Chapter 3: C-command factors in case assignment

I showed in the last chapter that case values can be assigned by configurational rules of dependent case assignment, which depend on an NP’s position relative to other NPs within a syntactic constituent, as an alternative to case being assigned by agreement with a functional category. This configurational sort of case assignment seems to be no small part of the overall theory of morphological case. I have reasoned that all languages that have structural ergative case use this mode of case assignment, including both ergative languages proper and tripartite languages. Furthermore, most of the languages with overt accusative case that I have worked on also seem to be of this type, in that they either do not have object agreement or object agreement does not correlate with accusative case very well. We have also seen that agreement on some functional heads depends on the agreed-with NP already having a particular case through a rule of dependent case assignment or default case assignment.

While agreement-assigned case is arguably well enough understood already, given the extensive literature on Agree and its properties, the notion of dependent case is less familiar. It stands in need of further development to know what contribution it can make to understanding the case properties of the languages of the world. In particular, some conceptual analysis is in order to identify the likely range of parametric variation on the dependent case marking side. Ideally, it should be rich enough to be descriptively adequate, and restricted enough to be explanatorily adequate. Exploring the rules of configurational case assignment, then, is the task of the next three chapters.

In its most abstract terms, we can take the general form of a dependent case rule to be as in (1):

(1) If XP bears c-command relationship Y to ZP in local domain WP, then assign case V to XP.

Anything that fits into this schema can legitimately be considered a type of dependent case assignment, whereas anything that does not fit this schema is really a different theoretical notion. What then needs clarification in this schema, and what can naturally be open to variation within it? There are three primary ingredients to consider: the categorical identities of XP and ZP, the specific c-command relationship Y, and the locality domain WP. I believe that there are interesting possibilities for variation in all three, as well as some further distinctions to be made. Therefore, I consider each of these ingredients in turn, over the next three chapters, beginning in this chapter with c-command relationship Y. Chapter 6 then rounds out the discussion with a consideration of when rules like (1) apply in the course of a syntactic derivation.

3.1 Positive c-command conditions

What c-command relationship is used in (1) is perhaps the most obvious factor that can vary in this schema. The two obvious choices are “XP c-commands ZP” and its converse “XP is c-commanded by ZP.” In chapter 2, I already proposed that this is the difference between ergative case and accusative case, making explicit what Marantz (1991) meant by “dependent case assigned upward” and “dependent case assigned downward.” These can be put in the format of (1) as follows (taking the locality domain to be TP, pending discussion in chapter 4).

(2)  
   a. If XP c-commands ZP in the same TP, then assign ergative case to XP.
   b. If XP is c-commanded by ZP in the same TP, then assign accusative case to XP.

This point of variation has been part of the identity of dependent case assignment from the beginning, intended to capture certain similarities and parallels between accusative languages and ergative
languages. We have just seen in section 2.5xx that individual languages can choose to include only (2a) (ergative languages), or only (2b) (accusative languages), or both (tripartite languages), or neither (neutral languages). These results, then, are already in the bag.

3.2 When c-command does not hold: NP in PP

Before going on to explore other possible c-command conditions, however, we can ask what the evidence is for assuming that (2) should be stated in terms of c-command per se, as opposed to some other prominence relationship—perhaps a nonstructural one like the thematic hierarchy (xx), or HPSG’s obliqueness hierarchy (xx). This may not need much argument for a strictly minimalist audience, for which c-command is the syntactic relationship of choice; there is the assumption that c-command underlies all the more specific syntactic relations, possibly for fundamental derivational reasons (e.g. Epstein xxx; Safir xxx). Nor do we expect to find many difference between c-command and a notion like thematic prominence, since these two notions of prominence are closely related, in general. But if we can find some evidence in favor of c-command as opposed to the alternatives, so much the better.

