

# Case and Meaning

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0. *Introduction.* The tradition of case investigations in Slavic is long and distinguished. Perhaps the two major monuments are Roman Jakobson's "Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kasuslehre" (1936/1971) and "Morfologičeskie nabljudenija nad slavjanskim skloneniem" (1958/1971). Characteristically, Jakobson's work, together with that of Hjelmslev ("La catégorie des cas," *Principes de grammaire générale*), Kuryłowicz ("Le problème du classement des cas"), and more recently Anderson (*The Grammar of Case: Towards a Localistic Theory*), provoked a great deal of discussion among European linguists working on case. In the United States Jakobson's work on case is for all intents and purposes universally accepted among Slavists, although until recently only a handful of scholars had been involved in research on this problem. This situation altered radically with developments in general linguistic theory in the U.S., in particular, with the proposals for Case Grammar launched by Fillmore's 1968 article "The Case for Case," Perlmutter's "Relational Grammar" theory developed in the 1970s (e.g. Perlmutter 1983), and now again with the notion of "abstract case" in Chomsky's Government-Binding theory of the last five years.

A detailed account of the developments in case theory lies well beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is possible to sketch in broad outline the coincidences and divergences of interest among the competing schools, particularly as they are reflected in current work on Slavic case. It is appropriate that even now the general discussion on case reflect Jakobson's lifelong concern: the explicit correlation of form with meaning. Specifically, current work operating from this point of view continues to pose the following questions: What is the function of case forms in inflected languages? Do case forms convey meaning? If so, just what meaning do they convey? Conversely, what is the status of such meaning in non-inflected languages? What other formal means have the same function as case forms?

While the central issues of the investigation of case in natural language seem to be more or less obvious to all, the differing

theoretical premises (as well as the specific language under investigation) occasion among investigators significant divergences in approach and emphasis. For example, the strong syntactic orientation of Transformational Grammar theory has produced a very "syntactic" approach to case among current American linguists operating within this framework. By contrast, the "functionalist" and "semiotic" legacy of Roman Jakobson and the Prague School focuses on the "meaning" of cases in various Slavic languages, their invariant semantic core, and their contextual variations.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, if one looks at the work being done on case around the globe, on first glance one is struck by an apparent wide diversity of concerns. For example, some linguists are concerned with the metalanguage necessary to catalogue languages according to their case structure. Others are concerned with developing an analysis of case as part of a general theory of grammar. Some investigators focus on the overall case structure, formal and/or semantic, in one language. Still other studies examine the contextual variations of a particular case in order to arrive at its general meaning. Some focus on case alternations and the conditions affecting the choice of case. At the other extreme investigators concentrate on the formal manifestations (morphological or syntactic) of one or more cases.

Still, there are certain assumptions and core concerns that virtually all contemporary studies have in common. Thus, there is general consensus that the category of case is more resistant to analysis than other grammaticalized semantic domains like gender, number, person and tense. The reason for this, it would seem, is that while these latter grammatical categories can be more or less readily identified with certain pragmatic categories of the real world, it is much more difficult to find real world correlates for the putative referents of case. And despite the diverse array of concerns mentioned above, one finds, upon closer examination, a certain commonality of interest among investigators working within different frameworks. So, almost all studies of case ultimately reduce to some sort of investigation of the relationship among the grammatical exponents of case (e.g. case affixes), the syntactic structures in which they occur, and the general and specific meaning associated with the use of particular cases in particular contexts. In fact, most studies focus exactly on the elusive line between the syntactic and semantic functions of case, emphasizing one or the other side of the question.

