

Meaning in Nominal Cases

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1. The Problem Stated

Do nominal cases have meaning? 'That is the question.' Over the last hundred years it has been asked and answered many times—in the negative as well as in the positive sense; cf. a clear resume in Wierzbicka 1980: xviii-xix. However, after a series of studies by Wierzbicka (for instance, 1980 and 1988: 391-461), where a precise description of the meanings of several nominal cases in Russian and Polish is presented, there is no more doubt: yes, in principle, nominal cases do have meaning. Nevertheless, many specific questions remain; among other things, I would like to achieve more clarity in the following respects:

- What does the expression *to have meaning* mean, especially when speaking of a nominal case?
- Do all nominal cases in all languages have meaning?
- Does a nominal case that has a meaning in language **L** always have it, i.e., have it in all of its uses?

I will try to shed more light on the problem by adhering to a precise theoretical framework: the Meaning-Text theory. I will use, without any explanations or justifications, the following postulates and concepts:

1) A text, in particular a sentence, is produced starting from its semantic representation. I take for granted the general architecture of the Meaning-Text linguistic model, with the standard levels of linguistic representation and the division of labor between Semantic, Syntactic, and Morphological modules, which describe the transition between the representations of adjacent levels. All of the argumentation is done in the Meaning-to-Text direction.

2) The following descriptive concepts are taken for granted: *Semantic-Structure* [= SemS], *Deep-Syntactic Structure* [= DSyntS], *Surface-Syntactic Structure* [= SSyntS], and *Deep-Morphological Structure* [= DMorphS] of the sentence; *Communicative Structures* on the Sem-, DSynt- and SSynt-levels [= Sem-CommS, DSynt-CommS, and SSynt-CommS]; *Government Pattern* [= GP], specified in the dictionary entry of a lexical unit; *Lexical Function* [= LF]; *semanteme* [= semantic unit] and *grammeme* [= inflectional value, such as SINGULAR OR PRESENT [TENSE]]; and, of course, the main character of this paper: (*nominal*) *case*.¹ A particular nominal case of language **L**, i.e., for instance, the nominative, the accusative, ..., the superrelative, the subessive, etc. is a GRAMMEME of **L**; this means that a nominal case is a (part of the) signified of one or several linguistic signs of **L**. Thus, I am not talking here about the form(s) of a case, i.e., about case markers; I am concerned exclusively with case grammemes.

3) Informally, 'meaning' is taken to be what the speaker wants to express, and only this. Formally, the meaning of a linguistic expression is specified by its *Semantic Representation* [= SemR], which includes the SemS and the Sem-CommS. Thus, meaning can be propositional (reflected in the

SemS) or communicative (reflected in the Sem-CommS). Any linguistic content that should not be specified in a SemR is not considered as meaning. Therefore, 'being (part of) the signified of a linguistic sign' is not the same as 'having meaning.' First, a signified can be empty: e.g., the signified of the 'expletive' **it** (as in *It is clear that he is unable to finish by June 5th*). Second, a signified can consist of syntactic significations: thus, the signified of the Russian adjectival suffix (*xoroš*)-**uju** is the set of grammemes FEMININE, SINGULAR, ACCUATIVE, but no one would like to say that any of the three grammemes or the whole signified is meaning. These grammemes mark the agreement of an adjective with the noun on which this adjective morphologically depends; however, they are not selected by the speaker to be expressed according to his intentions; thus, they are not meanings, nor do they carry meaning. What, then, is 'to have meaning'?

2. The Meanings of the Expression *to Have Meaning*

As it often happens in linguistics, the main difficulty in deciding whether a linguistic entity X has meaning is related to the fact that the expression *to have meaning* is itself at least two-way ambiguous (actually, there might be other interpretations):

X has meaning in language \mathbf{L}

vs.

X has meaning in a particular utterance of language \mathbf{L} .

The linguistic entities that interest us in this paper from the viewpoint of their meaningfulness are lexical units and grammemes.

If an X —a lexical unit or a grammeme—has no meaning in \mathbf{L} , it of course never has meaning in a utterance of \mathbf{L} . But an X that has meaning in \mathbf{L} may have no meaning in some utterances of \mathbf{L} ; inversely, an X that has a meaning in an utterance of \mathbf{L} may have no such meaning in \mathbf{L} (see examples in Comments 5 and 6 to Definition 3 below, p. 00). It is these two situations that create the confusion and misunderstandings. To clear away this hurdle I propose the following definitions.

Definition 1: To Have Meaning in an Utterance of Language \mathbf{L}

|| We say that X has the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ in an utterance \mathbf{u} (of \mathbf{L}) if and only if X is introduced into the DSyntS of \mathbf{u} by a sequence of rules such that the first rule of this sequence is a semantic rule of the form $\langle \sigma \rangle \Leftrightarrow \dots$, and the last is a rule of the form $\dots \Leftrightarrow X$.

The meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ must thus be an element of the Semantic Representation of \mathbf{u} : it must be present either in \mathbf{u} 's SemS or Sem-CommS. Within our topic (that is, the meaning of case grammemes), X is a case grammeme $[N]_{\mathbf{c}}$; if it has the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$, the grammeme \mathbf{c} is introduced into the DSyntS (of \mathbf{u}) by a semantic rule of the form $\langle \sigma \rangle \Leftrightarrow [N]_{\mathbf{c}}$.

Let me emphasize the following particularity of Definition 1. A natural phenomenon—having meaning—is defined by reference to the way it is modeled in the Meaning-Text theory. Definition 1 gives no objective criteria for 'having meaning;' but once accepted, it states that **if** you say that an X has the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ in \mathbf{u} , **then** you commit yourself to introducing $\langle \sigma \rangle$ into the SemR of \mathbf{u} by a sequence of rules of the form $\langle \sigma \rangle \Leftrightarrow \dots \Leftrightarrow X$, where the first rule is necessarily a semantic rule.

To take the next step, I need an intermediate concept: *unique pairing* $\langle \sigma ; X \rangle$ of the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ with the linguistic entity X .

Definition 2: Unique Pairing

We say that the pairing $\langle \sigma ; X \rangle$ is *unique* if and only if the pair $\langle \sigma ; X \rangle$ can be used in just one linguistic context.

To be usable in just one context means that X always appears syntactically or morphologically linked to a linguistic entity Y , which constitutes this 'unique' context. Thus, the adjective BLACK can be paired with the meaning 'without a milk product' only if BLACK depends on COFFEE (or at least refers to COFFEE); the noun COFFEE is the 'unique' context for the pairing $\langle \text{'without a milk product'} ; \text{BLACK} \rangle$.

Now I can formulate the basic requirements for X to have meaning in \mathbf{L} .

Definition 3: To Have Meaning in Language \mathbf{L}

We say that X has the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ in language \mathbf{L} if and only if the following two conditions are simultaneously satisfied:

1. X has the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ in some utterances of \mathbf{L} ;
2. either the pairing $\langle \sigma ; X \rangle$ is not unique or X has no other meaning in any utterance of \mathbf{L} .

