

CHAPTER 53

CASE IN AN AUSTRONESIAN LANGUAGE

DISTINGUISHING CASE FUNCTIONS IN TUKANG BESI

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53.1 TUKANG BESI

THE 'classic' paradigm of case marking assumes a unique and (pragmatically, semantically, or syntactically) coherent meaning for each phonologically distinct case. Thus in the Japanese examples in (1) each of *wa*, *ga*, *de*, and *o* marks a unique role for the NP it follows, definable either pragmatically (for *wa*, 'topic'), semantically (for *de*, 'instrument' and 'location of event') or syntactically (*ga* 'nominative' and *o* 'accusative').

Japanese

- (1) a. *Onna wa kooen de tori o mita.*
woman TOP park LOC bird ACC watched
'The woman watched birds in the park.'

- b. *Tori wa onna ga kooen de mita.*
 bird TOP woman NOM park LOC watched
 'The woman watched birds in the park.'

A different set of organizational principles govern case in *Tukang Besi*, an Austronesian language of central Indonesia (Donohue 1999). There is an unproblematic genitive case, an oblique case that marks modality, and two cases that mark core arguments ('terms'), *na* and *te*.¹ With a bivalent clause such as (2) *na* and *te* are used to mark the A and the P, respectively. We can see that these case markers may not be reversed, as in (2b), and that the position of the two arguments is fixed, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (2c).

- (2) a. *No-'ita te kadadi na wowine.*
 she:saw TE bird NA woman
 'The woman watched birds.'
 b. **No-'ita na kadadi te wowine.*
 she:saw NA bird TE woman
 c. **No-'ita na wowine te kadadi.*
 she:saw NA woman TE bird

With monovalent clauses the S is marked with *na*, as can be seen in (3).

- (3) a. *No-kede na wowine.*
 she:sat NA woman
 'The woman sat down.'
 b. **No-kede te wowine.*
 she:sat TE woman

Based on the data in (2) and (3) alone we would have no trouble distinguishing VOS order, *na* as a nominative case marker, and *te* as the accusative. The language is similar to Japanese in terms of the alignment of the case markers. Complications quickly arise with examples such as (4) and (5).

- (4) *Te wowine no-'ita te kadadi.*
 TE woman she:saw TE bird
 'The woman watched birds.'
 (5) *Te wowine no-kede.*
 TE woman she:sat
 'The woman sat down.'

¹ I describe these four as case markers, rather than prepositions or articles, since (i) certain prepositions may govern case markers, and some prepositions do not require overtly case-marked NPs, but no case markers govern prepositions on their NPs, and (ii) the form of the case marker correlates with grammaticality and interpretation in a very fundamental way, correlating with clausal position and verbal marking, not features usually associated with articles, and the occurrence of demonstratives is independent of the choice of case marker. The fact that there are pragmatic constraints on some of the case markers implies that their history is probably intertwined with articles.

Based on (4) and (5) alone we would have to assume that TE was a syntactically empty determiner with the phonological form *te*, since there is no differentiation of different syntactic roles. In combination with the data in (2) and (3) we must advance a more complicated characterization of the two case markers *te* and *na*, as seen in (6).

- (6) *te* marks nominative case when preverbal;
 it marks accusative case when postverbal.
 na marks nominative case when postverbal.

The fact that clauses of the form **te kadadi no'ita na wowine* are ungrammatical supports the hypothesis in (6): preverbal *te* does not mark accusative case. Although our characterization of case in *Tukang Besi* must make reference to position in the clause as well as to morphological form, it is still readily characterizable as a nominative–accusative system, with complications based on position such as have been described by, for instance, Marantz (1984). There are, however, further complications. In the examples seen so far the bivalent verbs have all shown S,A agreement by prefix (*no-* for third person arguments in realis clauses). It is also possible for the P to be cross-referenced on the verb. When there is agreement for the P *na* marks the P, and *te* the A, as in the two (equivalent) sentences in (7). By comparison with (2) we can see that this is exactly the opposite set of form:meaning correspondences as were seen there. Indeed, if we were to compare the case used in the monovalent clause in (3) with the bivalent data in (7) alone, we would have to characterize *te* as the ergative, and *na* as the absolutive case marker.²

