

ESSEX–JNU DELHI–KONSTANZ WORKSHOP ON CASE AND ELICITATION TECHNIQUES,
Colchester, 13–14 June 2011

Relational marking through CASE: Typological parameters

Frans Plank
frans.plank@uni-konstanz.de

“Cases form one of the most irrational part[s] of language in general.”
(Otto Jespersen, *Philosophy of grammar*, 1924, p186)

Is it, therefore, futile to seek to reduce their crosslinguistic diversity to rational
order in a typological questionnaire and database?

(And which are supposed to be the rational parts of language?
Numbers? Genders? Persons? Tenses? Moods? Aspects? ...)

What's CASE, anyhow?

(1) What are the (concrete/abstract semantic, syntactic) **RELATIONS** of **NOMINALS** that are being grammatically recognised in language X for purposes of relational behaviour (syntax), coding (morphology and syntax), and argument-structure alternations (lexicon, morphology, syntax)?

- Such grammatical relations can be distinguished syntagmatically and/or paradigmatically, through **ALIGNMENTS** of intransitive, transitive, bitransitive clauses: nom-acc, abs-erg, act-inact, tripartite, double oblique, etc.)
- How many? Theoretical maximum of nominal relations:
 - 216, according to Hjelmslev 1935/37;
 - 68 according to Blake 1930;
 - 44 according to Beard 1995;
 - ca. 30 according to Brøndal 1950;
 - ...

- More general relevant issue here: What are NOMINALS (NPs/DPs) in language X, and which OTHER CONSTITUENT CLASSES are they to be distinguished from for purposes of relational behaviour, coding, and argument-structure alternations?

Concerning one method of coding relations, through CASE, can there be **verbal** and **clausal** cases, with verbs and clauses not nominalised?

i.e., things like *eat*-PAST-ABL ‘after I ate’, *come*-INF-ACC ‘[want] to come’.

Or are we in such cases dealing with homonymies of case and verbal inflections?

Unlikely: Why should cases differ from adpositions, which happily do dual duty as conjunctions, ‘after I ate’ – ‘after lunch’, ‘because it rained’ – ‘because of the rain’.

Can case-marking itself CHANGE word/phrase class, in derivational rather than inflectional manner, e.g., adjectivalise or adverbialise nouns?

(e.g., genitive marking to derive adjectives or also adverbs)

- (2) How are these relations of nominals **FORMALLY EXPRESSED** (**designated**, or merely, where necessary, **distinguished**) in language X, generally speaking?
- (i) DIRECT marking on the nominal concerned itself (unless **displaced**, with phonological phrasing differing from syntactic phrasing)
 - (a) relational nouns
 - (b) relational verbs (serial verbs, converbs)
 - (c) adpositions (post-, pre-, circum-, in-)
 - ☞ (d) CASE inflection, on DEPENDENT nominals
 - ☞? (e) STATE inflection, on HEAD nominals
 - (f) derivation (adverbialisation, adjectivalisation, ...)
 - (ii) INDIRECT marking (somewhere else than on the nominal concerned itself)
 - (a) agreement/cross-reference with **one** nominal in a designated grammatical relation, with (α) person, (β) number, (γ) gender/class, (δ) case, (ϵ) ... serving as agreement categories
 - (b) direct-inverse, depending on the hierarchical relationship (in referential terms, speech-act roles, animacy) between **two** nominals
 - (c) relational markers on predicates (e.g., preverbs)

[and of course **predicates themselves**, defining semantic relations at their most concrete]

- (iii) linear order,
defined for one nominal **relative** to other clause parts (e.g., after verb and before other nominal) or **absolutely** (clause-initial, -final, -second)
- (iv) sentence prosody: intonation (?), pausing
- (v) incorporation,
with the nominal concerned forming a **morphological** rather than a **syntactic** construction with the constituent it is to be related to (e.g., ‘my suits are tailor-made’ – ‘made by a tailor’)
- (vi) left unexpressed

- (3) If several forms of relational expression are utilised in language X, how is the expressive labour **DISTRIBUTED** among them?

What is the relational domain of adpositions, case marking, ...?