Normally when two NP arguments are in the same clause, one of them will c-command the other. This may be largely guaranteed by Kayne’s (1994) Linear Correspondence Axiom, which maps asymmetrical c-command onto linear order, and/or by fundamental laws of how predicates combine with arguments (cf. Hale and Keyser 1983). However, there is one fairly standard exception to consider: an argument of the verb might be a PP rather than an NP. The PP typically contains an NP, of course. But if the PP happens to be the higher of the two arguments, then neither the NP contained in PP nor the other NP argument will c-command the other. If the P is overt, it is likely to be a phase head that determines the case on its NP complement itself, preempting dependent case assignment (see (33a) of chapter 2). But Ps can on occasion be transparent for purposes of dependent case assignment; see, for example, B&V 2010:xx for three Ps that allow dependent case marking of their complements in Sakha. P heads can also be phonologically null, as Baker (2012a, 2012b) argues for Amharic (with many precedents in the work of other linguists, and for other languages), and these null P heads may be particularly likely to be nonphases. If so, then we can hope to see c-command effects in this domain. Therefore, we could look for structural minimal pairs like the following.

(3) a. [ NP1 [ NP2 V ]] Ordinary transitive
b. [ [P P 0 NP1] [NP2 V]] Marked structure

In the normal transitive structure in (3a), NP1 c-commands NP2, and we expect to see ergative on NP1 and/or accusative on NP2. But in the special dyadic structure in (3b), neither NP c-commands the other. Hence, dependent case assignment should not happen, and (all things being equal) both NPs should receive the default case, nominative or absolutive.

Amharic is an accusative language that confirms this prediction, following the analysis of Baker (2012a, 2012b). To see this, consider first ditransitive constructions. Amharic has two kinds of ditransitives: verbs like ‘give’ or ‘tell’ that select an agent, a theme, and a goal, and verbs like ‘rob’ that select an agent, a theme, and a source. In active clauses, the two types can look very similar, as shown in (4).

(4) a. Lamma Almaz-in tarik-u-n naggar-at. (*naggar-a-w)
   Lemma.M Almaz.F-ACC story.M-DEF-ACC tell-(3mS)-3fO *tell-3mS-3mO
   ‘Lemma told Almaz the story.’
In particular, the agent-subject has unmarked nominative case, is normally clause initial, and triggers subject agreement on the verb, whereas both the theme and the goal or source are accusative, bearing the suffix by –n (if they are definite, with a D head).\(^1\) So the agent is the highest argument, as expected. There is also evidence that the theme is the lowest argument, lower than either the goal or source. The strongest support for this is that the verb shows object agreement with the goal or source, not with the theme in these structures (this holds true even if one controls for animacy (Baker xx:xx, Kramer xx:xx).

For example, the verbs in (4) show feminine object agreement –at with *Almaz and *Aster, and cannot show masculine object agreement (-w) with *story or *money. In addition, the natural word order is goal-theme-verb or source-theme-verb; example (5), for instance is quite degraded, whereas goal-theme-verb order is fine.

(5) ??Lemma mas’haf-u-n Aster-in asayy-at.  
  Lemma.M book-DEF-ACC Aster.F-ACC show.PF-3mS-3fO  
  ‘Lemma showed Aster the book.’

Evidence from bound variable anaphora is also consistent with this. In (6) the quantified NP is only understood as the goal, not the theme, and it is possible to interpret the pronoun inside the second object as a variable bound by the first object.

(6) (?Aster hullu-n saw abbat-u-n assayy-at.  
  Aster.F all-ACC person father-3mP-ACC show-3fS  
  ‘Aster showed everyone his own father.’

This supports saying that the goal A-binds the theme, and its location before the theme is not due to scrambling, which does not seem to feed bound variable anaphora in Amharic (see Baker 2012b:xx for a fuller paradigm). So the thematic/obliqueness hierarchy for Amharic seems to be agent > goal/source > theme.

But despite these similarities, goal DOCs and source DOCs look quite different when the verb is a passive form, as shown in (7).

(7) a. *Almaz tarik-u-(*n) ta-nagr-ow-at nābbār.  
   Almaz.F story-DEF-(ACC) PASS-tell-3mS.GER-3fO AUX  
   ‘Almaz was told the story.’

b. *Aster šant’a-wa-n ta-sarrak’-at.  
   Aster.F suitcase-3fP-ACC PASS-rob-3fS  
   ‘Aster was robbed of her suitcase.’

In particular, a crucial difference is seen in the verb agreement. The source argument in (7b) becomes the subject in a passive, and triggers subject agreement on the verb. The goal argument in (7a), however, does not become the subject of the clause: it triggers object agreement, not subject agreement.

