

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-29057-9 - The Grammar of Case: Towards a Localistic Theory

John M. Anderson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

*Part I*

---

PRELIMINARIES

# I Introduction

---

## 1.1 A non-localist view of case

In discussing the grammatical role of case inflexions (or pre-/post-positions) it has for some time been the usual custom to talk in terms of different ‘functions’ or ‘uses’ of each case, and in particular to separate out ‘concrete’ (or ‘local’) uses from ‘purely syntactic’ ones (and among the ‘concrete’ to differentiate between (especially) the ‘spatial’ and the ‘temporal’). Also, certain cases are usually considered to be ‘characteristically’ or ‘basically’ either ‘concrete’ or ‘syntactic’. Between the ‘concrete’ and the ‘purely syntactic’ are often ranged uses which are not obviously or merely spatial (or temporal) and do not seem to be ‘purely syntactic’ either, but are described in terms like ‘dative of possession’ or as being appropriate (to mark the ‘indirect object’, etc.) with certain (semantic groups of) verbs (e.g. ‘verbs of giving or putting’). What I have just very briefly outlined can be exemplified from almost any recent traditional classical grammar, or any grammar compiled within that tradition.<sup>1</sup> In terms of such a framework, one might say that the nominative *in*, for instance, Latin is a case with typically ‘syntactic’ functions (subjective, etc.), whereas the Latin accusative combines both ‘local’ (as ‘goal’—*Romam ire*) and ‘syntactic’ (as object—*Romam videre*) uses. A prepositional example like *to* in English shows (among other things) a somewhat ‘abstract’ use with verbs of ‘giving’, etc. (*I gave the news to the porter*) and also a more ‘concrete’ and ‘local’ function (in sentences like *I travelled to London*). It is doubtful whether there are cases (or prepositions) which are only ever ‘concrete’ in the strict sense of the word (whatever that might be); this would at least appear to be true of the various accounts of case systems that I have consulted in connexion with the present work. Such is a typical traditional viewpoint, and it continues to inform (though with modifications) more recent discussions like those of Kuryłowicz (1949; 1964: ch. 8).

<sup>1</sup> Consider, for example, Gildersleeve & Lodge, 1895: 207–66; Macdonell, 1916: 298–328; or the relevant parts of almost any of the grammars referred to by, say, Havers, 1911. See too Lyons, 1968a: §7.4.2, for a discussion of such traditional presentations.

**1.11 . . . exemplified from Finnish.** Within such a framework, then, the cases of, for instance, Finnish<sup>1</sup> might be divided into two groups with regard to their principal uses: the ‘syntactic’ and the ‘local’. The latter indicate location in space (and ‘metaphorical extensions’ of such), and comprise two main subgroups, the ‘internal’ and the ‘external’, each subgroup containing three distinct cases. One case in each subgroup indicates simple location; the internal (‘inessive’) locates with respect to the inside of some referent, and the external (‘adessive’) with respect to the surface. The other two represent ‘motion from’ the interior (‘elative’) or exterior (‘ablativ’) and ‘motion to’ the interior (‘illative’) or exterior (‘allative’). We can roughly compare the English prepositions *in, on, out of, from, into, to*. There is a further ‘local’ case, namely the ‘prosecutive’ or ‘prolative’, which expresses ‘motion through, along or over’. Also perhaps to be included here is the ‘comitative’ which indicates typically ‘the person along with whom’. Identical in representation to the comitative in many languages but not in Finnish is the ‘instrumental’ or ‘instructive’, which represents the means or manner by which some action is performed, and is thus intermediate between ‘local’ and ‘syntactic’.