A *sine qua non* for any study of the phenomenon is a general discussion on how to speak about case, for this is perhaps the only guarantee that investigations conducted within different theories can be related to one another no matter how far they diverge in basic premises and focus. The first task, then, is simply to define the notion of case in natural language. Just what is meant by "case," its form, its meaning and function, is sometimes less than obvious. As Comrie argues (this volume), we are still in need of a set of criteria to enable us to identify and distinguish one case from another in a given language. Thus, there are instances when a morphological form signals different cases, and other instances when different forms constitute different markers of the same case. Most would agree, for example, with Wierzbicka's (1983:249) analysis of the Russian sentences *Ivan uvidel Moskvíč* 'Ivan saw a Moskvíč (a brand of car)' and *Ivan uvidel Moskvíča* 'Ivan saw a Moscovite (a male inhabitant of Moscow)'. She notes that the object NP's in these sentences differ in CASE MARKING, but not in CASE: the two case forms,  $-\emptyset$  and  $-a$ , signal an inanimate and animate referent, respectively, yet at the same time both mark the accusative case. There are other instances, however, where alternative case forms imply different cases to some, but merely "variants" of the same case to others. For example, how should the Russian "partitive" be analyzed? Specifically, do the alternative genitive inflections,  $-a$ , vs.  $-u$ , which occur on certain masculine mass nouns (e.g. *cena konjaka* 'price of cognac' vs. *rjumka konjaku* 'glass of cognac') mark two distinct genitive cases, genitive I and genitive II (the partitive)? Or are these two forms, as Wierzbicka (1983:250) argues, mere "allomorphs" of one genitive case, the form in  $-u$  being a cumulative marker of the genitive case plus a new category of "partitiveness"? Such questions can only be answered if we have a rigorous definition of case and a set of principles for delimiting cases in language. These are precisely the issues addressed by Mel'čuk and Comrie (this volume). Also, such studies are valuable in keeping claims about universality more modest, at least initially. Universal claims made on the basis of data from the Indo-European languages must be shown to be valid for the less familiar or "esoteric" languages. Accordingly, we must be able to document that a theory of case is as applicable to a language with just two cases, like Old French, as it is to Tabassaran, which according to Mel'čuk (this volume) has forty-six cases!

In the following discussion we will first describe two poles from which case has been described, the semantic approach of Jakobson and the syntactic approach of Chomsky. We shall then attempt to relate most contemporary work done on Slavic case to these two "extremes" and thus show that in fact we are dealing less with the substance than with the focus of investigation. Our conclusion will be that a significant problem in the study of case is the failure on the part of investigators to understand the commonality of interest among them, a failure aided and abetted by the philosophical and terminological differences of competing linguistic schools.

1. *Semantic Case.* For linguists working on Slavic, particularly within the Prague School framework, the central issue with case, as with all grammatical categories, has been the isolation of the meaning which its individual instantiations contribute to the utterance in which they occur. Roman Jakobson's basic premise, as recapitulated by Waugh (1982:xii) is:

...as a primary fact, there is no meaning without a form (meanings are not abstract categories), and no form without a meaning (form is the means by which meaning is carried and can be conveyed from speaker to addressee).

The succinct version of this is "one form—one meaning". This axiom of "invariance" has driven linguists of the Prague School in their studies to isolate the "general meaning" of individual case morphemes by abstracting it as the common denominator of the contextual meanings associated with each form. Cf. again Waugh (1982:xiii-xiv):

The general meaning, which may also be termed the relational invariant, is the common denominator of signification as the sign is given an interpretation in various contexts and is thus more abstract and more general than any particular contextualization, while the contextual meanings are the more specific variants which occur in given contexts... furthermore, the general meaning is more paradigmatic in nature being based for example on oppositional structure, while the particular contextual meanings belong in all their complexity more

to the syntagmatic axis, being dependent upon their relation to other facets of the (syntagmatic) context.

Jakobson's fundamental insight, of course, is that the individual cases of a language are not atomic units, but enter into a system of correlative and oppositional relations with one another. It follows that the general meaning of each case is comprised of a set of semantic features available to a language (if not universally) which uniquely define each case on the basis of those features which it shares or does not share with other cases. In recent times the paradigm of this approach—with certain refinements—is represented by Cornelius van Schooneveld's work (e.g. van Schooneveld 1978, 1982 and this volume).

Though Jakobson's proposals have been tested, elaborated, and criticized, much of the work done on Slavic has accepted his basic assumptions and has concentrated on establishing the semantic contribution made by a particular case. In the work of the structural linguists and their current followers (for example, van Schooneveld, Wierzbicka) there has never been any doubt as to the centrality of the study of case in natural language and the necessity of investigating the meaning of individual cases in particular languages. However, few investigators have shared Jakobson's optimism that all case use, whether syntactic or semantic, can be unified under a highly restricted, correlative set of invariant semantic distinctive features.<sup>2</sup>

Scepticism of this general approach, that is, of the adequacy of attempts to provide semantic definitions of morphological cases, is perhaps one of the reasons why generative grammarians, until quite recently, had relegated case to a superficial position in grammatical theory (cf. Anderson 1971:9). And although the problem of case has now become a central object of interest in generative grammar, the view of case that has been advanced by Chomsky and his colleagues is, characteristically, a purely syntactic one. Thus, one can speak of two extremes in the assessment of the semantic load of case forms: On the one view, case morphemes contribute meaning on their own, meaning which is obligatorily in agreement with the other lexical and grammatical meaning of the utterance. The other view is that morphological case is dictated by the structure of the sentence itself or by the governing case-assigning verb or preposition. On this latter view, case forms are basically meaningless.

