Case in 2017: some thoughts

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Overview

What I have to say…

(i) enough with Abstract Case already

(ii) so-called "m-case" is syntactic

(iii) nominative ≡ the absence of case

(iv) only 2 kinds of real(≡non-nominative) case:
dependent case, and case assigned under closest-c-command by H^0

Abstract Case: what it's supposed to be

- A theory of the distribution of overt nominals
  - motivated by data like these:

(1) John tried (*Bill/*himself*/him) to win.

(2) John is fond *(of) Mary.

(3) the destruction *(of) the city

(4) It is impossible *(for) Bill to win.

[*Chomsky & Lasnik 1977, Vergnaud 1977, Chomsky 1981 et seq.*]

- Abstract Case has nothing to say about data like the following:

(5) a. John is fond of/*for Mary.

b. the destruction of/*for the city

c. It is impossible for/*of Bill to win.

  - these are typically handled by an appeal to c-selection

Abstract Case: what it's supposed to be *(cont.)*

- But c-selection is not only *necessary* to account for data like (6a–c) —

(6) a. John is fond {of/*for/*Ø} Mary.

b. the destruction {of/*for/*Ø} the city

c. It is impossible {for/*of/*Ø} Bill to win.

— it is also *sufficient* (Sundaresan & McFadden 2009).

⇒ That leaves (1):

(1) John tried (*Bill/*himself*/him) to win.

- *but Abstract Case is not a particularly interesting or successful account of (1)…*

wager-verbs (Pesetsky 1991, Postal 1974)

- There is a class of verbs which take an infinitival complement —
  - for which having an "in situ" subject of that infinitive is impossible:

(7) * John wagered Secretariat to win.

  - but passive(≡*A-movement*) allows this same noun phrase to be overt:

(8) Secretariat was wagered ***t*** to win.

  - ↦ and, crucially, so does *A-bar movement*:

(9) Which horse did John wager ***t*** to win?

wager-verbs (Pesetsky 1991, Postal 1974) *(cont.)*

(7) * John wagered Secretariat to win.

(8) Secretariat was wagered ***t*** to win.

(9) Which horse did John wager ***t*** to win?

- Importantly, the theory of Abstract Case must maintain that A-bar movement is "Case-neutral" —

(10) * Mary asked who John tried ***t*** to win.

  - otherwise examples like (10) are predicted to be okay

NB: On the Abstract Case theory, both *ask* and *try* (or clauses where these are the main verbs) must be considered viable "Case assigners":

(11) a. Mary asked [a question].

b. John tried [the pie].

⇒ the movement in (10) should, all else being equal, bring the moving phrase into the domain of Case assignment

wager-verbs (Pesetsky 1991, Postal 1974) *(cont.)*

(7) * John wagered Secretariat to win.

(8) Secretariat was wagered ***t*** to win.

(9) Which horse did John wager ***t*** to win?

- Given that A-bar movement is Case-neutral, the contrast between (7) and (9) cannot be Case-theoretic;

$\Rightarrow$ There must be a separate contraint at play, ruling out (7).

Infinitives reconsidered

- The badness of (7) is a subcase of a broader pattern:

(12) *infinitival subjects…*

that are "in situ"	that have vacated by A-mvmt	that have vacated by A-bar mvmt	
✓	✓	✓	John expected Secretariat to win. Secretariat was expected ***t*** to win. Which horse did John expect ***t*** to win?
✗ (red circle)	✓	✓	* John wagered Secretariat to win. Secretariat was wagered ***t*** to win. Which horse did John wager ***t*** to win?
✗ (boxed)	✗ (red circle)	✗	* John tried Secretariat to win. * Secretariat was tried ***t*** to win. * Which horse did John try ***t*** to win?

  - things marked with a red circle cannot be accounted for with Abstract Case

- **in terms of scientific method, inventing a sui generis explanation *just* for the boxed cell is just about the last thing we should entertain.**

A note on the Case Filter

- In Chomsky (2000, 2001), the Case Filter is recapitulated as checking condition on 'uninterpretable' Case features located on D(P)
  - the idea being that you get the Case Filter "for free" from the assumption that Case is a feature — because:

    (13) unchecked/unvalued/undeleted features cause a "crash"(=ungrammaticality) at the interfaces.