The typical ‘syntactic’ cases, which fulfil non-‘local’ functions, are the nominative, accusative and genitive. The first marks the subject of a sentence and a predicative nominal, and the direct object in imperative sentences (i.e. when no subject is present); otherwise, the direct object is represented by an accusative. The genitive is the (superficial) adnominal case *par excellence*. A further small set of cases blurs this dichotomy, and also, in particular, the preceding description of the syntactic cases. These are the ‘essive’ and ‘translative’ which alternate (meaningfully) with the nominative in marking a predicative nominal (the second being used in ‘inchoative’ sentences), and the ‘partitive’, which alternates (once again, meaningfully) with the nominative and accusative in representing subjects and objects. This last group, then, introduces further distinctions within the ‘syntactic’ cases, and also, more interestingly from the point of view of the following discussion, they have in addition ‘local’ uses, which indeed appear to antedate the ‘syntactic’ uses. In this respect, essive, partitive and translative constitute a parallel series to adessive, ablativ and allative.<sup>2</sup> There is also some

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Eliot, 1890: particularly 121–62; and for a semi-localist treatment, cf. Sebeok, 1946. For some exemplification of ‘syntactic’ and ‘local’ functions, see e.g. Lyons, 1968a: §§7.4.5–7.4.6.

<sup>2</sup> It is this sort of phenomenon that is perhaps most obviously suggestive of a localist interpretation (as discussed in §1.2—see too §11.62). In other languages (e.g.

evidence (Eliot, 1890: 138) that the Finnish genitive ‘incorporates’ a former ‘dative’, which is typically used in many languages to mark the subject with certain (‘impersonal’) sub-types of verb, and also the ‘indirect object’ (a further ‘syntactic’ use). Such an account is, in principle, in Hjelmslev’s (1935: particularly 55–61) terms, ‘demi-localist’, in that these two sub-types of case are recognized, the ‘grammatical’ or ‘syntactical’ (or ‘logical’—though this is, of course, often used distinctively (cf. §4.31)) and the ‘concrete’ or ‘spatial’ or ‘topical’ (cf. Holzweissig, 1877).

In other languages—e.g. the so-called ‘ergative languages’—the non-‘local’ cases display a somewhat different superficial organization: this will be relevant to our later discussion, and I will postpone an examination of such phenomena until then (§4.6). However, it is worth noting at this point that an account of this kind (involving strict separation of ‘local’ and non-‘local’) provides no explanation of why certain cases have both ‘local’ and non-‘local’ uses (a point which Hjelmslev, in his argument for a fully ‘localist’ theory—see §1.21—makes much of). Also, since the number of morphological cases varies from language to language, the uses associated with any particular case label are far from constant: hence some of the problems discussed in §1.3.

Comparability is improved if prepositions or postpositions are included. Thus, I shall want for the purposes of the following discussion of the semantics of case functions to ignore any distinction that might be drawn between ‘case’ and ‘pre/postposition’ (cf. e.g. Lyons 1968*a*: §7.4, particularly §7.4.7), and include under the label ‘case’ (in somewhat Wundtian fashion) ‘functional’ elements in general (while not neglecting the fact that prepositions, for instance, appear to be more appropriate to the representation of certain functions than others).

## 1.2 Localist views of case

Less commonly, attempts have been made, on the one hand, to show a relationship between the ‘concrete’ and the more ‘abstract’ uses of the same case or preposition—as, for instance, with the uses of English *to* mentioned above—and, on the other, to reveal common principles

Hungarian—cf. Sauvageot, 1951: 236–47), we must allow for a further series among the non-internal set, such that there is a distinction between a group of three cases indicating location with respect to a surface (‘superessive’, ‘sublative’ and ‘delative’) and a group expressing proximity (adessive, allative and ablative).

underlying both such uses and ‘purely syntactic’ uses (of the same case, or more generally—as with the Latin accusative (exemplified in §1.1), or with respect to it and the preposition *ad*). I am thinking in particular of the more or less localist accounts (of cases or prepositions) offered by scholars like the Byzantine Maximus Planudes, who appears to have been the first grammarian of note to evolve a coherent (and extant) localist theory of case,<sup>1</sup> Harris (1751: book 2, ch. 3), Condillac,<sup>2</sup> Wüllner (1827—developing Bopp’s proposals), Hartung (1831), Key (1850–2; 1874: ch. 18), Madvig (1875), de la Grasserie (1890; 1896: 178–82) and Hjelmslev (1935–7) (and, to a lesser extent, Jakobson, 1936, 1958).<sup>3</sup> The more radical of these attempted to relate all case functions to a small number of universal relations, of which the spatial uses (‘location at’, ‘movement from/to’) of (certain of) the cases represent only the most ‘concrete’ manifestation.