- (7) a. *No-'ita='e te wowine na kadadi.*
 she:saw:them TE woman NA bird
 'The woman watched the birds.'
 b. *No'ita'e na kadadi te wowine.*

Examining the possibilities for preverbal positions in clauses with P agreement on the verb, seen in (8), and combining with the monovalent data in (3) and (5), as well as the bivalent data in (7) (but ignoring, for the moment, (2) and (4)), we would arrive at the characterization of case seen in (9) (noting in passing the ungrammaticality of **te wowine no'ita'e na kadadi*).

- (8) *Te kadadi no-'ita='e te wowine.*
 TE bird she:saw:them TE woman
 'The woman watched the birds.'
 (9) *te* marks absolutive case when preverbal;
 it marks ergative case when postverbal.
 na marks absolutive case when postverbal.

² An analysis that treats clauses such as (7) as truly bivalent, and clauses such as (4) as 'antipassive' or 'detransitive' variants of these is untenable. See Donohue (1999: 158–66) for discussion.

In fact, of course, we cannot ignore the existence of the data in (2) and (4). Although the clauses with P-agreement present a clear increase in the amount of morphology in the clause, they are more frequent in natural speech, and P-agreement markers are acquired earlier than the nominative agreement prefixes. Following the argumentation in Donohue (1999: chapter 7), I propose that both clause types, both with and without P agreement markers, are basic.

There is clearly no one-to-one correspondence between the case marker used and the syntactic role of an argument, in terms of argument-structure or semantic features that will neatly correspond to categories such as 'nominative' and 'accusative' in Japanese, or 'ergative' and 'absolutive' in other languages. We can, nonetheless, offer some robust characterizations of the case system, shown in (10).

- (10) *te* marks a preverbal argument which would have been eligible to receive *na* case if postverbal;
 it marks a postverbal argument that is not eligible to appear preverbally.
na marks a P when it is postverbal and shows agreement on the verb; if there is no agreement on the verb for P, *na* marks the A (or S, if monovalent).

In terms of directly coding the arguments of the clause, the reader would be excused for thinking that the *Tukang Besi* case-marking system, in contrast to the rather transparent system of verbal agreement, is convoluted. This depends on our opinions on what a case-marking system is intended to encode. There are different opinions on this, and the widely accepted distinction between structural and semantic cases reflects this dichotomy. Examining the more complex case systems (e.g. Daniel and Ganenkov, Chapter 46) we would have to conclude that case exists to mark semantic distinctions. In the more simple case systems (e.g. König, Chapter 50, or Foley 1991 on *Yimas*) the relationships marked cannot be easily described in terms of semantic distinctions, but exist in terms of syntactic distinctions. Just as a 'standard' nominative-accusative case-marking system does not mark semantic roles but more directly grammatical information, so too can the *Tukang Besi* case system be more productively viewed not as encoding specific information about the identity of the A and P but rather about the SUBJECT and the OBJECT.³ The full case system of *Tukang Besi* consists of four members, shown in (11) (there are also a number of prepositions, some of which subcategorize for a *te*-marked object, and some for a *di*-marked object).

- (11) *na* subject
te object
i ~ *di* oblique / adjunct (unmarked/irrealis ~ past tense/realis)
nu genitive

³ The question of grammatical functions in western Austronesian languages has a long history, though it was only brought to the attention of general linguists by Schachter (1976, 1977). Work in a variety of frameworks by Guilfoyle (1992), Kroeger (1993), Sells (2000) et al., and Pearson (2005), demonstrates that the issues are not as problematic as presented by Schachter's articles.

When we examine syntactic tests for grammatical functions (see, for instance, Dalrymple 2000 for cross-linguistically relevant constructions) we find that the *na*-marked argument is consistently the most privileged argument of the clause – in other words, the subject (though see Donohue 2005b). To present just one example, examine (12)–(14), which illustrate the scope of floating quantifiers in different clauses. In an intransitive clause the scope of *saba'ane* is unambiguously with the argument, not with the adjunct *di wunua*. In each of (13) and (14) there are two arguments, and *saba'ane* scopes over the *na*-marked argument, regardless of whether it is the A or the P.

