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ARGUMENT ENCODING IN TWO-TERM CASE SYSTEMS:
POSSIBLE NEUTRALIZATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

❶ Previous studies of 2-case systems: very scarce (cf. Arkadiev 2008a, 2008b), as well as mentions in general literature on case, e.g. Blake 2001/1994 or Mel'čuk 2006.

☞ **a new and important field of research.**

❷ What is a 2-case system?

✦ only two grammaticalized case markers (one of them may be and usually is zero): **Dir**(ect) and **Obl**(ique);

✦ cases must express semantico-syntactic roles of arguments in sentences (so, Swedish with a Genitive vs. a 'general' case does not count);

✦ less clear situations (case expressed only with pronouns; case expressed by clitics etc.; multilayered case systems like in Indo-Aryan etc.).

❸ Two-term case systems in the world's languages (a preliminary survey):

   1. Europe: Indo-European:
      1.1. Romance: Old French, Old Provençal, Romanian
      1.2. Germanic: English (pronouns), Continental Scandinavian dialects
   2. Asia: Indo-European:
      2.1. Indo-Iranian: Iranian, Dardic, Nuristani, some Indo-Aryan languages
      2.2. Burushaski
      2.3. North-West Caucasian: Adyghe, Kabardian
   3. Africa:
      3.1. Semitic: Amharic, Ge'ez, Harari etc.
      3.2. Berber: Kabyle, Tamazight, Tachelhit etc.
      3.3. Cushitic: Somali, Oromo, Gidole etc.
      3.4. Nilotic: Maasai, Nandi, Päri etc.
   4. Americas:
      4.1. Salish: Squamish, Shuswap, Halkomelem, Saanich etc;
      4.2. Tsimshianic (with proper names only)
      4.3. Chinook (?)
      4.4. Muskogean: Choktaw
      4.5. Uto-Aztecan: Yaqui, Chemehuevi, Hopi
      4.6. Chibchan: Teribe
      4.7. Eskimo-Aleut: Aleut
      4.8. Amazonian: Movima (unclassified)
      4.9. Panoan: Matís
   5. Australia & Oceania:
      5.1. Austronesian: Nias (Malayo-Polynesian, near Sumatra), probably some others
      5.2. Papuan: Yimas (Sepik-Ramu), probably some others
      5.3. Australia: Maung (Yiwaidjan)

Number of known languages: ca. 75.

☞ **2-case systems are quite widespread**.

2. A functional typology of two-term case systems

✋ How does a minimal case system structure the universal semantic field of case functions?

✦ 'core' functions (cf. Dixon 1994): **A**(gent of a transitive verb), **P**(atient of a transitive verb), **S**(ole argument of an intransitive verb); also **Pred** (nominal predicate), **Top**(ic);

✦ 'peripheral' functions: **Rec**(ipient), **Poss**(essor in an NP), **Loc**(ation), **Goal**, **Temp**(oral extent/point), **Manner**, **Ins**(trument), **Com**(itative) etc.

➢ Two principal parameters of variation:

✦ the **case zone**: the range of functions covered in a particular language by cases (and not by adpositions);

✦ the distribution of functions from the case zone among the two cases.

➢ Major types of 2-case systems:

1. **narrow** systems, where the case zone includes only the core semantico-syntactic relations (Wakhi, Panjabi, Interior Tsimshian);
2. **intermediate** systems, where the case zone includes the core relations and only one or two peripheral functions (Maung, Berber, Norwegian dialects, Aleut);
3. **broad** systems, where the case zone includes the core relations and many peripheral functions (the overwhelming majority):
    3.1. **distributing** systems, where both cases have core as well as peripheral functions (Kati, Yaghnobi, Nias);
    3.2. **dividing** systems, where (almost) all peripheral functions are attributed to a single case (usually Oblique), which may also have some core functions (the overwhelming majority).

☞ Minimal systems tend to express many different functions, showing no 'reluctance' towards polysemy or homonymy.

