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On Direct and Oblique Cases

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One purpose of this paper is to utilize recent advances in the understanding of grammatical relations in order to test a standard assumption of structuralist and traditional analysis of morphological cases.* Another is to use the results of that testing — the pattern of successes and failures of the restated structuralist hypotheses — to draw more general conclusions about the nature of the linguistic sign and the organization of grammar. Another is to advance a new typological principle for classifying case systems and case languages.

The concept to be tested is the division of morphological cases into direct and oblique, or grammatical and local, or the like. Such a distinction is made by most approaches which bring syntactic function into an account of case meanings. It underlies the Indo-European tradition and hence the generalizing works of Kurylowicz (1949) and Jakobson (1936, 1958). This distinction evolved out of the classical division of cases into nominative (direct) vs. oblique (all non-nominative cases), combined with the classical distinction of case functions into those due to rection — roughly, government¹) — vs. others. The theoretical evolution seems to have involved identification, or at least approximation, of the two notions of direct and governed (casus rectus). The label 'direct' or 'grammatical' is, in the best-known structuralist approaches, applied to the nominative and accusative (Jakobson: 'direct') and sometimes also to the genitive (Kurylowicz: 'grammatical'). To summarize and simplify the structuralist literature: the terminology varies, the definitions vary, and the cases admitted as direct or grammatical or whatever vary. But that literature gives the impression of debating these issues as one. I therefore assume that underlying the variety of contributions to the question is a uniform assumption: that cases can somehow be divided into two sets, one marking syntactic relations in the abstract and the other bearing more semantics.

This paper tests, not some particular definition, but that general assumption. It tests it empirically, surveying case uses in several languages in an attempt to discern some division which is evidently equivalent to the structuralist distinction of direct from oblique cases. In other words, it seeks only a functional bifurcation within case paradigms, without stipulating which cases are to have which function. This is necessary because the traditional and structuralist literature does not give adequate criteria for unambiguous classification of cases, as is particularly clear when we venture outside of Indo-European. In addition, common sense dictates that we test the shared assumption of a functional dichotomy, which was clearly the essential theoretical notion, rather than the details of its various positive

characterizations. The conclusion will be that a direct-oblique dichotomy does exist, but it does not apply to morphological cases.

The above characterization of the structuralist position does not apply to Hjelmslev (1935, 1937), who correctly saw the question of whether there exist direct and oblique cases to be an empirical, language-specific one, found that 'dans certaines langues il existe des cas qui par leur signification se prêtent mieux que certains autres à exprimer les relations locales et concrètes' (1935:61), Indo-European being such a language, and declared the assumption that all languages would exhibit such a bifurcation 'idiosynchronic' and aprioristic.

Nor does this characterization do justice to Kurylowicz, whose analysis of case functions was surprisingly modern. He gives the following definitions ((1949)1960:135ff., restated in the terms used here):

primary function of a case = assignment by the syntax, or
residual lexical assignment

secondary function of a case = assignment by the lexicon
(non-residual)

syntactic function = governed function

semantic function = non-governed function

grammatical case = one whose primary function is syntactic

concrete case = one whose primary function is semantic

For instance, the Indo-European accusative is a grammatical case because its function as direct object is governed (Kurylowicz: syntactic) and residual (it is the neutral or unmarked object case; Kurylowicz: primary function). Kurylowicz also ranked case functions by relative centrality, a notion corresponding to subcategorization as that is defined below; he lumps this notion with the distinction of grammatical vs. concrete (p. 140). The approach taken in this paper differs from Kurylowicz's in using less lumping (it distinguishes residual lexical case marking from syntactic case marking, and subcategorization from the other notions). More important, while Kurylowicz evidently assumed that there is something that can be labeled by the expressions grammatical case and concrete case, this is exactly what the present paper questions.

I will distinguish between government and subcategorization in the following fashion. Government refers to determination, by verb or adposition, of the morphological form of the complement. For instance, the Russian verb ljubit 'love' governs the accusative of its object; the verb interesovat'sja 'be interested in' governs the instrumental; udivljat'sja 'be surprised' governs the dative; serdit'sja 'get angry' governs the preposition na 'on(to), at' plus accusative; and so on. The difference in cases here does not reflect a difference in surface syntactic relations, since all the objects are of the type that can be called first objects; it is not due to any difference in semantic roles, since for verbs of emotion the objects are uniformly sources of emotion. The case or preposition is simply required by the verb, and this is stated in the lexicon. 2)

Subcategorization (I omit strict, but the sense intended is that of strict subcategorization in Chomsky 1965) is the requirement that the complement be present, without reference to its morphological form. All the verbs just mentioned subcategorize their first objects, as well as governing the cases of those objects. Clearly, whatever is governed is also subcategorized. The converse is not true, although subcategorized but ungoverned relations are rather few. Three examples are the goal of a verb of motion (illustrated in (1)), the locative phrase with a verb of existence, location, or stance (in (2)), and the predicate nominal in certain fixed construction types (in (3)). These are subcategorized but not governed: the verb requires the presence of the goal, locative, or predicate nominal, but does not dictate its form. The case or adposition is determined by semantics, and the speaker has a choice.