- (12) *Saba'ane no-moturu di wunua na ana.*
 all they:sleep DI house NA child
 'All the children slept in the house(s).'
 * 'The children slept in all the houses.'
- (13) *Saba'ane no-'ita te 'obu na beka.*
 all they:saw TE dog NA cat
 'All the cats saw the dogs.'
 * 'The cats saw all the dogs.'
- (14) *Saba'ane no-'ita='e te beka na 'obu.*
 all they:saw:them TE cat NA dog
 'The cats saw all the dogs.'
 * 'All the cats saw the dogs.'

Further arguments for the privileged status of the *na*-marked argument can be found in Donohue (1999, 2004), and shall not be repeated here. There is considerable debate about whether the alternation in (13) and (14) (and earlier (2) and (7)) represents a true alternation in the status of the subject or not in Austronesian languages (e.g. Aldridge 2004; Pearson 2005), but whatever the exact syntactic status of the alternation, it is clear that there is a change in syntactic privileges when the cross-referencing on the verb changes.

Another factor that is relevant to our differentiation of the case markers *te* and *na* is pragmatic. In (15) and (16) we can see that, while there are no restrictions on questioning arguments *in situ* (there are also pseudo-cleft strategies), the *na*-marked argument may not be questioned.⁴ Furthermore, preverbal position and the *te* case marker does not license questioning: the same restrictions that were found with postverbal arguments are found with preverbal ones, as shown in (17) (compare with (15b) and (16a)).

- (15) a. *No-'ita te paira na wowine?*
 she:saw TE what NA woman
 'What did the woman see?'

⁴ This means that the pseudo-cleft strategy is the only one available for questioning the subject of a monovalent clause.

- b. **No-'ita te kadadi na emai?*
 she:saw TE bird NA who
 'Who saw the bird?'
- (16) a. **No-'ita='e te wowine na paira?*
 she:saw:it TE woman NA what
 'What did the woman see?'
- b. *No-'ita='e te emai na kadadi?*
 she:saw:it TE who NA bird
 'Who saw the bird?'
- (17) a. **Te emai no-'ita te kadadi?*
 TE who she:saw TE bird
 'Who saw the bird?'
- b. **Te paira no-'ita='e te wowine?*
 TE what she:saw:it TE woman
 'What did the woman see?'

What, then, is the status of arguments in the preverbal position? We have seen that only the argument that we would expect to see marked with *na* may appear there, and that in that position the argument is marked by *te*. The difference between (2) and (4), and between (7) and (8), is that in (4) and (8) a degree of identificational focus is necessarily associated with the preverbal argument; this identificational focus cannot be found with the equivalent postverbal argument, as shown in (18), which presents responses to a question calling for identification of the subject.

[Question: Who went home?]

- (18) a. *Te wowine no-mbule=mo.*
 TE woman she:returned
 'The woman went (home).'
- b. #*No-mbule=mo na wowine.*
 she:returned NA woman

How do we characterize the alignment of case marking? Both (2a) and (7a) can be argued to be 'basic' clauses in the language, and so both must be considered when determining alignment – and unfortunately our notion of alignment does not extend to there being two basic transitive clause types. Rather than being characterized as showing nominative–accusative or ergative–absolutive or semantic alignment, the case systems of the western and northern Austronesian languages directly mark grammatical functions, bypassing the standard notions of 'alignment' entirely. Even then, we need a set of conventions to interpret the 'meaning' of the case markers, as shown in (19).

- (19) *te*: if preverbal, *te* marks the subject;
 if postverbal, *te* marks a core non-subject ('object').
na: necessarily postverbal, *na* marks the subject.

Examined in terms of pragmatic information, we can re-couch the generalization in (19) as (20).

- (20) *te*: if preverbal, *te* marks identificational focus (see (18));
 if postverbal, *te* marks a non-given term.
na: necessarily postverbal, *na* marks a (non-focused) given term.