- linear order, agreement/cross-reference, and/or cases are preferably used for **syntactic** relations (because there aren't so many, and these modes of marking don't lend themselves to expressing rich paradigmatic distinctions),
- adpositions preferably for **semantic** relations (of which there are more, and it is easy to create large inventories of adpositions).

(4) **Which** other grammatical categories **INTERACT** with relational expression in language X? And **how** do they interact?

(i) Categories

(a) definiteness

(b) specificity

(c) topic-comment, focus, discourse-prominence

(d) animacy, gender/class

(e) number, quantification

(f) tense, aspect, mood, polarity

(g) clause types (main – subordinate, finite – non-finite, ...)

(h) ...

(ii) Ways of interaction

(a) cumulative exponence

(b) conditional (one-way or two-ways)

(α) encouraging, necessitating

(β) discouraging, prohibiting (incl. neutralising context)

(iii) **Differential marking** as one way of interaction:

same relation marked differentially depending on factors like referential semantics of nominals, affectedness (wholly/partly), tense/aspect, overall clausal transitivity, co-occurrence of other nominals (of particular kinds), ...

(which may be difficult to distinguish from: **single** semantic relation being alternatively mapped onto **several** syntactic relations; e.g., applicative alternations, ‘spray wall.ACC paint.INS’ – ‘spray paint.ACC wall.LOC’; partitive alternations, ‘drink wine.ACC’ – ‘drink wine.PART’, ‘shoot deer.ACC’ – ‘shoot deer.GEN’)

And now for CASE only.

(5) **HOW MANY** cases (paradigmatically) and **WHICH**?

- (i)
 - for language X as a whole
 - for particular subsets of nominals in language X
(nouns/pronouns, person/place/... and such referential distinctions)
 - only for smallish subsets of nominals in language X
(such non-productive/residual cases are the responsibility of the lexicon,
not the grammar)
- (ii)
 - “How many?” – maximally as many as there are grammatical relations
of nominals (216?), minus those relations encoded through other means;
 - “Which?” – those relations left after this subtraction, minus those
relations syncretised with others, with single cases alternatively
expressing more than one relation (see below).

(iii) Method for DISTINGUISHING cases in languages which have any:

However many formal distinctions are made or not made (=neutralised) for **particular** case-inflecting words of language X, assume so many paradigmatic contrasts for **all** case-inflecting words alike (that is, essentially the sum total of all formal distinctions of all individual case-inflecting words) as permit the syntactic-semantic rules of **case assignment** in language X to apply in a **maximally general** manner.

The general idea, thus, is: Let syntax be easy and suffer morphology being hard.

(Good exposition in Comrie 1991, also pointing out that no all grammar-writing traditions have been following this method. Australianists tend not to.)

(iv) SIZE of case inventories

2 cases	MINIMUM
3 cases	SMALL
4-6 cases	MEDIUM
7-10 cases	LARGE
11+ cases	EXTRA LARGE
ca. 20 cases	MAXIMUM (actual, not theoretical – though the 40+, 50+, or even 60+ cases in Daghestanian of <i>Guinness Book of Records</i> fame have been exposed as a hoax, – well, as a somewhat too comprehensive categorial misanalysis, failing to distinguish morphologically segmentable forms from several position classes, cases proper and markers for localisation and direction)

But are these size classes NATURAL classes?

(Plank 1986 suggests that with cumulative case LARGE is the limit, which would render at least this size limit natural, insofar as it figures in some sort of a generalisation.)

- (v) Constraints on membership in case inventories, implicational dependencies between members of case inventories?

possible 2-case inventories

- (i) Sbj, Obj
- (ii) Basic, Local
- (iii) Basic, Possessive

possible 3-case inventories

- (i) Sbj, dObj, iObj
- (ii) Sbj, Obj, Poss
- (iii) Sbj-Obj, Dat-All, Loc-Ins

etc.

Thus, if a Sbj case, then also an Obj case, and vice versa; if an iObj case, then also a dObj case; if a Dat-All, then also an Obj case; ...

(vi) Other paradigmatic relations between members of case inventories?

- **closeness** to one another (semantically or syntactically defined), with contrasts between neighbours especially prone to neutralisation;
- “**correlations**”, with member in privative or equipollent oppositions, markedness – Jakobsonian cubes and such.