- (1) He went { home
 into the library
 across the plaza
- (2) I lived { in Berkeley
 on Walnut
 near Peet's
- (3) Russian Našli ego { p'janogo (accusative)
 { p'janym (instrumental)
- found him drunk
 '(We) found him drunk'

(Government and subcategorization are also known as morphological government and syntactic government respectively.)

This paper tests two hypotheses. The first is that all languages will exhibit a fairly clear bifurcation among their cases. There will be one set of cases (here to be called 'direct') which will be used for governed or subcategorized actants. The remainder (the 'oblique' cases) will be used for non-governed or non-subcategorized actants. (This hypothesis does not claim that the set of direct cases will be cross-linguistically uniform. Nor does it claim that the basis for division will always be government, or will always be subcategorization. It claims only that there will be a discernable bifurcation among cases, along these lines.)

The second hypothesis is based on the observation that some languages grammaticalize the notion of 'core arguments', clearly distinguishing semantic roles from the level serving as input to lexical subcategorization; while others do not, apparently relying on semantic roles alone and giving few or no syntactic arguments for subjecthood and objecthood. (The observation is due to Van Valin 1981; see also Kibrik 1982. The terms in which it has been expressed here are due to Anthony C. Woodbury, personal communication.) The hypothesis is that this typological distinction will have some consequences for case functions: that languages with clearly grammaticalized core arguments will most clearly distinguish direct from oblique cases.

To test these hypotheses, I surveyed case functions in a number of languages. This paper reports on five of them: modern Russian, Old Russian, Chechen-Ingush (an ergative language of the North Central Caucasus), Nanai (Manchu-Tungus family, Altaic stock; an accusative language of far eastern Siberia), and Finnish. 3)

Case functions. Table 1 summarizes case functions for the five languages. Information about government and subcategorization is given there in compressed form: the 'Governed' and 'Non-subcategorized' columns should be self-explanatory; the 'Weakly governed' column uses the term traditional in Russian grammar for functions which are subcategorized for but not governed. These are functions like those shown in (1)-(3) above. The 'Overlap' column reports the presence of both governed and non-governed, or both subcategorized and non-subcategorized, functions of the given case. An x in any two of the first three columns means an x in the 'Overlap' column. The 'Adposition' column shows whether the case occurs as the object of a preposition or postposition. In languages having more than one adpositional case, the cases appear to be governed by the adpositions. This is most clearly true of Russian and Old Russian. For languages having a single adpositional case (Chechen-Ingush, Nanai), there is no need to have each adposition govern that case in the lexicon: it can be assigned automatically by a syntactic rule. The picture is more complex for languages like Finnish, where one case — the genitive — is the unmarked adpositional one and could conceivably be assigned by syntactic rule, while others are evidently governed. This discussion indicates that some notion of the governed or non-governed status of adnominal cases can be gained by checking the number of entries in that column: if a language has more than one, government is probably involved somewhere.

The 'Adnominal' column indicates whether the given case marks the dependent noun in a noun phrase, as does the Indo-European genitive:

- (4) Latin amor patris
 love father-GEN
 'a father's love'; 'love for one's father'
- (5) Russian dom brata
 house brother-GEN
 'brother's house'

The sole adnominal case of a language like Chechen-Ingush or Nanai appears to be non-governed, assigned by syntactic rule. When a language has more than one adnominal case, government appears to be involved at least part of the time, although the question requires more study. For Finnish, the genitive is the unmarked adnominal case and possibly assigned syntactically; others may be governed. (See also note 7 and the relevant discussion below.) The ambiguity in (4), where the genitive can be interpreted as either subjective or objective, shows that the genitive is

Table 1. Case functions in five languages. 3) (See Appendix for details.)

Language	Case	Governed	Weakly governed	Non-subcat-egorized	Overlap (clause level)	Adposition	Adnominal
Russian	Nominative	x	x*	x*	x	x	x
	Genitive	x	x	x	x	x	(x)
	Dative	x	x*	x*	x	x	(x)
	Accusative	x	x*	x	x	x	x
	Instrumental	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Prepositional 1	---	---	---	x		
	Prepositional 2	---	---	---	x		
Genitive 2	x				x		
Old Russian	Nominative	x	x*	x*	x	x	x
	Genitive	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Dative	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Accusative	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Instrumental	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Locative	x	x	x	x	x	x
Chechen-Ingush	Nominative	x				?	
	Genitive	x					
	Dative	x					
	Ergative	x					
	Instrumental						
	Locative	(x)	x	x	(x)		
	Comparative	(x)			(x)		
	Allative	x	?				

