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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL****MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC –  
METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**CASE IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN LANGUAGES****Zilola Rozikova**

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E-mail: [rozikova1625@gmail.com](mailto:rozikova1625@gmail.com)**ABOUT ARTICLE**

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the concept of case in different languages, focusing on the distinction between abstract and morphological case. While English has little visible case marking, such as with the genitive, German demonstrates a wider variety of morphological case, which allows for more flexible word order. The paper explains how case assignment works in languages like German and compares it with other languages like English and Chinese. Additionally, the discussion touches on the theoretical debate surrounding the existence of cases in English and different interpretations in linguistic theory.

**INTRODUCTION**

The idea that English lacks cases while languages like German possess them is a common belief among language learners. This misconception stems from the visible case endings in languages like German, where elements such as articles change form depending on their grammatical role in a sentence. For example, in German, word order can change without affecting meaning due to these case markings. By contrast, English primarily uses word order to express grammatical relations, despite still employing an abstract case system. The paper aims to explore how abstract case functions across languages and the ways in which morphological case impacts word order flexibility, with examples drawn from German, English, and other languages.

It is fairly common to hear people say that German has cases, whereas English does not. What they mean by this is that in a sentence such as [1, 141-158]

*1) Die Frau gab dem Mann den Brief**The woman gave the man the letter*

you can see by the forms of the determiners that dem Mann is in the dative case and den Brief is in the accusative and this tells you that dem Mann is the indirect and den Brief the direct object of the verb gab. In English, the does not have different endings; we can tell that the man is indirect and the letter direct object in the following sentence, which is the English equivalent of (1), by word order and semantics [1, 141-158]:

## 2) The woman gave the man the letter

One of the things which always strikes the second-language learner of German is that the word order is not important in determining the grammatical function of the elements in the sentence, as it is, for example, in English. For (1) we could equally well say [1, 141-158]:

## (3) Dem Mann gab die Frau den Brief

or

## (4) Den Brief gab die Frau dem Mann

But even though the in (2) cannot change, and its grammatical function is clearly determined by word order, it is nevertheless common in traditional, Latin-based grammar to say that the man in sentence (2) is in the dative case and the letter in the accusative case, even though there is no difference in any endings.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The conflict here arises from the difference between abstract case and morphological case. All languages have abstract case, that is, there are structural positions in the sentence which are related directly in various ways to other elements appearing in the sentence. Thus the presence of abstract case – it determines, for example, that the subject of a sentence is in the nominative case whether or not we can see that it is – is a matter of universal principle. All languages have abstract case, English just as much as German. How much morphological case languages show, on the other hand, is a question of parametric variation. German has far more than English, as examples (1), (2) and (4) show. Latin has more than German, and Chinese has none at all [2, 137].

In German there are the following four cases:

(5) Nominative: der Mann

Accusative: den Mann

Genitive: des Mannes

Dative: dem Mann(e)

and the endings are seen in most cases on the article (der, den, des, dem), or an adjective which precedes the noun, as in *der alte Mann*, or, as in *des Mannes*, on the noun itself. In some instances, the case is not so clearly visible as an ending [1, 141-158]:

*Nominative: die Frau*

*Accusative: die Frau*

*Genitive: der Frau*

*Dative: der Frau*

Here, the nominative and accusative share the same form of the article, as do genitive and dative, and all four cases of the noun have the same ending.

Nevertheless, we assume that these four forms of the lexical item *Frau* represent the same four abstract cases as the four forms of *Mann* in (5), even though its morphological realizations give no such signals. Intuitively, it appears that the freedom of word order in any particular language ought to be linked to the amount of overt, morphological case in that language. English, for example, does not have much in the way of obvious case endings and its word order is fairly fixed. We cannot say, corresponding to (3):

(6) *The man gave the woman a letter* and mean exactly the same as (3), that is (7) *The woman gave the man a letter* though the two corresponding German sentences (3) and (1) do mean the same.

In fact, studies by linguists have suggested that it is actually the way abstract, underlying case is assigned which largely determines word order in a language. We shall not worry about this here, though the interested reader may consult books such as Felix and Fanselow [2, 137] or von Stechow and Sternefeld [3, 110-123]. The observation that overt, that is, morphological, case corresponds to free word order is indeed a valid one.

When we consider abstract as opposed to morphological case, we speak of case being assigned by one element in a phrase structure to another. NPs are assigned case by verbs and prepositions, and recent linguistic research indicates that all NPs must actually be assigned case, whether or not we can see it. In the following example [2, 137]

(8) *Ich helfe dem Mann(e)*

*I help the man*

where the arrow indicates the assignment of case by the verb to the NP.

