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Marked Nominative: Form and Function

Corinna Handschuh Michael Cysouw

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig

Workshop on Grammar and Processing of Verbal
Arguments,
Leipzig, April 20th–21th 2007



Outline

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Traditionally Marked Nominative languages are defined by the following formal properties (Dixon 1979):

- (Transitive and intransitive) subjects receive overt morphological marking (nominative case)
- Objects receive no overt marking (zero coding)



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Wappo (Yukian), Thompson et al. (2006: 33,14):

- (1) *hel-i* *šut̃i:-šiʔ*
fire-NOM go_out-DUR
'The fire is going out.'
- (2) *mi-meʔ* *hel-khutem-i* *maʔa haʔ* *hel* *neʔ-khiʔ*
2SG-GEN fire-oven-NOM still Q fire have-STAT
'Does your fireplace still have fire in it?'



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A second type of marked nominative languages can be distinguished from the form based definition (König 2006).

- Nominative (S+A) and accusative case (P) are formally distinguished
- The accusative form is used in the widest range of functions (default case)



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Gamo (Omotic), Hompó (1990: 364):

- (3) *šankanca-z-ii* *dangarsa-z-aa*
hunter-DEF-NOM elephant-DEF-ACC
wod'-i-d-es
kill-PM-TN-COMPLX
'The hunter killed the elephant.'



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- Typological study of marked nominative languages (MNL)
- Case marking within a number of subject-like constructions
 - Nominal, existential and locational predication
 - Topicalized and focused subjects
 - Extra-syntactic forms (citation and address form)
 - Subjects introduced by valency increasing operations
 - Possessors
 - Subjects of subordinate clauses
 - ...



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Languages Studied So Far

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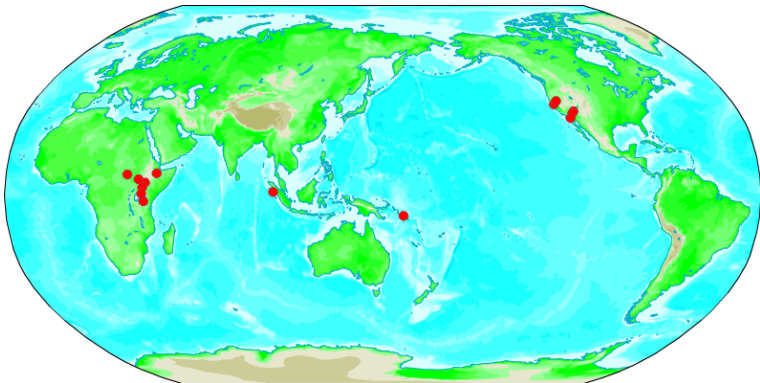
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König's Definition of Functionally Unmarked

König (2006: 677) lists a number of functions which have to be or can be fulfilled by the accusative form in MNLs:

- Citation form
- Object function
- Nominal predicate in copula clauses
- S & A before the verb
- Possessor
- Indirect object
- Participants introduced by head-marking devices
- After prepositions
- Basis for case inflection ('Basis for case doubling')
- Patients of passives
- Further participants

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König's Definition of Functionally Unmarked

In the following we will have a closer look at some of these. Namely:

- Citation form
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- Nominal predicate in copula clauses
- S & A before the verb
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Recapitulating König's 2006: 658 definition, it is clear that the citation form is an important indicator of a MNL for her.

*“In type 1 of marked nominative languages, **the accusative is** morphologically unmarked, functionally unmarked and **used in citation**. In type 2, **the accusative is** morphologically marked, functionally unmarked and **used in citation**.”*



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The accusative form is identical to the citation form in most languages, but:

- The (marked) nominative form is the standard citation form in Maidu, however, Shipley (1964: 30) notes that younger speakers use the accusative form in citation
- In Mojave many speakers tend to add a final *-a* or *-ə* to any noun in isolation (Munro 1976: 128, footnote 3)



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From her study on African MNLs König (2006: 678) concludes that the nominal predicate is a function which is most likely to be fulfilled by the accusative:

“Nominal predicates are always covered by the accusative, except where the languages has developed a case just covering this function.”