(x)
(x) ?

(Table 1, cont.)

Language	Case	Governed	Weakly governed	Non-subcategorized	Overlap (clause level)	Adposition	Adnominal
Nanai	Nominative	x				x(h)	x(h)
	Accusative	x					
	Instrumental			x			
	Dative	x		x	x		
	Locative		x	x	x		
	Ablative		?	x	?		
	Lative		x	x			
Finnish	Nominative	x	(x)	(x)	(x)		
	Genitive	x				x	x
	Accusative	x	?	x	x		
	Partitive	x		x	x	x	x
	Essive	x	x	x	x		
	Translative	x	x	x	x		
	Inessive		x	x	x		
	Elative	x	x	x	x		
	Illative	x	x	x	x		
	Adessive	x	x	x	x		
	Ablative	x	x	x	x		
	Allative		x			x	
	Abessive						
Comitative							
Instructive			?		?		

Key: x = occurs; (x) = marginal; x* = agreement only; x(h) = head-marked

assigned to the adnominal configuration, not to particular roles of the adnominal dependent; this is a strong argument that the case is syntactically assigned, hence not governed. This discussion shows that, for adnominal cases as for adpositional cases, the number of x's in the column gives some idea of whether government is present.

Presentation of complete data on the functions of each case in all languages surveyed is impossible in a paper of this size. The following examples give some idea of the multiple functions of some of the cases. (They also illustrate some of the dilemmas that are created by trying to make such a classification.) The Appendix gives an overview of each language, without examples.

(6)-(9) illustrate the Russian nominative, in its functions as subject (shown in (6)), 'weakly governed' (subcategorized but not governed) predicate adjective (in (7)), non-subcategorized predicate adjective (8), and object of preposition (9). (Here and below I ignore the non-syntactic functions of the nominative: citation form and direct address.) Nominatives are underlined.

- (6) On sidit v biblioteke
he sits in library 'He's sitting in the library'
- (7) On vernulsja p'janyj
he returned drunk 'He came back drunk'
- (8) Golodnyj on ploxo rabotaet
hungry he badly works 'He works badly hungry'
- (9) Čto on za čelovek?
what he for person 'What kind of person is he?'

The nominative on predicate nouns and adjectives actually represents agreement rather than direct assignment of a particular case (these constructions are analyzed in Nichols 1981); and the preposition in (9), although historically a representative of the preposition za 'for', 'behind', can synchronically be analyzed as simply a component of the complex pronominal modifier čto za 'what kind of'. These functions, then, though relevant to a complete account of the uses of the nominative, are suspect, or at least represent a different phenomenon from the use of the nominative as subject. The nominative subject is to be regarded as governed because it contrasts with other cases, the choice being dictated by the verb. One of the contrasting cases is the dative, governed by the verbs taking the inverse construction:

- (10) Mne nraivitsja èta pesnja
me-DAT like-3sg this song-NOM 'I like this song'

The functions of the Russian genitive are illustrated in (11)-(16): subject (11), direct object (12), oblique first object (13), time expressions (14, 15), adnominal (16), object of preposition (17). Genitives are underlined.

- (11) Moego brata ne bylo doma
my brother not was home 'My brother wasn't at home'

- (12) Ja ëtogo ne znal
I this not knew 'I didn't know that'
- (13) Želaju vam sčast'ja
I wish you happiness 'I wish you happiness'
- (14) On rodilsja pervogo sentjabrja
he was born first of September
'He was born September 1'
- (15) Pervogo sentjabrja posle dolgoj zasuxi nakonec pošel dožd'
first September after long drought finally went rain
'On September 1, after a long drought it finally rained'
- (16) dom brata
house of brother 'brother's house'
- (17) bez deneg 'without money' iz doma 'out of the house'

(11) and (12) illustrate the genitive subjects and direct objects that can be triggered by negation in Slavic languages. These present problems for a theory of case assignment, since the genitive is not governed by the verb but evidently assigned by a syntactic rule restricted to the governed-and-subcategorized relations of subject and direct object. They are often thought of as replacing the nominative or accusative assigned by the lexicon. They are clearly different from the genitive object of (13), which is governed by the verb and does not alternate with the accusative.

(14) is a 'weakly governed' genitive: the verb rodit'sja 'be born' forms a stable construction with temporal expressions, which it therefore subcategorizes; but the morphological form of the temporal expression is determined by its own semantics (dates are genitive, days of the week take v 'in' plus accusative, years take v plus prepositional, and so on), not by the verb. (15) shows the genitive in a true time adverbial, not subcategorized by the verb.