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\(^1\) The goal argument (but not the source argument) in Amharic could also be dative rather than accusative; I put that option aside here for simplicity.
agreement, and subject agreement in (7a) is default third person masculine. (The fact that there is an auxiliary verb in (7a) but not in (7b) is not crucial to this; these two examples happen to be in different past tenses.) Why is there this difference in agreement and grammatical function? My answer in Baker (2012a,b) was that the goal argument is embedded in a PP with a null P head, whereas the source argument is a simple NP. The null headed PP prevents the goal argument from satisfying the EPP property of T (cf. Landau 2007xx), hence from being the structural subject, hence from agreeing with T. In contrast, the source argument can perfectly well satisfy the EPP property of T, so T can agree with it. Therefore, we have evidence from agreement that the structure of (7b) is (3a), and the structure of (7a) is (3b).

Given this, notice next that there is also a difference between (7a) and (7b) in terms of case marking. The argument of a source passive in (7b) must be accusative, whereas the theme argument of a goal passive in (7a) cannot be. This is exactly what we expect from (3), given that the rule of dependent case assignment is stated in terms of c-command. The unembedded source argument c-commands the theme argument and triggers accusative case on it by (2b), whereas the goal NP is embedded in PP, so it does not c-command the theme argument. Indeed, neither argument in (7a)=(3b) c-commands the other, and the result is a clause with two nominative NPs in Amharic. Even though the P is only a slight one, it is enough to stop the higher thematic role from becoming the subject, and it is also enough to prevent it from triggering accusative on the theme. 2 In contrast, a simple alternative stated in terms of a nonstructural thematic hierarchy fails here: the goal argument (like the source argument) is higher on the thematic hierarchy than the theme argument, as shown by data like (6), but it does not trigger accusative on the theme argument. This then is evidence that dependent case marking should be stated in terms of c-command, not in terms of a less-structural representation like the thematic hierarchy, the obliqueness hierarchy, of a level of argument structure that does not distinguish NPs from NPs.

Just like the passive of a triadic verb with a goal argument are certain dyadic constructions with a possessor or experiencer argument and a theme like those in (8). In these structures too the thematically higher argument as revealed by tests like neutral word order and bound variable anaphora cannot become the subject or trigger subject agreement. Nor does it trigger accusative on the theme. 3

(8) a. Almaz[-ɨn] zamad mot-at. (*mot-at[tf])
   Almaz.F-(ACC) relative die-(3mS)-3fO die-3fS
   ‘Almaz had a relative die on her.’

   b. Llemma sejt lidʒ-u t’affa-aw.
   Lemma.M female child-DEF lose-(3mS)-3mO
   ‘Lemma lost his daughter.’

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2 Note that the null P apparently blocks c-command more strictly for dependent case marking than it does for bound variable anaphora or binding reflexives in English, since the object of a “little” P can sometimes bind lower NPs outside of the PP. But this is not unexpected, and some have questioned whether c-command really is a condition on bound variable anaphora (Higginbotham xxx, Safir xxx). I conclude that Ps always count for c-command, but bound variable anaphora does not depend strictly on c-command.

3 An example showing that the affected argument can bind a pronoun inside the theme is given in (i).

(i) Hullu saw lidʒ-u t’aff-a-w.
   all person child-3mP lose-3mS-3mO
   ‘Everybody lost his own child.’
The syntactic structure is essentially the same ((3b) again); the only difference is that these are intrinsically dyadic unaccusatives, with only a goal and a theme argument, rather than triadic verbs where the agent has been suppressed by passivization. Examples like (8) thus cannot be compared directly with corresponding active transitive examples, but they are valuable for comparative purposes, because other languages may have unaccusative structures comparable to these, even if they do not have a syntactic passive.

Some of these goal-theme structures in Amharic can appear in other forms too. For example, they can exist in a version in which the theme argument triggers subject agreement explicitly on the verb (as opposed to the verb having default agreement), and accusative case shows up on the affectee. This possibility is seen in (9), to be compared with (8b).

