

1.2. Cases syncretized.

Following Baerman et al. 2002, I distinguish three types of syncretism:

- ◆ syncretism of core grammatical cases (Nom and Acc vs. Abs and Erg);
- ◆ syncretism of peripheral cases;
- ◆ syncretism of one or two core cases with one or more peripheral cases.

Hereafter I will be concerned only with the latter type.

2. The data¹.

2.1. Synchronic distribution.

A survey of about 60 languages of various genetic phyla of Eurasia shows the following distribution:

- **Pattern 1:** syncretism of a ‘marked’ core case (Acc or Erg) and a ‘grammatical’ peripheral case (Gen or Dat; other peripheral cases may also syncretize; **only systematic** instances are counted):

AccGen — *Indo-European*: Russian, Belorussian, Czech, Slovak, Upper Sorbian, Ukrainian, Slovene, Icelandic, Old Icelandic, Old Swedish, Modern Greek, Osetin; *Turkic*: Balkar; *Mongolian*: Oirat, Bao’an, Daur, Mongor, Shira Yugur; *Uralic*: Saami, Komi; *Semitic*: Arabic, Akkadian

AccDat — *Indo-European*: Middle High German, Modern High German, Icelandic, Old Icelandic, Old Swedish, Gothic, Old Irish, Hittite, Armenian, Albanian, Panjabi, Assamese; *Mongolian*: Bao’an; *Uralic*: Khanty, Saami

AccGenDat — Middle High German, Modern High German, Modern Greek, Sanskrit, Armenian

AccGenLoc — various Slavic

AccGenAbl — Osetin

AccDatGenIns — Old English

ErgGen — *Indo-European*: Phalura; *Burushaski*; *Kartvelian*: Georgian; *North-East-Caucasian*: Khinalug

- **Pattern 2:** syncretism of a ‘marked’ core case with a ‘non-grammatical’ peripheral case (**only systematic** instances are counted):

AccIns — Czech, Upper Sorbian, Polish, Slovene, Latvian

AccAbl — Latin, Osetin

AccLoc — Old Armenian

AccLocDat — Old Armenian

ErgIns — *Indo-European*: Waigali, Kashmiri; *Chukotko-Kamchatkan*: Chukchee

ErgObl — *Indo-European*: Kanyawali, Dameli, Phalura

ErgLoc — *Chukotko-Kamchatkan*: Chukchee, Alutor

ErgAbl — *Indo-European*: Torwali

ErgTranslat — *Kartvelian*: Svan

ErgLocDat — *Chukotko-Kamchatkan*: Alutor

- **Pattern 3:** syncretism of an ‘unmarked’ core case (Nom or Abs) with one or several peripheral cases (**all instances are counted, systematic ones are underlined**):

NomGen — Czech, Gothic, Old Irish, Hittite, Sakan, Latvian, Latin

NomIns — Czech, Old Church Slavonic, Old Russian, Avestan

NomDat — Medieval Greek

NomDatLoc — Old Church Slavonic, Old Russian

NomGenIns — Old Church Slavonic

AbsIns — Kashmiri

AbsGen — *North-East-Caucasian*: Ingush

- **Pattern 4:** syncretism of both core cases with one or several peripheral cases (**only systematic** instances are counted):

NomAccGen — *Indo-European*: Czech, Middle High German, Modern High German, Icelandic, Old English, Old Swedish, Old Irish, Sakan, Osetin; *Uralic*: Mordvin

NomAccDat — Middle High German, Modern High German, Icelandic, Middle English, Old Swedish, Old Irish

NomAccLoc — Old Armenian, Romani

NomAccIns — Czech

NomAccGenDat — Middle High German

¹ The references to the sources of data are chiefly in Russian; I suppress them for the sake of space.

Summary:

- ◆ syncretisms following Pattern 1 occur frequently and are predominantly systematic;
- ◆ syncretisms following Pattern 4 are somewhat less frequent, but can be characterized by the same features as those of Pattern 1;
- ◆ syncretisms following Pattern 3 are rare and predominantly non-systematic;
- ◆ syncretisms following Pattern 2 occupy an intermediate position, being more frequent and systematic than those of Pattern 3, but less frequent and systematic than those of Patterns 1 and 4.

