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Neutralization in Case Morphology

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1. Around the second century B.C. there was a dispute as to how far language is regular and logical. One school, the analogists, maintained that language is essentially systematic and regular. Observable irregularities could be explained away by referring to some hidden true meaning of a word or word-form. Through the study of the etymology of words it should therefore become possible to achieve knowledge of the origin of language, which was for the ancient writers the most important goal of linguistic study. Their opponents, the anomalists, mainly the Stoics, did not deny the existence of regularities, but pointed to the many obvious instances of irregularities and anomalies occurring in language. By taking such anomalies into account, they were able to argue for the conventional character of language, and thus reject the idea of language as being given to Man by God.

The controversy was never definitely settled and it still goes on. Generally, however, the analogist point of view has been favoured among linguists. We have encountered it repeatedly in our studies of morphological case, in the ancient literature as well as among modern writers. One example will do for demonstration. According to Arnauld and Lancelot in *Grammaire générale* 1660, not only Latin, but also Greek, Hebrew, and French possess six cases, viz. the nominative, the vocative, the genitive, the dative, the accusative, and the ablative. The nominative is no case proper but rather "la matière d'où se forment les cas par les divers changements qu'on donne à cette première terminaison du nom" (*Grammaire générale* 1660:33). It is marked, in French, by being placed before the verb and as opposed to the vocative by demanding an article:

(1) *Le Seigneur* (nom.) *est mon espérance*
(2) *Seigneur* (voc.), *vous êtes mon espérance*

The genitive is expressed by the particle *de*:

(3) *Deus - Dieu*
(4) *Dei - de Dieu*

In the same way the dative is signalled by the particle *à*:

(5) *commodare Socrati - prêter à Socrate*
(6) *utilis reipublicæ - utile à la république* ·

The accusative is signalled by word order, opposed to the nominative by being placed after the verb. The French ablative, on the other hand, is expressed by a number of prepositions. It is the assignment of an ablative to Greek, however, that is the most interesting point in the argumentation, and we therefore quote the entire passage (*Grammaire générale* 1660:38):

> Ce cas <the ablative>, à proprement parler, ne se trouve point au pluriel <in Latin>, où il n'y a jamais pour ce cas une terminaison différente de celle du datif. Mais parce que cela aurait brouillé l'analogie, de dire, par exemple, qu'une préposition gouverne l'ablatif au singulier, et le datif au pluriel, on a mieux aimé dire que ce nombre avait aussi un ablatif, mais toujours semblable au datif.
> C'est par cette même raison qu'il est utile de donner aussi un ablatif aux noms grecs, qui soit toujours semblable au datif, parce que cela conserve une plus grande analogie entre ces deux langues, qui s'apprennent ordinairement ensemble.

The objective of this paper is to show the importance of keeping a sceptical and careful attitude to analogical thinking in the guise it took by the Port Royal grammarians. As we pointed out above, this kind of argumentation is very frequent also in contemporary linguistics. It should nevertheless be firmly rejected. Greek, of course, does not have any ablative, and neither does French or Hebrew.

2. In an earlier paper (Bílý and Pettersson 1986a) we defined a case marker as a discrete language sign, a bound morpheme that is obligatorily attached to a noun (substantive) stem via inflexion.[1] That is to say, case is a nominal category and it is therefore necessary to distinguish the noun proper and the noun phrase as separate levels of morphological structure. We also argued that this definition is appropriate even with regard to pronouns, since case marking in a restricted set

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[1] We would today prefer the following more explicit definition:

> A case marker is a discrete language sign: an overt and and bound morpheme (or exponent of such a morpheme) attached to and determining a noun (substantive) stem via inflexion.

The definition provides the NP-internal requirements for case marking. Since case, however, is a grammatical category indicating relations of the noun phrase to other constituents within the sentence, the NP-external properties of case-marking have to be specified as well in order to single out case *qua* category from categories such as number, gender, and species. This will be done in another context.

of NPs such as personal pronouns does not entail a corresponding case marking on nouns. For this reason we felt we were right in rejecting not only Swedish and English but also, French, Hebrew, Bulgarian and similar languages with highly grammaticalized prepositions as representatives of case languages.