In the terms familiar from German grammar lessons, *helfen* 'takes' the dative. Prepositions also assign case, for example, the preposition *angesichts* assigns the genitive [2, 137]:

(9) angesichts des schlechten Wetters because of the bad weather Again, learners of German are familiar with lists of prepositions and the cases they 'take'. But it is not only verbs and prepositions which assign case. In German, adjectives do too, as the following examples show:

(10) a. *Sie war ihren Idealen treu*

*She was faithful to her ideals*

b. *Er war sich der Tatsache bewusst*

*He was aware of the fact*

c. *Ich bin dir dankbar*

*I am thankful to you*

### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

It would be most helpful to learners of German grammar if particular adjectives were more explicitly given as 'taking' particular cases, just as verbs and prepositions are [2, 137]. This is not, of course, true of all adjectives; words like *gelb*, *alt*, *klein* do not assign case at all. (Note that the corresponding adjectives in English to those in (10) have to be followed by a preposition: *faithful to*, *aware of*, *thankful to*, and it is the preposition which assigns the case, not the adjective.) In the examples in (10), the adjectives *treu*, *bewusst* and *dankbar* assign dative and genitive case respectively to the preceding nouns. All languages assign case, even if it is not visible, as in Chinese. So we can assume that case assignment is a universal principle. It appears, however, that the direction in which case is assigned is a matter of parametric variation. Let us assume for a moment that the German subordinate clause represents the underlying word order in German, an assumption we shall return to in 2.4, but will simply take as given here.

The second sentence is not an acceptable sentence of German. This fact, together with examples such as those in (10), has led linguists working with German to assume that in German case is generally assigned to the left, though the observant reader will have noticed that prepositions (as in 9) appear to do it the other way round, with a few exceptions, such as:

(11) a. *der Straße entlang*

*along the street*

b. *entlang der Straße*

where either word order (and hence either direction of case-assignment) is possible. In English, however, case is always assigned to the right. It is generally assumed that the direction in which case is assigned in a particular language is directly linked to the underlying word order in sentences [7, 187].

Thus languages like German or Japanese which assign case to the left will have a basic subject-object-verb (SOV) order, and those like English and French, which assign case to the right, will have an SVO order. Broadly speaking, then, the verb will be in the appropriate position in relation to its object in which it needs to be to assign case to the object. However, though this apparent common pattern of case assignment to the left in German is one reason for assuming that it has a basic SOV order, the issue is far from clear, as the discussion in the next section shows [4, 187].

Case is expressed in English by the opposition of the form in -'s [-z, -s, -iz], usually called the "possessive" case, or more traditionally, the "genitive" case (to which term we will stick in the following presentation), to the unfeatured form of the noun, usually called the "common" case. The apostrophised -s serves to distinguish in writing the singular noun in the genitive case from the plural noun in the common case. *E.g.: the man's duty, the President's decision, Max's letter; the boy's ball, the clerk's promotion, the Empress's jewels* [29].

The genitive of the bulk of plural nouns remains phonetically unexpressed: the few exceptions concern only some of the irregular plurals. Thereby the apostrophe as the graphic sign of the genitive acquires the force of a sort of grammatical hieroglyph. Cf.: the carpenters' tools, the mates' skates, the actresses' dresses [7].

Functionally, the forms of the English nouns designated as "case forms" relate to one another in an extremely peculiar way. The peculiarity is, that the common form is absolutely indefinite from the semantic point of view, whereas the genitive form in its productive uses is restricted to the functions which have a parallel expression by prepositional constructions. Thus, the common form, as appears from the presentation, is also capable of rendering the genitive semantics (namely, in contact and prepositional collocation), which makes the whole of the genitive case into a kind of subsidiary element in the grammatical system of the English noun [11]. This feature stamps the English noun declension as something utterly different from every conceivable declension in principle. In fact, the inflexional oblique case forms as normally and imperatively expressing the immediate functional parts of the ordinary sentence in "noun-declensional" languages do not exist in English at all. Suffice it to compare a German sentence taken at random with its English rendering [7]:

*Erhebung der Anklage gegen die Witwe Capet scheint wünschenswert aus Rücksicht auf die Stimmung der Stadt Paris (L. Feuchtwanger)*. Eng.: (The bringing of) the accusation against the Widow Capet appears desirable, taking into consideration the mood of the City of Paris [7].

As we see, the five entries of nounal oblique cases in the German utterance (rendered through article inflexion), of which two are genitives, all correspond to one and the same

indiscriminate common case form of nouns in the English version of the text. By way of further comparison, we may also observe the Russian translation of the same sentence with its four genitive entries: *Выдвижение обвинения против вдовы Капет кажется желательным, если учесть настроение города Парижа.*

Under the described circumstances of fact, there is no wonder that in the course of linguistic investigation the category of case in English has become one of the vexed problems of theoretical discussion [11].

Four special views advanced at various times by different scholars should be considered as successive stages in the analysis of this problem.

The first view may be called the “theory of positional cases”. This theory is directly connected with the old grammatical tradition, and its traces can be seen in many contemporary text-books for school in the English-speaking countries. Linguistic formulations of the theory, with various individual variations (the number of cases recognised, the terms used, the reasoning cited), may be found in the works of J. C. Nesfield, M. Deutschbein, M. Bryant [10] and other scholars.

In accord with the theory of positional cases, the unchangeable forms of the noun are differentiated as different cases by virtue of the functional positions occupied by the noun in the sentence. Thus, the English noun, on the analogy of classical Latin grammar, would distinguish, besides the inflexional genitive case, also the non-inflexional, i.e. purely positional cases: nominative, vocative, dative, and accusative [30]. The uninflexional cases of the noun are taken to be supported by the parallel in-flexional cases of the personal pronouns. The would-be cases in question can be exemplified as follows [10].