Extreme views of case are well represented in the traditional literature on case in natural language. Mel'čuk (this volume) identifies them as paradigmatically and syntagmatically oriented theories of case. The principal exponent of the former approach is Jakobson and his followers. The latter is exemplified by an approach which treats a specific case in a language "...as the class of all nominal forms mutually substitutable in certain specified 'governing' contexts."<sup>3</sup> As far as the meaning bearing function of case is concerned, most traditional studies have taken the middle ground, starting from the observation that some instances of case usage are more "meaningful" than others. This insight has been captured by a distinction variously termed "grammatical" vs. "adverbial," "syntactic" vs. "concrete," as well as "grammatical" vs. "concrete" (e.g. Kuryłowicz 1949/1960). A clear example of this middle position is given again by Mel'čuk:

There are some cases 2 (in some languages) which never have meaning: such as, e.g., the Russian nominative or the Russian prepositional. There are cases 2 (in some languages) which always have meaning: such, it seems, is true of the Finnish partitive. Finally, there are also cases 2 which in some contexts have meaning and in other contexts do not: such as, e.g., the Russian partitive which conveys the meaning 'some' [= 'an indefinite portion of'] with the direct object of several verbs (*Prinesi sazar!* 'Bring the sugar!', vs. *Prinesi sazaru!* 'Bring some sugar!'), but which is devoid of meaning in such idiomatic expressions as *bez tolku* 'to no purpose' or *dlja smexu* 'to amuse people'.

Presumably, Mel'čuk would also treat as meaningless the partitive after lexemes such as *malo* 'a little', *mnogo* 'a lot', etc.<sup>4</sup>

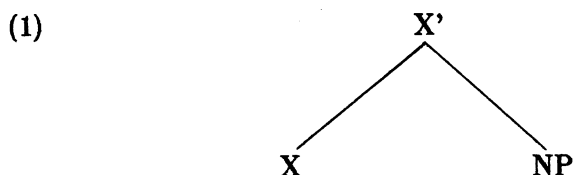
Since Chomsky's view of case as essentially meaningless contrasts so sharply with the traditional Prague School view, it is worthwhile sketching the basic assumptions involved. This is particularly relevant since both extreme views are represented by current work on case in the United States.

2. *Syntactic Case.* Syntactically/formally oriented contemporary linguists working within the framework of Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Grammar generally had neglected the problem of case in their model of natural language. However, the

recent development of Chomsky's Government-Binding Theory of "abstract case" (Chomsky 1981 and 1982) has stimulated new research in this area and has resulted in the formulation of some concrete proposals that have a direct bearing on the question of the "meaningfulness" of case. These proposals emphasize the role of configurational context in assigning case to a Noun Phrase (NP). They can be summarized as follows:

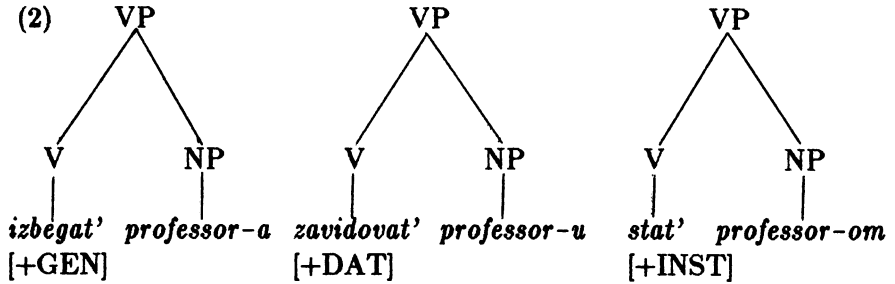
- (a) Case is strictly determined by syntactic structure, i.e., an NP is assigned a particular case if it bears a certain structural relation to another category (e.g. Verb or Preposition). Therefore,
- (b) case makes no contribution to the semantic interpretation of sentences.

According to Chomsky (1981), there are two strategies for assigning case to an NP. Both are defined in terms of syntactic configuration. In the first strategy, "Structural Case Assignment," an NP is assigned a particular case if it stands in a certain structural relation to another category. The key structural relation is that of "government."<sup>5</sup> The general schema of government is given below in (1), where X can be said to govern NP:



Thus, in English Prepositional Phrases (PP) and Verb Phrases (VP) the Preposition and the Verb "govern" their object NP's and so STRUCTURALLY assign to them the Objective case (e.g. 'about me', 'loves her'). In Russian these same categories structurally assign the Accusative case to their NP objects.

