Successive-cyclic case assignment in Amis: evidence from case-stacking

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This paper proposes an analysis of Amis (Formosan, Austronesian; VSO) case alternations, implemented in a dependent case model (Marantz 1991), in which nominals crucially may receive case multiple times. Moreover, I argue that, contra some previous proposals, e.g. Levin (2016), the presence of a nominal in multiple phases is not a prerequisite for multiple case assignments, but focus movement is necessary for overt case-stacking. I first show that in Amis, case patterns of the first (vP) Spell-Out in main clauses parallel those in gerunds: the external argument (EA) receives genitive (GEN) in both. I argue that DPs headed by bare roots illustrate the consequences of this first Spell-Out most clearly. In imperfective main clauses, the second (CP) Spell-Out replaces GEN on the EA with nominative (NOM), masking an earlier case assignment. I argue that case-stacking, licensed only in contrastive focus contexts, supports the existence of these two rounds of case assignment, where realization of the unmarked case is sensitive to the category of the Spell-Out domain (nominal ⇒ GEN, verbal ⇒ NOM).

Nominal roots | Bare event/state roots, e.g. cefus ‘splash,’ parallel bare entity roots, e.g. lupas ‘peaches,’ in distribution and case marking. First, Amis has a number of affixes commonly termed voice, e.g. mi-/pi- ‘actor voice (AV)’ (mi- appears in indicatives only). All voices can directly attach to either type of root, e.g. mi-cefus ‘splash,’ mi-lupas ‘pick peaches.’ Second, infixal plural reduplication can also apply to either type of root, yielding either a plurality of events or entities, e.g. cefus<cefus>s ‘splash repeatedly,’ lupas<lupas>s ‘peaches.’ Third, DPs headed by either type of root, as in (1), mark case in the same way: the higher DP (EA or possessor) receives GEN and the lower DP receives accusative (ACC). Moreover, (2a) shows that the transitive internal argument (IA) receives ACC even without an overt EA. This contrasts with the unaccusative IA in (2b), which always receives GEN. Following Baker & Vinokurova (2010), I will assume that a null argument (EA in (2a)) counts for the purpose of case competition. Last, gerunds (3) also show the same case pattern just described. This contrasts with imperfective main clauses (4), where the EA receives NOM instead of GEN. For reasons of space, I will not discuss perfectives, which show differential subject marking.

(1) [BareRootDP U cefus/cudad mu tawki tu epah ] ku sakaketer aku.
   U splash/book GEN boss ACC wine NOM reason.anger GEN.1SG
   ‘The boss’ splashing water/ the boss’ book about wine is the reason why I am angry.’

(2) a. u cefus *mu/tu epah
   U splash *GEN/ACC wine
   ‘splashing wine’ (Transitive IA)
   ‘sinking (a) boat(s)’ (Unaccusative IA)

(3) Faheka kaku [Gerund (tu)ya pi-faca’ mu tawki tu riko’ ].
surprised NOM.1SG (ACC)that AV-wash GEN boss ACC clothes
‘I am surprised at the boss’ washing (the) clothes.’

(4) Mi-faca’ ku tawki tu riko’.
AV-wash NOM boss ACC clothes
‘The boss is washing (the) clothes.

Category-sensitive unmarked case | The arguments above show that Amis roots all belong to the same category. Moreover, (i) bare root DPs/gerunds and (ii) voice-inflected roots in a main clause differ in the case the highest argument receives: GEN in (i) and NOM in (ii). These case patterns are easily captured if ACC is the dependent case, and GEN and NOM are two realizations of the unmarked case, conditioned by the category of the relevant case assignment domain: nominal in (i) and verbal in (ii). I thus propose that Amis roots are all born category-neutral. Once saturated with arguments, they are first nominalized by n0 and then verbalized by v0, where voice affixes, e.g. mi-/pi-, are merged, as in (5). Note that adopting category-neutral roots and overt category heads here allows us to have a uniform definition of case assignment domain category throughout, but any alternative where all arguments are visible in the first case assignment and where unmarked case is category-sensitive will be sufficient.
Case assignment

