

How necessary is the Case feature in syntactic theory? Consideration from the Latin Acl

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1. Introduction: The Case Feature and the Latin Acl

- Core components of generative Case Theory (Levin 2015: 12):
 - Noun phrase licensing (Case): NPs must be licensed through syntactic dependencies
 - Either by selection (inherent Case) or an A-dependency within the clause (structural Case)
 - Noun phrase morphology (case): Syntactic Case licensing affects morphological case
- With respect to NP-licensing, formalized as unvalued Case features [*u*Case] on an NP that can only be valued from certain positions (Chomsky 2000, 2001)
 - (1) a. It seems John likes cake. (2) a. Susan saw Mary at the library.
b. *Seems John to like cake. b. *Was seen Mary at the library (by Susan).
c. John seems to like cake. c. Mary was seen at the library (by Susan).
 - In (1b) Non-finite T cannot value Case feature of *John* (contrast with finite T of 1a)
 - Must raise to finite matrix clause to get feature valued (1c)
 - (In 2b), theme *Mary* cannot get Case feature valued by the passive in object position (contrast with active in 2a)
 - Must raise to subject position (2c)
- Is Case the best explanation for these phenomena?
 - Many instances of NP distribution can be largely explained by the properties of clausal heads, independently of Case (cf. Levin 2015 a.o.)
 - e.g. NP movement driven by need to satisfy EPP features rather than Case (e.g. McFadden 2004)
 - Along with other observations that dissociate Syntactic Case from morphological case, often results in Case being a redundant feature in the theory
 - Has led many to (implicitly/explicitly) propose eliminating it (e.g. Yip et al. 1987; Marantz 1991/2000; McFadden 2004, 2009; Bobaljik 2008; Sigurðsson 2009, 2010; Sheehan and van der Wal 2016 a.o.)
- The strength of this claim relies on examining each phenomenon where Case has been offered as the explanation for its occurrence

- Must determine:
 - That there exists an alternative explanation
 - Whether it is preferential to a Case analysis
- A good example of this is the Latin AcI (3)
 - Clausal complement used to express indirect speech
 - Verb appears in infinitival form
 - Its subject is marked with morphological accusative case

(3) *dicit* [*te* *venisse*]
 say-3sg.pres.act you-acc.sg come-perf.act.inf **Latin AcI**
 ‘He says that you have come.’

- Has two passivization strategies:
 - Personal passive, or NcI (4)
 - Impersonal passive (5)

(4) *tui* *diceris* [*ti* *venisse*]
 you-nom.sg say-2sg.pres.pass come-perf.act.inf **Personal Passive (NcI)**
 ‘You are said to have come.’

(5) *dicitur* [*te* *venisse*]
 say-3sg.pres.pass you-acc.sg come-perf.act.inf **Impersonal Passive**
 ‘It is said that you have come.’

- Case analysis accounts for (3) and (4)
 - Infinitival subject is ECM in (3) and can check Case in lower position
 - Cannot do this in (4) with passive matrix verb; must raise to matrix subject position (SpecTP)—cf. 2nd person agreement on matrix verb *diceris* ‘you are said’
- But (5) is problematic for the Case analysis
 - Infinitival subject remains in lower clause (cf. default third person agreement on matrix verb *dicitur* ‘it is said’)
 - Assuming same underlying structure, why does an unchecked feature require movement in (4), but not (5)?
- McFadden (2004) sees this as evidence for a non-Case analysis of the Latin AcI
 - But details remain to be addressed
- The purpose of this paper is to provide a preliminary account of the Latin data that does not appeal to the Case feature
 - Will lend support to the claim that the Case feature may be unneeded in syntactic theory
- **Roadmap:**
 - Section 2: The impersonal passive and the expletive
 - Section 3: The personal passive and discourse
 - Section 4: Putting the two together without Case
 - Section 5: Conclusion

2. The Impersonal Passive

2.1 Distribution

- 4 categories of predicates that take the AcI in the active (cf. Allen and Greenough 1903: 374f.):