(16) repeats (5), showing the typical adnominal construction in Russian. The genitive is clearly the unmarked adnominal case, although with deverbal nouns other cases or prepositions may be used. 4) (17) shows examples of the genitive governed by prepositions.

The instrumental is governed as object by a number of verbs.

(20) gives examples of a few of the verbs in one semantic class governing the instrumental: verbs of interest and similar positive attitudes. (21) and (22) show two of the many adverbial functions of this case: the instrumental of instrument (21) and the instrumental on a time-adverbial predicate nominal (22). (23) shows some of the prepositions governing the instrumental. Instrumentals are underlined in these examples.

- (20) On zanimaetsja/interesujetsja/vosxiščaetsja muzykoj
he is occupied is interested is delighted music
'He is occupied with (interested in, delighted with) music'

- (21) On pišet karandašom
 he writes pencil 'He writes with a pencil'
- (22) On žil zdes' rebenkom
 he lived here child 'He lived here as a child'
- (23) s bratom 'with brother' za derevom 'behind the tree'

Classification of the instrumental agent in a passive construction is problematical. Clearly the instrumental case is not governed. Less clear is whether the syntactic relation is subcategorized or not. The underlying relation of agent is clearly subcategorized by the verb; but one hesitates to say that the derived relations produced by passivization are subcategorized. Nevertheless, somewhat unhappily, I do adopt that analysis, on the grounds that since passivization can be described as verb-governed in Russian its resultant grammatical relations can be described as subcategorized. The truth of the matter is that the classificatory principles used here were not designed to accommodate derived grammatical relations.

The Russian (and, generally, Slavic) instrumental is famed for its multifunctionality: for fuller descriptions see e.g. Wierzbicka 1980, Mrazek 1964, Worth 1958.

The next few examples illustrate Chechen-Ingush cases. (24) and (25) show the nominative functioning as intransitive subject and as direct object: 5)

(24c) san waša c'a vo:|u
 my brother-NOM home comes 'My brother is coming home'

(25i) na:nas biera: kuoč t'aju:x
 mother-ERG child-DAT shirt-NOM puts on
 'Mother dresses child in shirt'

The only other function of the nominative is predicate nominal with the verb 'be' and a few others:

(26i) yz bwolxluo va
 he-NOM worker-NOM is 'He is a worker'

Such nominatives are clearly subcategorized, and probably governed: since the appearance of the nominative is not due to agreement (there being no case agreement in this language), they could be provided for in the lexicon. Non-governed and non-subcategorized predicate nominals, analogous to Russian (7), (8), and (22), apparently do not occur in Chechen-Ingush, which uses biclausal constructions with the verb 'be':

(27i) yz mogaž voacaž balxa vaxar
 he-NOM well-NOM not being to work went
 'He went to work sick'

(28i) bier dolaž yz jurta vā:xar
 child-NOM being he-NOM in village lived
 'As a child he lived in a village'

such as three-place predicates, adnominal constructions, postpositional constructions, etc.

A final example comes from Nanai, where the nominative is used in adnominal constructions and as object of postpositions. (35) shows the adnominal construction.

(35) nai dili-ni
 person=NOM head 3sg 'person's head; human head'

In its adnominal and adpositional functions, the nominative is properly equivalent to a caseless noun: those syntactic relations are marked, not by a case on the dependent noun, but by possessive suffixes on the head noun or preposition. In (35), the third person singular marker -ni is what marks the syntactic relation. (This is what is meant by the entry head-marked on Table 1.) Although it is clear that, of the seven inflectional forms available to nouns, these represent the nominative, and they must be taken into consideration when assessing the functions of the nominative, still there is a sense in which they do not count: the real marker of the syntactic relation is on the head of the construction.

All the preceding examples show the kind of data considered in this study, and the basis for determining government and subcategorization. They also show that refined concepts of government, subcategorization, and grammatical relations do not obviously simplify the task of classifying cases and case functions. On the contrary, they introduce complexity in a variety of ways. It is indispensable, for example, to discuss clause-level and phrase-level functions separately. It becomes evident that the genitive objects of (12) and (13) are phenomena of different orders. So, perhaps, are the type of non-government and non-subcategorization found in adverbials, on the one hand, and that found in adnominals, on the other. Derived syntactic relations do not fit the classificatory scheme. The question arises of whether the unmarked case for a given syntactic function is best described as governed (since it is associated, albeit perhaps only residually, with particular lexemes) or as assigned by regular syntactic rules (since the association with particular lexemes is unmarked and residual). Another dilemma is whether to regard agreement as an instance of the particular case assigned, or as in itself a morphological entity, consisting of a disjunction of cases.