If Conditions 1 and 2 are both satisfied, the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ —a configuration of semantemes in the SemS or an element of the Sem-CommS—must be associated to X , not necessarily directly, in the description, or model, of \mathbf{L} —in its lexicon or its grammar.

Comments

1. Consider a unique pairing of the form $\langle \sigma ; X \rangle$, which is valid only in one specific context. If X has other meanings, such a pairing is banned from the lexicon/the grammar as a separate unit. Thus, in the phrase *black coffee* 'coffee without a milk product' the adjective BLACK means of course 'without a milk product', but it carries this meaning only when used with COFFEE (**black tea* 'tea without a milk product', **black cocoa* 'cocoa without a milk product', etc.); at the same time it has other meanings. Therefore, in an English lexicon the adjective BLACK must not be assigned the meaning 'without a milk product': this meaning is expressed by *black* only within the phrase *black coffee*, which is described in the lexical entry of COFFEE. In such a situation, we say that the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ is expressed by the WHOLE CONSTRUCTION in which X participates. Practically, this means that the English lexicon should not contain a separate lexical entry for BLACK 'without a milk product': there is no such a lexical unit in English. The same considerations apply to BLACK in *black eye* 'eye such that the skin around it is made black by a blow', *black flag* 'all-black pirate flag', *Black Friar* 'Dominican friar', *black humor* 'humor of the morbid', *black market* 'illicit market', etc.: the different meanings of BLACK in all of these phrases must be specified for whole collocations in the entries of the respective nouns (as non-standard LFs of these nouns).

2. If the pairing $\langle \sigma ; X \rangle$ is not unique, no matter how constrained it is, the unit X is assigned the meaning $\langle \sigma \rangle$ in the lexicon/the grammar. In the phrases *heavy casualties* or *heavy rain* the adject-

tive HEAVY has a meaning '(to a) high degree/intense' \approx 'very'. This meaning is phraseologically bound: it is expressed as *heavy* only in collocations which must be listed in the lexicon. But in sharp contrast to BLACK in *black coffee* the number of nouns with which this HEAVY collocates is considerable, and therefore it gets its own lexical entry. (The meaning '(to a) high degree/intense' corresponds to the LF **Magn.**)

3. If the pairing $\langle \sigma' ; X \rangle$ is unique, but X has no other meaning(s) in \mathbf{L} , once again X is assigned the meaning $\langle \sigma' \rangle$ in the lexicon/the grammar. Thus, the adjective STENTORIAN 'very powerful' combines only with VOICE; however, STENTORIAN has no other senses, and therefore it gets its own lexical entry. (It is also referred to and approximately described in the entry for VOICE.)

4. In practice, the uniqueness of the pairing should be understood less rigorously than our formulation implies. The pairing does not have its own entry in the lexicon/the grammar if it can be used only in very few contexts; what is 'very few' can be left to the discretion of the researcher.

5. Examples of an X that has meaning in \mathbf{L} but has no meaning in some utterances of \mathbf{L} :

- Although the verb [*to*] PAY has several meanings (= senses) in English, in the phrase *pay attention* it has no meaning: it is not introduced into the phrase by a sequence of rules beginning with a Sem-rule $\langle \sigma' \rangle \Leftrightarrow \dots$. The verb [*to*] PAY appears in this phrase as a support verb—value of the LF **Oper**₁(ATTENTION), and **Oper**₁ is introduced by a DSynt-rule, which has to 'verbalize' a noun for it to serve as a syntactic head of the clause. To put it differently, this PAY has no independent source in the SemS of the utterance. The same is true about all support verbs.

- In an analogous way, KICK in *kick the bucket* does not have meaning, either: the whole idiom is introduced into the DSyntS by a Sem-rule $\langle \text{die} \rangle \Leftrightarrow \lceil \text{KICK THE BUCKET} \rceil$, but the verb [*to*] KICK as such appears only when a DSynt-rule 'develops' the DSynt-node of the idiom into a SSynt-subtree; KICK has no independent semantic source in the SemS. The same is true about any full idiom: its components normally have meaning in \mathbf{L} , but do not have a separate meaning within the idiom.

6. Now, an example of an X that has the meaning $\langle \sigma' \rangle$ in some utterances of \mathbf{L} , but does not have this meaning in \mathbf{L} . Although the adjective BLACK means 'without a milk product' in the phrase *black coffee*, this is not its lexicographic meaning: as indicated in Comment 1, BLACK does not have this meaning in the lexicon. The same is true about many non-standard LFs whose values involve unique pairings $\langle \sigma' ; X \rangle$ such that X has another meaning in \mathbf{L} .

3. Meaningfulness of Nominal Cases: A Little Typology

No sooner have we accepted Definition 1 than it becomes clear that, logically, there can exist nominal cases of three major types:

1. A nominal case \mathbf{c} has no meaning in \mathbf{L} : \mathbf{c} is never introduced into the DSyntS of an utterance by a Sem-rule of the form $\langle \mathbf{c} \rangle \Leftrightarrow [\mathbf{N}]_{\mathbf{c}}$. This \mathbf{c} is a SYNTACTIC GRAMMEME, introduced into the DMorphS of the utterance by a SSynt-rule (generally, as a result of government).

2. A nominal case **c** has a meaning in **L** and it has it in any utterance of **L**: **c** is a SEMANTIC GRAMMEME, which is always introduced into the DSyntS of an utterance by a Sem-rule of the form $\langle c \rangle \Leftrightarrow [N]_c$.

3. A nominal case **c** has a meaning in **L**, but it has this meaning only in some utterances of **L**: in some other utterances the case **c** has no meaning. In other words, in some utterances the case **c** is introduced into the DSyntS by a Sem-rule of the form $\langle c \rangle \Leftrightarrow [N]_c$, and in other ones it is not: it does not appear in the utterance's DSyntS at all, but is introduced later—by SSynt-rules.

All of these three logical possibilities are realized in natural languages. Accordingly, we have:

- *Syntactic cases* (= do not have meaning in any of their uses in **L**).
- *Semantic cases* (= have meaning in all of their uses in **L**).
- *Mixed cases* (= sometimes meaningful, sometimes not; they are, so to speak, partially semantic cases that can be used in a purely syntactic capacity).²

Along with these types, it is imperative to consider a particular phenomenon that at first glance might seem contradictory: A case has no meaning in a given context (it may be a syntactic or a mixed case); however, it is used to express a semantic contrast and is opposed to another case that has no meaning in this context, either. Thus, we are looking here at a meaningful use of two meaningless cases! This 'exotic' behavior is explained in more detail later (7, p. 00).