(6) Latin AcI-Active Matrix Verbs

a. Verbs of Knowing

sci-o *me* *paene* *incredibilem*
 know-1SG.PRS 1SG.ACC almost incredible-ACC.SG

rem *polliceri* (Caes. B.C. iii.86)
 thing-ACC.SG promise-PRS.PASS.INF
 ‘I **know** that I am promising an almost incredible thing.’

b. Verbs of Thinking

non *arbitr-or* *te* *ita* *sent-ire* (Cic. Fam. x.26.2)
 NEG think-PRS.1SG you.ACC.SG thus feel-PRS.INF
 ‘I do not **think** that you feel thus.’

c. Verbs of Speaking

non *se* *host-em* *ver-eri* *dicebant* (Caes. B.G. 1, 39)
 NEG REFL-ACC enemy-M.ACC.SG fear-PRS.INF say-IMPF.3PL
 ‘They_i **said** that they_i did not fear the enemy.’

d. Verbs of Perceiving

audi-vi (*eum*) *esse* *in Asi-a* (Ter. Heaut. Tim. I.ii.181)
 hear-PRF.1SG he.ACC.SG be.PRS.INF in Asia-F.ABL
 ‘I have **heard** that (he) was in Asia.’

- All four can form the impersonal passive of (5)
 - But only (6c) and (6d) can also form the personal passive of (4) (Bolkestein 1979: 26; Schoof 2003: 303)
- Points towards viewing the impersonal as a default passivization strategy

2.2 The Subject of the Impersonal Passive

2.2.1 AcI ≠ subject

- Traditional analysis of the impersonal passive treats the AcI itself as a neuter singular DP subject (e.g. Pinkster 1992: 163)
 - Triggers 3rd person agreement
- Yet AcI lacks the properties of sentential subjects (cf. Hartman 2012: 44-55)
 - Instead shows properties of sentential associates (7-10)

(7)

| | Sentential Subjects | Sentential Associates | Latin AcI |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| License emphatic reflexives? | ✓ | X | ? |
| License <i>pro</i> ? | ✓ | X | ? |
| Control agreement? | ✓ | X | X |

(8) AcI cannot license emphatic reflexive

?*ipsum*; *dicitur* [eos *venisse*]_i
 REFL say-PRS.PASS.3SG they.M.ACC.PL come-PRF.INF
 ‘It **itself** is said that they have come’/‘That they have come **itself** is said’

(9) AcI does not license *pro*

?*Hostes fugisse nuntiatum est, sed*
 enemy-M.ACC.PL flee-PRF.INF report-PRF.PASS.PRT.ACC.SG be-PRS.3SG but

(*hoc*) *non est verum*
 (this-N.NOM.SG) NEG be-PRS.3SG true-N.NOM.SG
 ‘That the enemy had fled was reported, but (**it**) is not true.’

(10) AcI does not control agreement

**dicuntur* [eos *venisse*] *et* [nos *abisse*]
 say-PRS.PASS.3PL they.M.ACC.PL come-PRF.INF and we-ACC.PL go_away.PRF.INF
 ‘That they have come and that we have left were said.’

- AcI’s lack of properties of sentential subjects points to something else in subject position
 - But what?

2.2.2 Impersonal AcI and non-promotional passives

- Latin impersonal passive is a **non-promotional passive**
 - The usual promotion-to-subject of passivization does not occur (cf. O’Connor and Maling 2014: 25)

(11) a. *hominem admonent rem esse*
 man.M/F.ACC.SG remind.PRS.3PL thing.F.ACC.SG be.PRS.INF

praeclaram
 wonderful.F.ACC.SG
 ‘they **remind the man** that the thing is wonderful.’

b. *admonetur rem esse praeclaram*
 remind-PRS.PASS.3G thing.F.ACC.SG be.PRS.IN wonderful-F.ACC.SG
 ‘**he is reminded** that the thing is wonderful’

(12) a. *Marcus* *dicit* *eos* *venisse*
 Marcus-M.NOM.SG say.PRS.3SG they.M.ACC.PL come.PRF.INF
 ‘Marcus says that they have come.’

b. *dicitur* *eos* *venisse*
 say-PRS.PASS.3SG they.M.ACC.PL come-PRF.INF
 ‘It is said that they have come.’