If the distinction between true nouns and full NPs is not acknowledged as we recommended in the above-mentioned paper, it will prove to be impossible to decide whether the absence of case markers in nouns is due to neutralization or not. Evidently, absolute neutralization in morphology is just as premature and illegitimate an assumption as that of absolute neutralization in phonology (cf. Kiparsky 1982:119ff.). Morphological categories must not be invented merely to satisfy the linguist's desire for harmony and regularity.

By distinguishing the noun phrase and the noun as separate levels of grammatical structure from a morphological point of view, we preclude the inference that case marking in nouns could be assumed on analogy with something similar in pronouns. This procedure does away with absolute neutralization of case in the nominal systems as far as languages such as English and Swedish are concerned. But the problem of absolute neutralization still remains. Arnauld and Lancelot are of course right in maintaining that, if it is legitimate to distinguish separate dative and ablative forms in Latin plural nouns, then it is just as fair to allot the same two cases to Greek nouns. As a matter of fact, the Greek dative fulfils, by and large, the same "ablative" functions as the corresponding Latin plural "ablative".

Therefore, in rejecting the suggestion that English has case and that Greek has an ablative in addition to the normal dative, we become obliged to find criteria for deciding when it is possible to speak about neutralization or homonymy in case systems. Actually, we have to explain how any paradigm in any language that shows up with identical forms for separate cases, could also possess separate case forms. We shall have to ask, for instance, why Finnish is held to possess four and not three central cases, the genitive and the accusative in the singular and the nominative and the accusative in the plural always being identical in form. We shall have to decide why or whether all Russian nouns have a separate accusative form, since in reality this case surfaces only in nouns of the 2nd declension (ending in *-a* in the nominative); otherwise, Russian accusatives are identical in form either to the nominative or the genitive. In short, we must decide if and/or under what circumstances comparison by analogy could be a sound approach for linguistic descriptions.

3. Analogical thinking, as manifested in the concept of all-comprising neutralizations, syncretisms, between covert cases in a paradigm expressed by the same

overt case marker, is deeply rooted in the linguistic tradition. As for Russian, even such sharp and unorthodox authors as Mel'čuk 1979 and Wierzbicka 1983 take for granted, without the slightest hesitation, the existence of a distinct accusative singular for animate masculine nouns and a distinct accusative plural for all animate nouns, in spite of the fact that the overt case marker in question is always identical to the genitive marker of the corresponding grammatical number.

The situation is quite typical of Indo-European languages. As de Groot 1956 points out, it is not at all obvious that all paradigms have the same number of cases. On the contrary, Latin *servus* 'slave' has possibly six cases, one more than *rex* 'king', which has no vocative form. But whether *servus* really should be allotted the usually recognized five syntactic cases is a moot point: two of the cases of this noun and other nouns belonging to the same paradigm possess identical forms for the dative and the ablative, both in the singular and the plural.

Many other authors have noticed the problem, among them Wierzbicka 1983. But whereas Wierzbicka seems content to sort out the notion of case (meaning) from that of case marking, she is otherwise fully prepared to accept the so-called virtuality principle[2]. She demonstrates her view with the following Russian examples:

(7) *Ivan uvidel Moskvič* (nom.) 'Ivan saw a Moskvič (a brand of a car)'
(8) *Ivan uvidel Moskviča* (gen.) 'Ivan saw a Muscovite (inhabitant of Moscow)'

The accusative is signalled in the inanimate noun of (7) by means of the nominative form, while in (8) the corresponding noun signals an animate referent by taking the genitive. According to Wierzbicka 1983:249 the two forms, the nominative and the genitive, are fully equivalent from "the point of view of the grammatical theory of case". They are, as she puts it, "different allomorphs of the same case". That is to say, the nominative in (7) is an accusative form and, correspondingly, the genitive of (8) is an accusative form too. The difference between the two accusatives has nothing to do with case but with another grammatical category, viz. that of animacy.