The second strategy for assigning case, according to Chomsky, is "Inherent Case Assignment." Here certain governing categories are subcategorized to occur with a particular case. In Russian, for example, certain prepositions and verbs provoke inherent case, i.e., they obligatorily assign a particular oblique case to their objects.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the verb *izbegat'* 'avoid' assigns Genitive, *zavidovat'* 'envy' assigns Dative, and *stat'* 'become' assigns Instrumental.



Observe that in the branching diagrams of (2) each Verb assigns its object a different case and that each of these cases is expressed morphologically by the different endings on the NP *professor*: *-a* (GEN), *-u* (DAT) and *-om* (INST).

To sum up Chomsky's view of syntactic case, in both case-assigning strategies, structural and inherent, the case-assigning category must be in the syntactically "governing" position in order to assign case to its object. If the governing category is a Verb or Preposition that is idiosyncratically marked to select a particular case, it will automatically assign that (inherent) case to its object. (In Russian, the inherently assigned cases would be the so-called "oblique" cases, namely the Genitive, Dative, Locative and Instrumental.) If, however, the governing category is a transitive Verb or one of a small number of Prepositions, it will structurally assign its object the Accusative case. Thus, in both of these strategies, case assignment is dictated by and predictable from the SYNTACTIC CONFIGURATION, with or without the peculiar properties of the governing category.

If the occurrence of morphological cases is completely predictable from the syntactic structure or from the lexical specification (specifically the subcategorization) of the verb, morphological case essentially makes no contribution to the semantic interpretation of sentences. This seems to present two alternatives. The first is to treat case morphemes as totally meaningless. The second is to assume that the meanings they express obligatorily agree with the context in which they occur. Both alternatives presume that the syntactic structure (in the instance of structural case assignment) and the subcategorization features (for inherent case assignment) themselves convey any case meanings associated with the notions of subject vs. object, direct vs. indirect object, accusative vs. instrumental governing verbs, etc. In any instance, such "semantic" questions are not entirely



eliminated but removed to a different component or level of the grammar.<sup>7</sup>

3. *The Debate on the Middle Ground.* The two positions sketched above, semantic case and syntactic case, define the extremes between which falls much work on case. For example, when testing Chomsky's proposals, one asks whether there are instances when morphological cases are not redundant, but, instead convey meaning? In other words, is there such a thing as "semantic case"? The strategy for answering this question, i.e. for determining whether morphological cases are meaningful, is to try to find instances where two or more morphological cases can occur **WITHIN THE SAME SYNTACTIC CONFIGURATION**. If in such constructions there is a discernible difference in meaning, then this meaning must be attributed to the morphological cases themselves.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the most obvious example of a case alternation occurring within apparently the same syntactic structure is one where a preposition can be followed by two or more cases:

- (3) a. On xodil v park.  
       he walked to park:ACC  
       'He walked to the park.'
- b. On xodil v parke.  
       he walked in park:LOC  
       'He walked in the park.'

In these two sentences the prepositional objects show an alternation between the Accusative and the Locative cases. These sentences exemplify the well-documented semantic distinction of "motion toward" vs. "location" in Slavic. The only difference in FORM between these sentences seems to be in the morphological case endings on the object NP's, and it is therefore tempting to attribute these differences in MEANING to the cases themselves. While this conclusion can hardly be surprising to most Slavic linguists, Chomsky's proposals can only be challenged if it can be documented that each sentence of the pair has the same syntactic structure. If this can be demonstrated, then the difference in meaning between the sentences must be attributed to the case forms—and so the existence of "semantic case" will be proven and Chomsky's claims for case will have to be revised.

The debate as to the meaningfulness of case is hardly new in the history of linguistics. Perhaps the best known discussion of the

issues involved is that of Kuryłowicz 1949/1960, who explicitly criticized Jakobson (and Hjelmslev) for their totally semantic approach to case. Significantly, Kuryłowicz used prepositional constructions, like the one cited above, to argue that the cases are not in direct opposition. Rather, he argued that in fact the contrast in case is a direct reflection of a structural contrast involving prepositional phrases which are inside or outside of the verb phrase. (Thus, Kuryłowicz argues for the existence of both semantic and syntactic case!) It goes without saying that Chomsky would have recourse to the self same argument in order to sustain his position on the meaninglessness of case. However, in a case-rich family of languages like Slavic, there are many putative instances of case alternations which can serve as candidates for semantic case: the Genitive/Accusative alternation in direct objects of negated verbs (Timberlake 1975 and this volume) or in subjects of intransitive verbs (Babby 1980b); the Nominative/Instrumental alternation in sentences involving natural forces (Wierzbicka 1980b) or in predicate nominals (Chvany 1975, Nichols 1981, Rothstein, this volume); the Instrumental/Accusative and Dative/Genitive of "inalienable possession" (Levine 1980, 1984, this volume, Brecht and Levine 1984). Mel'čuk (this volume) cites two "prototypical examples of 'meaningful' cases": the adessive vs. dative and the ablative vs. ergative in Lezgian.