(9) **Lamma-n sejt lidʒ-u t’affa-tʧʧ-əw.**
Lemma.M-ACC female child-3mP lose-3fS-3mO
‘Lemma lost his daughter.’

In (9), I claim that the subject agreement with the theme indicates that the theme has moved to SpecTP, with the result that T can agree with it without the affectee ‘Lemma’ intervening. (The surface word order, with ‘Lemma’ initial, then comes from this NP being topicalized. This topicalization is not obligatorily, perhaps, but it is common/normal in this sort of sentence (see Amberber xxx:xx and Baker xxx:xx.) Note also that the affectee argument ‘Lemma’ has accusative case in this version. This is what we might expect, because once the theme argument moves higher, to SpecTP, it c-commands the goal argument. This tells us several things. First, we see that the null P is intrinsically transparent for dependent case assignment; it is not a phase head that hides its NP complement from the rest of the derivation. Second, the geometry of the clause implies that P does not block c-command in the configuration [NP ... P-NP ... V], where the PP is the lower of the two phrases, although it does block c-command in the configuration [P-NP ... NP ... V], where the PP is the higher of the two phrases. Therefore, c-command has exactly the right properties to account for this paradigm. Third, we see that (A-)movement can change c-command relationships and hence dependent case assignment. In contrast, something like the thematic hierarchy or an argument structure condition does not work here, since the thematically lower theme argument triggers accusative on the thematically higher experiencer argument in this version, as a result of movement. The crucial structures are summarized in (10).

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4 Also possible, but less instructive, is the theme triggering subject agreement on the verb, but the goal remaining bare-nominative. Following Preminger’s analysis of Hebrew, I assume that the theme undergoes a short movement, so it is equidistant to the goal, so accessible to T, but not higher than it, to trigger accusative on it. [Dependent case needs asymmetrical c-command? Cf. Montalbetti’s suggestion re identificational copular sentences.] I don’t think I have accusative affectee with default Agr on T. Am I confident enough of this to boast?
a. \( \text{[TP -- [voiceP [vp NP\text{source} \ [ NP\text{theme} \ V ]] \text{PASS}] T ]} \rightarrow \) Passive of source verb

\( \text{[TP NP\text{source} \ [ voiceP \ [ vp t \ [ NP\text{theme} \ V ]] \text{PASS}] T+\text{Agr}]} \) \[ NP\text{source} \ c-\text{cs} \ NP\text{theme}, \ NP\text{theme} = \text{ACC} \]

b. \( \text{[TP -- [voiceP [vp [pp \emptyset NP\text{goal}]] [ NP\text{theme} V ] (PASS)] T ]} \rightarrow \) Passive of goal verb, dyadic unacc

\( \text{[TP [pp \emptyset NP\text{goal}]] [ voiceP \ [ vp t \ [ NP\text{theme} \ V ]] (PASS)] T+\text{Agr}]} \) * by EPP, no PP in SpecTP

c. \( \text{[TP -- [voiceP [vp [pp \emptyset NP\text{goal}]] [ NP\text{theme} V ] (PASS)] T ]} \rightarrow \) Passive of goal verb, dyadic unacc

\( \text{[TP \ (Expletive) [vp [pp \emptyset NP\text{goal}]] [ NP\text{theme} V ] T\text{-default}]} \) no c-command; no ACC; (7a), (8)

d. \( \text{[TP -- [voiceP [vp [pp \emptyset NP\text{goal}]] [ NP\text{theme} V ] (PASS)] T ]} \rightarrow \) Passive of goal verb, dyadic unacc

\( \text{[TP NP\text{theme} [ voiceP \ [ vp [pp \emptyset NP\text{goal}]] [ t V ]] (PASS)] T+\text{Agr}]} \) \[ NP\text{theme} \ c-\text{cs} \ NP\text{goal}, \ NP\text{goal} = \text{ACC} \]

Having seen the influence of embedding an argument inside a PP shell in an accusative language, consider next the possibility of this kind of [P-NP NP V] structure in an ergative language. Given the symmetry between ergative and accusative built into the dependent case theory, we expect to observe a similar effect. In an ergative language, if neither NP c-commands the other because of the presence of a (possibly null) PP shell, then ergative case assignment will not apply to the higher argument. The result should be a double absolutive structure, somewhat like the double nominative structures observed in Amharic. And such things are observed in some ergative languages, including Burushaski. Burushaski normally has ergative patterns, as seen in (11a). But Burushaski also has approximately 12 verbs that take two absolutive arguments, including ‘need’, ‘find’, ‘obtain’, ‘hear’, (43-44) and ‘perceive’ (Willson 19xx:43-44, 54n81).