- AcI ≠ direct object (contrast 11 and 12)
 - When direct object is present, it is promoted to subject (11)
 - Without direct object, no promotion-to-subject (12)
- Two kinds of non-promotional passives (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002)
 - True syntactic passives
 - e.g. Ukrainian *-no/-to* construction
 - Syntactically active
 - e.g. Polish *-no/-to* construction; Irish autonomous construction
- Latin impersonal AcI patterns with Ukrainian—i.e. is a true syntactic passive (13-16)

(13)

| | Ukrainian | Polish/Irish | Latin |
|----------------------------------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| <i>By</i> -phrase allowed? | ✓ | X | ✓ |
| Licenses anaphors? | X | ✓ | X |
| Allows subject-oriented adverbs? | X | ✓ | X |

(14) Impersonal AcI allows *by*-phrase

ab Marco *dicitur* *eos* *venisse*
 by Marcus.M.ABL say.PRS.PASS.3SG they.M.ACC.PL come.PRF.INF
 ‘it was said **by Marco** that they had come’

(15) Anaphoric subjects disallowed

**dicitur* *se* *ven-isse*
 say.PRS.PASS.3SG REFL.ACC come.PRF.INF
 *‘it is said that **himself** has come’

(16) Lack of subject-oriented adjuncts

dicitur *eos* *venisse*
 say.PRS.PASS.3SG they.M.ACC.PL come.PRF.INF

ebrios-os/-us*
 drunk-M.ACC.PL/*M.NOM.SG
 ‘it was said that they_i have come **drunk**_{i/*j}

- Two non-promotional passives have two different kinds of subjects
 - Syntactically active (Polish/Irish): agentive arbitrary *pro*
 - Syntactically passive (Ukrainian): null expletive (Sobin 1985)

2.2.3 The expletive

- As Latin patterns with Ukrainian, there is support for claiming that Latin also has an expletive (*pro_{exp}*) in the subject position of the impersonal passive (17)
 - Note that it must be silent/covert as Latin lacks any overt expletives

(17) a. *pro_{exp} dicitur te venisse*
 pro-exp say-3SG.PRES.PASS you-ACC.SG come-PERF.INF
 ‘It is said that you have come.’

b. [CP [TP *pro_{exp}* [T] [VP [v *dicitur*] [TP *te venisse*]]]]

2.3 Summary

- Impersonal passive has greater distribution among the predicates that take the AcI
 - Points to impersonal as default passivization strategy for the AcI
- The subject of this impersonal passive is an expletive (*pro_{exp}*)
 - Is in line with claims made for other non-promotional passives that are truly syntactically passive (e.g. Ukrainian)
 - Better fits with the syntactic associate status of the AcI
 - As opposed to treating the AcI clause itself as the subject

3. The Personal Passive

3.1 Subject is not an expletive

- The subject of the personal passive (NcI = *nominativus cum infinitivo*) is not an expletive
 - Agreement shows that lower clause subject is also subject of matrix verb (4, repeated as 18)

(18) *tu_i diceris [t_i venisse]*
 you-NOM.SG say-2SG.PRS.PASS come-PRF.ACT.INF
 ‘You are said to have come.’

- Why an expletive in the impersonal, but not one in the personal?
 - Or, why can the lower subject also serve as the matrix subject in the personal, but not the impersonal passive?
 - Answer lies in understanding the discourse difference between the two

3.2 The discourse difference between the two passives

- Pragmatic difference exists between the NcI and the impersonal passive (Bolkestein 1983: 121-2)
 - In the NcI some element of the infinitival clause is in focus (19)

- Usually the subject
- In impersonal passive, the infinitival clause is related without focusing on any particular individual element (20)

(19) ... *et multis ante saeculis Lycurgum, cuius temporibus **Homerus etiam fuisse ante hanc urbem conditam traditur.*** (Cic. Tusc. 5, 7)

‘... and Lycurgus many ages before, in whose time before the founding of the city **Homer is also held to have lived.**’

- In (19), focus is on nominative *Homerus* ‘Homer’
 - Contrasted as subject with the previously mentioned *Lycurgum* ‘Lycurgus’

(20) *Eorum una, pars, quam Gallos obtinere dictum est, initium capit a flumine Rhodano [...] vergit ad septentriones.* (Caes. Gal. 1, 1, 5)

‘**One part of these, which it was said that the Gauls occupy,** takes its beginning at the River Rhone and stretches towards the north.’