This brings us to the broader question of delimiting the object of study. For single-language descriptions, it may be expedient to start with syntactic relations and ask how they are signaled by cases. From this perspective, it is artificial to segment cases off from adpositions, conjunctions, adverbs, and the like. For instance, in modern Russian, the inventory of formal markings of nominal syntactic relations includes the six non-prepositional cases, preposition + case complexes, agreement, other regular disjunctions of cases, the caseless adjective form, conjunction + agreement complexes, adverbs, and possibly more.

These are all problems imposed by the classificatory system, which is evidently ill-suited to language. It will be of little

surprise that both hypotheses based on it fail. However, the particular patterns of failure give us two new typological principles, to be presented below.

Hypothesis 1. Even if we simplify the picture by restricting discussion to the clause relations, the first hypothesis — that languages distinguish direct from oblique cases as governed and non-governed, or subcategorized and non-subcategorized — is falsified. Case functions differ widely, but they turn out to fall into two basic types, which I call overlapping and complementary. An overlapping case has both governed and non-governed, or both subcategorized and non-subcategorized, functions. The Russian nominative, instrumental, and genitive shown above illustrate overlap: all have both kinds of functions. Table 1 shows at a glance that in general the Russian cases are prone to overlap: five of the six cases having clause functions show overlap. Old Russian tends even more strongly toward overlap, for a variety of historical reasons (greater productivity of genitive adverbials; more uses of independent cases, where modern Russian uses prepositions). In general, then, Russian disproves the first hypothesis. Other languages with a high incidence of overlap include Finnish, shown on Table 1, and Latin, not shown.

In contrast, Chechen-Ingush and Nanai display a great deal of complementarity. Case functions are neatly split, with overlap being limited, often marginal.

We might, then, wish to say that Chechen-Ingush and Nanai distinguish direct from oblique cases. The direct cases of Chechen-Ingush are nominative, dative, ergative, and allative; the oblique cases are instrumental and comparative; genitive and locative require further study. For Nanai, the direct cases are nominative, accusative, and dative; the oblique cases are instrumental and ablative; the lative is direct if subcategorization is criterial, oblique if government is; the locative shows clear overlap if subcategorization is criterial, but is oblique if government is criterial.

These lists of cases depart from the typical structuralist understanding of direct and oblique in two respects. First, cases with local-sounding names such as allative, locative, and lative are disconcertingly strong candidates for direct status. Second, the number of direct cases is much higher than the two or three usually admitted in the literature: Chechen-Ingush has up to six candidates for direct status, and Nanai has up to five. We have found evidence for a direct-oblique distinction at the price of considerable distortion of the substance and intent of the standard distinction.

On the other hand, the facts suggest a new typological principle: The world's case languages can be divided into those, like Russian, with considerable overlap, and those, like Chechen-Ingush, with little or no overlap.

A high incidence of overlap in case functions means that the language abounds in oblique objects — objects whose case, though

governed by the verb, is metaphorically motivated by other functions of the same case. (For instance, Russian verbs of negative emotion — 'fear', 'be ashamed', etc. — govern the genitive, a case which etymologically goes back to the Indo-European ablative, used for motion-away-from, the two functions being linked by a metaphor of aversion.) Complementarity means that there are few or no such oblique objects. (For instance, Chechen-Ingush has only a handful of verbs taking oblique objects, and a very limited set of cases so used; the motivation of the oblique objects involves no metaphor, but only syntactic analogy and reinterpretation of adverbials as objects.)⁶⁾ Put differently, overlap means that many different cases can mark one and the same syntactic relation; complementarity means fewer markers per syntactic relation. The same distribution holds when we turn our attention from clause actants to adnominal dependents and objects of adpositions. In Russian, which abounds in overlap and oblique objects, almost every case can be governed by adpositions and several can be adnominal. But Nanai and Chechen-Ingush have one adnominal case and one adpositional case each.⁷⁾

The abundant overlap and frequent metaphor found in Indo-European and Finnish case systems appears to be unusual in northern Eurasia, where most case systems seem to be more like those of Chechen-Ingush and Nanai. Overlap could be just a genetic peculiarity of Indo-European, spread as an areal feature to Baltic Finnic. (In general the case functions of Finnish and Estonian are strikingly reminiscent of those of Baltic and Slavic languages.) However, there is a more compelling historical explanation. The great majority of the north Eurasian case languages are agglutinating; Indo-European is inflecting. If inflecting languages evolve out of agglutinating languages by phonological change, then we can say with some confidence that the case system of Indo-European is older than the case systems of Uralic, Altaic, or North Caucasian. Then the overlap, metaphor, and general intricacy of the case rules in Indo-European is the natural consequence of the antiquity of the case systems: there has been more time to develop metaphor, to grammaticalize idioms, etc. (In Baltic Finnic it may be due to areal interaction.)

