Case typology

Pavel Caha

23 Oct 2023

Basic notions

- ▶ Argument of the verb: in our case, the *subject* and the *object* of a verb. Since the subject and the object are usually nouns (or more precisely *noun phrases*), they are called the **NP arguments of the verb**
- ▶ Semantic roles: for example *Agent*, *Patient*, *Instrument*, *Benefactive*, etc. There is no agreement on how many semantic roles there are.
- ▶ Head and dependent
  - ▶ In our case, the head is the verb.
  - ▶ In our case, the dependents are the subject and the object.
- ▶ Transitive and intransitive verbs
  - ▶ Transitive verbs are the ones with two arguments.
  - ▶ Intransitive verbs are the ones which take just a single argument.

Marking A and P in English

(1)   The woman visited the girl.

(2)   The girl visited the woman.

Marking A and P in Czech

(3)   Petr-a   honí zmij-e
           Peter-PAT chase snake-AG
           'A snake is chasing Petr.'

(4)   Petr-ø   honí zmij-i
           Peter-AG chase snake-PAT
           'Petr is chasing a snake.'

head vs. dependent marking

Dependent marking: the morphological marking appears on the verb arguments, that is the NPs subject and object. In other words, case is marked on the dependent.

(5)   Petr-a   honí zmij-e
       Peter-PAT chase snake-AG
       'A snake bit Petr.'

(6)   Petr-ø   honí zmij-i
       Peter-AG chase snake-PAT
       'Petr bit the snake.'

head vs. dependent marking (Swahili)

Head marking: the marking appears on the verb, i.e. on the head.

(7)   Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
      A -PAST -P -hit   Badru
      'I hit Badru'

head vs. dependent marking (Swahili)

Head marking: the marking appears on the verb, i.e. on the head.

(7) Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
     A -PAST -P -hit   Badru
     'I hit Badru'

(8) Ahmet a -li   -ni -piga
     Ahmet A -PAST -P -hit
     'Ahmet hit me.'

head vs. dependent marking (Swahili)

Head marking: the marking appears on the verb, i.e. on the head.

(7) Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
     A -PAST -P -hit   Badru
     'I hit Badru'

(8) Ahmet a -li   -ni -piga
     Ahmet A -PAST -P -hit
     'Ahmet hit me.'

(9) ni-li-ki-soma ki-tabu
     I-PAST-7-read 7-book
     'I read the book'   (Swahili)

head vs. dependent marking (Swahili)

Head marking: the marking appears on the verb, i.e. on the head.

(7) Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
     A -PAST -P -hit Badru
     'I hit Badru'

(8) Ahmet a -li   -ni -piga
     Ahmet A -PAST -P -hit
     'Ahmet hit me.'

(9) ni-li-ki-soma ki-tabu
     I-PAST-7-read 7-book
     'I read the book'   (Swahili)

(10) kitabu ki-li-anguka
     7-book 7-PAST-fell
     'The book fell'   (Swahili)

A-S-P

A = is the Agent, or the subject of a transitive verb

P = is the Patient, or the object of a transitive verb

S = technically this is "the sole argument of an intransitive verb"

A-S-P

A = is the Agent, or the subject of a transitive verb

P = is the Patient, or the object of a transitive verb

S = technically this is "the sole argument of an intransitive verb"

(11)   The woman visited the girl
        A visited P

A-S-P

A = is the Agent, or the subject of a transitive verb

P = is the Patient, or the object of a transitive verb

S = technically this is "the sole argument of an intransitive verb"

(11)   The woman visited the girl
         A visited P

(12)   The boy fell
         S fell

A-S-P

A = is the Agent, or the subject of a transitive verb
P = is the Patient, or the object of a transitive verb
S = technically this is "the sole argument of an intransitive verb"

(11)   The woman visited the girl
        A visited P

(12)   The boy fell
        S fell

Given these three primitives, we have 5 logical possibilities for languages to group them.

(13)   Five logical possibilities for grouping A, P and S

Nominative-Accusative	A & S	P
Ergative-Absolutive	A	S & P
Tripartite	A	S	P
AP/S	A & P	S
Neutral	A & S & P	

NOM-ACC

(14) Petr-ø vidí Marušk-u
      Petr-A sees Mary-P

(15) Marušk-a vidí Petr-a
      Mary-A   sees Petr-P

NOM-ACC

(14) Petr-ø vidí Marušk-u
      Petr-ᴀ sees Mary-ᴘ

(15) Marušk-a vidí Petr-a
      Mary-ᴀ   sees Petr-ᴘ

(16) Petr-ø spí.
      Petr-ꜱ sleeps

NOM-ACC

(14)   Petr-ø vidí Marušk-u
         Petr-ᴀ sees Mary-ᴘ

(15)   Marušk-a vidí Petr-a
         Mary-ᴀ   sees Petr-ᴘ

(16)   Petr-ø spí.
         Petr- s sleeps

(17)   Marušk-a spí.
         Mary-s   sleeps

NOM-ACC head

(18)   Ahmed a -li   -m -piga Badru
        Ahmed A -PAST -P -hit Badru
        'Ahmed hit Badru'

