0. Introductory remarks.

- previous work on case syncretism (e.g., Carstairs 1984, 1987: ch. 4, Plank 1990, 1991, Stump 2001: Ch. 7, Baerman et al. 2002) has shown that it is not a fruitless task to search for valid cross-linguistic generalizations concerning this phenomenon;
- however, questions concerning the actual inventory and distribution of syncretic patterns attested in human languages still remain unanswered.

The main argument:
- there is a non-random cross-linguistic distribution of syncretic patterns.

1. Some important distinctions concerning case syncretism.

1.1. Systematic vs. non-systematic syncretism.

A pattern of case syncretism is **systematic** (‘*deep*’) if it is not possible to reduce it to the result of application of (morpho)phonological rules, or to idiosyncrasies of individual lexemes/classes of lexemes (cf. Carstairs 1987, Plank 1990).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>inanimate</th>
<th>animate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘stone’</td>
<td>‘neighbour’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kamni</td>
<td>sosedi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘city’</td>
<td>‘Arab’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goroda</td>
<td>araby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘frost’</td>
<td>‘piglet’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>morozy</td>
<td>porosjata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>okna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Systematic syncretisms are best captured by rules of referral (cf. Zwicky 1985)

- Non-systematic (‘*shallow*, *sporadic*) patterns of syncretism are reducible to (a) (morpho)phonological rules resulting in surface identity of underlying distinct exponents; or (b) behaviour of individual inflection classes (esp. minor ones)

(a) Khakass, nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘ski’</th>
<th>‘fur-coat’</th>
<th>‘my horse’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sana</td>
<td>ton</td>
<td>adym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abl</td>
<td>sanadag</td>
<td>tonnañ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ins</td>
<td>sananañ</td>
<td>tonnañ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Gothic, singular nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘day’</th>
<th>‘son’</th>
<th>‘guest’</th>
<th>‘city’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dags</td>
<td>sunus</td>
<td>gasts</td>
<td>baurgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acc</td>
<td>sunu</td>
<td>gast</td>
<td>baurgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen</td>
<td>sunaus</td>
<td>gastis</td>
<td>baurg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dat</td>
<td>sunau</td>
<td>gusta</td>
<td>baurg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The systematicity continuum:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systematic</th>
<th>Non-systematic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Gothic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Russian, plural nouns:
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 data.

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, Komit; *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*: Chuckchee
  - ErgObl — *Indo-European*: Kanyawali, Dameli, Phalura
  - ErgLoc — *Chukotko-Kamchatkan*: Chuckchee, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Nom</th>
<th>Acc</th>
<th>Ins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattern 3</td>
<td>*vlbi &lt; CS</td>
<td>*vlkoi</td>
<td>*mazi &lt; CS *madjoi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern 3</td>
<td>*vlky &lt; CS *vlkons</td>
<td>*mazci &lt; CS *madjons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern 3</td>
<td>*vlk &lt; CS *vlkup</td>
<td>*mazi &lt; CS *madju</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian ‘swords’</th>
<th>Polish ‘countries’</th>
<th>Slovak ‘swords’</th>
<th>Serbocroatian ‘horses’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nom meči</td>
<td>kraj</td>
<td>meče</td>
<td>konji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acc meči</td>
<td>kraj</td>
<td>meče</td>
<td>konje</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ins mečami</td>
<td>krajami</td>
<td>mečmi</td>
<td>konjima</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>animate</th>
<th>inanimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nom páni</td>
<td>muži, mužové</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acc pány</td>
<td>muže</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ins pány</td>
<td>muži</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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):

\[ \text{Nom/Abs} > \text{Acc/Erg} > \text{Gen, Dat} > \text{other peripheral cases} \]
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


References