Hypothesis 2. The second hypothesis was that languages which grammaticalize the status of core argument (subject, object) will tend to have complementary case systems, while those that do not will prefer overlap. This hypothesis also fails, but most interestingly. Russian clearly grammaticalizes the notions of subject and object: numerous syntactic rules refer to these relations, and several rules change and/or create them. Yet Russian displays consistent overlap. Nanai just barely grammaticalizes these relations: only a few rules refer to them, none create or change them, and subject and object can be directly derived from semantic roles alone. Yet Nanai cases are highly complementary. Chechen-Ingush gives almost no evidence for syntactic relations as distinct from semantic roles, and the entire language can be adequately described

without using the terms 'subject' and 'object'. Yet Chechen-Ingush cases are, if anything, even more strongly complementary. So the second hypothesis is not merely falsified, but actually reversed: the stronger the grammaticalization of subject and object, the more widespread is overlap in case functions. It is intriguing that the languages with rampant overlap — Indo-European languages, including prominently Slavic — are the ones that have given rise to the theoretical distinction of direct vs. oblique.

Conclusions. The two hypotheses fail because both are based on a simplistic view of cases as autonomous morphological entities somehow correlated with autonomous syntactic relations. I suggest that we look at morphology and syntax not as autonomous levels of grammar but in another way: as function and coding technique. Syntax is function, case is coding technique. Viewed in this way, the grammars of languages do give evidence for a distinction of direct vs. oblique. But that distinction ceases to pertain to morphological paradigms, having rather to do with the coding of syntactic relations. On this view, coded functions comprise such notions as direct subject, oblique subject; direct object, oblique object (both are first objects); direct second object, oblique second object (both are traditional indirect objects); and so on. These coded functions, and the particular cases used on them, are shown for the languages studied here in Table 2. Other coded functions may be detectable. Russian, for instance, has direct instruments (in the instrumental case) contrasting with oblique instruments (e.g. *iz* 'out of' + genitive, for the verb 'shoot'). It has a direct adnominal case — the genitive — contrasting with several oblique adnominal forms (see again (15), (19)).

This method of classification captures in a single notion both contrasts in morphological form and differences in syntactic behavior: the first four to six entries on Table 2 constitute the beginning of an accessibility and/or control hierarchy for most of these languages (while neither morphology alone nor syntax alone ordinarily suffices to establish accessibility or control). It is important to emphasize that this approach does not make claims about cases per se. It does not, for example, ask whether the Russian dative or the Chechen-Ingush dative is a direct case (since it marks the direct second object) or an oblique case (since it marks the oblique subject). Rather, it asks what cases mark oblique subjects in Chechen-Ingush, and so on.

This approach has several advantages over received views. Classification is motivated and unambiguous, in contrast to the standard notions of direct vs. oblique, whose membership often had to be decided by fiat. The classification in Table 2 is based on universal notions, whose universality is demonstrated by the fact that they apply with equal ease to overlapping and complementary case systems. Yet it easily handles language-specific patterns. (In contrast, the standard notion of direct vs. oblique cases represents an attempt to impose a universal dichotomy on morphological paradigms, which are known to be highly idiosyncratic.)

Table 2. Functions and codings.

coded function	Russian	Chechen- Ingush*	Finnish	Nanai
direct subject	nom ~ gen	erg/nom	nom ~ part	nom
oblique subject	dat PP	dat gen	all	?
direct 1st object	acc ~ gen	nom	acc ~ part	acc ~ nom
oblique 1st object	various and PP	all loc	various	?
direct 2nd object	dat	dat ~ all	all	dat
oblique 2nd object	PP	PP adverb	?	?
direct adnominal	gen	gen	gen	nom (head- marked)
oblique adnominal	dat instr	---	part, etc.	---

KEY: case ~ case Principled grammatical alternation
 case/case Illusory alternation due to syntactic analysis *
 PP prepositional phrase, postpositional phrase
 cases: nom(inative), gen(itive), erg(ative), dat(ive), etc.

* Disjunctions for Chechen-Ingush are the outcome of forcing an ergative language into an accusative terminological mold. They disappear on an ergative analysis of coded functions:

direct S/O	nominative
oblique S/O	dative, allative, locative
direct A	ergative
oblique A	dative, genitive

Most important, it links the notion of grammatical relation with the notion of morphological coding, fusing the two into a single type of entity. Thus, although direct coincides with residual, the two notions are not at all the same: direct pertains to coding, residual to the mechanics of grammar and lexicon.