But are case inventories **well-structured systems** (whose analysis is science rather than interpretive art [Jakobsonian cubes and such – see below, Sebeok 1946 for Finnish and Hungarian])?

Or are they momentary, and transient, states in grammaticalisation scenarios which are bound to be somewhat **haphazard**, driven by all sorts of forces and reined in by all sorts of circumstances rather than exclusively by the teleology of well-designed paradigms?

(Good paradigm design would for instance be guaranteed if **morphological change** were subject to **constraints** such as “You may only innovate an ablative if you’ve already innovated a locative” or “You may not let a locative go as long as you’re keeping an ablative”.)

(6) **WHICH** cases in languages X, Y, Z?

(i) What's a case's ID? What does case identity consist in?

(Which is the key question if you want to compare cases, or any other grammatical categories for that matter, across languages.)

- Trivially, it's not a mere question of labels, however descriptively intended (“nominative”, “dative”, “genitive”, “partitive”, “prolative”, ...).
- In essence, a case's identity consists in the relations it encodes (see below for a list from which to choose) and in how it is in contrast in this respect with other cases in the same language. Perhaps also in how it is assigned in the language concerned, for there are different modes of case assignment (see below, (8)).
- Thus, a case which encodes (all) subjects and nothing else in language X would be a different case from one which encodes (all) subjects and also direct objects (some, such as those in clauses lacking a subject) in language Y. But such cases would be relatives, insofar as they share one relation.

- Or would one rather have to say that we have the **same** case in languages X and Y here (call it “nominative”), except that this same case has an **additional use** in language Y, also marking direct objects?
- Or are these two ways of putting things – a *Gesamtbedeutung* and a *Grundbedeutung* approach, as it were – really the one and the same? After all, what we’re doing is comparing across languages which relations are covered by particular (case) forms.
- Are there **focal** meanings/uses for particular cases, which need to be shared (and indeed tend to be shared) for cases to qualify as the **same** across languages, with more **peripheral** meanings/uses cross-linguistically more variable?

(ii) RELATIONS which cases can encode, uniquely or syncretically:

SYNTACTIC	intrans/trans subject	clause-level
	direct/primary object	
	indirect/secondary object	
	oblique object	
	predicative (sbj-complement)	
	predicative (obj-complement)	
	attributive	phrase-level
	adpositive	
	appositive	
	address rather than reference (appellative, vocative)	extra-clausal
	absolute	

NON-LOCAL SEMANTIC

- experiencer
- stimulus
- recipient
- beneficiary
- maleficiary
- source, origin
- agentive
- causal
- purposive
- patientive (affected, effected)
- instrumental
- modal
- aversive
- comitative
- sociative
- absentive (aka abessive)
- comparative

equative
temporal setting
duration
possessor (alienable, inalienable)
kin relation
whole of part
possession
material
value
characteristic
content
quality
explicative
comparatum, reference set for comparison
...

LOCAL SEMANTIC

LOCATIONAL

essive
inessive
adessive
subessive
superessive
...

DIRECTIONAL

lative
allative
illative
sublative
ablative
elative
delative
translative
terminative
...

combinatory cases: cases (usually local) syntagmatically combined (excluding agreement case as the combined case), e.g. ablative-subessive ‘from under the table’; to be distinguished also from two- or more-level inflection, with an innermost level of stem formation (distinguishing, e.g., direct and oblique), a next level of case proper, and an outermost level of adpositions(-soon-to-be-cases)

(ii) Example: GENITIVE

(on the evidence of relations expressed by GEN in one or another Germanic language)

• possessor	<i>the king's palace</i>
• kin and other converse relations	<i>the king's sister/subjects</i>
• whole of part	<i>the symphony's first movement</i>
• partitive	— <i>a large amount of wine</i>
• reference set for comparison	— <i>the king of kings</i>
• agent	<i>the king's reply</i>
• experiencer	<i>the king's anger</i>
• patient	<i>the city's destruction</i>
• recipient	<i>the cow's fodder</i>
• beneficiary	<i>a children's hospital</i>
• cause	— <i>a cry of pain</i>
• location	<i>England's villages</i>
• affiliation	<i>West Ham's Thomas Hitzlsperger</i>
• origin	— <i>the woman from/of Bath</i>