(11) a. \text{Hilés-e dasín mu-yeéts-imí.} (Willson 1996:17)
\text{boy-ERG girl.ABS 3fO-see-PAST.3mS}
‘The boy saw the girl.’

b. \text{Dasín redyó du-mó-yal-umo.}
\text{Girl.ABS radio.x/ABS d-3sf-hear-3sf/PAST}
‘The girl heard the radio.’

c. \text{jé kámán peesá d-á-can-abaa.}
\text{1s/ABS some money.x/ABS d-1s-need-1s/PRES}
‘I need some money.’

The lexical semantics of these predicates is in the same ballpark as those in Amharic: they have experiencer or possessor arguments as well as theme arguments, but no agent argument. So it is reasonable to think that they also have a null P introducing the experiencer argument, and this prevents either NP from c-commanding the other. The result is two absolutive arguments and no ergative argument, as expected.

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5 Shipibo is another ergative language that has a limited number of nonagentive verbs that take two absolutive arguments. But in Shipibo there is an interaction with applicative constructions that points to a different reason why ergative is not assigned, in one in terms domains; see Baker (in press) and chapter 6 for discussion. The Shipibo analysis could work for Burushaski too, potentially making the use of a null headed PP redundant unnecessary in this case (although not in Amharic).
It is notable that Amharic has some double nominative constructions, but no double accusative constructions. Similarly, Burushaski has double absolutive constructions, but no double ergative constructions. If our theory of case simply says—as descriptive grammars often do—that a language can have a few verbs that have anomalous case frames, as a brute-force lexical property, then we do not necessarily explain this asymmetry. However, if our addendum to the simplest case theory is that certain arguments of a particular kind can be PPs rather than NPs, as I advocated, then we do explain this. A PP node can lead to neither argument c-commanding the other, so that no dependent case is assigned, but only unmarked case. However, one cannot add an extra bit of structure that will cause both arguments to c-command each other. The sort of c-command involved in the realization of argument structure is intrinsically antisymmetric, and it follows from this that one cannot have the same dependent case assigned to both arguments of a two-argument clause.6 This is an advantage of developing dependent case assignment in terms of c-command, as opposed to listing case frames in lexical entries.

I should emphasize that there is no requirement that every language must have the sort of structures discussed in this section. Speaking impressionistically, it seems that at least as many do not as do. There do not seem to be double nominative structures in Sakha, for example, or (monoclusal) double absolutive structures in Ingush. But this is not necessarily surprising. There are several possible reasons. First, a language might have \([P+NP \{NP \{V\}\}]\) structures, but the case shows up differently because the null P assigns case to its NP complement, perhaps inherent dative case. If so, then the structure in question yields a DAT-NOM/ABS-V pattern rather than in a NOM-NOM-V or ABS-ABS-V pattern...7 The other possibility is that a language might simply not have \([P+NP \{NP \{V\}\}]\) structures. It seems that only experiencer-possessor-goal arguments can be PPs; agents cannot be, for example. Moreover, even this class of arguments does not have to be PPs. In Baker (2012)x I point out that this seems to vary semi-idiosyncratically from language to language, and even within the same language: I do not know why goals are in PPs in Amharic but sources are not, nor why goals are in PPs in Amharic but (arguably) not in Bantu languages.8 We also know from IE languages that it seems to be partially idiosyncratic which experiencer-like constructions have oblique subjects and which do not: ‘Mary likes John’ does, but ‘Mary loves John’ does not, for example, in Icelandic and other languages. Given this, we do not expect all languages to have exactly the same nominative-nominative predicates or absolutive-absolutive predicates, although the ones they do have should be in the same lexical-semantic neighborhood. In the limiting case, some languages may have none of these predicates. In that case, the verbs in the relevant semantic domain will simply show up in standard NOM-ACC-V or ERG-ABS-V clauses. The upshot is that we can conclude something about how case marking works from predicates

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6 The one structure in which one might have two NPs symmetrically c-commanding each other is in an identificational copular construction, in which the two NPs are (maybe) merged together without the projection of a theta-marking verb to structure them (Mario Montalbetti, p.c.). In such structures too, one typically gets no dependent case, rather than double dependent case. This may mean that we should stipulate asymmetric c-command in the rules of dependent case assignment in xx. See section 5.xx for some discussion of the special issues of dependent case in copular constructions.