I propose that merger of each phase head ($v^0$, $C^0$, $D^0$) triggers Spell-Out of its domain. The category (nominal, verbal) of a Spell-Out domain is determined by the highest category head ($n^0$, $v^0$) in the domain. I further posit that Amis assigns case by the ordered rules in (6) and in a neutral context, only the last case assigned surfaces. (7) illustrates how (6) derives the case patterns in imperfective main clauses (4) and gerunds (3). First, in both, merger of $v^0$ triggers Spell-Out of $n^P$, as in (7a, c). (6a) assigns ACC to the IA and (6b) assigns GEN to the EA because $n^0$ is the highest category head in this domain. Next, in a main clause, merger of $C^0$ triggers another Spell-Out, as in (7b). (6a) again assigns ACC to the IA, but (6b) assigns NOM to the EA this time because $v^0$ is the highest category head in this domain. In a gerund, I posit that the verbal structure is nominalized by another $n^0$ and this $n^P$ further merges with $D^0$. Gerunds in Amis receive case and can be overtly marked by a demonstrative, showing that they are DPs externally. Merger of $D^0$ triggers the second Spell-Out in a gerund, as in (7d). (6a) assigns ACC to the IA and (6b) assigns GEN to the EA because $n^0$ is the highest category head in this domain. In this proposal, movement into a higher phase is not a prerequisite for successive-cyclic case assignment, contra Levin (2016) on Korean. The NOM EA in (4) needs not be specific and cannot surface with GEN. This differs from Korean, where a DP that receives multiple cases is necessarily specific and can appear with either case. Moreover, given that in (7), the results of the second Spell-Out completely overwrite those of the first, positing multiple case assignments might seem superfluous. However, I show below that the presence of the first (nominal) case assignment in Amis is most clearly supported by case-stacking.

(6) a. If there are two DPs in the same phase such that $D_P$ asymmetrically c-commands $D_P_2$, and if $D_P_1$ is caseless, assign ACC to $D_P_2$.

b. If a DP does not receive dependent case, assign GEN to the DP if the current Spell-Out domain is nominal, and assign NOM if the current Spell-Out domain is verbal.

(7) Phase Main Clause | Phase Gerund
---|---
(a) $vP$ GEN.EA ACC.IA | (a) $vP$ GEN.EA ACC.IA
(b) $CP$ NOM.EA ACC.IA | (b) $DP$ GEN.EA ACC.IA

Case-stacking

Overt Spell-Out of both case assignments in (7) is licensed only when a DP is contrastively focused (indicated in the translation in (8)). In (8a), the focused EA can optionally surface with NOM-GEN, assigned at CP and $vP$, respectively (7a-b). Moreover, in (3) the EA of the gerund can optionally appear in the matrix clause, following the matrix NOM EA. When this raised gerund EA is focused, it can surface with ACC-GEN. I propose that focus-triggered movement licenses overt case-stacking in Amis. Crucially, (8b-c) show that even given an appropriate context, a transitive IA cannot surface with ACC-GEN, whereas an unaccusative IA can appear with NOM-GEN. This is predicted by the current proposal. As the bare root DPs in (2) show, a transitive IA receives ACC even in the first Spell-Out whereas an unaccusative IA receives GEN. Thus, ACC-GEN on the transitive IA in (8b) cannot be derived. I further propose that the focused IA in (8b) does not surface with ACC-ACC $tu-tu$ is a result of haplology, independently supported by DP conjunction. Atu ‘and’ can conjoin two DPs with case marking either the entire conjunction or both of the conjuncts, e.g. $ku\ pusi\ atu\ (ku)\ wacu$ ‘NOM cats and (NOM) dogs’. Amis has three allomorphs for ACC: $tu$ for common nouns and $ci/ca-...-an$ for (plural) proper names and kinship terms. When the second conjunct would otherwise appear with ACC $tu$, but not with either of the other two ACC allomorphs, the string $atu\ tu$ never appears. I attribute this and the ban on overt $tu-tu$ in (8b) both to haplology.

(8) a. Mi-faca’ $ku-nu\ tawki\ i\ matini\ tu\ riko’.
AV-wash NOM-GEN boss $P$ now ACC clothes
‘The boss is washing clothes now, and I will be washing mine later.’

b. ‘Mi-faca’ $ku\ tawki\ i\ matini\ tu-nu\ riko’.
AV-wash NOM boss $P$ now ACC-GEN clothes
Intended: ‘The boss is washing clothes now, and s/he will be washing towels later.’

c. Ma-leneng $ku-nu\ tamina’.
STATIVE-sink NOM-GEN boat ‘The boat sank, but the car did not.’