

Case is Uninterpretable Aspect

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Abstract. This paper is part of an approach to case as the morphological manifestation of features which have a direct semantic interpretation somewhere in the licensing structure. Inspired by Kiparsky's (1998, 2001) work on Finnish case, the interpretable component of Icelandic case is sought in the aspectual domain (Svenonius 2001). However, Icelandic accusative–dative alternations are controlled by factors which are more closely related to lexical structure than is the case with the Finnish accusative–partitive alternation (Svenonius 2002). In this paper, I examine the differences between Structural Case, Semantic Case, and Idiosyncratic Case, arguing that they all can be handled under the general treatment of Icelandic VP-case as determined by interpretable features of Inner Aspect or Aktionsart. These features are not interpretable on the noun phrase as such, hence the title of the paper.

1. Structural versus Inherent Case

Case theory in the generative tradition makes a basic distinction between Structural Case and Inherent Case (cf. Chomsky 1981:170). Structural Case is assigned in a particular structural configuration. For example, the subject of a finite clause in English takes a nominative form, and an object takes an objective form, as in (1a), while the ECM (Exceptional Case Marking) subject in (1b) is objective, because of its structural position.

- (1) a. He drew him.
b. We saw him draw him.

Inherent Case, on the other hand, is not supposed to be sensitive to the structural environment. There are generally assumed to be two types of Inherent Case: Idiosyncratic (or Lexical) Case and Semantic Case (cf. Zaenen & Maling 1984). Idiosyncratic Case is assigned by a lexical head along with a theta-role, and is responsible for, for example, the lexically fixed case which appears with certain prepositions, e.g. genitive with German *statt* 'instead of' or dative with *zu* 'to.'

- (2) a. *statt* eines Fernsehers
instead a.GEN television.GEN
'instead of a television'
b. *zum* neuen Kino
to.the.DAT new.DAT cinema
'to the new cinema'

Semantic Case is case which is not necessarily assigned by a particular lexical head but which is associated with some particular semantic interpretation, for example, accusative with paths and expressions of the measurement of time. Such phenomena can be illustrated with Finnish (exx. from Karlsson 1977: 116).

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- (3) a. Olen Suomessa viikon.
I.am in.Finland week.ACC
'I am in Finland for a week'
b. Viren juoksee kilometrin.
Viren runs kilometer.ACC
'Viren runs for a kilometer'

Informally speaking, the usual way to argue that a given instantiation of case is Structural Case rather than Inherent Case is to find a construction (such as ECM) in which a single DP (such as the subject of 'draw') shows an alternation in case (as between (1a) and (1b)). If it changes, it must be Structural, whereas if it never changes, it might be Inherent. If it is inherent then it should either be attributable to a particular selecting head (as in (2)) or it should have a particular semantic characterization (as in (3)).

Of course, these notions can be collapsed, in different ways. If null prepositions are assumed for cases like those in (3), then Semantic Case can be collapsed with Idiosyncratic Case (cf. Nikanne 1993). If there are no grammatical operations changing the grammatical functions of complements of prepositions (e.g. pseudopassives), then certain instances of Idiosyncratic Case (such as those in (2)) can be collapsed with Structural Case. Thus the only type that definitely exists is Structural Case. In the next section I show that at least some apparent instances of Semantic Case are actually structural.

2. Alternations and Semantic Case

Cases which admit of a semantic characterization often turn out to be Structural Case according to the diagnostics described in the previous section. For example, the adverbial elements in (3) become partitive under negation (as in (4a)) or nominative in imperatives (as in (4b)), just as if they were accusative objects (examples again from Karlsson 1977:116).

- (4) a. En ole Suomessa viikoa.
I.not be in.Finland week.PART
'I am not in Finland for a week'
b. Juokse kilometri!
run.IMP kilometer.NOM
'Run a kilometer!'

Icelandic has accusative paths and measures like the Finnish one in (3b), which also turn out to be Structural Case, changing to nominative under passive as in (5b) (exx. from Zaenen et al. 1985).