The situation with the meaningfulness of nominal cases is not at all different from what we see with lexical units, especially—with governed prepositions and so-called 'light' (= support) verbs. Generally speaking, lexical units fall into the same three major types:

1'. A lexical unit never has a meaning in **L** (this is of course a rather rare phenomenon). Here are examples of such lexical units:

- The governed subordinate conjunction ČTO 'that' in Russian (*On skazal, čto uxodit* 'He said that [he] was-leaving') or the English expletive IT (*It became clear that Leo was not there*).
- Russian 'light' verbs OKAZAT' (with VNIMANIE 'attention'), POČESTI 'honors' and a few other nouns) and ODERŽAT' (only with POBEDA 'victory'): they have no meaning of their own and are introduced into the SSyntS of the sentence as the values of the LF **Oper**₁ of the respective nouns.³
- The Russian noun BAKLUŠI that appears only in the idiom \lceil BIT' BAKLUŠI \rceil '[to] do nothing, be lazy'.

2'. A lexical unit always has a meaning: this is the most typical situation; no examples are needed.

3'. A lexical unit that has a meaning in **L** can 'lose' it in a particular context. Thus, the preposition ON has a clear meaning in English: $X \text{ on } Y \Leftrightarrow \langle X \text{ localized in and supported by the upper surface of } Y \rangle$, as in *The book is ON the windowsill*, *My hand was ON her shoulder* or *Three planes were ON the runway*. In these sentences, ON is selected starting from the corresponding semanteme configuration in the SemS and appears in the DSyntS. But with such verbs as [to] DEPEND or [to] INSIST, ON has no meaning: in the sentence *Everything depends on her choice* ON is not represented in the SemS, it does not appear in the DSyntS and is introduced into the SSyntS of the sentence according to

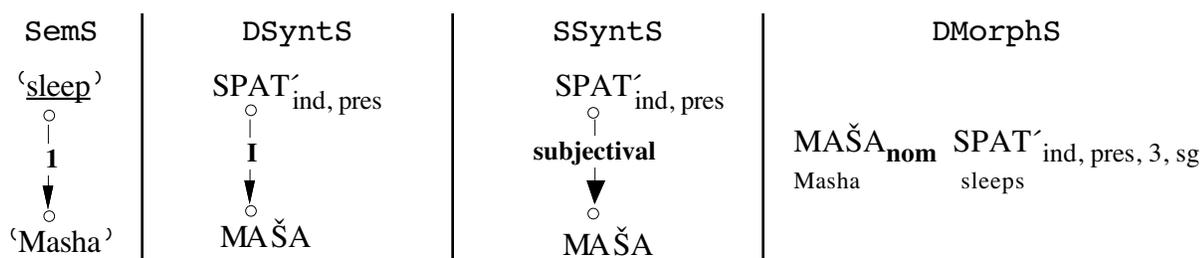
the Government Pattern of the verb. Quite similarly, the verb [*to*] PAY has meaning in English (e.g., *He paid the plumber*, etc.), but in [*to*] *pay attention* or [*to*] *pay a visit* it has none.

Meaningful uses of meaningless cases also find parallels in the lexical domain, see 7, p. 00. Now I can go ahead with the review of the three major types of nominal cases.

4. Syntactic Cases

A completely meaningless nominal case is of course not a very frequent phenomenon among cases. Only the most 'grammatical' cases—those used strictly to mark syntactic roles of nouns—can be always meaningless, i.e., syntactic. A prototypical example of a meaningless case is the Russian nominative: it NEVER has a semantic correspondence in the SemS nor in the Sem-CommS; it is never represented either in the DSyntS or in the SyntS; it is introduced into the DMorphS by a SSynt-rule—as a means of marking the dependent member of a SSynt-Relation. Cf. (1), where the nominative marks the dependent member of the **subjectival** SSyntRel:

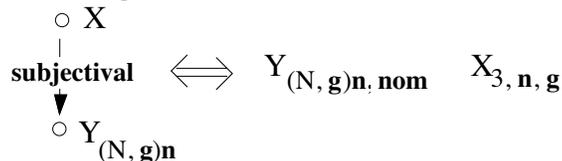
(1) Rus. *Maš+a spit* 'Masha [NOM] is-sleeping'.



NB: 1. The SemS must be written in terms of semantemes of the corresponding language **L**—meanings of lexical units of **L**. But in order to facilitate the reading, I replace them with the closest English equivalents.

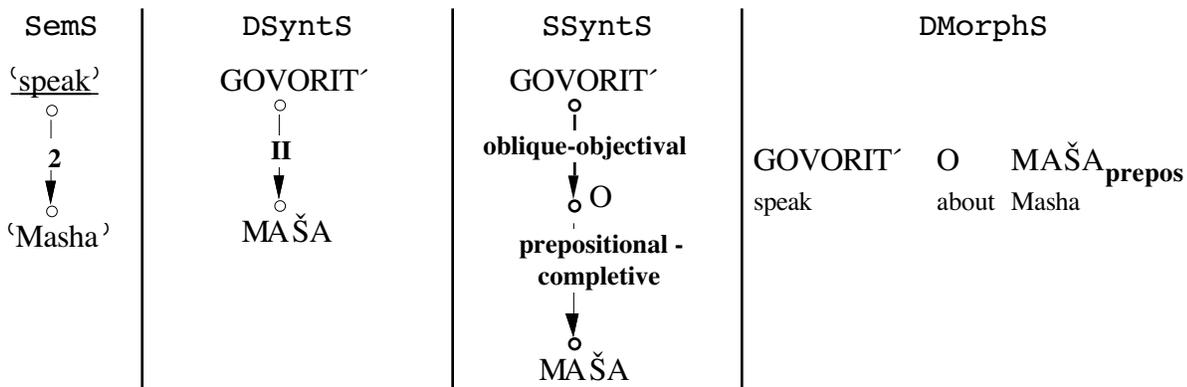
2. The underlining indicates the communicatively dominant node.

SSynt-rules that put the grammeme **nom**(*INACTIVE*) into the DMorph-string are similar to the following (in subscripts, **g** stands for 'gender,' and **n**, for 'number;' 3 is '3rd person'):

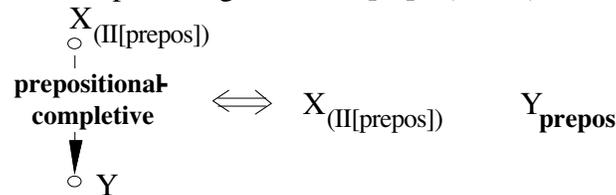


The Russian prepositional case is also meaningless: it is possible only after certain prepositions, so that it is always imposed by the governing preposition. The corresponding representations are as follows:

(2) Rus. *My govorim o Maš+e* 'We speak about Masha [**PREP**]'.