The point Wierzbicka wants to make is that some case uses may be preconditioned by factors outside the case system as such. To the extent that sentence pairs such as (7) and (8) above can be explained by pointing to the fact that the dif-

[2] According to the terminology proposed in Hjelmslev 1943. The principle says that if you have established a category by means of the commutation test, you are allowed to infer the category in question as virtually existing for all constituents or elements that have the same distribution as the once established one. The principle says, for example, that all Latin nouns have a virtual vocative case form due to the fact that nouns of the 1st declension, the *servus* type, have an actually existing overt vocative form.

ference in case marking is semantically motivated, we have no reason to take up the question of homonymy. This looks reasonable at first glance, but it is nevertheless untenable. First when we are able to pinpoint the inherent meaning of a certain case, are we right in accounting for semantically motivated variation in its marking. Since Wierzbicka can give no other indication of the core meaning of the Russian accusative than that of declaring that it is primarily the case of the patient, i.e. the entity viewed as affected by the action, we are at a loss. This is no valid definition at all. It is an account of one typical use of accusative-marked NPs. This leads to a vicious circle: according to Wierzbicka the meaning of the accusative is to signal patient, and since the nominative form of (7) and the genitive of (8) represent patients they are by necessity accusative forms.

This is to draw the analogy reasoning in absurdum. Without a sensible criterion for establishing true homonymy Wierzbicka's argumentation remains void.

4. Since natural languages are not altogether regular, the analogist has to presume underlying regularities hidden beyond manifest irregularities. One way of doing this is to declare, like Wierzbicka 1983:248, that forms such as *doč'* 'daughter' and *pis'mo* 'letter' in Russian or *templum* 'temple' in Latin, where acc.=nom., are just as good accusatives as *syna* (gen.) 'son' or *otkrytku* (acc.) 'postcard' in Russian and *filiam* (acc.) 'daughter' in Latin. Another way to do it is to give the fortress up and acknowledge all languages to be case languages. When all is said and done, English word-forms such as *postcard* and *letter* are just as good accusatives as their Russian equivalents.

On the other hand, a consequent anomalist approach is tantamount to resignation in the face of the apparent irregularities, which leads to the abandonment of any search for symmetry in language. The issue of analogy versus anomaly is, of course, a pseudo-problem. The only sound attitude is to recognize the existence of both analogy and anomaly. This is what most linguists do quite unconsciously, without any explicitly formulated theoretical stance. What causes difficulties is the question of what is the right ratio between analogy and anomaly in a particular language or in a particular language phenomenon.

Many of the divergencies in linguistic opinion regarding analogy and anomaly are caused by the lack of generally accepted decisive criteria on what should be described as the one or the other. A postulation of such explicit criteria does not necessarily abolish the divergencies, but it clarifies the issues by making the origins of different opinions transparent. To evaluate the merits of alternative models when their theoretical premises are explicitly stated is a much sounder enterprise than to accept or reject items of linguistic descriptions merely on the

basis of vague subjective likes and dislikes stemming from equally vague uncon-
scious personal preferences as to the right ratio of analogies and anomalies.

5. The traditional identification of the Russian accusative is supported only by
the existence of a distinct accusative marker in nouns of the 2nd declension sin-
gular and nothing else. Whether this precondition for recognizing an instance of
neutralization, i.e. the existence of more than one case expressed by only one
overt marker in a given paradigm, is valid, depends on the question of whether
there are case forms in other paradigms that are substitutable for the neutralized
ones. As far as the Russian accusative is concerned, this seems to be the actual
state of affairs. Compare the following minimal pairs:

(9a) *Mat' ljubit doč'* 'Mother loves her daughter (nom.)'
(9b) *Mat' ljubit dočku* id. (acc.)
(10a) *Irina ljubit Mixaila* 'Irina loves Michael (gen.)'
(10b) *Irina ljubit Mišu* 'Irina loves Mike (acc.)'
(11a) *Ivan čitaet žurnal* 'Ivan is reading a journal (nom.)'
(11b) *Ivan čitaet gazetu* 'Ivan is reading a newspaper (acc.)'

Obviously, apart from morphology, there can be found no reason whatsoever for
why the nouns *dočka*, *Miša* and *gazeta* should possess a specific accusative form as
opposed to their near to synonymous counterparts. The latter nouns, i.e. *doč'*,
Mixail, *žurnal*, belonging to the same semantic field as their 2nd declension cog-
nates, just happen to lack an accusative form distinct from the nominative or the
genitive. As can be seen, we accept neutralization as a fact of grammatical struc-
ture. But when we thus give support for analogism, we restrict it to such forms
which directly or indirectly may be confirmed by the substitution test. This latter
we will formulate as a necessary but not sufficient condition as follows:

Precondition 1

> In order to recognize the existence of a neutralized case, the case in question must
> have a distinct marker on another noun which is fully substitutable for the neutra-
> lized one in at least one context, without causing additional semantic and/or syntac-
> tic changes in the sentence.