- (5) a. Hann keyrði bílinn þessa leið.
he drove the.car.ACC this route.ACC
'He drove the car this way'
b. Þessi leið hefur aldrei verið keyrð.
this route.NOM has never been driven
'This route has never been driven'

However, Icelandic accusative adverbials of temporal duration do not pass this test for Structural Case, as seen in (6) (exx. (6a-b) from Sigurðsson 1989:169).

- (6) a. María las allan daginn.
Maria read all day.ACC
'Maria read all day'
b. Það var lesið allan daginn.
it was read all day.ACC
'Reading went on all day'
c. *Það var lesið allur dagurinn.
it was read all day.NOM

In (6b), the temporal adverbial remains accusative under passive, in contrast to the Finnish negative example (4a). This is not due to a difference between passive and negation; the Finnish passive can promote a temporal adverbial to nominative, as shown in (7) (from Maling 1993).

- (7) a. Siellä viivytettiin kokonainen viiko.
there stayed.PASS whole week.NOM
'We/they/one stayed there a whole week'
b. Käveltiin koko talvi.
walked.PASS whole winter.NOM
'We/they/one walked the whole winter'

From these facts one might conclude that Icelandic locative (path and measure) adverbials get Structural Case, just like Finnish locative adverbials, but that the two languages differ as to how case is assigned to temporal (durational) adverbials: Finnish temporal adverbials get Structural Case, but Icelandic temporal adverbials get Semantic Case. However, I will suggest below that this is not the right way to look at the picture.

In Russian, temporal accusatives are not affected by passive (ex. from Franks 1995).

- (8) Fabrika upravljalas' ètim direktorom vsego odin god.
factory managed.PASS by director only one year.ACC
'The factory was managed by the director for only one year'

This might be taken, in the spirit of the above discussion, to suggest that Russian temporal adverbials pattern with Icelandic temporal adverbials in taking Semantic Case.

However, Genitive of Negation affects them, suggesting that these accusatives are Structural after all (ex. from Pereltsvaig 2000, who cites Babby).

- (9) Ty u nas esche i mesjaca ne rabotaes
you for us yet even month.GEN not work
'You haven't been working for us for even a month'

Rather than characterizing the differences among these languages in terms of which adverbials get Structural Case and which get Semantic Case, it seems more fruitful to characterize them in terms of the domains of the different case-altering operations (or constructions, as you will). Negation, being a clause-level phenomenon, has a larger domain than voice, which is associated approximately with the verb phrase. Russian temporal and locative adverbials are outside the domain of voice, but inside the domain of negation.

For Finnish, (4) shows simply that the imperative and the partitive of negation catch temporal and locative adverbials in their scope, which is expected. (7), however, shows that voice does as well, which suggests that the domain of voice is larger than in Russian (assuming that adverbial elements appear at relatively fixed points cross-linguistically, as suggested by Cinque 1999, while voice is subject to substantial cross-linguistic variation).

Voice is closely tied in general to the assignment of case to VP-internal arguments. The contention that the domain of object case assignment is relatively ‘large’ in Finnish is supported by the fact that the case on Finnish objects is affected by the aspectual properties (boundedness vs. unboundedness) of the verb phrase in which they appear (see Kiparsky 2001 and references there). Such alternations are not found in Russian, consistent with the contention here that voice is lower there than in Finnish.

For Icelandic, in these terms, what (5)–(6) show is that the domain of voice is larger than the domain which is the attachment point for locative measure adverbials, but smaller than the domain of temporal measure adverbials. Thus, the domain of voice is larger than in Russian, but smaller than in Finnish.

These remarks are made at a certain level of abstraction. Note that passive voice in Icelandic does not affect dative case assignment (cf. e.g. Zaenen et al. 1985), while middle voice does (cf. Sigurðsson 1989; exx. here from his p. 269). This is illustrated in (10) with the dative-taking verb *týnda* ‘lose.’

- (10)a. Ég týndi úrinu.
I lost the.watch.DAT
‘I lost the watch’
b. Úrinu var týnt.
the.watch.DAT was lost
‘The watch was lost’
c. Úrið týndist.
the.watch lost.MIDDLE
‘The watch got lost’

This does not mean that middle has a larger domain than passive; the two voices operate differently on direct object arguments, which are attached at exactly the same level. Thus the difference between Icelandic passive voice and Icelandic middle voice is more akin to the difference between the Finnish imperative (in (4b)), which perturbs accusative case assignment, and the Icelandic imperative, which does not (exx. from Svavarsdóttir 1993, a workbook).