(19)   Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
        A -PAST -P -hit Badru
        'I hit Badru'

NOM-ACC head

(18) Ahmed a -li   -m -piga Badru
      Ahmed A -PAST -P -hit Badru
      'Ahmed hit Badru'

(19) Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
      A -PAST -P -hit Badru
      'I hit Badru'

(20) Ahmet a -li   -ni -piga
      Ahmet A -PAST -P -hit
      'Ahmet hit me.'

NOM-ACC head

(18)   Ahmed a -li   -m -piga Badru
    Ahmed A -PAST -P -hit   Badru
    'Ahmed hit Badru'

(19)   Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
    A -PAST -P -hit   Badru
    'I hit Badru'

(20)   Ahmet a -li   -ni -piga
    Ahmet A -PAST -P -hit
    'Ahmet hit me.'

(21)   Ahmed a -li   -anguka
    Ahmed S -PAST -fall
    'Ahmed fell'

NOM-ACC head

(18) Ahmed a -li   -m -piga Badru
      Ahmed A -PAST -P -hit   Badru
      'Ahmed hit Badru'

(19) Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
      A -PAST -P -hit   Badru
      'I hit Badru'

(20) Ahmet a -li   -ni -piga
      Ahmet A -PAST -P -hit
      'Ahmet hit me.'

(21) Ahmed a -li   -anguka
      Ahmed S -PAST -fall
      'Ahmed fell'

(22) Ni -li   -anguka
      S -PAST -fall
      'I fell'

NOM-ACC head

(18) Ahmed a -li   -m -piga Badru
      Ahmed A -PAST -P -hit Badru
      'Ahmed hit Badru'

(19) Ni -li   -m -piga Badru
      A -PAST -P -hit Badru
      'I hit Badru'

(20) Ahmet a -li   -ni -piga
      Ahmet A -PAST -P -hit
      'Ahmet hit me.'

(21) Ahmed a -li   -anguka
      Ahmed S -PAST -fall
      'Ahmed fell'

(22) Ni -li   -anguka
      S -PAST -fall
      'I fell'

both head and dependent

(23)   puer-∅   labora-t
       boy-NOM work-3SG.SUBJECT
       'The boy works'

both head and dependent

(23)   puer-∅   labora-t
        boy-NOM work-3SG.SUBJECT
        'The boy works'

(24)   puer-∅   magistr-um lauda-t
        boy-NOM teacher-ACC praise-3SG.SUBJECT
        'The boy praises the teacher'

both head and dependent

(23) puer-∅   labora-t
      boy-NOM work-3SG.SUBJECT
      'The boy works'

(24) puer-∅   magistr-um lauda-t
      boy-NOM teacher-ACC praise-3SG.SUBJECT
      'The boy praises the teacher'

(25) magister-∅   puer-um lauda-t
      teacher-NOM boy-ACC praise-3SG.SUBJECT
      'The teacher praises the boy'

both head and dependent

(23)   puer-∅   labora-t
        boy-NOM work-3SG.SUBJECT
        'The boy works'

(24)   puer-∅   magistr-um lauda-t
        boy-NOM teacher-ACC praise-3SG.SUBJECT
        'The boy praises the teacher'

(25)   magister-∅   puer-um lauda-t
        teacher-NOM boy-ACC praise-3SG.SUBJECT
        'The teacher praises the boy'

(26)   magistri-∅   puer-um lauda-nt
        teachers-NOM boy-ACC praise-3PL.SUBJECT
        'The teachers praise the boy'

ergative - absolutive

Yalarnnga

(27)　　kupi-ŋku milŋa-∅ tacamu
　　　　fish-A　　fly-P　　bit
　　　　'A fish bit a fly'

ergative - absolutive

Yalarnnga

(27)   kupi-ŋku milŋa-∅ tacamu
       fish-A   fly-P   bit
       'A fish bit a fly'

(28)   ŋa-tu kupi-∅ walamu
       I.A   fish-P killed
       'I killed a fish'

ergative - absolutive

Yalarnnga

(27) kupi-ŋku milŋa-∅ tacamu
     fish-A   fly-P   bit
     'A fish bit a fly'

(28) ŋa-tu kupi-∅ walamu
     I.A   fish-P killed
     'I killed a fish'

