The Interaction Between Syntax and Morphology

A Brief Overview
Our Roadmap

- Review of case and case systems
- Overview of agreement with nouns
- The relationship between meaning and morphology
  - Sometimes there is one, sometimes not
- The interaction between word order and morphology
Review of Case Systems

**Nominative**
- \( A \) = subject of transitive
- \( S \) = subject of intransitive
- \( O \) = object of transitive

**Accusative**

**Ergative**

**Absolutive**

**NOTE:** Absolutive is sometimes labeled Nominative.
Latin: a canonical case-marking language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nominative</td>
<td>porta</td>
<td>portae</td>
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<tr>
<td>genitive</td>
<td>portae</td>
<td>portarum</td>
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<td>dative</td>
<td>portae</td>
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<td>accusative</td>
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<td>ablative</td>
<td>porta</td>
<td>portis</td>
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<tr>
<td>vocative</td>
<td>porta</td>
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(Butt 2006)

Important: Each form in the paradigm does not have to be unique. Syncretism is when languages use the same morphological form to indicate different information.

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nominative = subject

genitive = possessive

dative = indirect object

accusative = direct object

ablative = motion to/from or instrumental
  • e.g. - with his hands

vocative = person/thing being addressed
  • e.g. – John, are you ready?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
</tr>
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<td>English</td>
<td>to talk</td>
<td>talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>hablar</td>
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<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td>hablo</td>
<td>hablas</td>
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<td>plural</td>
<td>hablamos</td>
<td>hablaís</td>
<td>hablán</td>
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Verbs agree with subjects (which have nominative case) in Spanish and English (kinda).

(From Paul Mains’ Ling 100 presentation, Fall 2010)
Cross-linguistically, verbs like to agree with nominative or absolutive DPs.

1. a. Við lásum bókina.  
   we.Nom read.1pl book.the.Acc  
   ‘We read the book.’ (Sigurðsson 1996, Ex 14)

   b. Einum málfráðingi líkuðu þessar hugmyndir.  
      one.Dat linguist.Dat liked.3pl these.Nom ideas.Nom.pl  
      ‘One linguist liked these ideas.’ (Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008)

   • NOTE: The non-Nominative really is a subject, not a topicalized object. Many syntacticians have illustrated this point.

2. a. Sudha away-i.  
    Sudha(fem).Abs came-fem  
    ‘Sudha came.’

   b. Sudha-e radio khəridy-o.  
      Sudha(fem)-Erg radio(masc).Abs bought-masc  
      ‘Sudha bought a radio.’ (Woolford 2006)

Gujarati is spoken by appr. 48 million ppl, primarily in India.
Noun Classes and Agreement

Noun classes are like genders.

In Archi, the verb, adverb, and indirect object agree with the absolutive noun.

- a. buwa d-axarši d-i
  mother(II).Abs II-lie.down II-be
  ‘Mother is lying down.’

- b. dija w-axarši w-i
  father(I).Abs I-lie.down I-be
  ‘Father is lying down.’

- c. buwa-mu b-ez dita<b>u xʷ alli a<b>u
  mother(II)-Erg III-1sg.Dat early<III> bread(III).Abs made<III>
  ‘Mother made bread for me early.’

- d. dija-mu ez dita<t>u nok4’ a<∅>w
  father(I)-Erg IV.1sg.Dat early<IV> house(IV).Abs made<IV>
  ‘Father made a house for me early.’

(Corbett 2006)
In NOM-ACC languages, non-nominative subjects tend to be less agentive than their nominative counterparts.

All of the finite verbs are in the 3rd singular form. Verbs do not agree with non-nominative subjects.