- (11)a. Myndið setningar í samræmi við munstrið.
form.PL.IMP sentences.ACC in accordance with the.pattern
‘Form sentences in accordance with the pattern’
b. Kláraðu matinn þinn!
finish.IMP the.food.ACC your
‘Finish your food’

What is important is that these observations remove some support for the basic distinction between Structural and Semantic Case. Semantic interpretations can be associated with cases which are clearly affected by structural factors such as negation and passive. Another result of this brief survey is to highlight the degree to which we should be uncertain that any case,

however semantically transparent, is truly Inherent in the sense outlined in §1. Examples of cases which are apparently immune to structural factors might just reflect an absence of grammatical operations (constructions) which affect those particular cases.

In the next section I probe the difference between Idiosyncratic Case and Structural Case.

3. Idiosyncratic Case and the Spray-Load alternation

Recall from §1 that Idiosyncratic Case, also known as Lexical Case, is case assigned by a particular lexical item to an argument along with a thematic role. It is usually observed to not be truly idiosyncratic, but to reflect certain tendencies and subregularities, possibly of a historical nature (see Svenonius 2002 for references). For example, it may be suggested that the dative tends to be the case of goals, but that since there are goals with cases other than the dative, and datives with thematic roles other than that of goal, dative goals must be stipulated in the lexical entries of the verbs selecting them (cf. e.g. Maling 2001a).

In Svenonius (2001) and Svenonius (2002), I have outlined an approach to Icelandic case in which the lexical decomposition of the verb determines the case of its internal arguments. This builds on earlier work which suggests that it is *v*, the (perhaps causative) head that introduces the external argument, which is responsible for the assignment of accusative case.

This means that Idiosyncratic Case is more like Structural Case than is usually acknowledged. Typical examples of Structural Case are the assignment of nominative by finite T, the assignment of Genitive by possessive D, and the assignment of accusative by V. If Idiosyncratic Dative on an object, say, is the result of a particular piece of lexical semantic structure (say some head which semantically corresponds to the Jackendovian formative TO), then the idiosyncrasy of that dative is not entirely innocent; it has repercussions for the meaning of the verb.

In this section I sketch an example where direct objects appear in the dative case in Icelandic. Traditionally in the generative literature, dative objects have been treated by lexically marking the verb as dative-taking; this is due to the preservation of dative under passive, as noted above in (10) (cf. e.g. Zaenen and Maling 1984).

In the examples to be discussed here, the presence of the dative is semantically predictable, therefore not idiosyncratic; in fact it participates in an alternation, the hallmark of Structural Case.

The verbs in (12) are essentially accusative-taking. The instrumental PPs (with dative-taking *með* 'with') are optional.

- (12)a. Hún spreypjar bílinn með málningu.
she sprays the.car.ACC with paint
'She sprays the car with paint'
b. Við hlóðum vagninn með heyi.
we load the.wagon.ACC with hay
'We load the wagon with hay'
c. Hann smyr brauðið með hnetusmjöri.
he smears the.bread.ACC with peanut.butter
'He smears the bread with peanut butter'

These verbs participate in the well-known spray-load alternation; but when appearing with the so-called 'locatum' argument as direct object, the locatum or moved theme appears in the dative

case. Here the directional prepositional phrases (with accusative locations) are not freely omissible.

- (13)a. Hún spreypjar málningu á bílinn.
she sprays paint.DAT on the.car
'She sprays paint on the car'
b. Við hlóðum heyinu á vagninn.
we load the.hay.DAT on the.wagon
'We load the hay on the wagon'
c. Hann smyr hnetusmjörinu á brauðið.
he smears peanut.butter.DAT on the.bread
'He smears peanut butter on the bread'

I have argued that the dative case on these objects appears because of the particular Aktionsart instantiated in these examples. The theme is generated in the specifier of a small clause of which the directional PP is the predicate (as in Hale and Keyser 1993). Essentially, the activity denoted by the verb and the motion which is expressed in the small clause constitute separate subevents in a larger event, unlike the situation in (12). It is the separation of those subevents which leads to the assignment of dative case in (13). Compare some examples which do not show a case alternation, in (14).