2.2. Diachronic evidence.

- the instances of syncretisms following the Patterns 1 and 4 attested in various groups of Indo-European languages have all arisen independently of each other and are not inherited from their common ancestor; thus their abundance in the languages of this family cannot be regarded as a consequence of genetic relationship;
- the said instances are usually diachronically stable, i. e. having once arisen in a language, they resist phonological and morphological change, becoming an important feature of the grammar (e. g. the ‘animate’ AccGen syncretism in Slavonic languages, see Comrie 1978, Huntley 1980);
- on the contrary, the syncretisms following Pattern 3 are often subject to diachronic change: Old Church Slavonic < Common Slavic (Meillet 1934), plural nouns:

	hard stems ‘wolves’	soft stems ‘men’
Nom	<i>vľbci</i> < CS * <i>vľbkoi</i>	<i>maži</i> < CS * <i>mađjoi</i>
Acc	<i>vľbky</i> < CS * <i>vľbkons</i>	<i>mažę</i> < CS * <i>mađjons</i>
Ins	<i>vľbky</i> < CS * <i>vľbkū</i>	<i>maži</i> < CS * <i>mađjū</i>

Modern Slavonic languages: abolition of NomIns (and AccIns) through the restructuring of Ins:

	Russian ‘swords’	Polish ‘countries’	Slovak ‘swords’	Serbocroatian ‘horses’
Nom	<i>meči</i>	<i>kraje</i>	<i>meče</i>	<i>konji</i>
Acc	<i>meči</i>	<i>kraje</i>	<i>meče</i>	<i>konje</i>
Ins	<i>mečami</i>	<i>krajami</i>	<i>mečmi</i>	<i>konjima</i>

Czech: abolition of NomIns through the restructuring of Nom, retaining AccIns and creating NomAccIns:

	animate				inanimate		
Nom	<i>páni</i>	<i>muži, mužové</i>	<i>předsedové</i>	<i>soudci, soudcové</i>	<i>hrady</i>	<i>stroje</i>	<i>dni, dny</i>
Acc	<i>pány</i>	<i>muže</i>	<i>předsedy</i>	<i>soudce</i>	<i>hrady</i>	<i>stroje</i>	<i>dny</i>
Ins	<i>pány</i>	<i>muži</i>	<i>předsedy</i>	<i>soudci</i>	<i>hrady</i>	<i>stroji</i>	<i>dny</i>

2.3. Summary.

- the syncretisms following Patterns 1 and 4 (and probably 2) may be considered ‘natural’ in the sense of Dressler (ed.) 1987: they are typologically widespread, systematic, and diachronically stable;
- the syncretisms following Pattern 3 may be considered ‘unnatural’, being typologically rare, non-systematic, and viable to diachronic change;
- **what is a possible explanation of these facts?**

3. The Case Hierarchy Constraint on case syncretism.

- the data suggests that there must exist a universal constraint on case syncretism, which permits certain patterns of syncretism and prohibits others;
- such a constraint is, however, no more than a statistical tendency, since it has to account for an uneven distribution of already attested patterns;
- the constraint in question is formulated in terms of the Case Hierarchy (Blake 1994: 157 — 162):

Nom/Abs > Acc/Erg > Gen, Dat > other peripheral cases

The Case Hierarchy Constraint on Syncretism (CHC):

Only those patterns of case syncretism are typologically frequent, systematic and diachronically stable ('natural'), in which the cases syncretized are adjacent on the Case Hierarchy

- patterns predicted by the CHC to exist and be 'natural': AccGen, AccDat, NomAccGen, NomAccDat, ErgGen etc;
- patterns predicted by the CHC to be 'unnatural': NomDat, NomGen, AbsDat etc.

4. Problems and perspectives.

- relatively 'natural' patterns predicted to be 'unnatural': Pattern 2; but note that the most prominent instance of Pattern 2, viz. AccIns is attested only in Slavic and its neighbour Latvian;
- permitted but non-attested patterns: ErgDat; however, ergative languages do not have much syncretism of core and peripheral cases;
- the hypothesis needs to be tested against data of the languages outside Eurasia (if those have syncretisms in question at all);
- **what is the possible explanation of CHC? I. e., is there any *functional* motivation for the relationship between case syncretism and Case Hierarchy at all?**

Abbreviations

Abl — Ablative, Abs — Absolutive, Acc — Accusative, Dat — Dative, Erg — Ergative, Gen — Genitive, Ins — Instrumental, Loc — Locative, Nom — Nominative, Obl — Oblique, Translat — Translative

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