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

Introduction

1 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.

2 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.).

3 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, Pāri 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(pient), Poss(essor in an NP), Loc(ation), Goal, Temp(oral extent/point), Manner, Ins(strument), 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. \textit{li chevalier-s} \textit{s=en part.}
   ART:DIR knight-DIR.SG REFL=CL departs
   ‘The knight departs from there.’ S (Dir; Foulet 1970: 4)

2. \textit{il vit \textit{un} home cru	extit{cefié.}}
   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. \textit{il est \textit{me-s} pere.}
   he:DIR is my-DIR.SG father:DIR.SG
   ‘He is my father.’ Pred (Dir; Foulet 1970: 8)

4. \textit{dites le roi que...}
   say:IMP.2PL the:OBL.SG king(OBL.SG) that
   ‘Tell the king that...’ Rec (Dir; Moignet 1976: 91)

5. \textit{la niece \textit{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.**
   REF=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

**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).

**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** **narmay** **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. **tayâgu-x** **awa-ku-x.**
   man-DIR.SG work-PRS-3SG
   ‘The man is working.’
   (intransitive)

   b. **hla-\text{x}** **axsinu-x** **kidu-ku-x.**
   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) \[ \text{ŋaykum makaw payum wa-mpu-ŋa-r-mpun.} \]
    \[ \text{woman:PL makau man:PL 3SG.O-3PL.A-give-PRF-3PL.REC} \]
    ‘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) \[ \text{spunei mame=i adevăr=ul.} \]
    \[ \text{tell(IMP) mother:OBL.SG-ART.OBL.SG truth(DIR.SG)=ART.DIR.SG} \]
    ‘Tell mother the truth!’ (ditransitive)

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

(14) a. \[ \text{usko bayacho=us as wa:so.} \]
    \[ \text{he break=3SG.M ART window} \]
    ‘He broke the window.’ (monotransitive)

   b. \[ \text{kaya=us os pa:ko n-os charke.} \]
    \[ \text{give=3SG.M ART dog OBL-ART meat} \]
    ‘He gave the meat to the dog.’ (ditransitive)

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. \[ \text{azu säw mät-\text{a}.} \]
    \[ \text{many man(DIR) come:PST-3SG} \]
    ‘Many people came.’ (intransitive)

   b. \[ \text{wašša-w bäqlo-wa-n näkkäs-\text{a}.} \]
    \[ \text{dog-ART mule-ART-OBL bite:PST-3SG} \]
    ‘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. \[ \text{fy\text{-}n y-rgaz-n.} \]
    \[ \text{left-3PL OBL-man-PL} \]
    ‘The men left.’ (intransitive)

   b. \[ \text{y-wt aqšiš-ni w-rgaz-im.} \]
    \[ \text{3SG-hit (DIR)boy-this OBL-man-2SG} \]
    ‘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. \[ \text{ikrz u-rgaz igr.} \]
    \[ \text{worked OBL-man (DIR)field} \]
    ‘The man worked the field.’ (transitive; rhematic subject)

   b. \[ \text{a-rgaz ikrz igr.} \]
    \[ \text{DIR-man worked DIR:field} \]
    ‘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. ę'ale-ᵣ  me-ćeje.
    boy-DIR PRS-sleep
    ‘The boy is sleeping.’  
    (intransitive)

b. ę'ale-m pšašeᵣ  j-e-λe⟩₄-a
    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  malim-i  vinen-o.
    student(DIR.SG) teacher-OBL.SG  see-PRS.3SG
    ‘The student sees the teacher’.
    (transitive; present)

b.  televe-y  malim  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  ìka-vi.
    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) əhməx-e-i  ərго  vaar-i  mahmuɗ-i  æsb-i
    Ahmad-OBL.SG want  spring-OBL.SG  Mahmud-OBL.SG  horse-OBL.SG
    ha-do-ʃe  jəvad-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.
‘Double-oblique’ alignment in Iranian: a typologically unique structure