- (14)a. Hann setur skóna á dúkkuna.
he sets shoes.ACC on the.doll
'He puts shoes on the doll'
b. Hann setur dúkkuna í skóna.
he sets the.doll.ACC in shoes
'He puts the doll in shoes'
c. Hann dregur sokkana af stelpunni.
he drags the.socks.ACC off the.girl
'He drags the socks off the girl'
d. Hann dregur stelpuna úr sokkunum.
he drags the.girl.ACC out the.socks
'He drags the girl out of her socks'

In each of the cases in (14), the verb expresses an activity which could be interpreted as chiefly affecting either of two notional participants, and thus there is an alternation in which of them appears as the direct object. The same could be said of (12)–(13). But in (12), the verb essentially expresses the kind of effect that the activity has on the accusative object; the verb itself says something about the locatum; only a liquid can be sprayed, only a solid can be loaded, and only something viscous can be smeared. This is not true of the verbs in (14). This distinction is not the same as that between activity-type verbs and result-type verbs, as (15) shows.

- (15)a. Hann fyllir flöskuna með vatni.
he fills the.bottle.ACC with water
'He fills the bottle with water'
- b. Hann fyllir vatn á flöskuna.
he fills water.ACC on the.bottle
'He fills the bottle with water'
- c. Hann tæmdi vatn úr fötunni.
he emptied water.ACC out the.bucket
'He emptied water from the bucket'
- d. Hann tæmdi fötuna af vatni.
he emptied the.bucket.ACC of water
'He emptied the bucket of water'
- e. Hann fléttaði band í hárið.
he braided ribbons.ACC in the.hair
'He braided ribbons in his hair'
- f. Hann fléttaði hárið með bandi.
he braided the.hair.ACC with ribbons
'He braided his hair with ribbons'

The verb 'fill' implies a particular result (that the container is filled), rather than primarily stating the form of the moved theme. Thus, it is a different lexical class from the spray-load type, and does not appear with dative case in (15b). Verbs which characterize the manner of the agent's actions, such as *sópa* 'sweep,' *maka* 'smear,' *ausa* 'scoop,' and *raka* 'rake' appear in the alternation (see Maling 2001b for a list of such verbs).

- (16)a. Hann sópar gólfíð.
he sweeps the.floor.ACC
'He sweeps the floor'
- b. Hann sópar ruslinu í poka.
he sweeps the.garbage.DAT in bag
'He sweeps the garbage into a bag'
- c. Hún eys bátinn.
she scoops the.boat.ACC
'She bails the boat'
- d. Hún eys vatni úr bátnum.
she scoops water.DAT out boat
'She scoops water out of the boat'
- e. Þeir rökuðu garðinn.
they raked the.yard.ACC
'They raked the yard'
- f. Þeir rökuðu laufum úr garðinum.
they raked leaves.DAT out the.yard
'They raked leaves out of the yard'

- g. Ég vil maka þig í sólaráburði.
I will smear you.ACC in sun.lotion
'I want to smear you with suntan lotion'
- h. Ég vil maka sólaráburði framan í þig
I will smear sun.lotion.DAT forward in you
'I want to smear suntan lotion on your face'

I have argued (Svenonius 2001) that in the accusative cases, the direct object is a Measure (cf. also Arad 1998), while in the dative cases it is not. I have argued furthermore (Svenonius 2002) that other instances of purported Idiosyncratic Case can be analyzed along these lines, by reference to components of the lexical semantics of individual verbs.

4. Dative Experiencers

In this section I briefly discuss a particularly intractable example of Semantic Case, that of the Icelandic experiencer. It has long been noted (cf. Andrews 1982, Zaenen et al. 1985, for example) that subjects in Icelandic may be dative, accusative, or genitive; such case is called quirky in the literature (exx. here from Jónsson 2001).