### 1.21 Hjelmslev’s ‘la catégorie des cas’

Thus, Hjelmslev—to take a more recent proposal—sets up three semantic dimensions for case systems—‘direction’ (‘éloignement’/‘repos’/‘rapprochement’), ‘cohérence’/‘incohérence’, ‘subjectivité’/‘objectivité’—which are intended to characterize the relations expressed by both ‘syntactic’ and ‘local’ cases. A number of cases can be differentiated with respect to a single dimension, since Hjelmslev recognizes, apart from the possibility of cases representing the two polar terms and a neutral term (such as ‘repos’), complex cases like, typically, the nominative, which can represent both ‘éloignement’ (as subjective) and ‘rapprochement’ (as predicative). Further, the dimension is capable of different ‘orientations’, depending on which case is the ‘intensive’ (roughly, semantically ‘marked’ or simplex) one. For instance, Hjelmslev (1935: 45–6, 101) proposes that the Latin ablative is ‘intensive’ (with respect to the dimension of ‘direction’), in that ‘l’ablatif latin insiste sur l’éloignement; toute autre cas du système normal du latin est

<sup>1</sup> But see the remark of Theodosius quoted by Steinthal, 1863: 623. Planudes’ work is printed in Bachmann, 1828: 1–166.

<sup>2</sup> See Le Roy, 1947: 478a–81b.

<sup>3</sup> See too Vogt, 1949; Sørensen, 1949; Kuipers, 1962; Velten, 1962. Other works are referred to by Hjelmslev (1935: 1–70) and Brøndal (1948: 49–50). Hjelmslev, indeed, provides a quite extended survey of the development of the various issues surrounding the localist *vs.* anti-localist debate, the comparative neglect of which is a relatively recent phenomenon. For a concise illustration of a localist hypothesis, see particularly Hjelmslev’s (1935: 11–13) account of the analysis of the Greek case system proposed by Planudes; and *cf.*, on Hjelmslev’s own proposals, §1.21 below.

complexe ou neutre à l'égard de la dimension de direction' (101). In another language (Hjelmslev suggests Greek), it might be a case representing 'rapprochement' that is 'intensive'.

The third dimension, which differentiates between cases which express relations from the point of view of a spectator (typically the speaker—as in a prepositional example like *He is behind the tree*) and those which do not necessarily (*He is underneath the tree*), presupposes the second, but not vice versa. That is, the (morphological) cases of a particular language may not express such distinctions, but if they do, then they will also express those appropriate to the second dimension. This relationship of pre-supposition also holds between the second dimension (which typically distinguishes between, for example, an inessive ('cohérent'—*dans*) and an adessive ('incohérent'—*à côté de*)) and the first. Thus, only the first dimension may be appropriate to the casual system of certain languages.

Other apparent restrictions are more problematic. In general, it is difficult to see the relevance of the second and third dimensions to the 'purely syntactic' cases—except negatively (they are 'incohérent' and 'objectif'?—though see chapter 11, particularly §11.6). It is not clear too how further kinds of 'spatial indication' (Collinson, 1937: 50–4) are to be accommodated. These could no doubt be regarded as essentially nominal rather than casual, so that the markers of such require a complex derivation from a superordinate nominal rather than a simple case or preposition (i.e. are derived by 'casualization'—§2.121); but then this might also be said (as is the case at least superficially in many languages) of, for example, the 'subjectivité'/'objectivité' distinction (cf. *behind* (= 'at/to the back of')). Might not the marking of this distinction simply by case-inflexions be merely superficial (rather than an indication of an underlying casual status) even in those languages where we find this phenomenon?

### 1.3 'Surfacism'

**1.31 . . . in localist theories.** Such questions are in part a reflexion of a wider deficiency, as a result of which (in particular) such attempts at a localist account can be judged to have been only partially successful; and this was, I think, due especially to the fact that the analyses were applied on the whole to case as a superficial phenomenon—semantic values were, for the most part, attached directly to cases as surface

morphological categories. This was despite the fact that such factors as the relationship between casual inflexions, ‘word order’ and prepositions were recognized (but remained to some extent strangely unexplored in any rigorous way) by, for instance, Wüllner (1827: 6–9) and Hjelmlev (1935: 40–3, 107)—as well as (in some respects at least) by many other scholars in the past, of course,<sup>1</sup> and particularly since the time of Wundt. Certainly, an extension of Hjelmlev’s avoidance of a simple ‘Grundbedeutung’ for nominatives would enable us to overcome the difficulties met by any approach which attempted to characterize the subject–verb relation in terms like ‘actor–action’ when confronted with sentences like the following:

- (i) a. That envelope contains my money
- b. She suffered terribly
- c. John is in the garden
- d. I owe you sixpence
- e. The hams hang from the ceiling
- f. The chalet sleeps six
- g. John got a shock
- h. Ariadne left

Only the last of these would fit without considerable difficulty this particular characterization. As Marache (1967: 292) observes: ‘Définir le sujet comme point de départ de l’action a de toute façon l’inconvénient de ramener la fonction au sens de quelques verbes: ceux qui expriment l’action.’ However, such an account, while avoiding such difficulties by assigning typically a complex value to nominatives, fails to explain the particular value the nominative has in any one instance. In other words, while it is true that, when we consider such a set of sentences as that in (i), it is impossible to consider that all the subjects have the same semantic function, nevertheless in any one of these sentences (if we ignore the others) the function of the subject is much less ambivalent. Moreover, this proposal does not throw any light on what these diverse elements might have in common—what it is that merits the use of the term ‘subject’—apart from identity of superficial marker (positional or inflexional); nor does it explain why the ‘actor–action’ description is

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. Robertson, 1905: 524–5; Trabalza, 1908: 123; Kukenheim, 1932: 108, 140; Chomsky, 1966: 44–5; Donzé, 1967: 171; Harris, 1751: 25–6; Hjelmlev, 1935: 24, on Bernhardi; Benveniste, 1949; Lyons, 1968*a*: §7.4.5; Salmon, 1969: 177. On the historical relationship between case inflexions and prepositions, see particularly, e.g., Pott, 1836: 613–51; Velten, 1962.

## 1.3 'Surfacism'

9

appropriate for very many active sentences (in English, at least—see Lyons, 1968*a*: §8.1.5). Such inadequacies follow, it seems to me, from a failure to appreciate that there may exist a complex relationship between the underlying semantic (case) relations and their superficial markers (case inflexions or prepositions), due particularly to that interaction with other semantic elements which our syntax will have to provide for.

**1.32 . . . and in non-localist theories.** This kind of failure, however, has also characterized (until very recently—see Fillmore, 1966*a*, 1968*a*, 1968*b*) most non-localist treatments of case—see e.g. de Groot, 1956, or the study of Redden's (1966) discussed by Fillmore (1968*a*: 8–9). And with respect to both positions, this weakened in particular the power of the generalizations concerning cases (as a feature of universal grammar and of particular grammars) that could plausibly be formulated (cf. Fillmore, 1968*a*: §1.2), and thus helped to earn for case grammars the scepticism of scholars like Jespersen (1924: ch. 13; 1930: ch. 30) and Bazell (1937). Consider too the debate concerning the semantic *vs.* the syntactic character of case(-inflexions) referred to by Moreux (1968: 31–2). Such considerations (concerning the inadequacy of attempts to characterize semantically case inflexions) also underlie in part, no doubt, the relegation of case to a very superficial position in 'traditional' transformational grammars (as Chomsky, 1965: ch. 4, §2.2).

Associated with this is the (possible) confusion resulting from the (well-established—cf. Baker, 1931) use of a single term to refer both to case(-relations) and case(-inflexions); part of the reaction against case-grammars is thus merely terminological. An early instance of such a reaction is represented by the remark of Meigret's quoted by Livet (1858: 70): 'Au regard des cas, la langue française ne les connoît pas, parce que les noms français ne changent point leur fin.' Part of the debate between Sonnenschein (e.g. 1927: ch. 1) and Jespersen (e.g. 1924: ch. 13) is concerned with terminological appropriacy. However, the question of terminology is connected with the degree of 'abstractness' accorded to 'case'. I shall opt below for an 'abstract' view of case.