The latest proposals concerning syntactic case have been made largely on the basis of data from minimally inflected languages like English; they have just begun to be tested on Russian, a typologically different language in which case is morphologically expressed on all the inflected constituents of an NP. The results of research within the Government-Binding framework thus far have been mixed. While certain studies have tended to support the validity of Chomsky's proposals for languages like Russian (Pesetsky 1982; Franks (this volume) and Rappaport (this volume)), others have pointed to inadequacies in the theory, using the traditional instances of semantic case. In particular, Babby (this volume) and Freidin and Babby (1984) argue within the G-B framework that Chomsky's proposals do not account for semantic case in Russian. According to Babby, only semantic case contributes to a sentence's semantic interpretation and it is only in "case languages" like Russian that semantic case is found.

One of the examples which Babby adduces in support of his claim for semantic case is the Accusative/Genitive alternation after

transitive verbs in Russian, the so-called "partitive genitive". Thus, examples like the following are to be treated as minimal pairs:

- (4) a. Daj nam xleb.  
       give to-us bread:ACC  
       'Give us the bread.'
- b. Daj nam xleba.  
       give to-us bread:GEN  
       'Give us some bread.'

Here the difference in meaning seems to be attributable directly to the difference in case. Significantly, this alternation has been the focus of the debate on the meaningfulness of case for many years. In fact, Kuryłowicz used this same construction to argue for the syntactic status of certain case alternations, arguing that the meaning distinction here must be attributed to the syntactic fact in English of article selection (definite or indefinite). Franks (this volume) proposes a different syntactic analysis for Russian: he posits an empty quantifier before the genitive object, thus again arguing for a clear structural basis for the distinction of case.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that some cases seem to be more meaningful than others is well documented in the literature on case. Normally a distinction is made between "voll-" and "randkasus," to use Jakobson's terminology. In Russian, according to Jakobson, the nominative, genitive and accusative are the "full" cases, while the instrumental, locative and dative are the "peripheral" ones. This division normally coincides with the "syntactic" vs. "semantic" ("grammatical" vs. "adverbial," or "abstract" vs. "concrete") distinction and even the "structurally" vs. "inherently" assigned cases of Chomsky. Presumably Tesnière's (1959) valence theory also is relevant here, particularly his distinction of "actants" vs. "circonstants," although the role of the dative and genitive cases is problematic with regard to the "full" vs. "peripheral" distinction. The issue is, not surprisingly, more complicated than this simple division would suggest, for there appear to be instances where other cases are syntactically determined. For example, the instrumental case in Russian occurs automatically where a double accusative is expected. Another example is given by Topolińska (this volume), who notes that in southern Macedonian dialects the dative (or what is functionally equivalent to the dative) has acquired the status of a "grammaticalized" case.

At this stage the preponderance of evidence seems to argue for the inclusion within the theory of grammar of both syntactic and semantic case. Mel'čuk (this volume) puts it succinctly:

Personally, I am convinced that only an appropriate combination of both approaches is capable of yielding satisfactory results. Case 1 is mainly a syntactic category, and cases 2 are there, before all, to mark passive SSynt-roles of nominals; at the same time, though, they so often convey a meaning that it is impossible to describe them without accounting for their semantic load. Yet one cannot abstract from their basically syntactic nature either: the majority of cases 2 cannot be described exclusively in terms of their content; they are, as a rule, entailed by particular syntactic constructions or by particular lexical items in particular constructions. Therefore, a double-faceted description, put forth in our definition of case 1, imposes itself.