The complexities do not end here. Since first or second persons are necessarily given information in any speech act, we would predict that it is impossible for *te* to mark a postverbal argument if it is first or second person. To some extent this prediction is borne out, as can be seen in (21). A 1SG argument may appear preverbally with *te*-marking, but not postverbally. For a third person argument these restrictions do not hold.

- (21) a. *Te iaku no-'ita=aku.*
 TE 1SG they:saw:me
 'They saw me (and not someone else).'
 b. *#!No-'ita te iaku.*
 they:saw TE 1SG
 'They saw me.'
- (22) a. *Te ia no-'ita='e.*
 TE 3SG they:saw:her
 'They saw her (and not someone else).'
 b. *No-'ita te ia.*
 they:saw TE 3SG
 'They saw her.'

It is, however, possible for *te* to mark a first or second person argument when it is postverbal, but only when that argument is the A of a clause such as (7). Reversing the roles of the participants of (21) results in the clauses in (23), both of which are grammatical despite the presence of a postverbal *te* phrase.

- (23) a. *Te ia ku-'ita='e (te iaku).*
 TE 3SG I:saw:her TE 1SG
 'I saw her (and not someone else).'
 b. *Ku-'ita='e te iaku (na ia).*
 I:saw:her TE 1SG NA 3SG
 'I saw her.'

The Tukang Besi case system, then, does depend on syntactic roles to some extent, despite being overwhelmingly governed directly by grammatical-function information, rather than argument-structure information.

53.2 OTHER WESTERN AUSTRONESIAN LANGUAGES

The pattern of case marking found in *Tukang Besi*, directly marking grammatical functions rather than marking specific positions in argument structure, is one that is shared by many languages of the so-called 'Philippine' type (see Donohue 2002 for a discussion of the reflexes of the Philippine voice morphology in *Tukang Besi*). The sentences in (24) (from Tagalog) show the same alternation of case marking between the A and the P that we observed in *Tukang Besi* between (2) and (7). As in *Tukang Besi*, the variation in *ang* marking the A or the P corresponds to the affixation on the verb. While in Tagalog the verbal affixes do not show a paradigm of inflection as the *Tukang Besi* cross-referencing does (though see Sells 1998, 2000), the net effect is the same.

Tagalog

- (24) a. *Nakita ng bata ang aso.*
 PV:SAW GEN child NOM dog
 'The child saw the dog.'
- b. *Nakakita ng aso ang bata.*
 AV:SAW GEN dog NOM child
 'The child saw a dog.'

Note that the case marking associated with the nominative argument does not vary by position in the clause, unlike the *Tukang Besi* examples seen earlier. (25) shows that Tagalog, which represents a more typical western Austronesian case-marking system, marks both preverbal and postverbal subjects with *ang*. Similarly, rather than having a dedicated core case marker, the genitive *ng* is used for non-*ang* arguments. The attractions of a nominal analysis of the data that are engendered by such a syncretism (under which (24a) would be more directly translated as 'The dog is the seen-one of the child') have been pointed out by many authors, just as many others have pointed out the problems with such an analysis.

- (25) a. *Ang aso-(a)y nakita ng bata.*
 NOM dog-AY PV:SAW GEN child
 'The child saw the dog.'
- b. *Ang bata-(a)y nakakita ng aso.*
 NOM child-AY AV:SAW GEN dog
 'The child saw a dog.'

The Austronesian patterns seen here, primarily through *Tukang Besi*, reveal direct reference to something other than argument structure positions. This chapter began with a brief look at Japanese, which has a pragmatic NP-marking system

separate from, though integrated with, the nominative–accusative syntactic system. In (western) Austronesian case systems too, pragmatic information plays a part, but it is completely integrated with syntactic marking. Since grammatical notions such as ‘subject’ are, it has been argued, the syntacticization of discourse-salient positions, this should not be seen as surprising. The fact that such tight integration of pragmatics and syntax is rare around the world does not mean that these case-marking systems do not deserve deeper investigation.