

Georgian Grammar by Anthony I and its Theoretical Implications for Case Assignment

This presentation aims to discuss case assignment in ergative languages on the example of Georgian. The main source for this work is the 18th-century manuscript of the Georgian Grammar *Cigni ġrammatikay kaṛṭulisamebr enisa* by Catholicos Anthony I (1753), preserved at the Wardrop collection of the Bodleian Library. This grammar contributes to our understanding of the Georgian case system/assignment and ergativity as such by providing information on various issues associated with cases in Georgian. It lists cases not described in the previous or subsequent Georgian grammars, such as ergative (mentioned for the first time), absolutive unmarked (and not nominative as in other grammars), accusative (absent from the Modern Georgian case system whatsoever), see Table 1. The existence of these cases has crucial theoretical implications for case assignment.

Table 1: Cases in Georgian Anthony’s Grammar¹ Modern Georgian Grammars

<i>case</i>	<i>case markers</i>	<i>case</i>	<i>case markers</i>
absolutive (ABS)	∅, -i/-y	nominative (NOM)	-i, ∅
genitive (GEN)	-is(a)/-ys(a)/-ws(a), -(i)si	ergative (ERG)	-ma, -m
dative (DAT)	-s, -(a)d, -da, -mi, -mde, mimart	dative (DAT)	-s
predicative (ACC)	-i/-y, -w	genitive (GEN)	-is, -s(i)
ablative (ABL)	-t(i), -(is) ² gan, gamo	instrumental (INSTR)	-it, -t(i)
narrative (ERG)	-man	adverbial (ADV)	-ad, -d
instrumental (INSTR)	-it(a)/-yt(a), -t(a), mier	vocative (VOC)	-o, -v

¹ Case markers in the Grammar by Anthony I include also some postpositions and phonologically conditioned discarded (1879) letters from Georgian alphabet as -y and -w, Mentioned in the first edition of the Grammar, but discarded in the second, though some examples based on GEN marker are still included. For more details about the two editions of Anthony’s Grammar and the manuscripts preserved in Georgia, see Babunashvili (1970).

The presentation focuses on these three cases, their distribution in the argument structure and consequences for case assignment in Georgian. Case assignment is a long-standing issue in generative syntactic theory, and many theories have been proposed (starting from the traditional Case Theory (CT) (Chomsky 1980; 1981; 1986; 2000; 2001); reformulated by Woolford (2006) as the Inherent Case Theory (ICT), see also Aldridge 2008; Anand & Nevins 2006; Legate 2006; 2008; 2012, *inter alia*; Dependent Case Theory (DCT) as proposed by Marantz (2000), and further elaborated in Baker & Vinokurova (2010); Baker (2013; 2015); Preminger (2014; 2021); Baker & Bobaljik (2017), *inter alia*). Still, ergative case assignment poses many challenges, as ergativity is not a uniform phenomenon cross-linguistically.

One of the challenges is the universal nature of absolutive/nominative, which is regarded either to be ABS=DEF or ABS=NOM in all ergative languages (Legate 2008). However, the alternative proposals question the universal validity of absolutive-as-accusative type theories (Mahajan 2017) and the clear-cut distinction of all ergative languages into two groups (Rudnev 2021). According to Legate (2008), Georgian is assumed to be an ABS=NOM language, where both subjects and objects receive their case from the T⁰ head, i.e. are abstract nominatives. Yet, it has been illustrated in the literature that Georgian shares mixed properties of both ergative types (Berikashvili & Lobzhanidze 2022; Berikashvili 2024)

Based on Anthony's Grammar and his discussion about absolutive and accusative cases in Georgian, I argue that absolutive/nominative is a syntactic unmarked/default case realized in opposition to the dependent case (DC) (ergative and accusative (m-dative)) in transitive structure in Georgian. It is not a morphological default or case assigned by the T⁰ head, but an "elsewhere" case assigned in the position where the conditions for case assigning are not met. In this assumption, I am in line with McFadden & Sundaressan (2011), who proposed that nominative is not contingent on the T⁰ head and is a default case, based on the examples as Tamil, Middle English, Icelandic and Brazilian Portuguese. The arguments for my claim mainly concern: (a) the notion of the morphological and syntactic defaults (thus deviating from Legate's (2008) division) and (b) the existence of a second DP in the same-case assignment domain, which has unvalued case features at the moment of derivation.

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