4. *Case and Meaning.* Chomsky's approach does not preclude the search for the semantics of case. Rather, it has simply removed the question from the syntactic component (and even the interpretive component) and made it a matter of the lexicon. Nevertheless, the central issue must be addressed. To be sure, if one or another case is dictated by a configuration or governing lexical item, then the semantic weight of the case in the utterance is indeed slight. However, in a theory of language which attempts to "explain" or account for all correlations, i.e. which assumes that such correlations are systemic rather than accidental, one is still left with specifying why a particular case is more compatible with one configuration or governing lexical category than another case might be. In other words, that *loben* in German takes the accusative case and *schmeicheln* the dative either is totally *ad hoc*, or the grammatical meaning of these cases and the lexical meaning of the verbs in question must be interrelated. Whether this question is resolved in the syntactic or interpretive components or whether it is left to the lexicon is merely a consequence of the theoretical framework in which one is operating.

The most common semantic basis for the assignment of case is what Fillmore calls the "labeled" or "mediated" relations of NP arguments. These "deep cases" or "theta roles," to use Chomsky's

term, have names like Agentive, Instrumental, Objective, Factive, Locative, Benefactive, etc. Many studies, including Grochowski (this volume), are devoted to the investigation of the surface realization of these semantic relations. The problem, at least as far as the semantic specification of the case morphemes is concerned, is that there is no one-to-one mapping from such semantic relations to surface form. Nevertheless, there appears to be at least some relationship, as Gladney (this volume) argues in positing the thematic relation of 'Measure' to account for the occurrence of the accusative case in Russian or as Grochowski (this volume) demonstrates in his study of the "deep" Instrumental case relation in Polish. In Chomsky's framework, as noted above, case meaning essentially is located in the lexicon and is tied to the thematic relations of the verb's subcategorized NP's. It is unclear, however, how one is to integrate the thematic relations, the lexical meaning of verbs dictating inherent case assignment, the grammatical functions (subject, object, etc.), and the formal manifestations of case. Jakobson, for example, posits a set of abstract semantic features which are assumed to map directly onto morphological forms and which seem to respond both to semantic (thematic and lexical) as well as syntactic factors.<sup>10</sup> However, the distinction between grammatical functions and semantic relations is not explicitly drawn. The same can be said about Localist accounts of case.

There have been various attempts to arrive at semantic features to define case, including Jakobson's and that of the Localists (e.g. Anderson 1971; Miller 1974 and this volume; Kilby 1977). The problem with abstract semantic features—as with all semantics—is that one cannot argue for or against them on other than intuitive grounds, for they lack specification in a universal semantic alphabet, nor are such posited features incorporated within some sort of formal calculus relating meaning and form. Wierzbicka's (1972, 1980a, 1980b and this volume) ongoing effort to develop a universal metalanguage of semantic primitives is promising in this regard. Her modeling of case meanings in terms of metalanguage constructed from natural language may be viewed as an elaboration of Jakobson's invariant distinctive feature approach (cf. Levine 1982). Wierzbicka treats the invariant general definition of a particular case as what Mel'čuk calls "META-descriptive statements." As Wierzbicka (this volume) puts it: "[each case has] a core meaning, on the basis of which it can

be identified cross-linguistically..., and a language-specific set of other, related meanings, which have to be specified in the grammatical description of a given language....” To use Nichols’ (1982:696ff.) words, this “maximally content-oriented” approach has “the merit of bringing out hitherto unnoticed semantic properties of syntactic relations...” and as such has great heuristic value.

It is indeed difficult nowadays to discuss the semantic contribution of an element in an utterance without addressing in some fashion the pragmatic factors involved.<sup>11</sup> Although the explicit distinction between semantically and pragmatically derived notions in an utterance is a fairly recent development in linguistics, this distinction has been at the basis of a significant amount of work on grammatical meaning. (For example, the Prague School “functional approach” is pragmatically oriented.) Recent work even has begun to propose a certain pragmatic calculus (Brecht, in press, Brecht & Levine 1984, Levine, this volume). One of the best examples of the complexity of the problem of the interrelation of semantic and pragmatic factors is Nichols’ (1981) work on the instrumental vs. nominative alternation in Russian predicate nominals. Nevertheless, the interaction of pragmatics and case is still a largely unexplored area. Much more work is needed before we know the full ramifications of pragmatics for case meaning.

5. *The Formal Manifestations of Case.* Many purely formal questions on case remain to be resolved. For example, one concern is the discrimination of a case form from its distribution, given the fact that form and distribution frequently are not in a one-to-one correlation. Any general theory of case must confront this issue, as Comrie and Mel’čuk (this volume) do, just as Chomsky and his colleagues must distinguish between the grammatical functions, i.e. the syntactic roles of subject, object, etc., and the real or “abstract” morphological manifestations of case. The question of the interrelationship among thematic roles, grammatical functions and morphological case currently is being vigorously debated (see, for example, Williams 1984) as a central issue in the theory of Government-Binding.