The nominative case (subject to a verb): Rain falls. The vocative case (address): Are you coming, my friend? The dative case (indirect object to a verb): I gave John a penny. The accusative case (direct object, and also object to a preposition): The man killed a rat. The earth is moistened by rain [7].

In the light of all that has been stated in this book in connection with the general notions of morphology, the fallacy of the positional case theory is quite obvious. The cardinal blunder of this view is, that it substitutes the functional characteristics of the part of the sentence for the morphological features of the word class, since the case form, by definition, is the variable morphological form of the noun. In reality, the case forms as such serve as means of expressing the functions of the noun in the sentence, and not vice versa. Thus, what the described view does do on the positive lines, is that within the confused conceptions of form and meaning, it

still rightly illustrates the fact that the functional meanings rendered by cases can be expressed in language by other grammatical means, in particular, by word-order [8].

The second view may be called the “theory of prepositional cases”. Like the theory of positional cases, it is also connected with the old school grammar teaching, and was advanced as a logical supplement to the positional view of the case [11].

In accord with the prepositional theory, combinations of nouns with prepositions in certain object and attributive collocations should be understood as morphological case forms. To these belong first of all the “dative” case (to+Noun, for+Noun) and the “genitive” case (of+Noun). These prepositions, according to G. Curme, are “inflexional prepositions”, i.e. grammatical elements equivalent to case-forms. The would-be prepositional cases are generally taken (by the scholars who recognise them) as coexisting with positional cases, together with the classical inflexional genitive completing the case system of the English noun [11].

The prepositional theory, though somewhat better grounded than the positional theory, nevertheless can hardly pass a serious linguistic trial. As is well known from noun-declensional languages, all their prepositions, and not only some of them, do require definite cases of nouns (prepositional case-government); this fact, together with a mere semantic observation of the role of prepositions in the phrase, shows that any preposition by virtue of its functional nature stands in essentially the same general grammatical relations to nouns [10]. It should follow from this that not only the of-, to-, and for-phrases, but also all the other prepositional phrases in English must be regarded as “analytical cases”. As a result of such an approach illogical redundancy in terminology would arise: each prepositional phrase would bear then another, additional name of “prepositional case”, the total number of the said “cases” running into dozens upon dozens without any gain either to theory or practice [11].

The third view of the English noun case recognises a limited inflexional system of two cases in English, one of them featured and the other one unfeatured. This view may be called the “limited case theory”.

The limited case theory is at present most broadly accepted among linguists both in this country and abroad. It was formulated by such scholars as H. Sweet, O. Jespersen, and has since been radically developed by the Soviet scholars A. I. Smirnitsky, L. S. Barkhudarov and others [7].

The limited case theory in its modern presentation is based on the explicit oppositional approach to the recognition of grammatical categories. In the system of the English case the functional mark is defined, which differentiates the two case forms: the possessive or genitive

form as the strong member of the categorial opposition and the common, or “non-genitive” form as the weak member of the categorial opposition. The op-position is shown as being effected in full with animate nouns, though a restricted use with inanimate nouns is also taken into account. The detailed functions of the genitive are specified with the help of semantic transformational correlations [6].

Of the various reasons substantiating the postpositional theory the following two should be considered as the main ones [6].

First, the postpositional element – ‘s is but loosely connected with the noun, which finds the clearest expression in its use not only with single nouns, but also with whole word-groups of various status. Compare some examples cited by G. N. Vorontsova in her work: somebody else’s daughter; another stage-struck girl’s stage finish; the man who had hauled him out to dinner’s head [5, 228].

Second, there is an indisputable parallelism of functions between the possessive postpositional constructions and the prepositional constructions, resulting in the optional use of the former. This can be shown by transformational reshuffles of the above examples: ...→ the daughter of somebody else; ...→ the stage finish of another stage-struck girl; ...→ the head of the man who had hauled him out to dinner [5, 228].

One cannot but acknowledge the rational character of the cited reasoning. Its strong point consists in the fact that it is based on a careful observation of the lingual data. For all that, however, the theory of the possessive postposition fails to take into due account the consistent insight into the nature of the noun form in -’s achieved by the limited case theory. The latter has demonstrated beyond any doubt that the noun form in -’s is systemically, i.e. on strictly structural-functional basis, contrasted against the unfeatured form of the noun, which does make the whole correlation of the nounal forms into a grammatical category of case-like order, however specific it might be.

## CONCLUSION

The article concludes that all languages have an abstract case system, even if they do not visibly mark case as in English or Chinese. In languages like German, where morphological case is more pronounced, this allows for greater flexibility in sentence structure, but even English shows traces of case, especially in its genitive forms. The investigation of case assignment, whether leftward as in German or rightward as in English, provides insight into a language’s underlying syntactic structure. Moreover, the debate on English cases reflects broader discussions in linguistics about how case is realized and the function it serves in different languages.



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