(1) a. Mig dreymdi í nótta
    ‘I had a dream last night’

    b. Sumum leiðist að læra heima
    some-D is-bored to study at home
    ‘Some (people) find it boring to do homework’

    c. Jóns nýtur ekki lengur við
    John-G enjoys not longer at
    ‘John is no longer available’

(2) a. Fólkinu sármúðu þessi ummæli
    the people-D hurt these words-N
    ‘The people were hurt by these words’

    b. Hana verkjar í bakin
    her-A aches in the back
    ‘Her back is aching’

    c. Mig minnir að hann búa í Reykjavík
    me-A remembers that he lives in R.
    ‘I seem to remember that he lives in Reykjavík’

    d. Eiríki finnst þetta ómögulegт
    Eric-D finds this-N impossible

(Jónsson 2003)
Some Verbs Alternate Between a Nominative and a Dative Subject

\[ (4) \]

- a. Peir sömdu um þetta
  - they-N agreed on this
  - ‘They reached an agreement on this’

- b. Peim samdi ekki
  - them-D agreed not
  - ‘They did not get along’

\[ (5) \]

- a. Börnin læðu að hlyða
  - the children-N learned to obey

- b. Börnunum læðist að hlyða
  - the children-D learned to obey

- (4a): they volitionally agreed on something
- (4b): they had the experience of not getting along

- (5a): læra ‘to learn by experience or conscious effort’
- (5b): lærast ‘to learn by experience’

(Jónsson 2003)
Ergative languages sometimes also distinguish between a more agentive and less agentive subject.

\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \text{ nino-m Ceril-i } \text{ daCera.} \\
& \text{ Nino-ERG letter-NOM wrote-3SGS;3O} \\
& \text{ ‘Nino wrote a letter.’} \\
b. & \text{ Kar-i } \text{ gaiγo.} \\
& \text{ door-NOM opened-3SGS} \\
& \text{ ‘The door opened.’} \\
c. & *\text{Kar-ma } \text{ gaiγo.} \\
& \text{ door-ERG opened-3SGS} \\
& \text{ ‘The door opened.’} \\
d. & \text{ nino-m } \text{ imγera.} \\
& \text{ Nino-ERG sang-3SGS} \\
& \text{ ‘Nino sang.’}
\end{align*}
\]

(Butt 2006)

Georgian

Spoken by appr 4.3 million ppl in Georgia, Russia, the US, Israel, Ukraine, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan

NOM = ABS in (a) – and arguably in (b).
The case of the subject depends on volitionality.

(44): he just happened to see his wife.

(45): he made a special effort to see his wife
Back to Icelandic:
Adjectives can also agree with nouns

a. Prestarnir hittu biskupinn drukknir.
   priests.the.N.M.PL met bishop.the.A.M.SG drunk.N.M.PL
   ‘The priests met the bishop drunk (i.e. the priests were drunk).’

b. Prestarnir hittu biskupinn drukkinn.
   priests.the.N.M.PL met bishop.the.A.M.SG drunk.A.M.SG
   ‘The priests met the bishop drunk (i.e. the bishop was drunk).’

c. Prestarnir sýndu biskupnum óvirðingú drukknunum.
   priests.the.N.M.PL showed bishop.the.D.M.SG disrespect drunk.D.M.SG
   ‘The priests showed the bishop disrespect (when he was) drunk.’

d. Prestarnir föru til biskupsins drukkinum.
   priests.the.N.M.PL went to bishop.the.G.M.SG drunk.G.M.SG
   ‘The priests went to the bishop (when he was) drunk.’

(Sigurðsson 2006)

The verbs are all 3pl; they agree with the nominative subject
a. Jón las ekki bækurnar.
   John.Nom read.3sg not the books.Acc
   ‘John did not read the books

b. Jón hefur ekki leið bækurnar.
   John.Nom has.3sg not read the books.Acc
   ‘John has not read the books.’
   (Collins and Thráinsson 1996)
Some quantifiers in Icelandic also agree with the nouns they modify.

a. Strákarnir komust allir í skóla.
   boys.the.nom got all.nom.pl.masc in school.Dat
   ‘The boys all got to school.’

b. Strákana vantaði alla í skólann.
   boys.the.acc lacked all.acc.pl.masc in school.the.Acc
   ‘The boys all missed school.’

c. Strákunum leiddist öllum í skóla.
   boys.the.dat bored all.dat.pl.masc in school.Dat
   ‘The boys all felt bored in school.’