## 1.4 A statement of intent

Despite such inadequacies in the formulation of localist case grammars in the past, it seems to me that, on the one hand, the study of case functions



(whether marked inflexionally or otherwise) has been interestingly renewed (by particularly Fillmore (1968*a*)) within a framework that allows for a complex relationship between case functions and their superficial representation, and that, on the other, localist studies like those I have mentioned did progress sufficiently towards demonstrating common principles underlying ‘spatial’ and ‘abstract’ uses and both of these and ‘syntactic’ uses, to require the attention of any serious attempt to construct a grammar of grammatical functions (cf. Lyons, 1968*a*: 301–2). Even in such (for the most part) non-localist discussions as Kuryłowicz’s (1964: ch. 8) concerning the Indo-European case-system, the intricate superficial and historical relationships between the representation of ‘concrete’ and ‘abstract’ uses are well illustrated—and demand an explanation.<sup>1</sup> A localist conception of case inflexions (and prepositions) and case functions provides in principle an explanation for such, as well as (I am going to suggest) for various other synchronic and diachronic semantic and syntactic phenomena. Moreover, the effect of Fillmore’s (non-localist) proposals, if accepted in the following respect, is to remove from consideration at the deepest levels those functions (the subjective and objective, in particular) which represent the most difficult problems with respect to a localist interpretation of case relations. That is, not only different levels of representation are allowed for, but also the traditional ‘syntactic’ cases, nominative and accusative (the subject and object markers) are to be regarded as (like the genitive) superficial neutralizations of distinct underlying cases (cf. Fillmore, 1968*a*: 49). Subjective and objective are not among the underlying cases; the non-local underlying cases are of quite a different order, and are thus (I shall suggest) rendered more amenable to a localist interpretation. I shall also argue in what follows that such a conception removes the difficulties noted above (in §1.31), and yet includes what is of value in the demi-localist position, by thus incorporating the ‘syntactic’ functions as superficial (though some kind of localist interpretation of the surface syntactic functions is not excluded). In sum, then, one of the things I want to argue for most strongly in what follows is that a more abstract view of **case**—taking this term to refer to grammatical relations contracted by nouns which express the nature of their ‘participation’ in the ‘process’ or ‘state’ represented in the sentence (or noun phrase)—cf. Lombard, 1929—and which are repre-

<sup>1</sup> For a similar illustration with respect to prepositions, consider, for instance, Sastri, 1968.

1.4 *A statement of intent*

11

sented superficially in various fashions, including inflexionally and by pre- and postpositions—enables us to avoid some at least of the difficulties encountered by earlier studies, and yet to maintain an essentially localist standpoint.

**1.41 Prospect.** In the following chapter I shall be concerned to formulate a grammatical framework within which to evaluate various sub-parts of a localistic conception of functional relations. As things stand (or fall apart) at present, this will involve me in a number of assumptions and assertions which I cannot hope to fully substantiate in what follows. In particular, at a number of points we are constrained to choose between alternatives whose relative merits I (at least) am in a very poor position to pronounce upon. Thus, I shall for the most part merely try to indicate the nature of the major assumptions being made, some of which are relatively independent of the localist argument (and vice versa). Part II will explore the status within such a grammar (particularly of English) of the case elements nominative and ergative, with respect to both their occurrence in underlying representations and (to a lesser extent) their superficial manifestation. The purpose of the first two parts, then, is to establish a grammatical framework within which case relations can be discussed and to examine (from a non-localist point of view) aspects of the grammar of two cases.

In Part III, two further ('local') case elements, locative and ablative, are introduced (in chapters 6 and 8, respectively) and their syntax examined. Chapters 7 and 9 represent attempts to show that sentences involving various non-spatial relations can plausibly be considered to involve (semantically and syntactically) locative or directional structures, and that they differ from 'concrete' locatives not with regard to the basic case relations involved but in the character of the nouns and (particularly) the verbs that contract the relations. The final section is in part a very tentative attempt to demonstrate that even the most radical localist proposal, namely that there are common (semantic and syntactic) principles underlying both the non-'local' and 'local' cases, can be given some substantiation, even though the incorporation of such 'insights' into the grammar presents for the moment a number of difficulties.

**1.42 Wider considerations.** This survey of putative 'localist phenomena' is of course far from exhaustive and is intended merely as an illustration of something of the range of phenomena that a localist