Here is the SSynt-rule that puts the grammeme **prepos**_(ITIONAL) into the DMorph-string:



- NB:** 1. The notation 'X_(II[α])' means "The DSynt-Actant II of the lexical unit in the node X is realized on the surface by means of the unit α" (α can be a structural word or a grammeme).
2. In this rule, X corresponds to the preposition O 'about', selected by a DSynt-rule in accordance with the GP of the verb GOVORIT' '[to] speak'—in order to mark its DSynt-Actant II; Y is the preposition-governed noun.
3. See Example 4, (9), in 7, p. 00, for a comparison of the Russian prepositional case with the Russian locative.

The nominative, which is the case of naming, is probably meaningless in most languages (although I am not quite sure). The same must be more or less true about the Georgian ergative and the Japanese subjective—cases that are used to mark the SSynt-subject. The situation with the accusative is more complex, since the accusative can be used to express the meaning 'during', as in Russian (*Ivan rabotal celuju nedelju* 'Ivan worked [for a] whole week') or 'trajectory's length' (*Ivan bežal tri kilometra* 'Ivan ran three kilometers'), or else 'with respect to...', as in Ancient Greek; I reserve my judgment for the time being.

5. Semantic Cases

Completely meaningful cases are also rather rare. After all, the inflectional category of case is called upon to serve the needs of syntax, that is, to mark syntactic roles of nouns; therefore, any meaningful case risks being hijacked and pressed into syntactic service, losing its meaning in the process. However, completely meaningful, i.e., semantic, cases do exist.

NB: Even a case that always has a well-defined meaning marks AT THE SAME TIME the SSynt-role of its noun. This is an important asymmetry: a syntactic case is only syntactic, but a semantic case is also inevitably syntactic.

A good example of a meaningful nominal case is the Finnish abessive. The abessive ALWAYS has a correspondence in the starting SemS: the semanteme 'without'. This case grammeme is introduced into the DSyntS by a Sem-rule and is transferred from there to the SSyntS and DMorphS. Cf. (3):

(3) Fin. *Tuli kirjoi+tta* '[He] came without-books'.

SemS	DSyntS	SSyntS	DMorphS
$\begin{array}{c} \text{'come'} \\ \circ \leftarrow 1 - \\ \left[\begin{array}{c} \circ \\ \circ \end{array} \right] \\ \downarrow \\ \text{'books'} \end{array}$	$\text{KIRJA}_{\circ} \text{pl, abessive}$	$\text{KIRJA}_{\circ} \text{pl, abessive}$	$\text{KIRJA}_{\text{pl, abessive}} \\ \text{without-books}$

The Sem-rule for the Finnish abessive is as follows [$L(\langle Y \rangle)$ stands for "lexical unit L that expresses the meaning $\langle Y \rangle$ "]:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{'without'}_{\circ} \\ \downarrow 2 \\ \langle Y \rangle_{\circ} \end{array} \Leftrightarrow L(\langle Y \rangle)_{\circ} \text{abessive}$$

6. Mixed Cases

This is the most widespread phenomenon: many cases of most languages are meaningful in **L**, but have at the same time many uses in which they are morphologically governed—by the Syntactic Governor of the noun; and, as a result, they become meaningless in a given context.

Thus, in Lezgian (Daghestan) the superessive case (the marker **-l**) has a clear meaning: ' $\langle \text{on } X \rangle$ '; cf.:

- (4) a. *Neki stol+Ø+da+l ala*, lit. '[The] milk on-table is'.⁴
 b. *Buba lam+Ø+ra+l ala*, lit. 'Father on-donkey is'.
 c. *Jac čur +Ø+a +l amuq'na*, lit. '[The] ox on-pasture stayed'.

Representations for (4a):

SemS	DSyntS	SSyntS	DMorphS
$\begin{array}{c} \text{'on'}_{\circ} \\ \downarrow 2 \\ \text{'table'}_{\circ} \end{array}$	$\text{STOL}_{\circ} \text{sg, superessive}$	$\text{STOL}_{\circ} \text{sg, superessive}$	$\text{STOL}_{\text{sg, superessive}} \\ \text{on-table}$

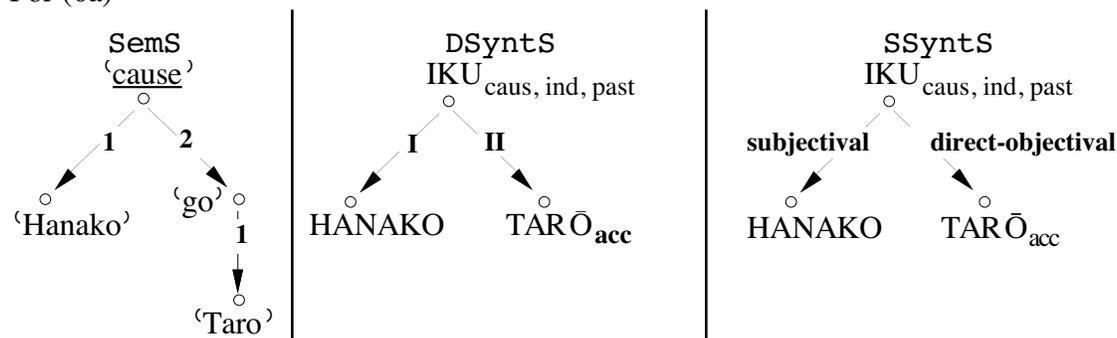
The Sem-rule for the Lezgian superessive is straightforward:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{'on'}_{\circ} \\ \downarrow 2 \\ \langle Y \rangle_{\circ} \end{array} \Leftrightarrow L(\langle Y \rangle)_{\circ} \text{superessive}$$

At the same time, the superessive is governed by some lexical items, e.g., HUŽUM(+un) '[to] attack [N]' or AŠUQJA '[to] be in-love [with N]':

There is a semantic contrast: the use of the accusative "implies that the intention of the Causee is ignored by the Causer," while the use of the dative indicates that "the Causer typically appeals to the Causee's intention to carry out the caused event" (Shibatani 1990: 309; the contrast between, roughly speaking, the *make*-causative and the *let*-causative in Japanese was explicitly described in Kuroda 1965: 34ff; cf. also the remarks in Kuno 1973: 327-328, 341-345 and Wierzbicka 1988: 238-239). Based on the indicated distinction, I propose the following representations:

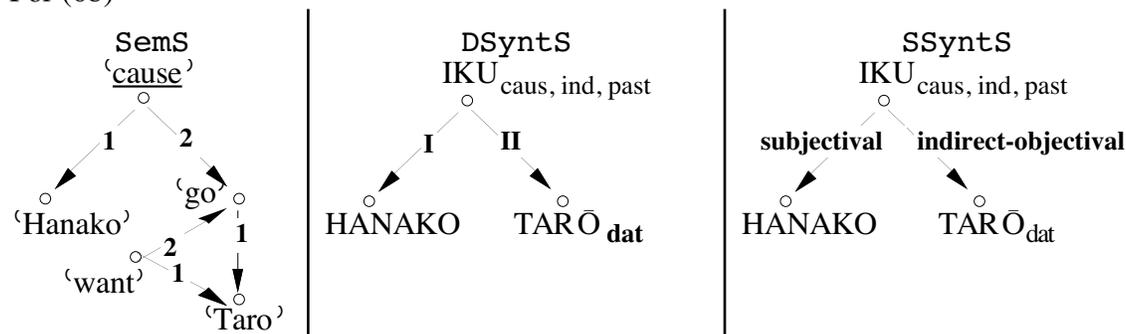
For (6a)