☞ 'Natural' form-function pairings: a peripheral function, e.g. Loc or Temp, is expressed by case with nouns denoting 'matching' concepts (locations or temporal intervals), but by other means otherwise (Aristar 1997).

➢ A typical broad system: OLD FRENCH (Indo-European > Romance)

(1) *li   chevalier-s   s=en   part.*
     ART:DIR   knight-DIR.SG   REFL=CL   departs
     'The knight departs from there.'   S (Dir; Foulet 1970: 4)

(2) *il   vit   un   home   crucefié.*
     he:DIR   saw   ART:OBL.SG   man(OBL.SG)   crucified(OBL.SG)
     'He saw a crucified man.'   A (Dir) and P (Obl; Moignet 1976: 90)

(3) *il   est   me-s   pere.*
     he:DIR   is   my-DIR.SG father:DIR.SG
     'He is my father.'   Pred (Dir; Foulet 1970: 8)

(4) *dites   le   roi   que...*
     say:IMP.2PL   the:OBL.SG king(OBL.SG)   that
     'Tell the king that...'   Rec (Obl; Moignet 1976: 91)

(5) *la   niece   le   duc*
     the   niece   the:OBL.SG duke(OBL.SG)
     'the niece of the duke'   Poss (Obl; Foulet 1970: 14)

(6)   *droit*   *sentier*   *qui*   *cele*   *part*   *le*   *menast.*
         direct(OBL.SG)   road(OBL.SG)   that:DIR.SG   this(OBL.SG)   place(OBL.SG)   he.OBL   would.lead
         [He could not find] a direct road that would lead him to that place.'
                                                                   Goal (Obl; Moignet 1976: 96)

(7)   *Erec*   *dormi*   *po*   *cele*   *nuit.*
         Eric:DIR.SG   slept   little   this(OBL.SG)   night(OBL.SG)
         'Eric slept a little this night.'   Temp (Obl; Moignet 1976: 95)

(8)   *s'=en*   *part*   *le-s*   *gran-z*   *galop-s.*
         REFL=CL   departs   the-OBL.PL   great-OBL.PL   gallop-OBL.PL
         '[And the knight] departs in great gallop.'   Manner (Obl; Foulet 1970: 32)

3. Alignment patterns in two-term case-systems
❶ A general outline

    ✦ *core* vs. *peripheral*: all core relations are expressed by a single case (usually the unmarked
       Dir), while other semantic roles are subsumed under the marked Obl (*neutral* alignment);
    ✦ *nominative* vs. *oblique*: either S/A or S/P relation is encoded by one case, while the other
       core role falls together with peripheral semantic roles (*accusative* or *ergative* alignment).

❷ Core vs. peripheral systems are common among the polysynthetic languages with rich head-marking morphology (e.g. Salish, Yimas, Aleut), but they are not limited to this type of language (cf. Romanian and Norwegian dialects).

YIMAS (Papuan, Papua-New Guinea; Foley 1991: 125, 193)

(9)   a. *panmal*   *na-tmuk-t.*
         man   3SG.S-fall-PRF
         'The man fell down.'   (intransitive)

       b. *payum*   *narmaŋ*   *na-mpu-tay.*
         man:PL   woman   3SG.P-3PL.A-see
         'The men saw the woman.'   (monotransitive)

ROMANIAN (Indo-European > Romance, Romania; Beyrer et al. 1987: 86, 87)

(10) a. *popor=ul*   *sîntem*   *noi.*
         people(DIR.SG)-ART.DIR.SG   COP.1SG   we
         'The people is us.'   (intransitive)

       b. *corb*   *na*   *corb*   *nu*   *scoate*   *och-i=i.*
         crow(DIR.SG)   PREP   crow(DIR.SG)   NEG   peck.out   eye-DIR.PL=ART.DIR.PL
         'A crow does not peck out the eyes of another crow.'   (monotransitive)

☞ The 'core' case is not necessarily morphologically unmarked:

ALEUT (Eskimo-Aleut, USA; Bergsland 1997: 126, 138)

(11) a. *tayaĝu-x̂*   *awa-ku-x̂.*
         man-DIR.SG   work-PRS-3SG
         'The man is working.'   (intransitive)

       b. *hla-x̂*   *asxinu-x̂*   *kidu-ku-x̂.*
         boy-DIR.SG   girl-DIR.SG   help-PRS-3SG
         'The boy is helping the girl.'   (monotransitive)

☞ The differences emerge with ditransitive predicates (cf. Haspelmath 2006 for a typology):

YIMAS (Papuan, Papua-New Guinea; Foley 1991: 229): neutral alignment

(12) *ŋaykum   makaw payum   wa-mpu-ŋa-r-mpun.*
      woman:PL   makau man:PL   3SG.O-3PL.A-give-PRF-3PL.REC
      'The men gave the women makau' or 'The women gave the men makau.'   (ditransitive)

ROMANIAN (Indo-European > Romance, Romania; Beyrer et al. 1987: 87): indirective alignment

(13) *spunei   mame=i   adevăr=ul.*
      tell(IMP)   mother:OBL.SG-ART.OBL.SG   truth(DIR.SG)=ART.DIR.SG
      'Tell mother the truth!'   (ditransitive)

MOVIMA (Amazonian, unclassified, Bolivia; Haude 2006: 281, 282): secundative alignment

(14) a. *usko bayacho=us   as   wa:so.*
         he   break=3SG.M   ART   window
         'He broke the window.'   (monotransitive)

      b. *kayaɬe=us   os   pa:ko   n-os   charke.*
         give=3SG.M   ART   dog   OBL-ART   meat
         'He gave the meat to the dog.'   (ditransitive)

❸ Nominative vs. oblique systems fall into several types according to the distribution of core relations among the two cases.

    ✦ 'trivial' nominative vs. accusative systems (Amharic, Persian)

AMHARIC (Afroasiatic > Semitic, Ethiopia; Leslau 1995: 180, 181)

(15) a. *bəzu   säw   mäṭṭ-a.*
         many   man(DIR)   come:PST-3SG
         'Many people came.'   (intransitive)

      b. *wəšša-w   bäqlo-wa-n   näkkäs-ä.*
         dog-ART   mule-ART-OBL   bite:PST-3SG
         'The dog bit the mule.'   (monotransitive)

    ✦ 'marked nominative' systems (Berber, Nilotic, Cushitic; Muskogean; Old French)

KABYLE (Afroasiatic > Berber, Alger; Chaker 1983: 276, 279)

(16) a. *fɣ-n   y-rgaz-n.*
         left-3PL   OBL-man-PL
         'The men left.'   (intransitive)

      b. *y-wt   aqšiš-ni   w-rgaz-im.*
         3SG-hit (DIR)boy-this OBL-man-2SG
         'Your husband hit this boy.'   (monotransitive)

☞ Topicalized subjects are encoded by Dir; only rhematic subjects get Obl marking:

TACHELHIT (Afroasiatic > Berber, Morocco; Galand 1964: 34, 40):

(17) a. *ikrz   u-rgaz   igr.*
         worked OBL-man   (DIR)field
         'The man worked the field.'   (transitive; rhematic subject)

      b. *a-rgaz   ikrz   igr.*
         DIR-man   worked DIR:field
         'The man, he worked the field.'   (transitive; topical subject)

✦ ergative vs. absolutive systems (Adyghe, Kabardian; Päri (Nilotic))

ADYGHE (North-West Caucasian > Circassian; my own fieldwork, 2005)

(18) a. *č'ale-r   me-čəje.*
          boy-DIR   PRS-sleep
          'The boy is sleeping.'   (intransitive)

      b. *č'ale-m   pŝaŝe-r   j-e-λeʁ_wə.*
          boy-OBL   girl-DIR   3SG.A-PRS-see
          'The boy sees the girl.'   (monotransitive)

✦ 'marked absolutive' system (Nias: typologically unique!)