(29) kupi-∅ waya kunhu-ŋka
     fish-S that water-LOC
     'That fish is in the water'

ergative - absolutive

Yalarnnga

(27)   kupi-ŋku milŋa-∅ tacamu
        fish-A   fly-P   bit
        'A fish bit a fly'

(28)   ŋa-tu kupi-∅ walamu
        I.A   fish-P killed
        'I killed a fish'

(29)   kupi-∅ waya kunhu-ŋka
        fish-S that water-LOC
        'That fish is in the water'

(30)   ŋja wakamu
        I.S fell
        'I fell'

ergative - absolutive

Yalarnnga

(27) kupi-ŋku milŋa-∅ tacamu
      fish-A   fly-P   bit
      'A fish bit a fly'

(28) ŋa-tu kupi-∅ walamu
      I.A   fish-P killed
      'I killed a fish'

(29) kupi-∅ waya kunhu-ŋka
      fish-S   that water-LOC
      'That fish is in the water'

(30) ŋja wakamu
      I.S fell
      'I fell'

Tzotzil.

(31)   X-i-tal-otik
       X-1.ABS-come-1PL
       'We came'

(32)   X-i-s-pet-otik
       X-1.ABS-3.ERG-carry-1PL
       'He carried us'

(33)   X-Ø-j-pet-tik   lok'el ti   vinike
       X-3.ABS-1ERG-carry-1PL away that man
       'We carried away that man

(34)   X-Ø-tal
       X-3.ABS-come
       'He/she/it/they came'

tripartitie

This type of case-marking systems are very rare. It is only a group of Australian languages spoken in the south-east of Queensland that make a three-way distinction for A, P and S across all noun phrases. Example language – *Wangkumara*.

(35) kana-ulu kalkaŋ titi-nana
man-ERG hit dog-ACC
'The man hit the dog'
A-erg hit P-acc

(36) kana-ia paluŋa
man-NOM died
'The man died'
S-nom died

neutral

English

Split systems

There are more-complicated case marking systems in the world's languages than the ones described in the previous section. The "more complicated" aspect comes from the fact that such languages

- ▶ use more than one case marking system (e.g. split-ergative systems)

There are more-complicated case marking systems in the world's languages than the ones described in the previous section. The "more complicated" aspect comes from the fact that such languages

- ► use more than one case marking system (e.g. split-ergative systems)
- ► additionally complicate the S in that it starts to matter whether S controls the activity or not

There are more-complicated case marking systems in the world's languages than the ones described in the previous section. The "more complicated" aspect comes from the fact that such languages

- ▶ use more than one case marking system (e.g. split-ergative systems)
- ▶ additionally complicate the S in that it starts to matter whether S controls the activity or not
- ▶ make use of discourse salience and referentiality to mark the *who does X to whom*

There are more-complicated case marking systems in the world's languages than the ones described in the previous section. The "more complicated" aspect comes from the fact that such languages

- ▶ use more than one case marking system (e.g. split-ergative systems)
- ▶ additionally complicate the S in that it starts to matter whether S controls the activity or not
- ▶ make use of discourse salience and referentiality to mark the *who does X to whom*

(37) ŋuma-∅ yabu-ŋgu buran
      father-ABS mother-ERG saw
      'Then mother saw the father'

(38) ŋuma-∅ banaganu
      father-ABS returned
      'The father returned'

(39) ŋana-∅ nyurra-na buran
      we-NOM you-ACC saw
      'We saw you'

(40) nyurra-∅ banaganu
      you-NOM returned
      'You returned'

(41)   The nominal hierarchy and split-ergative systems

	1st & 2nd person	3rd person	personal names kin terms	humans	animates
Dyirbal	Nom-Acc	Ergative-Absolutive			
Nhanda	Nominative-Accusative			Ergative-Abs	
Mangarayi	Nominative-Accusative				

(41)   The nominal hierarchy and split-ergative systems

	1st & 2nd person	3rd person	personal names kin terms	humans	animates
Dyirbal	Nom-Acc	Ergative-Absolutive			
Nhanda	Nominative-Accusative			Ergative-Abs	
Mangarayi	Nominative-Accusative				

(42)   a.   Differential Object Marking

(41)   The nominal hierarchy and split-ergative systems

	1st & 2nd person	3rd person	personal names kin terms	humans	animates
Dyirbal	Nom-Acc	Ergative-Absolutive			
Nhanda	Nominative-Accusative			Ergative-Abs	
Mangarayi	Nominative-Accusative				

(42)   a.   Differential Object Marking
         b.   plural

(43)   tXo   naizdraX   qitra
       we-ABS to.ground fell
       'We fell to the ground (unintentionally)'

(44)   atXo   naizdraX   qitra
       we-ERG to.ground fell
       'We fell to the ground (intentionally)'