- source
- temporal setting
- duration
- material
- value
- content
- characteristic
- quality
- appositional
- epexegetical/explicative
- comparatum
- ???

the woman's tale

today's lecture

ten day's absence

— *a coin of gold*

— *a fine of two pounds*

— *a cup of/with tea*

— *the house of the seven gables*

— *a man of genius*

Dublin's fair city

— *the virtue of honesty*

— *a scoundrel of a man*

(7) **FORM(S)** of cases in language X

(i) Kinds of EXPONENTS:

- zero
- additive (=affixes): suffixes, prefixes, circumfixes, infixes
- segment-modification/replacement/metathesis
- subtractive
- suppletion
- suprasegmental: tone, stress

(ii) POSITION CLASS of case exponents in word template:

more central (near stem) or more peripheral (at word-edge)?
(e.g., NUMBER always more central than CASE?)

(iii) Relationship to other paradigmatic categories:

Which category is paradigmatically DOMINANT over the other?
(e.g., NUMBER always dominant over CASE?)

- (iv) NEUTRALISATIONS of case(.X) contrasts
- systematic or accidental? (e.g., NOM=ACC in neuter in IE, GEN=DAT in feminine singular in German)
 - patterns?
 - subject to general conditions?
(no/little neutralisation when exponents are separative)
- (v) INVARIANCE or VARIANCE of case(.X) exponents?
- If variant, how conditioned?
 - semantically, phonologically, morphologically, lexically?
 - If lexically conditioned, how many INFLECTION CLASSES are there?
 - Which cases are especially prone to be variant and which invariant?
(e.g., DAT.PL invariant in OE, DAT.SG variant, GEN.SG most variant)
 - And how are the choices of variants for one case dependent on those for others? Or also on other categories, such as gender?

(8) Syntax/semantics of **CASE ASSIGNMENT** in language X

(i) Domain of case assignment:

within clause, also **across** clause boundaries?

(ii) Modes of assignment:

- assignment through inherent case semantics

- case government :

lexically or constructionally governed?

- case agreement:

What are possible domains and possible targets of case agreement?

- within nominal constituents (determiners, modifiers agreeing with heads – or is the relevant mechanism percolation?;
- apposition (or special appositive case?);
- at clause-level: (co-)predicatives of noun, adjective adverbial kin (or special predicative case?)

- case percolation:
Which words within nominal constituents can be case-marked by percolation? What can influence where case percolates to?
 - case assimilation/attraction
- (iii) Obligatory/optional use of all/particular cases:
circumstances favouring/disfavouring, requiring/prohibiting use of a case
- (iv) Different assignment rules for different subclasses of nominals;
different assignment rules for different clausal contexts (tense/aspect, main/subordinate, ...)

(9) Case **HISTORY**

- (i) Are (particular) cases of language X **old** or **young** morphology?
How old/young?
- (ii) From which **sources** and by which **kinds of reanalysis** did (particular) cases develop in the history of language X?
 - (a) adpositions
 - (b) adverbs
 - (c) verbs
 - (d) nouns
 - (e) demonstratives
 - (f) “particles”
 - (g) other (what?)
 - (h) existing morphology reanalysed
(derivation? stem formation? other inflection? other?)
 - (i) borrowing (Where from?)
 - (j) no source reliably identifiable

- (iii) Are/Have particular cases (been) developing **into** something else during the history of language X?
- (a) remaining cases, but changing their case function
 - (b) turning into something else inflectional (What?)
 - (c) turning into something else non-inflectional (What?)
 - (d) being used less productively or indeed discontinued, with something else (What?) taking on the case's function(s)
 - (e) the case exponent wearing out or indeed disappearing phonologically
 - (f) other
- (iv) Did/do any of these creative, modificational, or destructive developments occur **simultaneously** for two or more cases? Or did each particular case have its own history?

number of CASES

Uralic

Yukaghir

Kolyma
Tundra

9 (6)

Samoyedic

Selkup

8

Nenets

7

Enets

7 (6)

Nganasan

7 (6)

Kamas

7 (6)

Finno-Ugric

Ugric

Hungarian

17 (18+, 21, 24)

Mansi

6 (5)

Khanty

3 (2)

Finnic		
	Permic	
		Komi-Permyak 21 (17)
		Komi-Zyrian 17 (16, 18)
		Udmurt 14 (16, 17)
	Volgaic	
		Mari 13
		Erzya Mordvin 8 (9, 11)
	Balto-Finnic	
		Finnish 12 (15)
		Estonian 14
Saami		7

What is the **TIME-DEPTH** of Uralic (if there **was** a Proto-Uralic, that is)?
Some 6,000 years?