NIAS (Austronesian > Malayo-Polynesian, Western Indonesia, Brown 2001: 94)

(19) *me   mofanö ya,   la-roro   ya   niha   fefu.*
       when   left   he:OBL 3SG-follow he:OBL DIR:person all
       'When he left, everyone followed him.'   (intransitive, transitive)

✦ various 'split' systems (Indo-Iranian, Uto-Aztecan, Tsimshianic etc.)

ZAZA (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Iranian, Turkey; Selcan 1998:): tense-aspect split

(20) a. *televe   malım-i   vinen-o.*
          student(DIR.SG)   teacher-OBL.SG   see-PRS.3SG
          'The student sees the teacher'.   (transitive; present)

      b. *televe-y   malım   di.*
          student-OBL.SG   teacher(DIR.SG)   see:PST
          'The student saw the teacher'.   (transitive; past)

CHEMEHUEVI (Uto-Aztecan; USA; Press 1979: 73, 108): main vs. subordinate split

(21) a. *maŋ   nakwi-j.*
          he(DIR)   run-PRS
          'He is running'.   (intransitive; independent clause)

      b. [*puŋkuc-i havitu-g*]   *aipac   ay   tɨka-vɨ.*
          dog-OBL   sing-SBRD   boy(DIR)   that   eat-PST
          'While the dog sang, the boy ate'.   (intransitive; subordinate clause)

4. Argument neutralizations in two-term case systems

VAFSI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Iranian, Iran; Stilo 2008)

(22) *æhmæd-i   ærgo   vaar-i   mæhmud-i   æsb-i*
       Ahmad-OBL.SG   want   spring-OBL.SG   Mahmud-OBL.SG   horse-OBL.SG
       ha-do-æ   jævad-i.
       PVB-give-3SG   Javad-OBL.SG
       'In spring Ahmad wants to give Mahmud's horse to Javad.'

☞ Extended case polysemy not necessarily results in ambiguity, even when, as in (22), multiple occurrences of the same case are found in one sentence.

❶ 'Double-oblique' alignment in Iranian: a typologically unique structure

ROSHANI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Iranian, Tajikistan; Payne 1980: 155)[1]

(23)   a.   *dāδ*   *xawrič-ēn=an*   *tar*   *Xaraγ*   *sat.*
           these(DIR) boy-PL=3PL   to   Xorog   go:PST
           'These boys went to Xorog'.   (intransitive)

       b.   *duf*   *xawrič-ēn*   *um*   *kitōb*   *x̌ēyt.*
           these(OBL) boy-PL   this(OBL) book   read:PST
           'These boys (have) read this book'.   (monotransitive)

✋ Both A and P marked with the same Obl case. How come?

☞ Interaction of functionally motivated case-marking alternations.

   ✦ Differential object marking (Bossong 1985, Aissen 2003): individuated P is marked w.r.t the non-individuated

VAFSI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Iranian, Iran; Stilo 2004: 243)

(24)   a.   *tæ*   *in*   *xær-i*   *næ-ruš-i?*
           you:DIR.SG this   donkey-OBL.SG NEG-sell-2SG
           'Won't you sell this donkey?'   (accusative)

       b.   *bæ-ss-e*   *yey*   *xær*   *ha-gir-e.*
           PFV-went-3SG   one   donkey(DIR.SG) PVB-take-3SG
           'He went to buy a donkey'.   (neutral)

   ✦ A in Past/Perfective is marked w.r.t Non-Past/Imperfective (cf. DeLancey 1981):

VAFSI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Iranian, Iran; Stilo 2004: 244):

(25)   a.   *in*   *luti-an*   *yey*   *xær=esan*   *æ-ruttæ.*
           this   wise.guy-OBL.PL one   donkey(DIR.SG)= 3PL   DUR-sell.PST
           'These wise guys were selling a donkey'.   (ergative)

       b.   *luas-i*   *kærg-e=s*   *bæ-værdæ.*
           fox-OBL.SG   chicken-OBL.SG=3SG PFV-take.PST
           'The fox took the chicken'.   (double-oblique)

