

# Syntax

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## ∅-Marking Hierarchy for Case in the NP Domain

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[INT] When it comes to doing typological research on languages, hierarchies form a powerful tool to express the relationship between particular properties. In the following piece, the hierarchy involving ∅-marking of cases on NP with both nominal and pronominal heads will be explored in both a syntactic and a semantic context. This specific hierarchy is described in this course's lecture slides (Hengeveld, 2020a, p. 53) as follows:

Subject  $\subset$  Object  $\subset$  Oblique

To be more specific, the hierarchy states that if one of the grammatical relations on the hierarchy is ∅-marked, the grammatical relations preceding it on the hierarchy will be as well. This should hold true for any domain which adheres to the nominative-accusative alignment.

First of all, the languages French, Dutch, Latin and Kambera were investigated. While among these four only Latin employs a nominative-accusative alignment system in the nominal NP domain, all four employ such a system in the pronominal NP domain. All nominal NP heads are marked for case in Latin, as is illustrated in example 1; both subject 'templum' and object 'te' are marked for their respective nominative and accusative case. For each of the aforementioned languages the pronominal heads of NP are marked for case. This marking is exemplified in example 2.

- (1) Imman-e                    te                    habe-t                    templu-m                    ...  
monstrous-N.NOM.SG 2SG.ACC have-PRS.3SG temple.N-NOM.SG  
'A monstrous temple contains you ...'  
(Accius, n.d., p. 114)

- (2) Pa=meti=bia=mu=ŋga,                    nda   ŋgàra ehi  
CAU=die=just=2SG.G=1SG.DAT NEG shat   content  
'(You) just kill me, it doesn't matter'  
(Klamer & Klamer, 1998, p. 65)

Since for these NP heads, no ∅-marking takes place—meaning that for each syntactic function (subject, object and oblique) the argument is marked—these languages do not contradict the hierarchy. Because of this distribution of markedness, the hierarchy holds no interesting contradictions when it is viewed from a semantic perspective; case is marked for any of the semantic roles (eg. agent, patient, topic, goal).

The other two languages part of this investigation were Hebrew and Hup. In the case of these two languages, when viewed on a more superficial level, examples were found where a ∅-marking hierarchy could also be formulated in terms of semantic roles (as described in the lecture slides (Hengeveld, 2020a, p. 54)):

Agent  $\subset$  Patient  $\subset$  Other

This interpretation of the hierarchical properties is illustrated in example 3. In both Hebrew and Hup, it would seem that arguments with the agent role are ∅-marked, while arguments with the role patient or any other semantic role are not, thereby confirming a semantic approach for the ∅-marking hierarchy.

Example 4 contradicts this supposed semantic interpretation however, as in this case the argument with patient role is unmarked.

- (3) ?āh tih=dóʔ-ān                    get-waed-ach  
1SG 3SG=child-OBJ stand-eat-DECL  
'I fed the child'  
(Epps, 2008, p. 402)

- (4) Dan pagaʃ                    et    ha-xavev-im        ʃel-o  
Dan met.pst.3SG.M ACC DEF-friend-M.PL POSS-3SG.M  
'I fed the child'

Formulated by a native speaker according to (Hus, 2020)

With all this in mind, approaching the Ø-marking hierarchy from a syntactic perspective seems to be the most logical based on the data presented for the languages in the given data-set. This approach also rhymes with the case-based view of grammatical relations as mentioned in the lecture slides (Hengeveld, 2020b, p. 23).

## References

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