Nominal Predicates

The Yuman Situation

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In most Yuman languages the nominal predicate, rather than the subject of predication, is marked with the nominative affix:

Dieguño, Mesa Grande dialect (Yuman) Gorbet (1976: 15):

- (4) *ixpa-pu a:sa:-c yis*
eagle-DEM bird-NOM is_indeed
'The eagle is a bird'



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Yet Another Pattern in Maidu

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Whereas in Maidu (5) both arguments receive the nominative:

Maidu (Penutian), Shipley (1964: 30):

- (5) *mym kylókbe-m ma-káde*
DEM old_woman-NOM be-INTERR
mín-kotò-m
2-grandmother-NOM
'Is that old woman your grandmother?'



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Variation in Africa

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Also there seems to be more variation in African languages:

Wolaytta (Omotic), Lamberti & Sottile (1997: 225):

- (6) a. *ha-nna gelaawi-ya*
DEM-one girl-NOM
- b. *ha-nna gelaawi-y^u*
DEM-one girl-ACC
- ‘This is a girl.’



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Another important factor in determining the functionally unmarked case is the paradigmatic build-up of the case system.

This includes the relation between the accusative and the nominative form (König 2006: 658):

As well as the building of oblique case forms, referred to as 'case doubling'.



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Another important factor in determining the functionally unmarked case is the paradigmatic build-up of the case system.

This includes the relation between the accusative and the nominative form (König 2006: 658):

“If one of the two cases is derived from the other, it must be the nominative which is derived from the accusative”

As well as the building of oblique case forms, referred to as ‘case doubling’.



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This includes the relation between the accusative and the nominative form (König 2006: 658):

As well as the building of oblique case forms, referred to as 'case doubling'. Explained in the following way by König (2006: 683):

“The case marker is not suffixed to the morphological unmarked form, but to a form which itself is already a derived case form.”



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This includes the relation between the accusative and the nominative form (König 2006: 658):

As well as the building of oblique case forms, referred to as 'case doubling'.

She states that in Wolaytta the accusative is the basis of case doubling (ibid. p. 677).



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The Wolaytta Case System Revisited

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| NOM | -ay | ya/ -iy ^a | -i |
| ACC | -a | -yu/ -iyu | -a |
| GEN | -aa | -ee | -u |
| DAT | -aa-ss ⁱ | -ee-ss ⁱ | -uu-ss ⁱ |
| LOC | -aa-n ⁱ | — | -u-n ⁱ |
| ALL | -aa-kko | -ee-kko | -u-kko |
| ABL | -aa-ppe | -ee-ppe | -uu-ppe |
| COM | -aa-ra | -ee-ra | -u-ra |
| VOC | -ow/ -aw | -ey | -oow |

Lamberti & Sottile (1997: 67ff.)



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- Comparing our 14 MNLs with 6 non-MNLs
- Method: take every pair of these 20 languages
- Count in how many constructions their case assignment is the same
- Visualize which languages are similar in their case assignments



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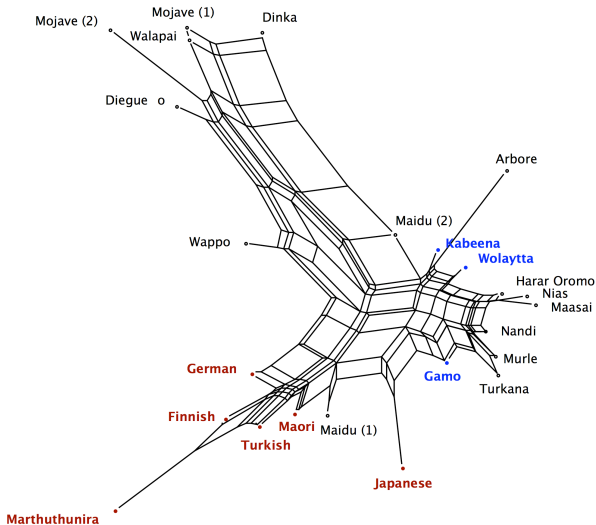
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What we have learned about marked nominative languages

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- Some of the properties of African MNLs cannot be generalized to all MNLs
- It is not always the accusative, which has all the functions
- More data are needed in order to understand the rare phenomenon of marked nominative languages



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Handschuh,
Cysouw

Form vs.
Function

Formally Marked
Nominative

Functionally Marked
Nominative

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Project

Counter-
examples

Citation Form
Nominal Predicates

Base of Case
Inflection

A Preliminary
Typology

Summary

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