm to also make distinctions for non-human nominals. Yimas has several additional noun classes (glossed with roman numerals throughout) and two types of embedded complements, that are also able to be cross-referenced on the verb.
⁴I assume that the morpheme order is the result of a linearization process, which takes place after case is assigned.
⁵Again, see Yuan (in prep) for the motivation behind this claim.
3 Dependent case in Yimas

The distributions of the ERG and DAT clitic paradigms are exactly as expected under the dependent theory of case.

- A crucial difference: The elements that directly participate in the case calculation are clitics, not nominals.

(7) Dependent case assignment rules for Yimas:

a. **ERG**: Assigned to a clitic \( \alpha \) that cooccurs with a clitic \( \beta \), where the DP doubled by \( \alpha \) c-commands the DP doubled by \( \beta \).

b. **DAT**: Assigned to a clitic \( \alpha \) that cooccurs with clitics \( \beta \) and \( \gamma \), where the DP doubled by \( \alpha \) c-commands the DP doubled by \( \beta \) and is c-commanded by the DP doubled by \( \gamma \).

\[ \text{I assume a very standard syntactic structure, and assume that both syntactic structure and clitic environment are relevant for dependent case assignment.} \]

4 Ergative

Yimas has previously been taken to have an ERG-ABS alignment (Phillips, 1993, 1995), based on data like (8):

(8) a. \textit{pu}-\textit{wa-t}\text{ 3PL.ABS-go-PERF} ‘They went.’ (F195)

b. \textit{pu-n-tay}\text{ 3PL.ABS-3SG.ERG-see} ‘He saw them.’ (F195)

However:

- Clitics cross-referencing transitive subjects are not always ERG, but are sometimes ABS.

- Clitics cross-referencing intransitive subjects are not always ABS, but are sometimes ERG.

**Proposal**: This follows if ERG is a dependent case, always assigned to a given clitic if another clitic cross-referencing a structurally lower argument (e.g., a direct or indirect object) is also present on the verb.

- Evidence from **partial doubling**, **lexical case**, and **applicativization**.

**Partial doubling**: In (9), the presence of the ABS clitic cross-referencing the embedded complement covaries with ERG on the subject clitic, while its absence causes that same clitic to surface with ABS instead.

(9) a. \[\text{impram} \textit{pay-cu-mpwi} \textit{pia-n} \text{3SG.ABS-forget} \]

\[\text{[basket.VII.SG carry-NFN-COMP]} \text{COMP.ABS-3SG.ERG-forget} \]

‘He forgot to carry the basket.’ (F389)

b. \[\text{impram} \textit{pay-cu-mpwi} \textit{na} \text{3SG.ABS-forget} \]

\[\text{[basket.VII.SG carry-NFN-COMP]} \text{3SG.ABS-forget} \]

‘He forgot to carry the basket.’ (F389)

**Lexical case**: Another instance of the same pattern—inalienable possessors are always cross-referenced with DAT.6

- The subject clitic is realized as ABS if no other clitic is present (10a); obligatory DAT case on the inalienable possessor clitic blocks ERG.

- The subject clitic is ERG if a third clitic is present (10b).

(10) a. \textit{narm} \text{pu} \textit{tpul-kamprak-r-akn}\text{3PL.ABS-hit-break-PERF.3SG.DAT} ‘They hit and broke his skin.’ (F324)

\[\text{skin.VI.SG} \]

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6See the Appendix.
Applicativization: ERG may surface on clitics cross-referencing intransitive subjects, if a nominal structurally lower than the subject is also clitic doubled, e.g., due to applicativization:

\[(11) \text{ a. impa-} \text{n kant} \text{ na-} \text{kwalca-t} \]
\[3DL-\text{FR.DIST with 3SG.ABS-rise-PERF} \]
\[\text{‘He got up with them both.’ (F303)} \]
\[\text{ b. impa-} \text{n-} \text{ta-na-tmi-am-nt-} \text{akn} \]
\[3DL-3SG.ABS-DEF-CAUS-eat-PRES-3SG.DAT \]
\[\text{‘I made him eat a sago pancake.’ (causee) (F292)} \]

The data shown here reveal a dissociation between case and argument structure. Transitive subjects are not inherently ERG, and ERG case is not exclusively assigned to transitive subjects.

- Problematic for a view of ERG case as inherent, assigned to transitive subjects based on thematic role (e.g. Wollford, 1997, 2006; Aldridge, 2008; Legate, 2012).
- More generally problematic for any view of ERG case as assigned by a dedicated functional head (e.g. Bobaljik, 1993; Laka, 2000; Rezac et al., 2014).