This approach has the important advantage of letting us describe an ergative language as ergative, regardless of whether the syntax of control, word order, etc. turns out to be accusative. It therefore unifies the description of ergative languages and gives ergativity a deeper, more central status in the grammar than that of superficial morphological marking. Such a description is shown at the bottom of Table 2, for Chechen-Ingush.

Talking about direct and oblique relations means more than just working a bit of syntax into morphology. The difference between direct and oblique is neither syntactic nor morphological. It is a difference in the nature and delicacy of coding — that is, a difference pertaining not to levels of grammar but to the linguistic sign function. The direct markings simply signal the presence of the given syntactic relation: subject, first object, or whatever. The oblique ones not only signal the syntactic relation; they also index semantic properties of the dependent noun and/or the verb. For instance, the dative inverse subject marks not only subjecthood but also the fact that the subject is an experiencer and/or that the verb is one of perception, modality, cognition, or the like. The instrumental first object of Russian tells us not only that we are dealing with an object, but furthermore that it is the manipulated object of a verb of motion or control. Oblique marking, in other words, contributes additional semantic information to the basic syntactic information.

It now becomes evident that the traditional and structuralist strategy was to use the label 'direct' for the cases used to mark direct subjects and direct first objects, and sometimes also direct adnominals. The 'oblique' cases were those used for all oblique relations, all adverbials, and direct second objects (the traditional indirect object). Why should the markers of direct second objects have been excluded from the set of direct cases, when their function is so clearly to mark a syntactic relation? I submit that it is because the indirect object always carries more semantic information than does either subject or direct object: it is inherent in indirect objects that they will be goals or recipients, hence also often experiencers. In contrast, the direct subject is virtually unlimited as to semantic role, and the direct object is not obviously restricted to roles (with the apparent exception of Chechen-Ingush, where direct objects are always patients).

The structuralist analysis, then, attempted to distinguish the more semantic cases from those simply marking syntactic relations. The more semantic information a case carried, the more likely it was to be labeled 'oblique'. From this paper's perspective, the structuralist position lumped relative semanticity with direct vs. oblique relations. It also conflated two distinct kinds of semanticity. There are two ways in which a case may carry

semantic information: directly, by indexing the semantic role of its noun and/or the lexical semantics of its verb; and indirectly, when it marks a syntactic relation which is inherently restricted as to semantic role or verb class. These two were lumped in the implicit structuralist understanding of semanticity.

In other words, the structuralist position seems to have been based on an understanding like that of direct vs. oblique function. It erred simply in lumping these with two types of semanticity, in assuming autonomy of levels, and in attempting to apply the labels direct and oblique as invariant descriptions of cases. I have argued that these assumptions make the structuralist position untenable. It is interesting that the structuralists could sense, and partly codify, a notion whose full explication was precluded by the structuralist commitment to invariance and autonomy of levels. 8)

In contrast to that position, the approach taken here sees autonomous levels of syntax and morphology as indispensable conceptual tools for proper description of languages, but not as necessarily real elements of grammar. Once we see the autonomy of levels to be a descriptive convenience and conceptual distinction rather than a necessary property of language, the structuralist assumption of invariance in the relation of case to syntax simply evaporates. It becomes uninteresting to ask what the dative always or typically 'means', whether it is an oblique case, whether a dative oblique subject is a subject or an indirect object, and whether direct cases are assigned lexically or syntactically. Rather, we simply ascertain what kinds of oblique objects exist in a given language, and then ask whether they can passivize, control reflexivization, and the like. In the end, this approach encourages attention to language-specific differences. It does this by rejecting the assumption that there is a universal inventory of syntactic or semantic relations which cases simply exist to mark, along with the assumption that cases have autonomous meanings which motivate their use to mark one or another syntactic or semantic relation. To accept that assumption would be to reify the analytic tools of syntactic relations and semantic roles.

Summary. The two hypotheses about direct and oblique cases fail, but they fail revealingly. The failure of the first hypothesis points to a new typological principle for classifying case systems and case functions. The failure of the second hypothesis has several implications worth testing, for example the question of whether variable marking of core relations is not perhaps favored by clear grammaticalization of those relations. The ultimate reason for the failure of the two hypotheses is that the notions of direct and oblique, which the structuralist position intuits and attempts to explicate, properly pertain not to morphological cases but to coded functions. More specifically, there are three reasons for their failure. The first is the structuralist assumptions of invariance and autonomy placed on the original notions. The second is properly a subcase of the first: the condition of autonomy of levels entails that morphological case will be seen as a distinct

kind of entity and investigated in isolation, when properly the question of nominal marking requires study of adpositions, agreement, conjunctions, and the like. (As was hinted above, this assumption of the autonomy of morphological case is due not solely to reification of conceptual tools, but also to the analytic, form-to-function approach that dominates the structuralist literature. It is also worth pointing out that both Hjelmslev and Kurylowicz saw the artificiality of isolating cases from other markers of nominal relations.) The third reason is the inherent heterogeneity of case functions, a problem which is not lessened but only revealed more clearly by recent theoretical advances.