To make the point absolutely clear: our criterion above spells out what it is ne-
cessary to observe in order to recognize true neutralization. However, it does not
imply anything about the identification of case forms. On the contrary, we con-
sider it incorrect to identify a word-form as carrier of a case marker by virtue of
commutation only. Rather a certain form may or may not occur in a context

which demands a certain case function. If, as in Russian, it can be established that
there is an accusative, this fact does not imply that all Russian nouns possess
accusative forms any more than, say, Latin *servus* has separate dative and abla-
tive forms. Actually, most Russian nouns lack a specific accusative form. As a
consequence, they have to be replaced by some other form, either the nominative
or the genitive. We shall therefore say that, in (7) above, the nominative occurs
in accusative function. As far as the genitive form of (8) is concerned, we cannot
yet claim the same thing to be true. The given context happens to be compatible
with both accusative and genitive function.[3]

6. There is nothing remarkable about our criterion. As a matter of fact, it is just
an application of Kiparsky's 1982:119-163 proposal. In the article concerned,
which was distributed as an underground paper from 1968, Kiparsky argued

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[3] When saying that two cases are compatible in function, we mean that a case-marked noun
should be syntactically and semantically coherent with the case definitions listed below. A pre-
liminary set of such definitions was published in Bílý and Pettersson 1983. The revised defini-
tions presented here are primarily worked out to catch the characteristics of the Russian case
system. We hypothesize, nevertheless, that they are universally valid. They are strictly pre-
scriptive.
  In the definitions, x stands for referent(s) and X for noun(s) or noun phrase(s).
  For the time being we take a junction to be a one-sided relation between entities where one
entity determines the other, while the reverse relation is impossible. A nexus is considered to be
a mutual and necessary relation between two entities. The concepts junction and nexus so de-
fined thus correspond to the determination (selection) and the interdependence (solidarity) of
Hjelmslev 1943. Differently from Jespersen 1924, we consider the concepts nexus and junction
to be semantic and not syntactic relations.
  A constituent whose distributional pattern is wider than other constituents within the same
endo- or exocentric construction is syntactically independent; consequently, other constituents
within the construction are syntactically dependent on the independent one.

> **Nominative:** Something is said about x, denoted by X, where x is the kernel of a
>   potential junction (das Ding an sich) and X is syntactically independent
> **Accusative:** Something is said about x, denoted by X, where x is a qualification
>   (adnex) of a nexus and X is syntactically dependent
> **Dative:** Something is said about x, denoted by X, where x is the first argument in a
>   secondary (derived) nexus and X is syntactically dependent
> **Genitive:** Something is said about x, denoted by X, where x is a qualification (ad-
>   junct) of a junction and X is syntactically dependent on an overt or covert noun or
>   noun phrase
> **Instrumental:** Something is said about x, denoted by a syntactically dependent X, in
>   order to say something about something else
> **Prepositional:** Something is said about x, denoted by a syntactically dependent X, to
>   say something about the predication as a whole
> **Vocative:** Something is said about x, denoted by X, where x is the kernel of a junc-
>   tion, not being part of a nexus, and X is syntactically independent
> **Locative:** Something is said about x, denoted by a syntactically dependent adverbial
>   X, to say something about the predication as a whole
> **Partitive:** Something is said about x, denoted by X, where x is a non-argument qua-
>   lification (adjunct) of a junction and X is syntactically dependent on a covert
>   noun or noun phrase

against the stipulation of never-surfacing underlying abstract elements in phonological descriptions, the sole purpose of which is to arrive at empirically confirmed phonetic realizations of the postulated abstract underlying elements. It is, of course, easy and quite tempting to save a phonological rule of the form

(12) $A \rightarrow B / \underline{\hspace{2em}} C$

when not all As become Bs in the context C, by claiming that the apparent C is in fact a never perceived D, transformed into C by a later rule. By prohibiting the establishment of such escape rules we will find that it is possible to pay due respect to classical analogical thinking without increasing the complexity of the grammar.