Finally, even the question of the morphological manifestation of case is by no means clear, as the debate over case and prepositional phrases makes clear.<sup>12</sup> The issues involved become clearer in diachronic perspective, as Topolińska (this volume) demonstrates in her investigation of the loss of case in the Slavic

languages of the southern Balkan peninsula. Grammaticalized clitics and prepositions are on a par with morphological desinences, provided one can determine when grammaticalization has taken place.

6. *Conclusions.* Our purpose here has been to provide a brief overview of the state of case investigations in Slavic. This is particularly important for general linguistic theory because, in our view, some of the most important work on case has been carried out on the basis of data from the Slavic languages. While there remains considerable commonality of interest among both general and Slavic linguists, the all too characteristic epistemological issues remain. Basically the problem is one of communication, of linguists working within different frameworks failing to address themselves to anyone outside the particular theory in which they are operating. As any broad examination of work being done on case will show—and this collection of papers is as good a sample as exists, investigators are involved naturally enough with the same substantive issues: case and thematic roles, syntactic vs. semantic case, syntactic functions and morphological expression. To be sure, the approaches dictated by various theoretical premises focus on different aspects of these issues, often casting traditional problems in new guises. Thus, the following are questions unifying the concerns of different theoretical approaches:

- Among the many putative instances of case alternations with semantic consequences within case languages like Russian, can one argue for or against the existence of different syntactic structures?

- What are the formal structures for signaling case beyond the traditional morphological desinences? What do the languages and dialects in transition (for example, in the south Balkan Slavic or the north Great Russian dialects) have to show us in this regard?

- Do anaphoric processes operate in case languages as they do in languages like English?

- How, in particular, does the long tradition in Slavic of the investigation of voice and diathesis interrelate with the syntactic concerns of case?<sup>13</sup>

- How are thematic roles and syntactic functions to be related?

- What is the relationship between semantic case features,

thematic roles, and syntactic functions?

• What aspects of the utterance value, which are dependent upon case phenomena, are attributable to pragmatic considerations?

Of course, many such issues can be raised. Our goal has been to focus the attention of investigators in different traditions on issues such as these in hopes of provoking more mutually comprehensible discussion on case.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Presumably, the semantically oriented approach must reflect the contemporary concern for the pragmatic aspects of an utterance as well. See Levine (this volume).

<sup>2</sup>The view that there can be a single, invariant meaning unifying all the uses of a given case has recently been rejected by N. Ju. Švedova, author of the section "Meanings of cases" (§1156-1172) and general editor of the latest Soviet Academy Grammar (*Russkaja Grammatika* 1980). Denying the possibility of a semantic invariant, Švedova postulates for each case a complex of meanings, some of which are described as "central" or "basic" to a given case, while others are semantically "peripheral".

According to Švedova, the (prepositionless) cases may have one, two or all three of the following central meanings: "subjective", "objective" and "attributive." The distribution of these meanings is given as follows: the Nominative can express both a subjective (*Syn rabotaet* 'The son[Nom] works') and attributive meaning (*Doč' - krasavica* 'The daughter is a beauty[Nom]'). The Genitive is subjective (*Knig ne vypuskaetsja* 'Books[Gen] are not being produced'), objective (*On ždet utra* 'He is waiting for morning[Gen]') and attributive (*SSSR-eto strana ozer* 'The USSR is a land of lakes[GEN]'). The central meanings of the Dative are objective (*Pis'mo drugu* 'A letter to a friend[Dat]') and subjective (*Mne xolodno* 'To me[Dat] it is cold'). For the Accusative the central meaning is objective (*On čitaet knigu* 'He is reading a book[Acc]') while for the Instrumental they are attributive (*Sestra budet vračom* 'Sister will be a doctor[Inst]') and objective (*Otec gorditsja synom* 'Father is proud of his son[Inst]'). Moreover, each of the central meanings, according to Švedova, in certain contexts can be found in combinations with one another, so that, for example, the Nominative is said to have a "subjective-objective" meaning in a sentence like *Syn nakazan ocom* 'The son[Nom] was punished by his father.'

Among the possible peripheral meanings of the cases Švedova mentions the "information-supplying meaning" (*informativno-vospoln'ajusčee značenie*) of the Nominative (*Ee zovut Lena* 'Her name is Lena[Nom]') and the Instrumental (*On sčitaetsja eruditom* 'He is considered an erudite person[Inst]'), as well as a number of "adverbial" meanings of the Accusative (e.g. *My ždem god* 'We've been waiting a year[Acc]') and the Genitive (*Uvidimsja pjatogo maja* 'We'll see each other on the fifth[Gen] of May').