Table 1. Patterns of argument marking in Vafsi

A	P	alignment	conditioning factor
Dir	Dir	neutral	non-past; non-individuated P
Dir	Obl	accusative	non-past; individuated P
Obl	Dir	ergative	past; non-individuated P
Obl	Obl	double-oblique	past; individuated P

☞ Cf. languages with rich case systems:

HINDI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Indo-Aryan, India, Mohanan 1994: 59, 69, 80):

(26)   a.   *Ravī*   *kelā*   *khā* *rahā* *thā.*
           Ravi(NOM.SG)   banana(NOM.SG) eat   DUR AUX.PST
           'Ravi was eating a banana.'   (neutral)

       b.   *Nīnā*   *bacce=ko*   *uṭhāyegī.*
           Nina(NOM.SG)   child:OBL.SG=OBJ lift:FUT
           'Nina will lift the child.'   (accusative)

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[1] In Roshani, case is retained only with personal and demonstrative pronouns.

c. *bacce=ne*   *kītāb*   *paḍhī.*
    child:OBL.SG=ERG   book(NOM.SG)   read:PFV
    'The child read a/the book.'   (ergative)

d. *Īlā=ne*   *bacce=ko*   *uṭhāyā.*
    Ila=ERG   child:OBL.SG=OBJ   lift:PFV
    'Ila lifted the child.'   (tripartite)

Table 2. Patterns of argument marking in Hindi

A	P	strategy	conditioning factor
Nom	Nom	neutral	imperfective; non-individuated P
Nom	Obj	accusative	imperfective; individuated P
Erg	Nom	ergative	perfective; non-individuated P
Erg	Obj	tripartite	perfective; individuated P

☞ Similar functional motivations result in different structures because case systems are different.

❷ Neutralization of Agent and Recipient in ditransitive constructions

KATI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Nuristani, Afghanistan; Grjunberg 1980: 153)

(27)   *amki* *paři*   *yīmo*   *tu*   *nuř-e*   *pt'e.*
        this   apple(DIR.SG) we:OBL your mother-OBL.SG give:PST
        'We gave this apple to your mother.'   (ditransitive; past)

✍ Agent and Recipient in ditransitive constructions are marked by the same Obl. How come?

☞ Again interaction of different marking strategies: 'split' encoding of A vs. uniform encoding of Recipient, cf. (28).

KATI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Nuristani, Afghanistan; Grjunberg 1980: 151, 148)

(28)   *uze*   *kuřy-e*   *ano*   *šenu-m.*
        I:DIR   dog-OBL.SG   meat(DIR.SG) throw-1SG.PRS
        'I am throwing some meat to the dog.'   (ditransitive; present)

☞ 'Absolutive' vs. 'oblique': Agent patterns with peripheral relations in ergative alignment, cf. (29), (30).

ADYGHE (North-West Caucasian > Circassian; my own fieldwork, 2005)

(29)   *č'ale-m*   *pŝaŝe-m*   *məʔeresə-r*   *r-jə-tə-ʁ.*
        boy-OBL   girl-OBL   apple-DIR   3SG.REC-3SG.A-give-PST
        'The boy gave the apple to the girl.'   (ditransitive)

(30)   *č'ale-r*   *wəne-m*   *ča-ʁe.*
        boy-DIR   house-OBL run-PST
        'The boy ran home.'   (intransitive + adjunct)

❸ Clause type splits in Uto-Aztecan and Tsimshian

YAQUI (Uto-Aztecan > Southern Uto-Aztecan, Mexico; Lindenfeld 1973: 81, 103):

(31)   a. [*hu-ka*   *oʔoo-ta*   *yepsa-k-o*]   *itepo*   *saha-k.*
           this-OBL   man-OBL   arrive-PRF-SBRD   we.DIR go-PRF
        'When this man arrived we left'.   (intransitive; subordinate)

    b. *na=a* *biča* *ke*   [*hu-ka*   *usi-ta*   *čuʔu-ta*   *kipwe-ʔu*].
           I.DIR=it see   that   this-OBL   child-OBL   dog-OBL   have-SBRD
    'I see that this child has a dog'.   (monotransitive; subordinate)

☞ Main vs. subordinate 'split' resulting from nominal nature of non-finite predications, where subject is encoded like the NP-internal possessor, cf. (32).