↦ Preminger 2014: (13) is demonstrably false

⇒ Whatever you want to say about the Case Filter, you certainly can no longer say it comes "for free" from the mechanisms of feature-checking/valuation.

What else does(n't) Abstract Case do?

- *Obligatory A-movement (as in passives & raising)?*
  - even if we were to adopt the theory of Abstract Case —
    - there are well-established cases of obligatory A-movement that cannot possibly be explained in terms of this theory
  - ex.: Object Shift (in Scandinavian)
    - involves obligatory A-movement from positions that Abstract Case theory would have to characterize as already-Case-marked

      (as evinced by the behavior of the shifted nominals' non-specific / non-pronominal / … counterparts, which do not shift)

⇒ even Abstract Case theory must resort to an obligatory A-movement operation having nothing to do with "Case"; therefore —

↦ **obligatory A-movement in passives & raising is in no way an argument in favor of Abstract Case.**

What else does(n't) Abstract Case do? *(cont.)*

- *Determine (or help determine) morphological form?*
  - ↛ Abstract Case has nothing to do with overt case morphology

    - some would point out that Abstract Case *often* makes the right predictions concerning overt case
      - I actually think that's a gross idealization;
      - but even if we grant it, it's hardly redeeming
    - our criterion for a successful theory isn't, and shouldn't be, "*X* gets a lot of the facts right"
    - associationist/connectionist approaches to language get a lot of the facts right, too
      - but that doesn't lead us to adopt Google Translate as our theory of grammar

What else does(n't) Abstract Case do? *(cont.)*

- we generativists see a profundity in the kinds of errors that associationist/connectionist systems make
  - and we take these errors to be indicative that the logic of these systems is fundamentally off

- look no further than Icelandic to see that, when it comes to overt case morphology, the logic of Abstract Case is fundamentally off
  - an observation that has been around since the late-80s, by the way
    - Zaenen et al. (1985), Yip et al. (1987), Marantz (1991)

What else does(n't) Abstract Case do? *(cont.)*

- most importantly, if you look at what one does need to say to accurately predict case morphology —

  (probably some version of configurational case assignment)

  — you get a system that:

  (i) makes no reference to whatsoever to the primitives of Abstract Case

  (ii) is (much) simpler than what you'd need to say to "fix" the morphological mispredictions that Abstract Case generates

  - cf. Legate 2008

⇒ and so I think I am entirely justified when I say that **Abstract Case is of no use whatsoever in predicting overt case morphology**

In closing…

Enough already with Abstract Case.

So-called “m-case”

- What it refers to:
  - an empirically adequate system that determines the case of nominals
    - **in a way that actually matches what we see** in languages with case morphology
  - includes *dependent case* ⇒ is (at least partially) configurational
    - what that means: case is assigned to (some) noun phrases by virtue of their structural relation to other noun phrases
      - not (just) by virtue of their structural relation to designated functional heads

So-called "m-case" *(cont.)*

- Marantz (1991): m-case is, well, morphological
  - what he means by this:
    - it is computed on the PF branch, after the PF-LF split
      - in the same part of the derivation where what we (pre-theoretically) call 'morphology' is
  - what he does **not** mean by this:
    - m-case only exists where it is morpho-phonologically visible (more on this shortly)

- This statement about the modular locus of m-case is justified in terms of the following claim:

(14) There are no properties that must be located in syntax proper and which make unambiguous reference to m-case. [*Marantz 1991*]

So-called “m-case” *(cont.)*

(14) There are no properties that must be located in syntax proper and which make unambiguous reference to m-case. [*Marantz 1991*]

↦ Claim (14) is **false**.

- Bobaljik (2008): agreement in φ-features (PERSON, NUMBER, GENDER/NOUN-CLASS) requires unambiguous reference to m-case
  - in a way that cannot be subsumed by ‘grammatical function’, ‘theta role’, ‘position’, etc.
- Preminger 2014: movement to canonical subject position (in a subset of languages) requires unambiguous reference to agreement in φ-features
  - moreover, movement to canonical subject position has LF consequences (e.g. it is scope-expanding)

⇒ both agreement in φ-features and m-case must reside within syntax proper.