For such a long period, the current diversity in CASE would seem quantitatively (number of cases), also qualitatively (identity of cases) rather moderate.
It's really only Khanty (Ob-Ugric) which deviates on the **SMALL** side, with the average inventories **LARGE** to **EXTRA LARGE**.

Is CASE in general **pertinacious** rather than **transient**?

Compare Indo-European, time depth about 9,000 years (or only 6,000? or 12,000 or more?): ranging from 9-10 cases (Tocharian B, Ossetic, Lithuanian) to **no** cases (English, Afrikaans, French), with everything in between also attested, and with 8 (or 9: including an endingless locative-allative) cases reconstructed for Proto-IE.

The Finnish case system (according to Sebeok 1946, lines partly reordered)

	location	direction	marginality	limitation	closeness
ELATIVE	+	+	Ø	+	+
ABLATIVE	+	+	Ø	+	—
ILLATIVE	+	+	Ø	—	+
ALLATIVE	+	+	Ø	—	—
INESSIVE	+	—	Ø	—	+
ADESSIVE	+	—	Ø	—	—
PROLATIVE	+	—	Ø	+	Ø
ACCUSATIVE	—	+	Ø	Ø	+
TRANSLATIVE	—	+	Ø	Ø	—
ABESSIVE	—	Ø	+	+	Ø
COMITATIVE	—	Ø	+	—	Ø
PARTITIVE	—	Ø	—	+	+
GENITIVE	—	Ø	—	+	—
NOMINATIVE	—	—	—	—	Ø
ESSIVE	—	—	—	—	—

The Hungarian case system (according to Sebeok 1946, lines partly reordered)

	location	direction	marginality	limitation	(closeness)
“suffixed postpositions”					
ELATIVE	+	+	Ø	+	+
DELATIVE	+	+	Ø	+	Ø
ABLATIVE	+	+	Ø	+	–
ILLATIVE	+	+	Ø	–	+
SUBLATIVE	+	+	Ø	–	Ø
ALLATIVE	+	+	Ø	–	–
INESSIVE	+	–	Ø	Ø	+
ADESSIVE	+	–	Ø	Ø	–
SUPERESSIVE	+	–	Ø	Ø	Ø
COMITATIVE	–	–	+	Ø	Ø
DATIVE	–	+	–	Ø	+
FINAL	–	+	–	Ø	–

“cases proper”

SUPERESSIVE	+	Ø	Ø	Ø
ACCUSATIVE	Ø	+	Ø	Ø
TRANSLATIVE	Ø	Ø	+	Ø
TERMINATIVE	Ø	Ø	Ø	+
NOMINATIVE	—	—	—	—

- + marked member of privative opposition
- unmarked
- Ø doesn't participate in opposition