DMorphS

HANAKO_{subj} TARO_{acc} IKU_{caus, ind, past}
 Hanako Taro made-go

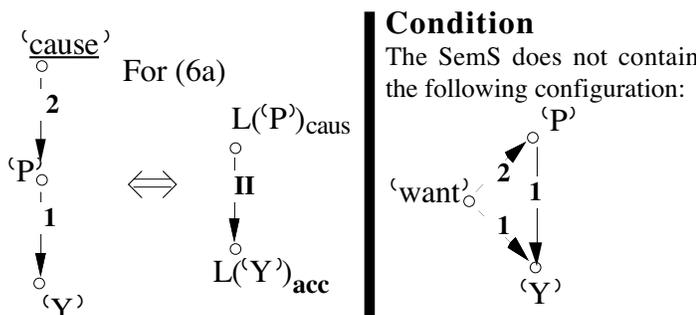
For (6b)

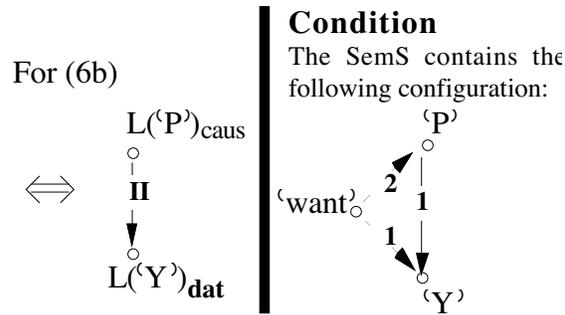


DMorphS

HANAKO_{subj} TARO_{dat} IKU_{caus, ind, past}
 Hanako Taro let.go

The corresponding Sem-rules are [L('P') is an intransitive verb]:





On the one hand, it is impossible to say that the Japanese accusative means (among other things) ‘there is no mention of whether the Causee wants or not to do P’ and that the dative means ‘the Causee wants to do P’: this happens only in the causative construction with an underlying intransitive verb. As a result, the pairing ‘meaning/form’ would be unique for both cases, and unique pairings are banned by Condition 2 of Definition 3 (“To Have Meaning in **L**”), p. 00.

On the other hand, while deciding on the representations, we observe two principles:

- The structure of each level carries ALL the information necessary for the closer-to-surface levels; therefore, the semantic contrast in question must be reflected in the DSyntS.
- In the GP of a lexical unit L, L’s DSynt-Actants must be numbered consecutively (so that the numberings of the type ***I** + **III** are disallowed); therefore, the semantic contrast cannot be shown by choosing to use the DSyntA **III** in the second subrule.

This makes it unavoidable to mark the semantic contrast by case grammemes appearing in the DSyntS, and thus we have here a quasi-meaningful use of cases.

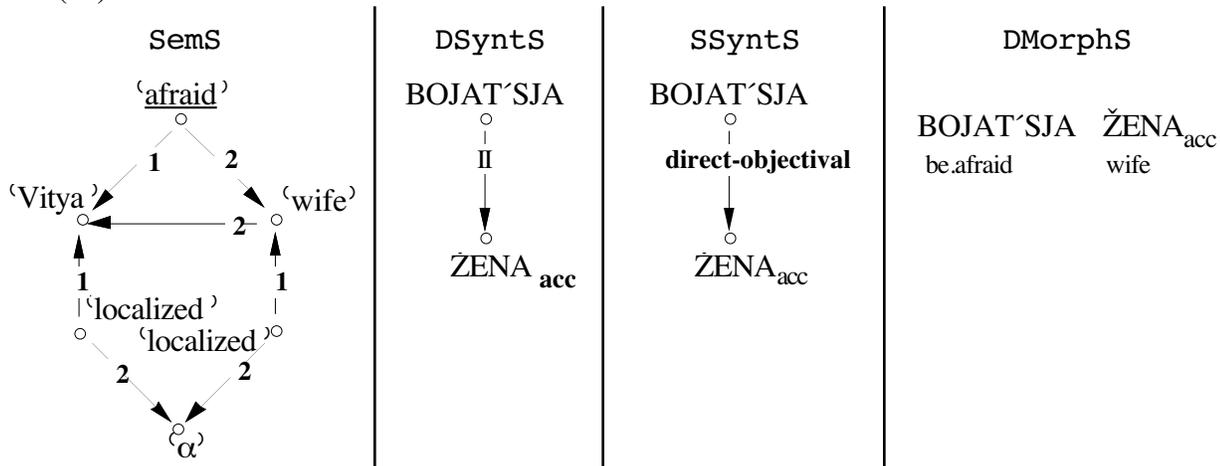
Example 2: Russian

Consider the verb BOJAT’SJA ‘[to] be afraid’: *X boitsja Y-a* ‘X is afraid of Y’. The Object Y can be marked with the accusative, if Y’s referent is a person or an animal that is present at the scene and X is afraid of a direct contact with Y; otherwise, Y must be marked with the genitive (Iordanskaja & Mel’čuk 1990: 319, fn. 8, and 343):⁵

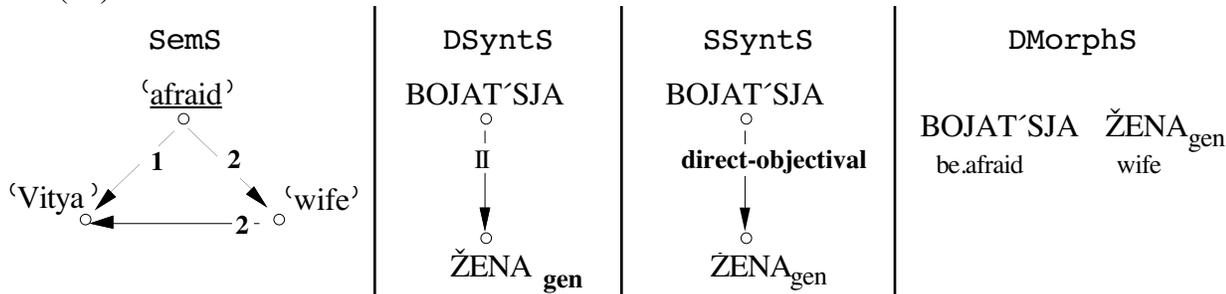
- (7) **a.** *Vitja ne skažet: boitsja žen+u*
 Vitya will.not.tell he.is.afraid.of [his] wife SG.ACC
 ‘Vitya won’t tell us: he is afraid of his wife’ [his wife is present here, and if he tells us, he will have to confront her].
- b.** *Vitja ne skažet: boitsja žen+y*
 Vitya will.not.tell he.is.afraid.of [his] wife SG.GEN
 ‘Vitya won’t tell us: he is afraid of his wife’ [nothing is said about the presence/absence of his wife here].

