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## CASE AND AGREEMENT IN ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

### ВІДМІНОК І УЗГОДЖЕННЯ В АРГУМЕНТНІЙ СТРУКТУРІ

**Zinchenko H. Ye.**

*Candidate of Philological Sciences,  
Associate Professor  
at the Department of Germanic  
and Finno-Ugrian Philology  
Kyiv National Linguistic University  
Kyiv, Ukraine*

**Зінченко Г. Є.**

*кандидат філологічних наук,  
доцент кафедри германської  
і фіно-угорської філології  
Київський національний лінгвістичний  
університет  
м. Київ, Україна*

Case (from Lat. *cāsus* < Gr. *ptōsis* “fall”) is generally defined as a system of marking dependent nouns for a certain type of relationship they have to a corresponding head element. The nominative case is regarded the basic one for nominals, while other cases “fall away” from it [1, pp. 1094–1096]. There is a strong connection between the case and the argument structure of a clause. The substantive semantic content of a clause is represented by the proposition, which encompasses a predicate and its arguments, most frequently expressed by noun phrases. A predicate denotes an activity or an event, and arguments denote the participants in this activity or event. In syntactic terms, the arguments of a verb are usually its subject and complements. In generative grammar framework, semantic roles that arguments play in relation to the predicate are referred to as thematic roles, or theta-roles ( $\theta$ -roles). Theta-roles are assigned to the arguments in accordance with the semantic properties of the verb in the process of their merging with the predicate. The thematic role of the complement is directly assigned by the verb, whereas the thematic role of the subject is determined by the whole verb + complement structure and hence, is assigned by the verb indirectly [4, p. 243–248].

The list of roles played by arguments is the following: agent, experiencer, instrument, goal, source, location, and theme. A description is provided for each of them. In particular, agent denotes the entity that performs an activity or brings about a change of state, experiencer is the creature experiencing an emotion or perception, and theme represents the entity existing in a state, undergoing change, located or moving somewhere, or effected by another entity [3, p. 202–203; 5, p. 199–200]. For example, transitive verbs assign the thematic roles of agent and theme; therefore, in

sentence (1), the subject *The police* is the agent and the object *the suspect* is the theme:

(1) *The police arrested the suspect.*

It is possible to find some relationship between thematic roles of arguments and the morphological case, this relationship is many-to-one and one-to-many [5, p. 200]. Being a constituent of a syntactic structure and performing a semantic role, the argument also receives a morphological case, which is realized either overtly or in some other way according to the properties of the language. The morphological case further falls into two kinds: structural and lexical. The structural case depends on the grammatical role or relation of the noun phrase that receives this case. In languages with accusative case system, like English or Icelandic, nominative is the default structural case of subjects and accusative is the default structural case of objects. The case assigner, expressed by a lexical category, such as verb, preposition, or adjective, determines the lexical case. If the thematic role of the argument makes it possible to predict the lexical case to some extent, the lexical case is termed as thematic. Otherwise, i.e. if the case is unpredictable, the case is defined as idiosyncratic, or quirky [5, p. 181–182]. The examples of sentences in Icelandic (2), (3) illustrate the key difference between structural and lexical case, the essence of which is that lexical case, unlike structural, does not change in the course of syntactic operations that change the grammatical role of the corresponding noun phrase [5, p. 183].

(2) a. **Þeir** hafa sofð.

*they (N) have slept*

b. *Við teljum [þá hafa sofð].*

*we believe them(A) have(inf.) slept – “We believe them to have slept.”*

(3) a. **Þeim** hefur leiðst.

*them (D) have bored – “They have been bored.”*

b. *Við teljum [þeim hafa leiðst].*

*we believe them(D) have(inf.) bored – “We believe them to have been bored.”*

In (2a) NP *Þeir* is marked with the structural nominative case as the subject. This simple clause is embedded in subject-to-object raising construction in (2b), where the NP in question has changed its grammatical role from the subject to the object and appears in accusative form *þá* as a part of the infinitive complex. In (3) NP *Þeim* is lexically case-marked with dative and preserves the case irrespective of its syntactic role – subject in (3a) or object in the embedded infinitival construction in (3b).

The Government-Binding approach to syntax suggests a somewhat different view on the kinds of case assignment and distinguishes between structural and inherent case. Structural case is the property of formal syntactic configuration, and it is assigned to a noun phrase regardless of its thematic relation to other constituents of the clause. Thus nominative case is typically regraded a structural case assigned by a tensed Infl to its specifier (= subject) and dissociated from theta-role. Inherent case is lexically dependent, or thematically based, in that it is closely connected to thematic role. Inherent case marking depends on the lexical choice of the case assigner and on the thematic relation between the case assigner and the category receiving the case; it marks the relation between a head and a complement [2, p. 228–229; 4, p. 283; 5, p. 192].

Case systematically relates to the agreement of finite auxiliaries and their subjects. Consider the way case and agreement operate in the process of derivation in (4). A third person singular pronoun is required to give reference to the third person singular noun phrase *the picture*, and a past tense auxiliary is required to denote a past event.

(4) *Where is the picture?* – ***It was sold yesterday.***

Thus  $\phi$ -features (the categorial features of person and number) of *it* and the past tense of *be* are determined before these constituents enter the derivation. This means that noun phrases enter the syntax with their  $\phi$ -features valued, and finite T/Infl constituents enter the derivation with a valued tense feature, but their  $\phi$ -features (person, number) remain unvalued yet. In the process of syntactic derivation, the pronoun *it* merges with the passive verb *sold* and forms VP with *it* as the complement [<sub>VP</sub> *sold it*]. This constituent merges with the tense auxiliary *be* and forms the constituent T' [3, p. 241]. At this point, the T-auxiliary *be* will probe and search for a suitable goal to agree with. In the course of agreement, the unvalued  $\phi$ -features on the probe *be* are valued by the goal *it*, i.e. a copy of the goal's values of person / number is assigned to the probe. As a result, *be* acquires the third person and singular number features carried by *it*. At the same time, the unvalued case feature is assigned a value dependent on the nature of the probe, hence *it* is valued as nominative by the finite T-probe *be*. At the point when all the features are valued, *be* is spelled out in the phonology as third person singular past tense *was*, and the pronoun is spelled out as third person singular nominative form *it*. Finally, the EPP feature triggers A-movement of *it* to become the structural subject of *was* [<sub>TP</sub> *it was sold* †]. Once the unvalued, uninterpretable features are checked and valued, they are deleted in the sense that they become invisible for semantic and syntactic components. Consequently, the constituents *it*, *was*

cannot participate in further operations of agreement, case assignment, and A-movement [3, p. 238–246].

Whether agreement, case assignment, and movement occur at the same time remains a disputable question. As the Minimalist syntax claims, all operations involving a given probe –  $\phi$ -feature valuation, feature deletion, case marking, agreement, A-movement – apply simultaneously [4, p. 290]. However, it has been argued that lexical case assignment occurs prior to syntactic operations that change the grammatical relation of the constituents, and this operation is irreversible [5, p. 184]. Such theoretical discrepancies encourage further speculation on the licensing of oblique subjects and their case marking.

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