ERG is context-dependent.

5 Dative case

- DAT is normally found on clitics cross-referencing intermediate arguments (e.g., IOs, causees).\(^7\)

\[(12) \text{ a. k-ka-} \text{tkam-r-} \text{akn} \]
\[\text{V1.SG.ABS-1SG.ERG-show-PERF-3SG.DAT} \]
\[\text{‘I showed him it (the coconut).’ (IO) (F211)} \]
\[\text{ b. tpuk ka-ka-na-tmi-am-nt-} \text{akn} \]
\[\text{sago pancake.X 3SG.ABS-DEF-CAUS-eat-PRES-3SG.DAT} \]
\[\text{‘I made him eat a sago pancake.’ (causee) (F292)} \]

As with ERG in the previous section, DAT is also dependent.

- Clitics cross-referencing intermediate arguments are DAT if:
  
  (i) there are two other arguments in the syntax (one structurally higher, one structurally lower), and
  (ii) all three arguments undergo clitic doubling.

→ Otherwise, ABS.

- Evidence from: partial doubling and noun incorporation.

Partial doubling: Removal of a clitic on a ditransitive verb bleeds DAT case, just as it does with ERG on transitive verbs.

- In (13), both constructions have the same three arguments: subject, causee, and direct object—but the case on the clitic cross-referencing the causee differs: DAT vs. ABS.

\[(13) \text{ a. tpuk ka-ka-na-tmi-am-nt-} \text{akn} \]
\[\text{sago pancake.X 3SG.ABS-DEF-CAUS-eat-PRES-3SG.DAT} \]
\[\text{‘I made him eat a sago pancake.’ (F292)} \]
\[\text{ b. irwa ngaykum na-} \text{mpu-tmi-ampa-} \text{t} \]
\[\text{mat.IX.SG woman 3SG.ABS-3PL.ERG-CAUS-weave-PERF} \]
\[\text{‘The women got her to weave a mat.’ (F292)} \]

\(^7\) See Appendix for other instances of DAT.
Noun incorporation: Noun incorporation of the direct object prevents it from being clitic doubled. Again, no DAT case on the indirect object clitic.

(14) \textit{ura}-mpu-na-akpi-api-n
\textit{FIREF.ABS-3PL.ERG-DEF-back-put.in-PRES}
‘They are putting their backs to the fire’ (to warm themselves) (F320)

**DAT case in Yimas is also context-dependent.**

6 Absolutive and anti-identity

ABS is the “elsewhere” form of a clitic, surfacing where DAT and ERG cannot.

- When a verb hosts a single clitic, this clitic is ABS.
- Clitics exhibit alternations with ABS: Cl[SUBJ] \rightarrow ERG~ABS; Cl[IO] \rightarrow DAT~ABS.

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

- While the Yimas clitics make multiple case distinctions, the DPs in the syntax invariably resemble the ABS paradigm, regardless of their grammatical function. Most obvious with the pronouns (15).
- Therefore, clitic doubling of a nominal automatically yields an ABS clitic.

(15) a. \textit{kapwa} \textit{taŋka-mpi} \textit{kapwa-wa-t}
\textit{2DL where-ADV 2DL.ABS-go-PERF}
‘Where have you gone?’ (S) (F458)

b. \textit{kapwa} na-nqran-a-aykapi-na
\textit{2DL 3SG.ABS-2DL.ERG-DEF-know-PRES}
‘Do you two know him?’ (A) (F462)

c. \textit{kapwa} nq\textit{kut-ja-ira-kwalca-kia-k}
\textit{2DL.DAT-DEF-ALL-rise-FUT-IRR}
‘I will come up on you.’ (O) (F460)

A new puzzle: No matter the total number of clitics on the verb, there is maximum only one ABS morpheme (Phillips, 1993).

- Why do these clitics not all remain ABS; i.e., why do some surface as ERG and DAT instead?

Proposal: Dependent case assignment takes place in order to eliminate sequences of case-invariant clitics.

1. If no dissimilatory process applies to a clitic, it will surface as ABS.
2. Non-ABS clitics are the result of dissimilatory processes such as dependent case assignment.

\textit{Exception:} Lexical case, see Appendix.

