

## Two-term case systems in cross-linguistic perspective

Two-term case systems are quite widespread in the languages of the world and represent a very interesting phenomenon, although they have not figured prominently in the typological research on case systems and argument structure. Their study, though, seems to be of primary importance for the theory and typology of case systems and argument structure, since these systems clearly show what are the ultimate limits of neutralization of different semantic roles NPs may bear in the clause, to what extent the expression of these roles depends on the number of morphological cases available in a language, which markedness relations may exist between cases encoding these roles. Moreover, two-term case systems present all-important evidence about how larger case systems may arise and decline.

The goal of this paper is to summarize the most important points of a much larger project of a cross-linguistic investigation of two-term case systems from semantico-syntactic, morphological and diachronic perspectives, based on the data from some 70 languages of diverse genetic and areal origins.

Two-term case systems are found on almost all continents, and are particularly prominent in the languages of Central Asia (Indo-Iranian group) and Eastern Africa (Nilotic, Cushitic, and Ethio-Semitic languages), but they are also attested in North America (Salish and Uto-Aztecan families, as well as Aleut), Oceania (Austronesian: Nias and Papuan: Yimas) and Europe (old Romance languages, modern Romanian, some Scandinavian dialects, English).

Despite the fact that two-term case systems show considerable cross-linguistic variation, there are some important features common to their majority and allowing to consider such systems as a typologically coherent type of case system. The most prominent features are the following:

1. Despite the seeming poverty of expressive means, two-term case systems more often than not cover quite a wide range of different semantic roles, not only such core grammatical relations as S, A, and P (Comrie 1981), but also such roles as Addressee/Recipient and Possessor, as well as Locative, Temporal, Manner etc.; 'poor' two-term case systems covering only the core relations, are rather rare.
2. Although different 'alignment' types (accusative, ergative, active etc., see Comrie 1981, Dixon 1994, Primus 1999) and various types of 'alignment splits' (e.g. Tsunoda 1981) are available to languages with various case systems or without any such system at all, two-term case systems show that a language with a 'minimal' case system may under specific and semantically well-motivated circumstances altogether dispense with the so called 'discriminatory' function of cases, allowing quite unexpected neutralizations of core grammatical relations and quite unprecedented 'alignment' patterns.
3. Markedness relations between cases in two-term case systems are usually driven not only by the cross-linguistically stable associations of marked expression with more 'peripheral' semantic roles and unmarked expression with more 'central' semantic roles (most importantly, the association between the unmarked case and the S relation), but also with the functional load of the cases; 'marked nominative' (see e.g. Koenig 2004) systems, where S/A or even S/P relation is encoded by a marked case, while other semantic roles fall under the unmarked case, are quite widespread here (Nilotic and Cushitic languages, Old French, Nias).

Summing up, it is possible to say that two-term case systems tend to show 'peculiar' features which are less often found in richer case systems. This pertains to both functional parameters, such as the array of functions a single case may have, the number and distribution of different alignment types a linguistic system may allow, and morphological ones, e.g., high

frequency of unusual types of case markers, such as apophony (some Indo-European languages), tonal shift (Nilotic and Cushitic languages, see Bennett 1974), prefixal and prepositional marking (Berber, Salish, Nias).

From the diachronic perspective, a cross-linguistic investigation has shown that two-term case systems, contrary to some claims, not always constitute the final stage of a dying reduced many-case system (such situation is, actually, common only for the Indo-European languages), but quite often are the product of a more or less recent grammaticalization process (e.g. Nias, Ethio-Semitic, Salish). Also, such systems, even ‘peculiar’ ones, seem to be relatively stable and not always viable to loss or ‘reinforcement’ by newly-grammaticalized adpositions; such ‘old’ two-term case systems are attested in America and Africa. However, diachronically, a two-term case system may develop into a richer many-case system, when adpositions (usually postpositions) used with one of the cases (usually, the marked one) become affixes. Such process is historically attested in the Indo-Aryan languages (see Masica 1991), but it seems plausible that such systems also underlie some attested many-case systems, such as that of Eskimo or North-East Caucasian languages.

To conclude, two-term case systems turn out to be a very rich and interesting field for a typological research, allowing a deeper insight into the very nature of the phenomenon of ‘case’ in general.

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