For the second clause in (7), we have the following representations (‘ α ’ refers to the location where both Vitya and his wife are present):

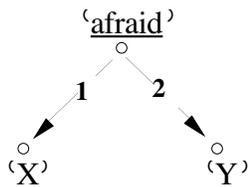
For (7a)



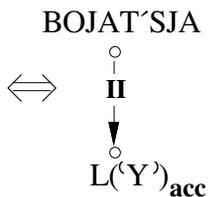
For (7b)



The corresponding Sem-rules are as follows:

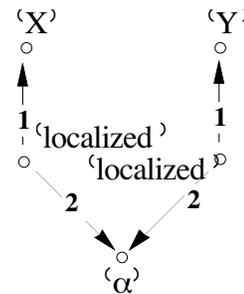


For (7a)

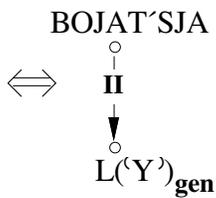


Condition

The SemS contains the following configuration:

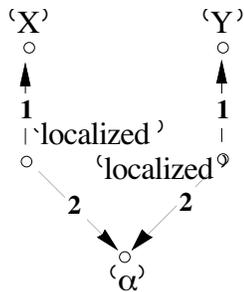


For (7b)



Condition

The SemS does not contain the following configuration:



The Russian accusative can be associated with the meaning ‘X and Y are present at the same place’ only when the noun in the accusative is the object of *BOJAT’SJA*; the same is true about the genitive: it signals the absence of this meaning only in the context of *BOJAT’SJA*. This is a clear-cut situation of unique pairing, which should be avoided. Therefore, neither the accusative nor the genitive itself carries the meaning in question; the whole construction does. (The corresponding information is stored as constraints on the GP of *BOJAT’SJA*—in its lexical entry.)

Example 3: Hindi

In Hindi, with the causative of a transitive verb, the Causee Agent is marked either with the dative or with the instrumental. As explained in Saksena 1982, the dative is chosen if the intended goal of the Causer is to affect the Causee Agent, and the instrumental, if the Causer's goal is to affect the Patient of the action. Cf.:

- (8) a. *Maĩ+ne Rām+ko kitāb +Ø paṛh+vā +ī*
 I ERG Ram DAT book NOM read CAUS IND.PAST.1SG

‘I made Ram read the book’ [my goal is to get Ram to know the contents of the book].

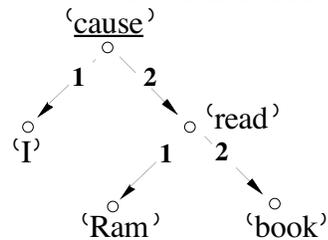
vs.

- b. *Maĩ+ne Rām+se kitāb +Ø paṛh+vā +ī*,
 I ERG Ram INSTR book NOM read CAUS IND.PAST.1SG

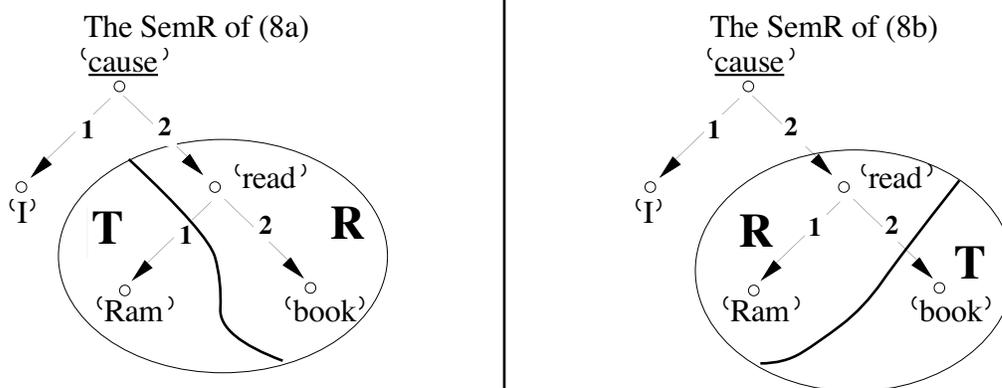
lit. ‘I made the book be read by Ram’ [my goal is to get the book read].

In spite of the gloss of (8b), the Hindi verb in this sentence is not in the passive: it has the same active causative form as in (8a).

The question arises, How should these sentences be represented? The answer is that both sentences have the same SemS ‘I cause the situation ‘Ram reads the book’’, which appears as follows:

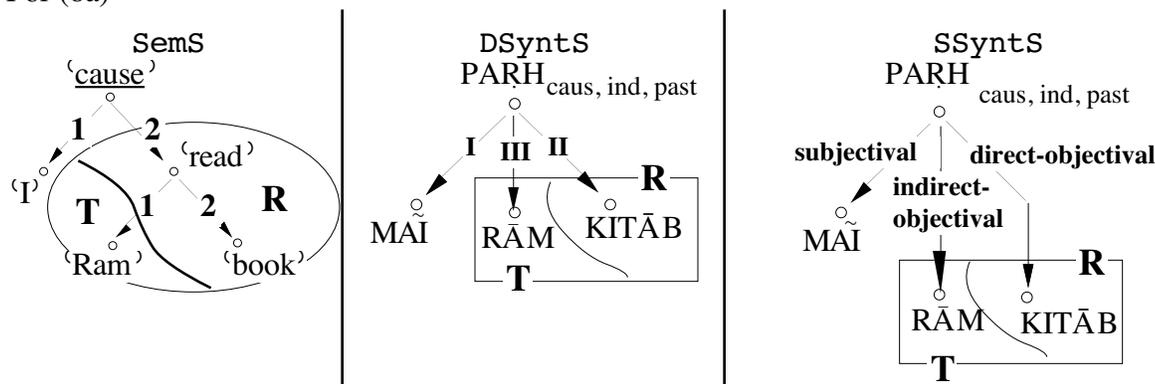


I think that the semantic contrast between (8a) and (8b) is best captured via different Sem-Communicative Structures (Mel'čuk 2001), rather than by specifying different intentions by the speaker: in (8a), the speaker wants to speak about Ram and say what Ram did, so that in the embedded Sem-subnetwork, ‘Ram’ is the Theme, the rest being the Rheme; while in (8b), the speaker chooses to speak about the book and say what happened to it, and therefore, in the same subnetwork, ‘the book’ is the Theme and the rest the Rheme:



If these representations are correct, I see no possibility of ascribing the corresponding semantic load directly to the dative and the instrumental. Both the dative and the instrumental first appear—under sentence production—in the DMorphS of the sentence, introduced as markers of the SAME **indirect-objectival** (or maybe **agentive**?) SSynt-Relation (that subordinates RĀM to the verb), but of DIFFERENT SSynt-Comm-Structures derived from the different Sem-Comm-Structures.⁶ Cf.:

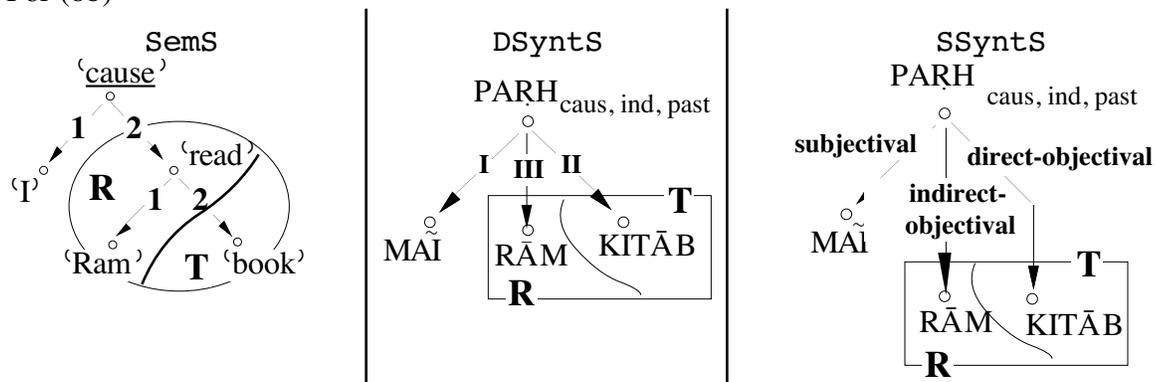
For (8a)



DMorphS

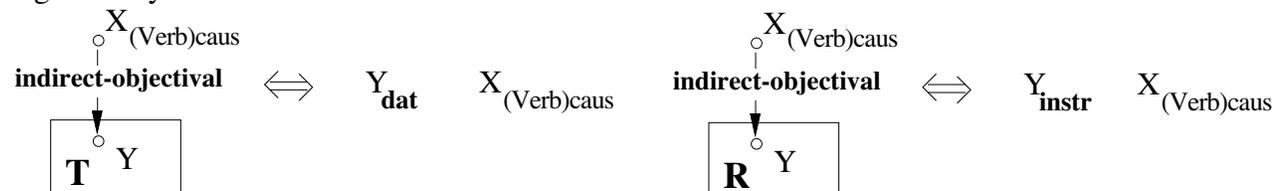
MAĪ_{erg} RĀM_{dat} KITĀB_{nom} PARH_{caus, ind, past, 1, sg}
 I to-Ram book made.read

For (8b)



DMorphS
 MAĪ_{erg} RĀM_{instr} KITAB_{nom} PARH_{caus, ind, past, 1, sg}
 I by-Ram book made.read

The cases in question are introduced into the DMorphS of the Hindi sentence by the following two SSynt-rules:



Recall that unlike Hindi, in the Japanese causative construction, the different cases of the Causee Agent are introduced into the DSyntSs of the respective sentences by Sem-rules, because these cases correspond to the different semanteme configurations in the initial SemS. In Hindi, however, the two contrasting case grammemes are introduced only into the DMorphS, because they correspond to two contrasting Sem-CommSs and this contrast is preserved all the way up—till the SSynt-CommS.

Other examples of purely syntactic cases being used to mark communicative roles of the subject and/or direct object are presented in Mel'čuk 2001: 306-312 (in Yukagir, Eskimo, and Newari).

The quasi-meaningful use of nominal cases finds its parallels in the use of lexical units. Thus, a lexical unit that in a particular context cannot be ascribed a well-specified meaning still can be used—precisely in this context—to mark a semantic contrast. In Russian, the verb STRELJAT' '[to] shoot [at]' governs two different prepositions to introduce its object [= the target]: V 'in(to)' ≈ 'at' vs. PO 'across' ≈ 'on'. The choice is done according to the nature of the target: V is selected for a unique 'punctual' static target, while a multiple, or very large, or else moving target selects PO (*streljat' v Ivana* '[to] shoot at Ivan' vs. *streljat' po tolpe* 'into the crowd'/*po gavani* 'on the haven'/*po samolëtu* 'on the aircraft'). We cannot 'load' the meaning like 'consisting of many elements', '(very) large' or 'moving' onto the preposition PO: it is not associated to these meanings outside the unique combination with STRELJAT'. Therefore, a meaningless preposition, opposed to another meaningless preposition, is used there to express semantic nuances. (The corresponding information is given as semantic constraints on the GP of the lexeme STRELJAT'.)

Now, to drive my point home, I will present another example that almost invites a faulty analysis concerning quasi-meaningful use of nominal cases.

Example 4: Russian

Russian has the locative case—a partial⁷ case, which appears only after a preposition, but contrasts with the prepositional case in the following way:

- (9) a. Čto ty našël v snég+e?
 What.ACC you_{SG} found in snow SG.PREPOS
 lit. 'What have you found [metaphorical] in the snow?' ≈
 'Why do you think the snow is interesting/beautiful/useful?'

b. *Čto ty našel v sneg+ú?*
 What.ACC you_{SG} found in snow SG.LOC

‘What have you found [literal] in the snow?’ = ‘What physical object have you discovered?’

This contrast was established in Jakobson 1936/1971: 63-64. Jakobson shows that, in point of fact, this contrast is not as clear-cut as (9) implies: there are numerous cases of phraseologization of the locative use, such as *Ona pojavilas’ vsja v šelk+ú* ‘She appeared all [dressed] in silk [LOC]’ vs. *V šelk+e zavelas’ mol’*, lit. ‘In [the] silk [PREPOS] appeared moths’. This is, however, not relevant to the present discussion.

The meaningfulness of the Russian locative as opposed to the meaningless prepositional, which is always governed by a particular preposition, seems to be obvious in (9): the locative in (9b), instead of the prepositional in (9a), is the only element that distinguishes between the literal and the metaphorical senses of *NAJTI* ‘[to] find’. However, the locative is also used in Russian only if governed by one of the two specifically-locative prepositions: *V* ‘in’ and *NA* ‘on’; these prepositions are different from two other, non-locative *V* ‘in’ and *NA* ‘on’, which govern the prepositional case. Thus, on the one hand, we have *V1* and *NA1*, governing the prepositional, and *V2* and *NA2*, meaning only ‘(be) localized in’ and governing the locative (or the prepositional—in the nouns that do not have the locative, which is, as indicated above, a partial case). As a result, the semantic distinction that we are concerned with here is reflected under lexicalization by the choice of *V2* and *NA2* vs. *V1* and *NA1*. The choice of the appropriate preposition is made either under the control of the GP of the governing verb or independently of the GP—according to meaning: the semanteme ‘(be) localized in’ in the initial SemS leads to *V2* and *NA2*, a number of other semantemes to *V1* and *NA1*. If a preposition is not governed, it appears of course in the DSyntS. Cf. (the example was suggested to me by Ju. Apresjan):

(10) a. *V [= V2] sneg+ú [LOC] byli obnaruženy perčatki žertvy*,
 lit. ‘In [the] snow were discovered the victim's gloves’ [*V2* = ‘localized in’].
 vs.

b. *V [= V1] snég+e [PREP] byli obnaruženy sledy stroncija*,
 lit. ‘In [the] snow were discovered traces of strontium’ [*V1* = ‘contained in’].