The criterion ought to be self-evident. It turns out not to be so, however. Recently, in Bílý and Pettersson 1986b, we rejected the generally accepted claim that Dyirbal is an ergative language, differing from the majority of ergative languages by being truly ergative even from a syntactic point of view. This misunderstanding is the result of an uncritical acceptance of the authoritative source on Dyirbal, Dixon 1972; 1979. Dixon's methodological move towards the identification of grammatical cases is a mixture of overt case morphology and semantic/syntactic roles. He recognizes in one overt case, in fact a case with the same instrumental meaning as its Russian equivalent, the existence of two covert cases in all noun paradigms of Dyirbal: an ergative and an instrumental. In the same way he identifies an allative and a dative, in spite of the fact that the two cases in all occurrences are morphologically identical. The postulated neutralizations are motivated by the syntactic behaviour and the distribution of NPs with heads marked for the cases in question.

The very concept of grammatical case as a discernible surface phenomenon loses its *raison d' être* in such an approach. The same line of reasoning would force us, for example, to postulate a neutralization of several covert cases in e.g. Russian and Icelandic for the overt accusative exponent of these languages. One would have to recognize an "objective", i.e. the case of direct object NPs susceptible to becoming subjects in corresponding passive clauses, as opposed to an "adverbialis", the case of such adverbials that cannot become subject in corresponding passive clauses. Similarly, we would be forced to allow for neutralization of several overt cases expressed by one nominative form: the case of subject in active clauses, the case of subject in passive clauses, and the case of predicate.

It is not possible to defend Dixon's argumentation by reference to genuine ergative languages that do possess distinct case markers for both the ergative and the instrumental. This would amount to regressing to the way of thinking

proposed by the Port Royal grammarians with mere substitution of the Latin standard of comparison with some other, equally arbitrarily chosen language measure.

7. The substitution criterion does away with absolute neutralization in case marking. Thus Dyirbal has no ergative and English has no cases at all. Still, we have no procedure to follow in order to tackle the problem of partial homonymy. That is to say, by what criteria do we decide whether a certain case form is used for the function of another case rather than the other way round? We will not be able to deliver an absolute and infallible answer to this question. However, by investigating the distribution of cases in particular languages we can find decision procedures to be acknowledged with a considerable amount of confidence.

To resort to Russian once again, we find instances of pairs of case markers in some paradigms, where one of the cases stands in a privative semantic opposition to the other. Thus the noun *čaj* 'tea' has a distinct partitive form *čaju* which is privatively opposed to and always interchangeable with the unmarked genitive form *čaja*. In addition there are paradigms where only the marker of the unmarked case can be found. To cope with such oppositions a second criterion may be formulated:

Precondition 2

It is impossible to recognize a covert marked member of a semantic opposition in case paradigms that possess an overt marker only for the unmarked member, since the less specific meaning of the overt unmarked case automatically includes the more specific meaning of the marked case.

The criterion implies that we may recognize a Russian partitive, but only in those Russian nouns that do possess a distinct partitive form that differs from the case marker of the usual genitive. It thus excludes the idea of Jakobson 1936; 1958 and Sørensen 1957:42, that all nouns unable to express the partitive nevertheless possess a covert but virtually existent partitive. For the same reason we feel we are right in detecting a Russian vocative with those nouns that do differentiate between the unmarked nominative and the marked vocative overtly[4], but we refuse to postulate a covert vocative in Russian paradigms which lack distinct morphological marking for the case in question. As a consequence, Russian paradigms that do not possess specific partitive and vocative markers are lacking the partitive and the vocative cases.

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[4] Mainly proper names of the type *Maša* and *Aleša* which in vocative function can take the optional forms *Maš!* and *Aleš!*.

8. As in other Indo-European languages, one case marker in a given Russian paradigm may correspond to several case markers in another paradigm. In other words, one overt marker may be used in several case functions. This fact allows us to formulate an additional criterion: .

Precondition 3

> In order to recognize the occurrence of case neutralization in a declension paradigm, the supposed distinct cases inferred from the overt existence of the same cases in another paradigm must be per definition incompatible as to their functions.