The approach taken in RG 1980 clearly stresses the importance of syntax as a basis for arriving at case meanings. While syntactic functions like "subject" and "object" are obviously crucial to an adequate account of case, the approach outlined above does not make clear how these syntactic functions interrelate with semantic roles like Agent, Patient, Instrument, etc. We argue



below that perhaps the central problem that must be addressed in current work on case is how grammatical functions, semantic roles and the formal exponents of case can be related in an explicit theory of case.

<sup>3</sup>Mel'čuk (this volume) cites Revzin 1967, Marcus 1967, Zaliznjak 1967, 1973 and Gladkij 1969, 1973 as examples of the syntagmatically oriented approach to case.

<sup>4</sup>It should be noted that Gladney (this volume) directly challenges Mel'čuk's claim that the Russian prepositional is a meaningless case.

<sup>5</sup>Babby (this volume: note 31) argues that certain case data in Russian point to *c*-command, not government, as the key structural relation in case theory.

<sup>6</sup>Gladney (this volume) argues against the view that prepositions in Russian assign inherent case.

<sup>7</sup>Such questions are raised in Gladney's (this volume) discussion of the relative semantic contributions of the preposition, the morphological case and the Case Relation in a prepositional phrase. Clearly, neither the meaning of the preposition nor that of the case is irrelevant; rather the issue has to be viewed as one of semantic agreement between the individual lexical and grammatical morphemes in the phrase.

<sup>8</sup>One of the primary goals of Babby (this volume) is to argue for the existence of semantic case in Russian.

<sup>9</sup>Another putative instance of semantic case is the so-called "genitive of temporary use." The genitive case on the direct object in this construction contributes the meaning 'for a while'. Corresponding utterances with the accusative direct object lack this meaning. Common in nineteenth-century Russian literature, this use of the genitive, illustrated in (ii) below, is becoming extinct in Contemporary Russian (cf. RG 1980:§1765; Ickovič 1968:57-8):

- (i) Odolži mne nožik.  
loan to-me knife:ACC  
'Loan me a knife.'
- (ii) Odolži mne nožika.  
loan to-me knife:GEN  
'Loan me a knife (for a while).'

However, as Wierzbicka (1983:259-61) demonstrates, this construction has a counterpart in Polish, which, though subject to certain conditions, is perfectly acceptable in the contemporary language:

- (iii) Daj mi nóż.  
give to-me knife:ACC  
'Give me a knife.' (e.g. as a present)
- (iv) Daj mi noża.  
give to-me knife:GEN  
'Give me a knife (for a moment).'

According to Wierzbicka, the genitive is favored over the accusative when the object NP is indefinite, unmodified and refers to a "small object." Stylistically, use of the genitive is considered very colloquial. The meaning contributed by

the genitive case is that the action is "quick," "spontaneous" and of a "non-serious" nature.

Wierzbicka concludes that the genitive-case object in this construction is semantically motivated, i.e., an instance of what we have been referring to as semantic case. However, it is clear that even here, a configurationally-based analysis could be proposed. Thus, following tradition, one could treat the genitive object here as a variety of the partitive genitive (cf. Delbrück 1893/1967), which, as in Franks (this volume), is assigned its genitive case marking by a governing empty quantifier. Assuming Jakobson's characterization of the genitive as [+quantified] is correct, then the "temporary use" meaning associated with the genitive object in this construction would be explainable as "quantification of time." The remaining nuances—that the action is spontaneous and for a non-serious purpose—are no doubt pragmatically implied. Clearly, more data must be gathered before the question of semantic vs. syntactic case can be resolved.

<sup>10</sup>See Chvany (this volume) for a detailed investigation of the putative isomorphism between form and meaning claimed by Jakobson in his analysis of the Russian case system. Also, see Kilby 1977 and (this volume) where it is argued that Jakobson's characterization of the instrumental case as "peripheral" is syntactically as well as semantically motivated.

<sup>11</sup>Programmatic studies of the scope of linguistic pragmatics are to be found in Leech 1983 and Levinson 1983.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. the opposing views of Gladney and Mel'čuk (this volume).

<sup>13</sup>This is the central concern of Perlmutter's theory of Relational Grammar, especially the work of Channon in Slavic (e.g. Channon 1980). This tradition is conspicuous by its absence in the present volume.