3. Dissimilation is necessary due to 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.\(^8\)
- In other words, dependent case dissimilates.
- In Yimas, the relevant domain is the span of clitics on \(C_0\), and anti-identity is evaluated over the doubled clitics.
Anti-identity explains why ERG and DAT are dependent, i.e., assigned in the presence of one and two other clitics, respectively.

- Sequences consisting of two or more ABS clitics are ruled out and must be repaired.

It also explains the one-ABS generalization:

- If the endgoal of case-marking clitics is to eliminate sequences of case-invariant clitics, then one clitic may remain ABS.

(16) Schematization (ignoring linear order):

a. \*ABS\(\text{SUBJ}\)-ABS\(\text{IO}\)-ABS\(\text{OBJ}\) → ABS-ABS-DAT 

b. \*ABS\(\text{SUBJ}\)-ABS\(\text{OBJ}\)-DAT → ERG-ABS-DAT

7 Broader implications

That dependent case applies to satisfy an anti-identity requirement recasts the context-sensitive nature of dependent case in a different light.

- It dissimilates the members of a pair of otherwise morphosyntactically indistinguishable objects (here, case-invariant clitics) from each other.

- It redefines the notion of ‘case competition.’ Case-receiving elements are not competing for case; case is necessarily assigned to certain elements to satisfy a well-formedness condition.

8 Conclusion

Main point: The distributions of morphological case are context-dependent. Moreover, this type of case assignment should be reconceptualized as a subtype of dissimilation, a much larger phenomenon.

- This crosscuts different views of dependent case as assigned postsyntactically (Marantz, 1991; McFadden, 2004) or in the syntax proper (Baker & Vinokurova, 2010; Preminger, 2011, 2014, a.o.)

- It is also flexible with respect to what types of elements (e.g., nominals vs. clitics) may receive morphological case.

- All of these views are compatible with the basic insight that dependent case has a dissimilatory function.

References


8 There’s also an intuitive functional basis for this effect. Yimas, a language allowing rampant pro drop and free word order, expresses grammatical function through its doubled clitics. As noted earlier, the case that a clitic surfaces with helps determine the grammatical relations between the nominals doubled by the clitics; for instance, when a verb contains an ABS and ERG clitic, we know that the ERG clitic cross-references a nominal structurally higher than the ABS clitic.


Appendix: Lexical case

Although I have been assuming a case-based analysis, nothing has forced us to this conclusion.

- An alternative, still viable: Simple contextual allomorphy, without reference to case.

The case for case: While the paradigms are often context-dependent, they are at other times not.

- In certain circumstances, instances of what I’m calling the ‘DAT’ paradigm is completely obligatory.
- Proposal: There are two subtypes of DAT case in Yimas, diagnosable by their different distributions.

(17) a. \text{DAT}_{IO}: Dependent DAT case cross-referencing IOs/causees arguments (intermediate arguments).
   b. \text{DAT}_{POSS}: Lexical DAT case cross-referencing inalienable possessors.\textsuperscript{9}

\text{DAT}_{POSS} behaves like lexical case: Idiosyncratic, preserved in different syntactic environments, etc.

- Lexical DAT clitics in Yimas block dependent ERG case on subject clitics (18).
- Lexical DAT clitics are totally insensitive to their clitic environment (19).

(18) \begin{align*}
\text{narm} & \quad \text{pu}-\text{tpul-kamprak-r-akn} \\
\text{skin.VII.SG} & \quad \text{[3PL.ABS-hit-break-PERF-3SG.DAT} \\
\text{‘They hit and broke his skin.’ (F324)} & \\
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{p-mpu} & \quad \text{tpul-kamprak-r-akn} \\
\text{skin.VII.SG} & \quad \text{VII.SG-3PL.ERG-hit-break-PERF-3SG.DAT} \\
\text{‘They hit and broke [his skin.’ (F283)} & \\
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{narm} & \quad \text{pu}-\text{tpul-kamprak-r-akn} \\
\text{skin.VII.SG} & \quad \text{3SG.ABS-hit-break-PERF-3SG.DAT} \\
\text{‘They hit and broke [his skin.’ (F324)} & \\
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\text{skin.VII.SG} & \quad \text{hit-break-PERF-3SG.DAT} \\
\text{‘They hit and broke [his skin.’ (F,p,c.)} & \\
\end{align*}

\begin{tabular}{|c|}
\hline
A single paradigm, DAT, can be split into two distinct subtypes, which happen to behave like two distinct types of case. \textbf{Not treating these paradigms as case misses this parallel.}
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{9} Also 1st/2nd person internal arguments, though I will set these aside.