The condition says that, if two or more case functions are expressed by way of one overt case marker only, no covert case in the paradigm analyzed may be postulated for a function compatible with the function of another case expressed by the overt marker in question.

Wierzbicka 1983 proposes a test of case markers as exponents of the same case by deciding whether it is possible to coordinate two or more nouns with different overt markers. If one may coordinate two different case forms in this way, the two forms in question should be held to carry the same case meaning and hence be regarded as allomorphs of the same case. The test gives the right result for overt case markers that express the same case function. Consider the following Russian examples:

(13) *Ja vižu otca i mamu* 'I see Father (gen./acc.) and Mother (acc.)'
(14) *Deti igrali v sadu i na ploščadke.* 'The children were playing in the park (loc.) and on the playground (dat./prep.)'
(15) *Ivan napisal pis'mo otcu i materi* 'Ivan wrote a letter to his father (dat.) and his mother (gen./dat./prep.)'
(16) *Ja kupil ètu russkuju knigu i ètu češskuju gazetu* 'I bought this Russian book (acc.) and this Czech newspaper (acc.)'

However, Wierzbicka's coordinability test does not make it possible to decide whether the coordinated nouns instantiate the same case as in (16) or whether two different case markers are merely used in a function compatible with the definitions of the cases in question as in (13) - (15).

9. Russian *a*- and *i*-stems in the singular have one common marker for the dative and the prepositional. Since there are distinct markers for these cases in other paradigms, our Precondition 1 on its own would lead to the conclusion that the

dative/prepositional marker is an instance of neutralization between the covert dative and prepositional.

The same kind of neutralization could have been claimed for all declension paradigms in Serbo-Croatian. The word tone of some dialects serves as the exponent for the distinction in question in a restricted set of words. Otherwise, only some optional remnants of a distinct prepositional form can be found in the pronominal flexion. Yet, by virtue of the compatibility criterion (Precondition 3) we should not acknowledge the supposed neutralization.

The Slavic prepositional is, per definition, an obligatory nexus case: it demands a preposition and cannot occur outside of prepositional phrases. It follows that a prepositional marker might not be used in dative function. On the other hand, the dative can be reinterpreted as prepositional: its definition allows it to take prepositional function since it may appear as the first argument in a nexus formed by a preposition. Observe that any prepositional phrase must be held to constitute a secondary (derived) nexus. Consequently, the dative can take on the function of the prepositional and there is no reason to search for neutralization of datives and prepositionals in the Russian paradigms in question, nor in their Serbo-Croatian counterparts. All such instances are simply occurrences of one and the same case, the dative, used either in its original dative function or in its secondary prepositional function.

Similarly, we are not compelled to recognize, in Russian, any covert accusative with animate masculine nouns in the singular or with animates in the plural because of the existence of case markers distinct from the genitive in other paradigms. The accusative is obligatorily a nexus case. For this reason it cannot be used as a prepositionless nominal attribute, i.e. in genitive function. On the other hand, the genitive is per definition compatible with the accusative, since it is a junction case and, accordingly, may occur imbedded in a nexus. Our conclusion, based on Precondition 3, must be that the animate nouns in question simply require their genitives to be substituted for the missing accusatives. There is no neutralization to be found between genitives and accusatives in Russian.

10. Actually, evidence could be given to demonstrate that the Russian genitive used instead of the missing accusative is a factual genitive and not some kind of accusative substitute. Similarly, all instances of syncretism between the dative and the ablative in Latin and Sanskrit actually render the dative and not any of the neutralized cases in instrumental or ablative function.

There are, however, other instances in case languages where it is impossible to tell whether a certain form common to more than one case should be taken to represent a specific case form in the function of another case or not. Consider,

for example, nouns like Russian *pal'to* 'coat' or colloquial Icelandic *bíó* 'movie' which do not change their form for any case function in the singular or the plural. In principle, any of our preconditions discussed above could also have been applied to such words, but to no avail. They are simply indeclinable, which means that, given our general case marker definition (footnote 1), they cannot signal case at all. They are not able to carry case markers any more than the corresponding English nouns, and hence they cannot be considered as case forms. To acknowledge absolute neutralization in a restricted set of words is just as illegitimate as in major parts of speech.