d. Strákanna var allra getið í ræðunni.
   boys.the.gen were all.gen.pl.masc mentioned in speech.the.Dat
   ‘The boys were all mentioned in the speech.’ Sigurðsson 1991

How do we get the surface order?
What is ‘all’ agreeing with???

a. Strákarnir vonast til að komast allir í skóla.
   boys.the.nom hope for that to get all.nom.pl.masc in school.Dat
   ‘The boys all hope to get to school.’

b. Strákarnir vonast til að vanta ekki alla í skólann.
   boys.the.nom hope for that to lack not all.acc.pl.masc in school.the.Acc
   ‘The boys all hope not to miss school.’

c. Strákarnir vonast til að leiðast ekki öllum í skóla.
   boys.the.nom hope for that to bore not all.dat.pl.masc in school.Dat
   ‘The boys all hope not to be bored in school.’

d. Strákarnir vonast til að verða allra getið í ræðunni.
   boys.the.nom hope for that to be all.gen.pl.masc mentioned in speech.the.Dat
   ‘The boys all hope to be mentioned in the speech.’

(Sigurðsson 1991)
Sometimes case on a noun can encode information about an entire sentence.

- There’s *lots* of case in Finnish – 16 of them (depending on how you count)!

- In Finnish, direct objects are *accusative* if the activity is necessarily complete.

- Direct objects are *partitive* if the activity isn’t necessarily complete.

(1) a. Ammu - i - n  karhu - a.  
   shoot - past - 1sg bear - part
   I shot at a bear.  
   I shot at the bear.

   b. Ammu - i - n  karhu - n.  
   shoot - past - 1sg bear - acc
   I shot the bear.  
   I shot a bear.

(2) a. Ammu - i - n  karhu - j - a.  
   shoot - past - 1sg bear - pl - part
   I shot bears.  
   I shot at bears.  
   I shot at the bears.

   b. Ammu - i - n  karhu - t.  
   shoot - past - 1sg bear - pl - acc
   I shot the bears.

   Jussi-Nom paint-Pst(3Sg) house-Acc (red-Transl)
   ‘Jussi painted the (a) [whole] house (red).’

   Jussi-Nom paint-Pst(3Sg) house-Part (red-Transl)
   ‘Jussi was painting the (a) house (red).’

(Kratzer 2002)
Hindi-Urdu

- Subject is ergative if the verb is in the **perfective aspect** (the action has necessarily been completed).

**Nominative subject:** Not perfective. We don’t know if the action was completed. (‘hab’ means habitual)

Rahul kitaab parh-taa thaa
Rahul.masc.nom book.fem.acc read-hab.masc.sg be.past.masc.sg
‘Rahul used to read (a/the) book.’

**Ergative subject:** Perfective. The action has been completed.

Rahul-ne kitaab parh-ii thii
Rahul-erg book.fem.acc/abs read-pfv.fem.sg be.past.fem.sg
‘Rahul had read the book.’

- We can’t tell if the object is acc or abs

Bhatt 2005
Sometimes word order affects agreement

Standard Arabic

- Verb agrees in person, gender, number when the subject is preverbal
- Verb agrees in person and gender when the subject is post-verbal.

(Samek-Lodovici 2003)
**Standard Italian:** No change
- Person and number agreement with pre and post-verbal subject

**Urbino (Southern Italian dialect):**
- Number agreement when pre-verbal
- No number agreement when post-verbal

(Samek-Lodovici 2003)
• When an object is adjacent to the verb, the accusative marking is optional.

• Generally SOV = (2)/(4)

• But the object can be fronted = (3). And then the accusative marking is required.