- In (20), subject of infinitival clause is accusative *Gallos* ‘the Gauls’
 - Not in focus
 - Subject of larger discourse is *eorum una, pars* ‘one of these, a part’
 - Use of impersonal allows for providing additional information without shifting focus away from *eorum una*

3.3 Formalizing the difference

- The use of the NcI is a way of introducing a “shifting topic”
 - “Topics that are newly introduced or newly changed to” (Frascarelli and Hinterhözl 2007: 89; following Givón 1983)
- Shifting topics reside in the left periphery
 - Satisfy feature [+aboutness] (Frascarelli and Hinterhözl 2007: 89)
- NcI results from infinitival clause subject satisfying a [+aboutness] feature on matrix C
 - Must pass through matrix SpecTP
 - Get agreement on matrix verb
 - Impersonal passive with AcI has a [-aboutness] C

(21) [CP *tu*_i [C_{+aboutness}] [TP *ti* [T] [VP [*v diceris*] [TP *ti* [VP [*v venisse*]]]]]]



3.4 Summary

- Agreement shows NcI does not have an expletive subject
 - Lower subject is also matrix subject
- Discourse difference exists between personal and impersonal passives
 - Personal passive (NcI) puts some element of the infinitival clause in focus

- Usually the subject
 - Impersonal passive does not single out any individual element
- This difference is formalized with an [aboutness] feature on C
 - Personal passive = [+aboutness]
 - Subject of infinitive raises to matrix clause to satisfy this
 - Impersonal passive = [-aboutness]
 - Subject of infinitive remains in lower clause

4. Putting the two together without Case

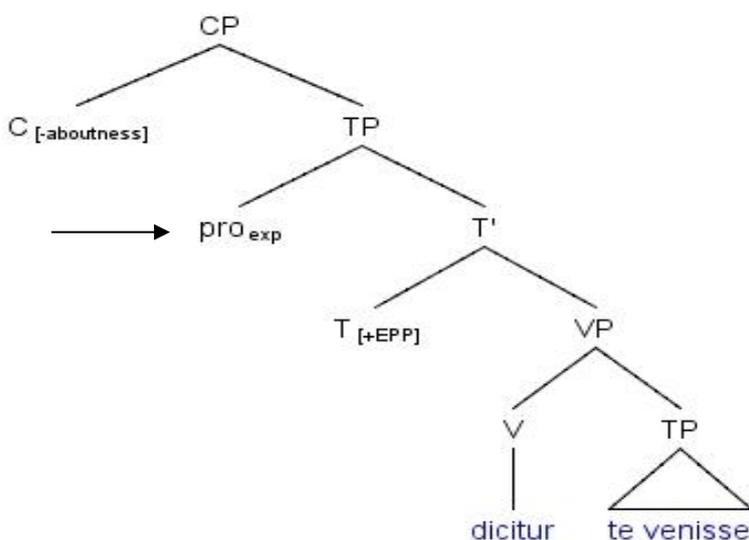
4.1 Expletive is not compatible with [+aboutness]

- Why two kinds of subjects?
 - Why can't the null expletive (*pro_{exp}*) satisfy [+aboutness]?
- [+aboutness] requires a full referential DP
 - i.e. Must be about something
- Expletive is non-referential
 - Cannot be what the sentence is about