7 Superficially Sakha and Ingush seem to be of this type, in that they have DAT-NOM-V structures with dyadic unaccusatives. However, in section 4.2 I argue for a somewhat different analysis of these languages, in which dative is a dependent case assigned to the higher NP in VP, not an inherent case assigned by P (see also B&V:xx).

8 Another way of expressing this point is saying that the Uniformity of Theta-role Assignment Hypothesis (Baker 1988, 1997) may govern where this sort of argument is relative to other arguments in the gross syntactic structure, but not whether it is expressed as an NP or a PP.
like these when they are present in a language, but we probably cannot conclude too much from when they are absent.

3.3 Negative c-command conditions

So far we have considered how the two most obvious c-command relationships are at work in dependent case theory, namely ‘c-command’ and ‘is c-commanded by’. These are positive c-command conditions, in the sense that a particular case is assigned to one NP if and only there is another NP that enters into the relevant c-command relationship with that NP. But a broader range of c-command conditions can be imagined. In this section, I argue that some of them should be imagined. In particular, I propose the following additional possibilities:

(12) a. Assign NP1 marked nominative if there is no other NP, NP2, in the same domain WP as NP1 such that NP2 c-commands NP1.
   b. Assign NP1 marked absolutive if there is no other NP, NP2, in the same domain WP as NP1 such that NP2 is c-commanded NP1.

In other words, an NP gets marked nominative if it is the highest NP in the domain (there is no higher one), and an NP gets marked absolutive if it is the lowest NP in the domain (there is no lower one). These are negative c-command conditions, in that they say that there must not be an NP in the specified c-command relationship to the NP in question.

The impetus for this extension of the dependent case ideal is that recent (and not so recent) typological literature has distinguished another, less common kind of case system, the so-called marked nominative languages (Comrie 2005, König 2009). These are languages in which the subjects of transitive and intransitive clauses bear the same overt affix, whereas the object(s) of a transitive clause are typically morphologically unmarked. Such languages are different from ergative languages in that the subject of the intransitive verb is marked the same as the subject of a transitive verb; they are different from typical accusative languages in that it is the subject that bears the overt affix, rather than the object. This sort of case system is said to be an areal feature of Africa, especially northeastern Africa. (14) gives some examples from the Ethiopian language Oromo.

(13) a. Sárée-n adií-n ni’ iyyi-f-I (unergative, Owens p. 100)
   Dog-MNOM white-MNOM FOC bark-FEM-IMPF
   ‘The white dog is barking.’

   b. D’axáa-n maná duubá: b-bu’e. (unaccusative, Owens p. 100)
   Rock-MNOM house behind LOC-fell
   ‘The rock fell behind the house.’

   c. Húrrée-n arká d’olki-t-i. (nonagentive transitive, p. 99)
   Fog-MNOM sight(ABS) prevent-f-IMPF
   ‘Fog reduces visibility.’

Some North American languages are also of this type, notably Yuman languages like Maricopa (Gordon xx) and Digueño (Munro xx). I also take Choctaw to be in this class: it has a clear subject case marker, and, although it is said to have object case as well, objects can be morphologically unmarked and in
practice are unmarked 80-90% of the time (Broadwell 2006:75). If that optional and less common case marker is put aside, then Choctaw counts as a marked nominative language.9

(14) a. Hattak-at taloowa-tok (unergative, Broadwell p. 128)
    Man-MNOM sing-PAST
    ‘The man sang’

b. John im-ofi-it illi-tok. (unaccusative, Broadwell, p. 68)
    John III-dog-MNOM die-PAST
    ‘John’s dog died.’

