

Overview

Moro (Kordofanian: Sudan) provides new evidence for accusative as a dependent case.

- Accusative case occurs wherever one DP c-commands another DP in a phase.
- All human objects shift to [Spec, vP] where they are accessible for dependent case assignment.
- Only proper nouns, kinship terms, and pronouns mark accusative case.

Agree-based vs. dependent theories of case

Agree-based case: Standard analyses of structural accusative case assume it is assigned by transitive v under Agree.

Dependent case: Baker (2015) argues that case reflects c-command relationships between DPs in the same phase, following (Marantz, 1991).

- Ergative vs. accusative alignment can be derived by assigning dependent case ‘up’ or ‘down’.

Dependent case in Moro

Proposal: Dependent case rule

If DP₁ c-commands DP₂ in the Spell-Out of φ:

- 1 Value DP₂ as ACC.
- 2 Where φ={CP, DP}

Argument 1: Ditransitives

Both objects of ditransitive verbs surface with ACC:

- (1) éga-nac-ó ɲálo-ɲ kója-ɲ
1SG.RT-give-PFV Ngalo-ACC Kója-ACC
‘I gave Ngalo to Kója.’ / ‘I gave Kója to Ngalo.’

- This configuration is predicted by the dependent case account as both objects are c-commanded by the subject DP.

Argument 2: Passives

Accusative case is assigned to internal arguments in passives:

- (2) ɲálo gA-nac-ən-ú kója-ɲ
Ngallo CLG.RT-give-PASS-PFV Kója-ACC
‘Ngallo was given to Kója.’ / ‘Ngallo was given Kója’

- If ACC were assigned structurally by v_{active}, it should disappear in passive contexts.

Dependent case in Moro (continued)

Argument 3: Focused objects

A-bar movement of the object bleeds ACC assignment:

- (3) ɲw-Kúku-(*)ɲ-ki₁ n=égó-bwáɲ-á t₁
FOC-Kuku-(*)ACC-REL.OP COMP=1SG.DPC-like-IPFV
‘It’s Kuku that I like.’

Argument 4: Bare nominal complements

‘Accusative’ case markers surface on inalienable possessors in the absence of possessor agreement:

- (4) a. ləŋge Kúku-ɲ b. ləŋg-en gó-Kúku
mom Kuku-ACC mom-3.POSS CLg.POSS-Kuku
‘Mom of Kuku’ ‘Kuku’s mom’

- Kúku-ɲ must be the complement of NP in (4a), meaning c-command by D⁰ can license ACC.

- In (4b), the possessor raises to [Spec, ɲ] to receive inherent genitive case (cf. Dvorak, 2011).

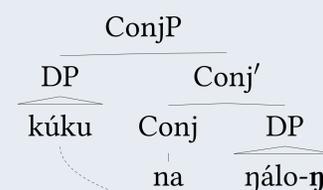
Argument 5: DP Coordination

DP coordination triggers ACC on the right conjunct, even in subject position:

- (5) Kúku na ɲálo-ɲ l-aɲer-á
Kuku and Ngalo-ACC CL.LRT-good-ADJ
‘Kuku and Ngalo are nice.’

- ACC on the first argument is ungrammatical, which we might expect if this was default case.

Analysis: Dependent case in coordination



Multiple [PERSON] object shift

Human objects always precede non-human ones:

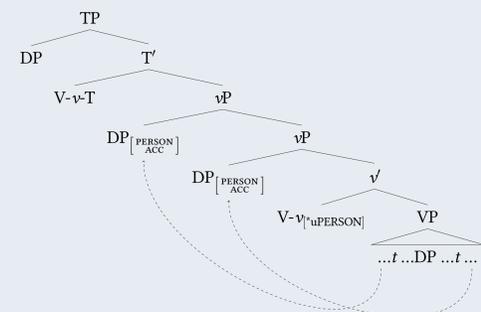
- (6) a. éga-nac-ó kója-ɲ diá
1SG.RT-give-PFV Kója-ACC cow
‘I gave the cow to Kója/ Kója to the cow.’
b. *éga-nac-ó diá kója-ɲ

- Binding data suggest this asymmetry is structural:

- (7) íga-saj-ac-ú lámmiá lənələnəɲ é-nega dəŋgen
1SG-see-L.APPL-PFV boys each LOC-houses 3PL.POSS
‘I saw each boy at his house.’

Analysis: Object shift of human nouns

- Human nouns are specified [PERSON]
- v has a strong, insatiable [uPERSON] probe



- [PERSON]-valued objects in [Spec, vP] are accessible for dependent case assignment in the CP phase.

[PROPER] morphological case

Only names and kinship terms receive ACC in Moro:

- (8) a. éga-nac-ó kója-ɲ ɲera(*)-ɲ
1SG.RT-give-PFV Kója-ACC girl(*)-ACC
b. éga-nac-ó ɲera(*)-ɲ kója-ɲ
‘I gave a girl to Kója/Kója to a girl.’ (both exx.)

- Associative plural suffixes are restricted to the same class of nouns:

- (9) lorlda-ñ-anda b. Kója-ɲənda
brothers-1SG.POSS-ASSOC.PL Kója-ASSOC.PL
‘My brothers’ ‘Kója’s family/friends’

- 3P object clitics are only overt when these nouns serve as their antecedents:

- (10) a. g-war-ó ɲaló na náɲ-ɲú-bug-i
CLG.RT-insult-PFV Nalo and 3SG.I-3SG.OM-punch-CPFV
‘He yelled at Ngallo_i then punched him_i.’
b. kuku g-war-ó ɲera na náɲó-búg-i
kuku CLG.RT-insult-PFV child and 3SG.I-punch-CPFV
‘Kuku yelled at the child_i then punched him_i.’

- We propose that these nouns have a common [PROPER] feature (Matushansky, 2006).

Analysis: Accusative case allomorphy

- 1 [ACC] ↔ -ɲ / [PROPER]___
- 2 [ACC] ↔ -∅ / elsewhere

Implications for case typology

Object asymmetries in Moro

Syntactic [PERSON] > [ANIMATE]
Morphological [PROPER] > [PERSON]

- Moro resembles Diyari (Pama Nyungan), in which high-animacy objects, including names, receive accusative case while low animacy objects are unmarked (Baker, 2015, 22-23).

- Baker (2015) and Legate (2008) argue that animacy-based splits must occur in the morphology (pace Merchant, 2006).

- Yet Moro shows that animacy can trigger syntactic asymmetries, which should be able to feed dependent case assignment.

Typological prediction

Both syntactic and morphological animacy-based case splits are possible, predicting a three-way case split for some language.

Conclusion

- The distribution of accusative case in Moro support an analysis based on dependent case (Marantz, 1991; Baker, 2015).

- The Case facts exist alongside syntactic and morphological asymmetries that feed case assignment.

- The distribution of overt accusative case is crucially dependent on the morphological component.

- While DPs may still need to be licensed by verbal heads in Moro (voice morphology suggests this is the case), there is no evidence that nonhuman objects receive case in the syntax.

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