In both (10a) and (10b) we have the same lexical unit: the verb *OBNARUŽIT’* ‘[to] discover’; the semantic difference—‘localized in’ vs. ‘contained in’—is rendered by different prepositions: *V2* vs. *V1*. The choice of the appropriate case—the prepositional vs. the locative—is then automatic: according to the GP of the preposition. Again we see that the language resorts, for the surface marking of a semantic distinction, to the contrast between two nominal cases that, however, are themselves meaningless—because imposed by the government of a preposition.

8. Roman Jakobson's 'Basic Meanings of Cases'

In order to complete my study, I have to answer a touchy question: How can I explain numerous—and some of them quite successful—attempts to establish general basic meanings of all cases of **L** in all their uses? Even without analyzing in detail Wierzbicka's work on Slavic nominal cases, what about the classic Jakobson's study 'Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kasuslehre' (1936/1971: 23-

71), where the author described a semantic system of Russian nominal cases, organized according to three binary oppositions: directionality, quantitativity, and marginality:⁸

	NOM	PART	GEN	ACC	INSTR	LOC	PREPOS	DAT
Directionality	—	—	+	+	—	—	+	+
Quantitativity	—	+	+	—	—	+	+	—
Marginality	—	—	—	—	+	+	+	+

Is this description wrong or useless? I do not think so, and here is why.

Jakobson's distinctive features of cases cannot appear as semantemes in the SemS of utterances; but then they were never meant to be used in this way. They are generalizations that characterize the signified of nominal cases and thus capture commonalities in their actual use. Case distinctive features are intended not for a Meaning-Text model of **L**, but for **L**'s META-model, where each case grammeme can be characterized in such a way as to reduce (at least to some extent) its variegated uses to a surveyable set of patterns. Metaphorically speaking, a Meaning-Text model of a language deals with the meanings, including case meanings, at an 'atomic-molecular level;' Jakobsonian features or Wierzbicka's semantic analyses of cases push into the 'quark structures' of meaning.⁹

9. Conclusion

The case-related phenomena sketched in this paper are good illustrations of the following two general characteristics of natural language, both of which concern the use of linguistic units (in particular, lexemes and grammemes) in phraseologized expressions:

- A semantically full linguistic unit can be used not for its meaning, but, so to speak, in an aseman-
tic way:

—either according to cooccurrence requirements of its neighbors, like PAY in *pay attention*;

—or within full idioms, where a set of units expresses—as a whole—a meaning, ignoring the inherent meanings of its elements, like KICK and BUCKET in *kick the bucket*.

NB: Let it be emphasized that PAY in *pay attention* is the same lexical unit PAY as in *pay \$30* and KICK in *kick the bucket* the same lexical unit KICK as in *kick angrily a bucket with dirty water*.

- A linguistic unit that is semantically empty in a given context can be used in this context in oppo-
sition to another semantically empty linguistic unit in order to express a semantic contrast, that is, in a
semantic way, like Rus. V and PO with the verb STRELJAT' ([to] shoot at).

As for the meaning of nominal cases:

—some nominal cases have meaning, some do not;

—some of those that do can be used meaninglessly;

—some of those that do not can be used meaningfully.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

¹ (1, p. 00) The present paper does not consider neither adjectival cases, nor nominal cases used for case agreement with the governing noun (i.e., *casus concordatus*)—only nominal *casus rectus* is our object.

² (3, p. 00) The opposition 'syntactic cases vs. semantic cases' was explicitly introduced by J. Kuryłowicz (1949).

³ (3, p. 00) These verbs cannot even be glossed separately. (OKAZAT' implies '[to] give'—because of the nouns it combines with and its GP, which is the same as with DAVAT' '[to] give'; ODERŽAT' vaguely implies '[to] obtain'.)

⁴ (6, (4a), p. 00) In Lezgian, the forms of all cases, except for the nominative, are built on the form of the ergative, so that a typical nominal wordform in an oblique case **c** has the following structure:

stem + number marker + ergative marker + **c** marker

In (4), **-Ø** marks the singular, and **-da**, **-ra** and **-a**, the ergative.

⁵ (7, Example 2, p. 00) The difference in case marking of the object of BOJAT'SJA is disappearing from Modern Russian: it is not done by many speakers, and younger speakers reject the accusative marking altogether. Cf., however, Zaliznjak 1967: 49 and Anna Zaliznjak 1992: 34.

⁶ (7, Example 3, p. 00) The contrast in Hindi causative construction is similar to what we find in the French causative construction, the difference being that in French the semantic contrast is marked by prepositions rather than by cases:

(i) **a.** *Je fais lire le livre à Ram*

'I make Ram read the book' [my goal is to get Ram to know the contents of the book].
vs.

b. *Je fais lire le livre par Ram,*

lit. 'I make the book read by Ram' [my goal is to get the book read].

Note that the SSynt-description of the Hindi causative construction may be slightly different: if the Causee Agent is the Rheme of the embedded predication, the SSyntRel subordinating it to the causative verb may be **agentive**, rather than **indirect-objectival** (which subordinates the expression of the Causee Agent as the Theme). The information available to me is insufficient to make a principled

choice. But if this is the case, example (8) is not valid as an illustration of a quasi-meaningful use of meaningless cases: the semantic-communicative contrast is rendered by the choice of different SSyntRels, and the dative *vs.* the instrumental are then imposed by the corresponding SSyntRels.

⁷ (7, example 4, p. 00) A partial case is distinguished only for a SUBSET of nouns. Thus, the Russian locative is possible only for a few (lexicographically marked) nouns: IInd declension masculine nouns, such as SNEG 'snow', LES 'forest' and MOST 'bridge', and IIIrd declension feminine nouns, such as KROV' 'blood', GRJAZ' 'dirt' and DVER' 'door'.

⁸ (8, p. 00) For more explanations on this Jakobsonian Case Table, see Jakobson 1971: 154-183 ('Morfologičeskija nabljudenija nad slavjanskim sklonenijem').

⁹ (8, p. 00) The concept of 'semantic quarks'—"real meanings that are never realized by words of natural languages" (p. 481; the translation is mine—IM.)—was put forth in Apresjan 1994/1995. 'Semantic quarks' are also known as "non-trivial semantic features" (Apresjan 1980/1995: 28ff).

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