4.2 Formalizing the incompatibility

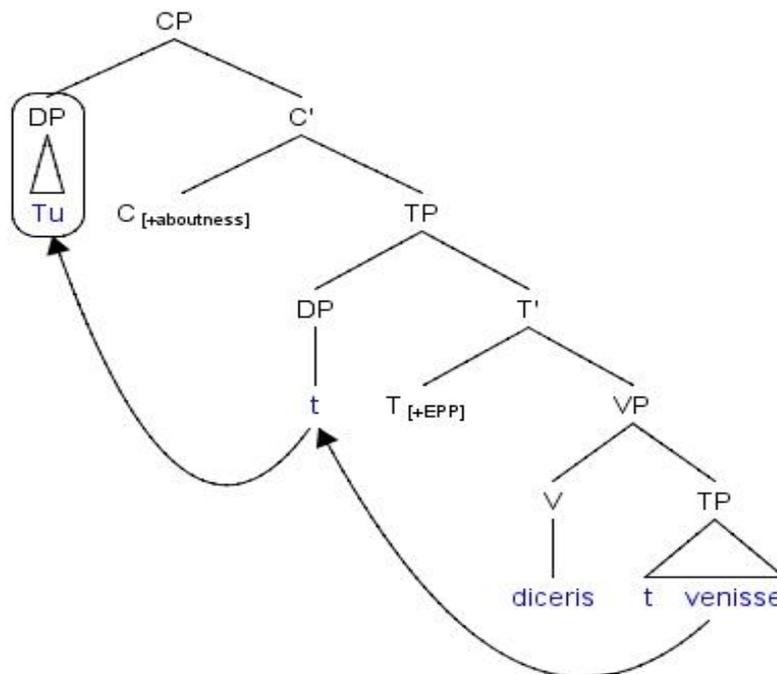
- When passive matrix verbs take an infinitival clausal complement, two structures are available:
 - Impersonal—expletive is merged into matrix SpecTP position, and a [-aboutness] C is head is then also merged (22)
 - Expletive is merged to satisfy EPP
 - It is compatible with [-aboutness] and the derivation converges

(22) Impersonal Passive



- Personal—empty matrix SpecTP is merged, along with a [+aboutness] C (23)
 - Lower subject moves to satisfy aboutness
 - Also satisfies matrix EPP

(23) Personal Passive (NcI)



- Recall that impersonal structure (22) is available to all predicates that take Acl complements; personal structure (23) is only available to a subset
 - Impersonal is the default passivization structure available
- Impersonal as default fits with Merge-over-Move
 - Merging of expletive is ‘less costly’ move in satisfying matrix EPP
 - Preferable to moving the lower clause subject to matrix SpecTP
- Personal structure arises when default option conflicts with discourse requirements (i.e. [aboutness])
 - [+aboutness] needs a full referential DP
 - Must move nearest referential DP (the lower clause subject) rather than merge in null expletive

5. Conclusion

- Part of the role of a feature like Case in syntactic theory is as an explanatory device for observed linguistic phenomena
 - Yet its explanatory power (and therefore necessity) has been called into question
 - Case analyses must be evaluated to see if:
 - An alternative analytical tool to Case exists

- Whether this alternative can better account for the data than Case
- The existence the personal passivization of the Latin AcI (the NcI) can be explained by something other than Case
 - Exists as a discourse-determined variant alongside the default impersonal passive
 - The movement of the lower clause subject to the matrix clause is a last-resort option to provide a referential subject
 - Needed to provide a topic that the sentence can be about [+aboutness]
- The non-Case analysis, as opposed to one appealing to Case, also accounts for the impersonal variant alongside the personal NcI
 - The impersonal is a default passivization strategy
 - In line with the distributional patterns of the two passives
 - Utilizes an expletive matrix subject
 - As a non-promotional passive
- Is still a preliminary analysis
 - Is the EPP and/or [aboutness] satisfied by AGREE rather than movement?
 - Complete a corpus search on instances of the NcI
 - Categorize each instance of focus on the subject
- But, the current analysis does suggest that Case is unnecessary (and, if fact, dispreferred) for accounting for the Latin AcI and its two passive variants
 - Provides evidence in favor of the claim that Case may be an unnecessary feature of syntactic theory and ultimately dispensed with
 - Or, at least, modified (cf. Levin 2015)
 - Similar (re-)evaluations of other purported Case phenomena must occur

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