YAQUI (Uto-Aztecan > Southern Uto-Aztecan, Mexico; Lindenfeld 1973: 56)

(32) *itom   pare-ta   kari   si   weela.*
      we:POSS   priest-OBL house:DIR very old
      'Our priest's house is very old'.

☞ Neutralization may appear only on the paradigmatic level, but not in syntax.

INTERIOR TSIMSHIAN (Tsimshianic, Canada; Peterson 2006: 75)[2]

(33) a. *w'itx   t=John.*
          come   PNC=John
      'John came.'   ('indicative'; intransitive)

      b. *hlə̣moo-yə-(t)=[s   (t)=Tom]   t=Mary.*
          help-TR-3=OBL   PNC=Tom   PNC=Mary
      'Tom helped Mary.'   ('indicative'; monotransitive)

      ➢ ergative alignment in 'indicative' (verb-initial) clauses.

INTERIOR TSIMSHIAN (Tsimshianic, Canada; Peterson 2006: 76)

(34) a. *needii-t   hlimoo-t=[s   (t)=John]   t=Peter.*
          NEG-3   help-3=OBL   PNC=John   PNC=Peter
      'John didn't help Peter.'   ('subjunctive'; monotransitive, lexical A)

      b. *yukw=hl   litsx̲xw-(t)=[s (t)=John].*
          PROG=CNC   read-3=OBL   PNC=John
      'John is reading.'   ('subjunctive'; intransitive)

      c. *needii=tə̣p   gya'-(t)=[s   (t)=John].*
          NEG=1PL   see-3=OBL   PNC=John
      'We didn't see John.'   ('subjunctive'; monotransitive, pronominal A)

      ➢ in 'subjunctive' (non verb-initial) clauses accusative ('marked nominative') alignment on the syntagmatic level, but neutral alignment on the paradigmatic level: Obl marks any verb-adjacent core argument regardless of its role.

Conclusions
2-case systems show that

      ✦ languages may tolerate extended polysemy of case markers (even comprising such 'contrary' functions as A and P or A and Rec) – both on the paradigmatic and on the syntagmatic levels;

      ✦ **iconicity** (encoding of paradigmatic distinctions, e.g. individuated vs. non-individuated P) may often outrank **distinguishability** (syntagmatic distinction between A and P) in case-marking;

      ✦ different 'alignments' ('global' systems of encoding of core arguments) are epiphenomenal to iconic patterns of encoding of particular arguments and the inventory of case markers (indeed, the 'unnatural' double-oblique alignment in Vafsi and other Iranian languages turns out to be motivated by the same functional factors that the 'overdistinctive' tripartite alignment in Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages);

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[2] Case marking is observed only with proper names; case particle =*s* is positioned **before** the NP it marks and is cliticized to the **preceding** constituent.

✦ the overall functional load of cases in 'poor' case systems is no less important than in the richer ones, and the very number of cases in a given language may become an important typological parameter.

Abbreviations

ART – article, AUX – auxiliary, CL – clitic, COP – copula, DIR – direct, DUR – durative, ERG – ergative, FUT – future, IMP – imperative, M – masculine, NEG – negation, NOM – nominative, OBJ – objective, OBL – oblique, PFV – perfective, PL – plural, PNC – personal noun connective, POSS – possessive, PREP – preposition, PRF – perfect, PROG – progressive, PRS – present, PST – past, PVB – preverb, REFL – reflexive, SBRD – subordination marker, SG – singular, TR – transitive

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