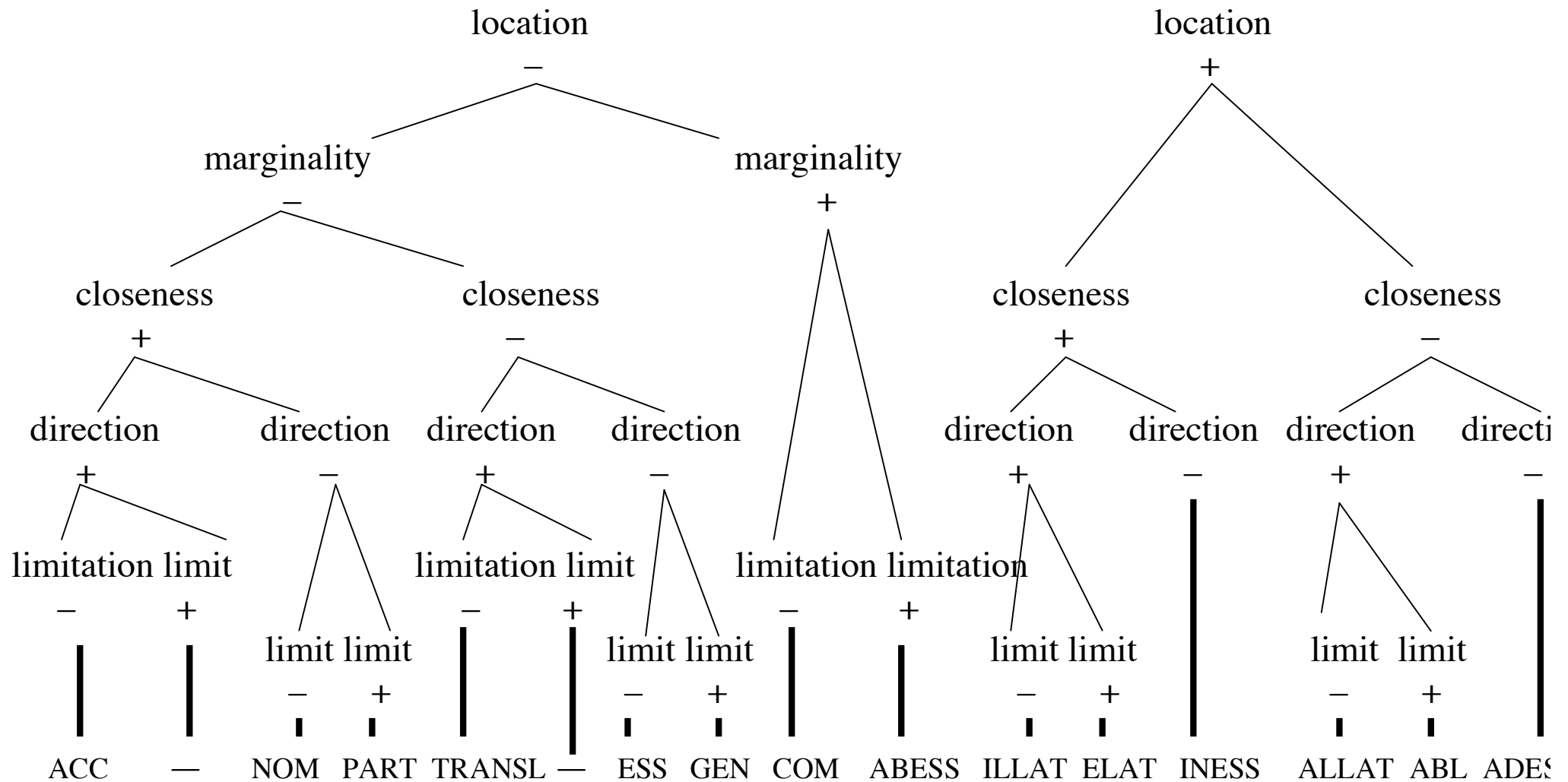
Above, the lines have been reordered so as to reflect similarities among cases, and so as to have markedness decrease from top to bottom.

But what about the relationships between the CORRELATIONS (columns)?

Any more meaningful linear arrangement of columns?

Something like a feature geometry as in featural phonology?

Structure of the Finnish system according to Sebeok: a feature hierarchy, sort of:



PROLAT? loc +, dir −, clos \emptyset

If the case “features” were independent of each other, there should be a three-way contrast for each feature – e.g., for Finnish

NOMINATIVE	—	—	—	—	Ø
ESSIVE	—	—	—	—	—
NN	—	—	—	—	+
NN	—	Ø	—	+	Ø
PARTITIVE	—	Ø	—	+	+
GENITIVE	—	Ø	—	+	—

But many such NN cases aren’t part of the systems analysed. Accidental gaps?
Or the result of systematic dependencies among features?

Feature dependencies for Finnish

- marginality implies no location and non-participation in direction, and non-participation in closeness;
- no marginality implies no location;
- non-participation in marginality implies location and/or direction;
- direction implies non-participation in marginality;
- non-participation in direction implies no location;
- location implies non-participation in marginality;
- non-participation in limitation implies no location, direction, non-participation in marginality;
- And: each case must participate in the location correlation.