An all-too-frequent caricature of m-case

- In the literature, m-case is often simply interpreted as:
  “case you can see(=hear)”

- ↦ It is abundantly clear that this cannot be right; here’s why:
  - one of the crowning achievements of m-case is correctly predicting the distribution of nominative case in Icelandic
  - in particular, the fact that when the subject is exceptionally ACC/DAT/GEN —
    - the object gets marked with NOM instead of the usual ACC
  - as noted by Bobaljik (2008), finite agreement in Icelandic tracks NOM
  - now, several nominal paradigms (incl. pronouns) in Icelandic show various cross-case syncretisms
  - **but a (syntactically) non-NOM subject in Icelandic that happens to be (morphologically) syncretic with its NOM counterpart is not suddenly able to control agreement**

An all-too-frequent caricature of m-case *(cont.)*

⇒ In other words, m-case is itself an abstract system of categories

- that may or may not be exponed in a way that tracks every single syntactically-relevant distinction

- Or, to put it in the form of a slogan: “m-case is abstract.”

‘Nominative’: the traditional view

- The traditional view of ‘nominative’ —

  (no doubt inspired by older philological traditions, but largely persistent to this day)

  — takes ‘nominative’ to be an extant grammatical primitive.

- One then finds various discussions in the literature about how & when nominative is “assigned”
  - see, e.g., Chomsky 1981 *et seq.*

↦ *I have argued that this is fundamentally mistaken…*

‘Nominative’ as caselessness

Preminger 2014, Kornfilt & Preminger 2015:

(i) Everything preempts nominative

Viewing (m-)case assignment as run-of-the-mill feature valuation, and ‘nominative’ as caselessness —

we derive the fact, which had to be stipulated in Marantz 1991, that nominative comes “last” in the case assignment hierarchy

- if ‘nominative’ ≡ “my case features have not been valued”:
  - ⇒ any contentful assignment of case to a nominal would make it impossible for that nominal to subsequently be ‘nominative’
    - this is precisely the kind of preemption that Marantz had to stipulate as part of his *disjunctive case hierarchy*
- ↣ and remember: we already know that features remaining unvalued through the end of the derivation is okay (Preminger 2014)

'Nominative' as caselessness *(cont.)*

(ii) Raising-to-ACC

(15) a. min ehigi$_1$-**ni** [bügün t_1 kyaj-yax-**xyt**] dien erem-mit-im
I you-**ACC** today win-FUT-**2pl.SUBJ** that hope-PST-1sg.SUBJ
'I hoped you would win today.'

b. ehigi bihigi$_1$-**ni** [t_1 kyajtar-dy-**byt**] dien xomoj-du-gut
you we-**ACC** lose-PST-**1pl.SUBJ** that become.sad-PST-2pl.SUBJ
'Y'all were disappointed that we lost.' [*Sakha (Turkic); V05:369*]

- these are instances of **raising** per se (Baker & Vinokurova 2010)
  - ⇒ the trigger for subject-agreement in the embedded clause is the very nominal that shows up bearing ACC in the matrix
- outside of this construction, subject agreement in Sakha adheres to a strict **NOM** ⇔ **finite agr** generalization
  - ↦ *how and why is that generalization violated here?*

‘Nominative’ as caselessness *(cont.)*

(15) a. min ehigi$_1$-**ni** [bügün t_1 kyaj-yax-**xyt**] dien erem-mit-im
I you-**ACC** today win-FUT-**2pl.SUBJ** that hope-PST-1sg.SUBJ
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- **A reasonable solution:** the relevant nominals go from being nominative (in the embedded clause) to being accusative (in the matrix)
  - Baker & Vinokurova (2010): they do so by means of “case-stacking”

    (16) [[[DP]-NOM]-ACC]
  - Kornfilt & Preminger (2015): Contrary what (16) requires, Sakha does not allow already-case-marked nominals to participate in subsequent *dependent case* relations

‘Nominative’ as caselessness *(cont.)*

(15) a. min ehigi$_1$-**ni** [bügün t_1 kyaj-yax-**xyt**] dien erem-mit-im
I you-**ACC** today win-FUT-**2pl.SUBJ** that hope-PST-1sg.SUBJ
‘I hoped you would win today.’