The function-and-coding approach allows us to make cross-linguistic sense of, and impose terminological order on, what must otherwise be seen as very messy language-specific variation in case functions. In this particular corner of grammar it has proven expedient to seek coded functions, i.e. grammatical signs, using autonomous levels of grammar as a descriptive convenience without ascribing reality to them; the implications for the more general practice of grammar should be obvious. The structuralist notion of direct and oblique cases fails to the extent that it reifies the conceptual tools of analysis, and succeeds to the extent that it captures coded functions.

Appendix:

Clause-level case functions in the languages shown on Table 1.³

KEY: subj. = subject pred. nom. = predicate nominal
 obj. object inv. inverse
 dir. direct indir. indirect

* = case by agreement C = under certain conditions only

locus = place expression with verb of existence or location
 object (contrasts with dir. obj. and indir.obj.) = an oblique object (most examples are first objects)

Language, Case	Governed functions	Weakly governed	Non- subcategorized
<u>Russian</u>			
Nominative	subj.	pred. nom.*	pred. nom. *
Genitive	subj. (neg.) dir.obj.(neg.) object	time	time
Dative	inv. subj. indir. obj. object	pred. nom. *	pred. nom. *
Accusative	dir. obj.	pred. nom. *	pred. nom. *,time
Instrumental	pred. nom. ⁹ object	pred. nom. agent in passive	pred. nom. means, time, place, etc.

(Russian, continued)

Prepositional 1, 2: used as objects of prepositions only

Genitive 2 object — —

Old Russian

Nominative	subj.	pred. nom. *	pred. nom. *
Genitive	subj. (neg.) dir. obj. (neg.) object	source, goal of motion	time, reason
Dative	inv. subj. indir. obj. object	goal of motion	dative absolute
Accusative	dir. obj.	goal of motion	time
Instrumental	object	pred. nom. agent in passive	means, time, place, etc.
Locative	—	—	time

Chechen-Ingush

Nominative	S/O		
Genitive	inv. subj.		
Dative	inv. subj. ind. obj.		
Ergative	A		
Instrumental			instrument, means, comitative
Locative	(object)	locus	(place)
Comparative	(object)		object of comparison
Allative	object indir. obj.	?	

Nanai

Nominative	subj.		
Accusative	dir. obj.		
Instrumental			instrument, means
Dative	indir. obj.		dative absolute
Locative		locus	place
Ablative		source?	source
Lative		goal	

Finnish

Nominative	subj. dir. obj. C	(time)	(time)
Genitive	inv. subj.		
Accusative	dir. obj.	time?	time
Partitive	subj. C dir. obj. C object		partitive absolute
Essive		time locus	time place
	pred. nom. ⁹	pred. nom.	pred. nom.
Translative	pred. nom. ⁹	pred. nom.	pred. nom. forms adverbs
Inessive		locus	place, time
Elative	object	time source pred. nom.	
Illative	object	goal	time
Adessive	object inv. subj.	locus	time instrument manner
Ablative	pred. nom. ⁹	source	time
Allative	ind. obj.	goal	
Abessive			'without'
Comitative			comitative
Instructive		time	manner

Footnotes

* Research on Chechen-Ingush was carried out as a participant in the Exchange of Senior Scholars with the Ministry of Higher Education administered by the International Research and Exchanges Board (Tbilisi, USSR, 1979-80 and 1981). Research on Russian and Old Russian was carried out as a participant in the Exchange of Junior Scholars (Moscow, 1975-76). This research was further supported by Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad grants from the U.S. Department of Education. I am grateful to Tbilisi State University, in particular the Department of Caucasian Languages and the Foreign Division, and to my advisors T. V. Gamkrelidze and G. V. Rogava; and to the Russian Language Department of Moscow State University and my advisor G. A. Xaburgaev. Deepest thanks go to my Chechen and Ingush consultants, students of Tbilisi State University and the Rustaveli Theater Institute in Tbilisi.

8 Gary Holland has pointed out to me that the structuralist adherence to autonomy of levels in the study of case can be traced to Meillet's insistence on the autonomy of the word. Meillet's theoretical pronouncements underlie the entire early twentieth-century Indo-European tradition and consequently determine the structuralist stance.

9 A governed predicate nominal can also be called an object. An example is Russian

on kazalsja molodym
he seemed young-INSTR 'he seemed young'

where the verb kazat'sja 'seem' requires the instrumental.

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