There are also other instances where an application of our preconditions would seem to be far-fetched. One could mention Czech nouns ending in *-í*, which, if neuter (e.g. *náměstí* 'square'), possess a distinct instrumental but otherwise retain the same citation form throughout the whole singular paradigm. The feminine noun *paní* 'lady, Mrs.', although being a native word as opposed to Russian *pal'to* and Icelandic *bíó*, is altogether indeclinable in the singular. Hence we would say that *paní* cannot express case in the singular and that *náměstí* has an instrumental but otherwise just a general citation form.

We should preferably regard nouns of the so-called weak declensions of Germanic languages in the same way. Such nouns possess, in the singular, only two forms, one for the nominative and one for all other cases (genitive, dative, and accusative). Rather than asking what specific case is expressed by a word-form like Icelandic *sögu*, which is the oblique form of *saga* 'tale, story', we should acknowledge the plain truth: it is a general oblique form fit for all Icelandic syntactically dependent case meanings.

Summing up, we recognize therefore three types of syncretism:

a. one case form is replaced by another case form in the function of the first one by Preconditions 1 and 3. This type could be exemplified by the use of the Russian nominative in accusative function or the Slavic dative instead of the prepositional.

b. an unmarked case form takes precedence over a marked case when a given paradigm does not contain a morphologically distinct marked form as stated by Precondition 2.

c. a general citation form takes precedence as a *"casus generalis"* when none of the preceding conditions may readily apply.

This third type is neutralization proper.

11. Comrie 1986, developing the ideas discussed in Zaliznjak 1973[5], has chosen another approach to the problems discussed above.

As a first step, Comrie differentiates between a formal and a functional concept of case. He is certainly right when he rejects the formal concept, according to which all morphs specifiable as belonging to the same category and consisting of the same phonemic set-up belong to the same morpheme. Of course, such an approach is consistent, but, to quote Comrie himself, "the oppositions it defines as significant play no role elsewhere in the description of Russian" (Comrie 1986:90).

Secondly, he endeavours to formulate criteria for establishing the number of cases and the identity of particular case tokens in particular languages. In this respect Comrie departs from Zaliznjak's dichotomy between formal and semantic case. The semantic case of Zaliznjak 1973:55 amounts to a "deep case" or semantic role, i.e. something claimed to exist by the linguist on the basis of his conceptualization of the denotata in the real world. Such a classification does not have to correspond to any overt categorization of linguistic expressions based on an objectively ascertainable analysis on internal grounds.[6] In other words, Zaliznjak's concept "semantic case" equals what Comrie calls the extremist functional approach.

Comrie pledges for a semantico-functional approach constrained by formal criteria. The criterion used is distributional and is based on the implicit acceptance of Hjelmslev's virtuality principle. Three possibilities are obtained (Comrie 1986:91):

a. If some distribution is of a distinct form for all nominals, then this is a distinct case.
b. If the distribution (a) of some form of some nominal is a proper subpart of the distribution $(a + b)$ of some form of any other nominal, then the distribution or subdistribution defined by a and b are distinct cases for all nominals.
c. If the distribution $(c + d)$ of some form of some nominal mutually and nonexhaustively overlaps the distribution $(d + e)$ of some form of any other nominal, then each of c, d, and e is a distinct case for all nominals.

Comrie's distributional criteria lead to absurd consequences. Thus he is forced to recognize full declension paradigms for Russian undeclinables such as *pal'to*. He must also admit the existence of separate genitive and partitive as well as prepo-

sitional and locative cases for all Russian nouns on the basis of a few hundred nouns actually possessing an overt partitive and/or locative case distinct from the genitive and the prepositional, respectively. There are still other unhappy results such as the fact that he will be forced to say that Latvian has two accusatives and genitives, one of which occurs other than after prepositions (accusative$_1$, genitive$_1$), while the other (accusative$_2$, genitive$_2$) occurs only after prepositions.[7] Comrie is fully aware of these undesirable effects and promises to present an alternative analysis that avoids this unwieldiness in the remainder of his paper. His solution is quite ingenious, but, as we shall show, it is nevertheless an illusive one.