b. ehigi bihigi$_1$-**ni** [t_1 kyajtar-dy-**byt**] dien xomoj-du-gut
you we-**ACC** lose-PST-**1pl.SUBJ** that become.sad-PST-2pl.SUBJ
‘Y’all were disappointed that we lost.’ [*Sakha (Turkic); V05:369*]

- since ACC in Sakha is *dependent case*, the only way something can “become ACC” is if it was previously caseless
  - **and that’s what being nominative is.**

Other types of (m-)case

- So we've seen that so-called 'nominative' is just the absence of case;
- And we've mentioned *dependent case* —
  - case is assigned to a noun phrase by virtue of its structural proximity to another as-of-yet-caseless noun phrase

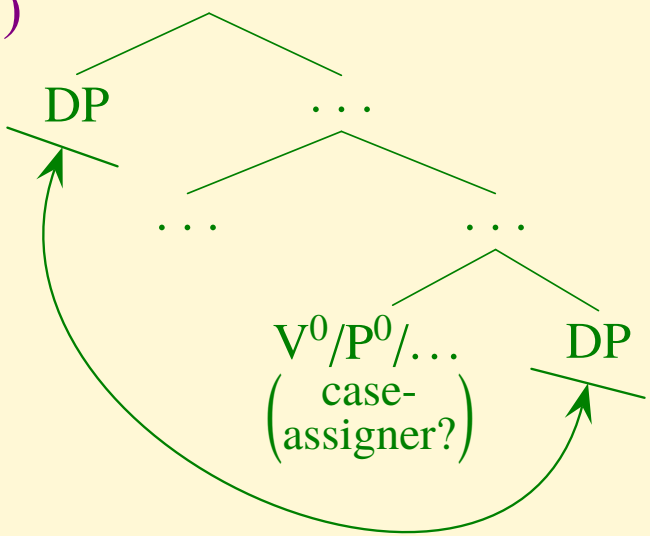
⇒ What else is there?

- For Marantz 1991, there is only one other category: *lexically governed case*
  - which, for him, meant case assigned to a nominal by the head that selects it

Other types of (m-)case *(cont.)*

- For Marantz, *lexically governed case* must preempt *dependent case*
  - in Preminger 2014, I showed that viewing (m-)case assignment as run-of-the-mill valuation derives this instance of preemption, as well
- That's because, on a bottom-up model of structure building —

(17)



  - the sisterhood relation in question will obtain before the necessary configuration for DEPENDENT case assignment

Other types of (m-)case *(cont.)*

- However, I no longer think this story is correct —
  - ↛ or rather, I don't think it is complete

- For one thing, there are certain kinds of case that Marantz's (1991) system, as stated, is a very poor fit for
  - most notably, case associated with prepositional complementizers
    - which is a very poor fit for *dependent case*, but is assigned to a nominal not selected by the prepositional complementizer

⇒ As a result, I no longer think *lexical(ly governed) case* should be restricted to the sisterhood relation
  - rather, it is case associated with the lexical identity of a particular head, **and assigned under closest-c-command**

Other types of (m-)case *(cont.)*

- When *lexical case* is discharged under sisterhood —
  - the earlier results (preemption of *dependent case*) still obtain
- But now we can account for case assigned by prepositional complementizers
- As well as… *case in English!*

(18) a. He$_{C1}$ is here on time.

b. Her$_{C2}$ and him$_{C2}$ are here on time.

- I'm assuming, with Sobin (1997), that the other forms are just prescriptive (hyper)correction
  - that they exist doesn't mean we should shove them in the grammar
  - any more than the existence of *"Numeral NP do/does not a NP make"* means we should make the grammar of English verb-final

Other types of (m-)case *(cont.)*

(18) a. He$_{C1}$ is here on time.

b. Her$_{C2}$ and him$_{C2}$ are here on time.

- Note, importantly, that C1 has nothing to do with agreement:

(19) a. I demand that he$_{C1}$ be here on time.

b. I demand that her$_{C2}$ and him$_{C2}$ be here on time.

⇒ C1 is case assigned by T^0 under closest-c-command;
C2 is caselessness(≡unmarked case)

- in other words, insofar as English has anything you'd want to call 'nominative' —
  - it's C2, i.e., the thing we've been calling 'accusative' or 'objective' case

Happy Birthday David!

And thank you all for listening!

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