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

(23) a. \(dāδ\) \(xawrič-ēn=an\) \(tār\) \(Xarāγ\) \(sat.\)
    theses(DIR) boy-PL=3PL to Xorog go:PST
    ‘These boys went to Xorog’.
    (intransitive)

b. \(duf\) \(xawrič-ēn\) \(um\) \(kitōb\) \(xēyt.\)
    these(OBL) boy-PL this(OBL) book read:PST
    ‘These boys (have) read this book’.
    (monotransitive)

\(^1\) In Roshani, case is retained only with personal and demonstrative pronouns.

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. \(tæ\) \(in\) \(xær-i\) \(nae-ruš-i?\)
    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)

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<th>A</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>alignment</th>
<th>conditioning factor</th>
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<td>accusative</td>
<td>non-past; individuated P</td>
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<td>Dir</td>
<td>ergative</td>
<td>past; non-individuated P</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obl</td>
<td>Obl</td>
<td>double-oblique</td>
<td>past; individuated P</td>
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Cf. languages with rich case systems:

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

(26) a. \(Ravi\) \(kelā\) \(khā\) \(rahā\) \(thā.\)
    Ravi(NOM.SG) banana(NOM.SG) eat DUR AUX.PST
    ‘Ravi was eating a banana.’
    (neutral)

b. \(Nīnā\) \(bacce=ko\) \(uthāyegī.\)
    Nina(NOM.SG) child:OBL.SG=OBJ lift:FUT
    ‘Nina will lift the child.’
    (accusative)
c.  
\[
\text{bacce}=ne \ kîtāb \ \text{padhī}.
\]
child:OBL.SG=ERG book(NOM.SG) read:PFV

‘The child read a/the book.’  

(ergative)

d.  
\[
\text{Ila}=\text{erg} \ \text{child:OBL.SG=OBJ} \ \text{lift:PFV}
\]

‘Ila lifted the child.’  

(triptite)

<table>
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<th>P</th>
<th>strategy</th>
<th>conditioning factor</th>
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<td>Erg</td>
<td>Obj</td>
<td>tripartite</td>
<td>perfective; individuated P</td>
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Similar functional motivations result in different structures because case systems are different.

Neutralization of Agent and Recipient in ditransitive constructions

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

(27)  
\[
\text{amki} \ pārī \ yīmo \ tu \ nur-e \ pt‘e.
\]

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)  
\[
\text{uze} \ \text{kuřy-e} \ \text{ano} \ \text{šenu-m}.
\]

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)  
\[
\text{č’ale-m} \ pšaše-m \ məʔeres-r \ r-ja-tə-s-s.
\]

boy-OBL girl-OBL apple-DIR 3SG.REC-3SG.A-give-PST

‘The boy gave the apple to the girl.’  

(ditransitive)

(30)  
\[
\text{č’ale-r} \ \wəne-m \ ča-sc.
\]

boy-DIR house-OBL run-PST

‘The boy ran home.’  

(intransitive + adjunct)

Clause type splits in Uto-Aztecan and Tsimshian

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

(31)  
\[
\text{a.} \ [\text{hu-}\text{ka} \ οʔbo-ta \ yepsa-k-o] \ \text{itepo} \ \text{saha-k}.
\]

this-OBL man-OBL arrive-PRF-SBRD we.DIR go-PRF

‘When this man arrived we left’.  

(intransitive; subordinate)

b.  
\[
\text{na}=u \ \text{biča ke} \ [\text{hu-}\text{ka} \ \text{usi-ta} \ \text{čuʔu-ta} \ \text{kipwe-ʔu}].
\]

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-Aztec > Southern Uto-Aztec, 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)

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

   b. hləmoo-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 hləmoo-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 litsxw-(t)=[s (t)=John].
   PROG=CNC read-3=OBL PNC=John
   ‘John is reading.’
   (‘subjunctive’; intransitive)

   c. needii=təp 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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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


References


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