12. Comrie's answer to the problem lies in giving the traditional names of particular cases to distinct distributional positions. The following possibilities are obtained with regard to mappings between distributionally defined cases and morphological forms with new, arbitrarily chosen labels (Comrie uses numbers):

   a. a one-to-one mapping.
   b. a one-to-many mapping (e.g. the Russian partitive is mapped into two morphological forms, say, 18 and 19, i.e. what we referred to as the unmarked genitive and the marked partitive, respectively – cf. section 7 above).
   c. a many-to-one mapping (e.g. the genitive and accusative distributions of animate nouns of the Russian 1st declension; such a mapping is possible for some nouns only; otherwise there would be no reason to differentiate between these distributions).

In this way case is reduced to a syntactic, distributional phenomenon, and morphological case becomes a mere accident not very different from the surface case of deep case grammarians. It is interesting to observe that Comrie and Fillmore 1968 reach their negligent attitudes towards the significance of surface case from quite different points of departure, Comrie by way of an analysis of factually existent surface case forms and Fillmore by postulating meanings that ought to be carried by, among other things, surface cases. What is lurking behind this fact is again the virtuality principle, the unconquerable desire for making comparison by analogy.

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[7] The problem is that, in Latvian, prepositions govern different cases as in other Indo-European languages. In the plural, however, prepositions can only be followed by what otherwise is identified as the dative form, no matter what case they demand in the singular. Observe that this is exactly the problem that bothered Arnauld and Lancelot with respect to the Latin dative and ablative.
  Our Precondition 1 excludes the unavoidable consequences of Comrie's third criterion by insisting on the existence of at least one instance of a distinct case form for the distribution d.

The trick of eating one's cake and having it did not quite satisfy Comrie himself. Summing up his paper he tries to make it more attractive by applying semantic features in an alleged Jakobsonian vein. Comrie's features, however, are equipollent as opposed to Jakobson's, which are considered privative. Moreover, Comrie needs no less than five features to differentiate between three cases: the nominative (subjective), the accusative (objective), and the genitive (adnominal) distributions. The appropriate mapping for the Russian 2nd declension, represented by the noun *lapa* 'paw', is one-to-one. For animate masculine nouns of the 1st declension (example *slon* 'elephant'), a many-to-one mapping is obtained for the accusative and genitive distribution. For inanimate masculines of the 1st declension (example *stol* 'table'), another many-to-one mapping is obtained for the nominative and the accusative distribution:

nominative	genitive	accusative
lapa	*lapy*	*lapu*
slon	*slona*	*slona*
stol	*stola*	*stol*

Comrie 1986:103 offers the following (incomplete) feature assignment to these morphological forms:

lapa /nominative; direct/	= nominative
lapy /genitive; objective/	= genitive
lapu /accusative; direct; objective/	= accusative
slon /nominative; direct/	= nominative
slona /objective/	= genitive and accusative
stol /direct/	= nominative and accusative
stola /genitive; objective/	= genitive

As a matter of fact, there is very little that remains of Jakobson's ideas after having been sifted through Comrie's formalism. Comrie postulates a brand new semantic feature for every type of neutralization. Such new features are simply common denominators of all cases entering the neutralizations in question; they have certainly nothing to do with Jakobson's original feature system. One may, in this connection, wonder what one is supposed to do with syncretisms such as Russian *soldat*, which is the form for the nominative singular on the one hand and the genitive plural on the other. Neither of the features nor any combination of the features proposed are capable of capturing this fact.

13. As can be seen, the reliance on the virtuality principle is dangerous. In order to avoid unacceptable consequences of unrestrained analogical thinking one has to apply the principle with uttermost care and moderation.

Our Precondition 1 is actually a weaker form of the principle in question. It does not deny the existence of true neutralization altogether, but it is formulated in such a way that it demands supporting functional criteria. That is to say, whereas Comrie chooses a functional approach constrained by formal criteria, we do it the other way round. We establish a formal approach to identifying cases and constrain this approach by using functional criteria. It could appear that the two approaches are theoretically equivalent. This is not the case, however, for the simple reason that it is impossible to construct a consistent and non-redundant grammar using distributional criteria only. This is the crucial weakness not only in Comrie's but also in Wierzbicka's treatment of the neutralization problem. Our own functional criteria combine syntactic (distributional) and semantic standards for solving a difficult but neglected problem of general linguistics.

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