- (17)a. Bátinn rak á land.
the.boat.ACC drifted to shore
'The boat drifted to shore'
- b. Stelpuna kitlaði í tána.
the.girl.ACC tickled in the.toe
'The girl was ticklish in the toe'
- c. Bátnum hvolfdi á miðjum flóanum.
the.boat.DAT capsized in middle the.bay
'The boat capsized in the middle of the bay'
- d. Sumum leiðist að læra heima.
some.DAT bores to study home
'Some find it boring to do homework'

Jónsson (2001) mounts a particularly well-grounded argument, based on Icelandic quirky case subjects, for distinguishing Semantic Case from Idiosyncratic Case. The argument is that dative case is spreading (so-called 'Dative Sickness') to experiencer subjects of verbs which historically appeared with some other case (thus (11b) is used with dative, by some speakers), while theme subjects which historically took non-nominative cases are tending to become nominative in modern speech (thus (11a) and (11c) both appear in the nominative, for some speakers). This is explained if the dative case on experiencers is a Semantic Case assigned by a rule, while dative case on theme subjects is an Idiosyncratic Case which must be learned (nominative being the 'default' case for subjects).

If there is a difference between Semantic Case and Idiosyncratic Case, then it is not true that both can be reduced to Structural Case.

Of course, a counterproposal to Jónsson's analysis would be to claim that dative case on experiencer subjects is Structural, and that the spread of dative is due to a change in the structure of the relevant verbs. For example, if there is an 'experiencer *v*' in the structure of certain experiencer verbs which is responsible for dative case, then verbs like that in (11b) might be

being reanalyzed by speakers as having experiencer v instead of, say, ‘cause v ’ (see e.g. Arad 1998 on the decomposed vP structure of causative and experiencer predicates).

But as Jónsson notes, Icelandic has a wide variety of constructions in which no verb seems to be responsible for the dative case on the experiencer. Jónsson lists these constructions as they ordinarily appear, with *vera* ‘be’ or *verða* ‘become,’ but when embedded under *telja* ‘believe,’ an ECM verb which tends to allow small clauses, the dative case remains, showing that the copular elements are not actually necessary (see Zaenen et al. 1985 for tests showing that the DP after *telja* is the subject of the embedded clause).

- (18)a. Við teljum henni fyrir mestu að fara til útlanda.
we consider her.DAT for most to travel to foreign.country
‘We consider it most important for her to travel abroad’
- b. ?Þeir telja honum efst í huga þakklæti til Jóns.
they consider him.DAT uppermost in mind gratitude to John
‘They consider him to be thinking mainly of gratitude to John’
- c. ?Ég tel honum illa við þetta.
I consider him.DAT ill with this
‘I consider him to dislike this’

As indicated, some examples of this type are degraded, speakers preferring to include the verb *vera* ‘be’ after the ECM subject (other examples are completely impossible). However, at least some, such as (18a), are completely acceptable, and there is in any event no case alternation, in that the experiencer remains dative—despite the absence of any verbal experiencer predicate. Thus, if Icelandic experiencer datives are due to an experiencer v , it must be capable of appearing independently of any overt verb (unexpectedly).

Thus it seems that in order to entirely fold Semantic Case into Structural Case, it is necessary to adopt a nonapparent level of structure, be it in the form of a null case-assigning head (like experiencer v) or a case rule specific to a construction (in the sense used in Construction Grammar).

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to promote a view of case as realizing interpretable features which may not be interpretable on the noun phrase itself. In §2 I suggested that language-specific differences in constructions like passive may obscure the structural properties of some cases generally analyzed as Semantic. In §3 I suggested that features of Aktionsart may determine the distribution of object case, which is usually left to Idiosyncratic lexical stipulation. I have generally eschewed making use of thematic notions such as Agent and Experiencer, in accordance with recent work that has attempted to limit linking principles to aspectual factors. However a residue of such thematic notions may remain, as discussed in §4.

This approach adopts from Chomsky (1999, 2001) the treatment of syntactically relevant features as appearing in interpretable–uninterpretable pairs, but without treating case as an exception to that general pattern.

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