

“Quirky case”: Rare phenomena in case-marking

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The talk addresses cross-linguistically rare phenomena in case-marking in order to answer two general questions: a) why are certain phenomena rare, and b) how do they arise. First, I discuss cases deviant in terms of morphological distribution, such as ‘double case’ (Plank (ed.) 1995), ‘distributed case’ where case markers appear in different morphological slots (as in Koasati), as well as the ‘displaced’ case in Iraqw, where case markers may attach to a “wrong” NP. Explanation for these patterns will be sought either in diachrony (renewal of the case systems resulting in layering), or in interaction between syntactic and phonological constraints (which condition case displacement in Iraqw). Turning to functional properties of cases, I discuss a number of cross-linguistically unusual functions, such as “pragmatic cases” in Austronesian languages, “modal” and “verbal cases” in Australian languages (Kayardild), as well as designative case in Tungusic languages, which assigns two different roles to its host NP and its possessor. As in the previous case, diachronic considerations can explain both the rise of a specific pattern, but also why it is rare; in particular, it is claimed that “quirky” cases in Kayardild represent incomplete cycles of grammaticalization (cf. Dench & Evans 1988). Finally, I address cross-linguistically unusual case-marking patterns, such as marked nominatives, double oblique patterns (as in some Iranian languages), or ‘pronominal ergatives’, i.e. ergatives restricted to pronominal subjects (as in some Mande languages). It will be shown that many of these unusual patterns are the outcomes of different functional motivations, as familiar from the functional-typological literature, or result from interaction of functional motivations with universal grammaticalization processes. A general conclusion is that a cross-linguistically consistent pattern arises when several functional motivations converge, while cross-linguistic variation is found when the constraints are in conflict (cf. the account of the asymmetries between differential object marking and differential subject marking in Malchukov 2008; de Hoop and Malchukov, forthcoming). Finally, truly exceptional patterns arise when the constraints operate on a “cross-modular” basis, e.g. through interaction of syntactic and morphonological constraints (cf. de Hoop and Malchukov, in preparation).

References

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