(2) John-at tákkon(-a) chop-a-h.
John-NOM peach(-ACC) bought
‘John bought a peach.’ (Broadwell 2006:39)

(3) Tákkon-a John-at chop-a-h.
peach-ACC John-NOM bought
‘John bought a peach.’ (Broadwell 2006:39)

(4) Hattak-at alla-yă towa(-yă) i-pila-tok.
man-NOM child-ACC ball(-ACC) APPL-throw-past
‘The man threw the child the ball.’ (Davies 1986:7, reglossed³)

Choctaw
Spoken by appr 10,400 ppl in Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Tennessee

(Data appears in Woolford 2008)
Slovenian

• Generally nominative-accusative and the nominative can be pre or post-verbal
• Verbal agreement in gender and number with nominatives
• When there’s a nominative conjoined DP, the verb agrees with the closest DP

(7) Včeraj so odšla /*odšle [ teleta in krave ] na pašo.
yesterday aux went_N-PL went_F-PL [ calf_N-PL and cow_F-PL ] on graze
‘Yesterday calves and cows went grazing.’

(8) Včeraj so odšle /*odšla [ krave in teleta ] na pašo.
yesterday aux went_F-PL went_N-PL [ cow_F-PL and calf_N-PL ] on graze
‘Yesterday cows and calves went grazing.’

(9) [ Krave in teleta ] so odšla /*odšle na pašo.
[ cow_F-PL and calf_N-PL ] aux went_N-PL went_F-PL on grazing
‘Calves and cows went grazing.’

(10) [ Teleta in krave ] so odšle /*odšla na pašo.
[ calf_N-PL and cow_F-PL ] aux went_F-PL went_N-PL on grazing
‘Calves and cows went grazing.’

(Marušič et al 2007)

N=neuter
F=feminine
The main clause verb cannot agree with a DP inside of a relative clause

(14) Šotori in postelje, ki so jih dali vojaki, so smrdele. tent\textsubscript{M-PL} and bed\textsubscript{F-PL} that aux them gave soldiers\textsubscript{M} aux stank\textsubscript{F-PL} ‘Tents and beds that were given by the soldiers stank.’

(15) Trditev, da je Peter odšel, je absurdna. claim\textsubscript{F-SG} that aux Peter\textsubscript{M-SG} left\textsubscript{M-SG} is absurd\textsubscript{F-SG} ‘The claim that Peter left is absurd.’

(Marušič et al 2007)

Linear order isn’t the only factor
Other intervening material also doesn’t interfere

(16) Teleta in krave so (včeraj zjutraj) odšle na pašo
calves$_N$ and cows$_F$ aux (yesterday morning) went$_{F,PL}$ on grazing
‘Calves and cows went grazing yesterday early morning.’

And, split closest conjunct agreement is allowed, though odd.

(17) Včeraj so bile [krave in teleta ] prodana.
yesterday aux been$_{F,PL}$ [cow$_{F,PL}$ and calf$_{N,PL}$ ] sold$_{N,PL}$
‘Yesterday cows and calves were sold.’

(Marušič et al 2007)
Transitive
atləg-ə ən-in l’ulqəl rə-gtəkwən-nən.
father-erg 3sg-poss face.abs cause-freeze-3sg:3sg:past
‘Father suffered frost-bite on his face.’

• Verb agrees with subject and object

Intransitive
atləg-ən l’o-nə-gtəkwət-g’e
father-abs face-cause-freeze-3sg:past
‘Father got face frost-bitten.’

• Verb agrees with subject

The object is “incorporated” into the verb and the sentence is now intransitive.

Chukchi
Spoken by appr 5.100 ppl in Eastern Russia

(Tallerman 2005)
Another Transitivity-Changing Pattern: The Antipassive

**Transitive**

atləg-ə  keyng-ən  penrə-nen  
father-erg  bear-abs  attack-3sg:3sg:past  
‘Father attacked the bear.’

- Verb agrees with subject and object

**Intransitive**

atləg-ən  penrə-tko-gʔe  keyng-etə  
father-abs  attack-antipassive-3sg:past  bear-dat  
‘Father ran at the bear.’

- Verb agrees with subject

(Tallerman 2005)
• Sometimes syntactic features are expressed morphologically, sometimes not.

• In general, verbs like to agree with nominative or absolutive DPs.

• Languages can use case to encode information about a particular noun or information about the activity denoted in the verb phrase.

• Surface word order can interact with agreement.


Marušič, Franc, Andrew Nevins, and Amanda Saksida. 2007. Ms. available at ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/000382.