c. Ópah tikchi-it alla i-paya-ttook. (transitive, broadwell p. 68)
    Owl wife-MNOM child III-call-DPAST
    ‘The owl’s wife called the children.’ (also OK, but less common: alla-ya child-ACC)

In Baker (xxx), I also argued that Tukang Besi nominative case na is assigned by (13a), whereas the “core” marker te is a default case marker, assigned to all other NPs, based on data and insights from Donohue xxx. For purposes of this discussion, I focus on Oromo and Choctaw, with occasional mention of the others. The question then is whether case is assigned in these languages in the same way as in other nominative-accusative languages, with the only difference being in the morphological spell out, or whether case is assigned differently, with nominative actively assigned by (13a) and accusative being the elsewhere case—the opposite of a standard accusative language like Sakha. I argue for the latter.

There is also one (and only one) marked absolutive language known to recent typological discussions: the Austronesian language Nias (Brown xxx). Nias uses a morphologically marked form for the subjects of intransitive verbs and the objects of transitive verbs, and a morphologically unmarked form as the subject of transitive verbs, as shown in (15) (D&B 1999:xx).

(15) a. Manavuli sui [n-ama-da Tohönavanaetu] ba Maenamölö. (intransitive)
    Return again MABS-father-1pP Tohönavanaetu LOC Maenamölö.
    ‘Ama Tohonavanaetu came back again to Maenamölö.

b. I-a [m-bavai] [ama Gumi] (transitive)
    3sS.REALIS-eat ABS-pig father(ERG) Gumi
    ‘Father Gumi eats pigs.’

One detail about Nias, not evident in (16), is that the marked absolutive case is not in general realized as a segmental affix, but rather as a change of feature on the initial consonant of the root (e.g., voicing of a voiceless consonant). But there is apparently no doubt about which form is derived from the other, and I take this to be a detail of the morphophonology, of no significance for the morphosyntax. Again, this is the opposite of the usual situation, where ergative case is morphologically marked and absolutive case is unmarked. It also raises the question of whether the difference is only morphological, or whether absolutive is the case positively assigned in the syntax of Nias, whereas ergative is positively assigned in other ergative languages.

9 Indeed –ya in Choctaw might be a switch reference marker (marking different subject) rather than a true accusative case marker; see Jelinek xxxx. This might fit with the fact that –ya is used on objects that are peripheral to the clause, but not often on objects in the argument position inside VP (Broadwell 2006:74).
3.3.1 Negative c-command conditions versus markedness reversal

To see the relative advantages of the case assignment rules in (13) more clearly, let us spell out explicitly the morphological alternative. The morphological approach to Oromo or Choctaw would be as in (17), where accusative and nominative are assigned just as in Tamil, but the language makes a different choice at PF of which case to spell out as an overt affix. The syntactic approach that I am proposing is embedded in a larger system in (18).

(16) a. If NP1 is c-commanded by NP2 in the same TP, assign NP1 accusative.  
    Otherwise NP is nominative. 
    b. X [Case:NOM] → X-n (Oromo), X-it (Choctaw)  
       X → X-Ø elsewhere

(17) a. Assign NP1 marked nominative if there is no other NP in the same TP as NP1 such that NP  
    c-commands NP1.  
    Otherwise NP is absolutive.  
    b. X [Case:MNOM] → X-n (Oromo), X-it (Choctaw)  
       X → X-Ø elsewhere

(17) posits a mismatch between syntactic markedness and morphological markedness: nominative is the elsewhere case in the syntax, but it is the special affix in the morphology. In contrast, (18) keeps these two kinds of markedness aligned. Similarly, the morphological approach to marked absolutive case in Nias would be (19) and the recommended syntactic approach is filled out in (20).

(18) a. If NP1 c-commands NP2 in the same TP, assign NP1 ergative.  
    Otherwise NP is absolutive.  
    b. X [Case:ABS] → +nasal/+voiced+X  
       X → X-Ø elsewhere

(19) a. Assign NP1 marked absolutive if there is no other NP, NP2, in the same TP as NP1 such that NP  
    2 is c-commanded NP1.  
    Otherwise NP is absolutive.  
    b. X [Case:ABS] → +nasal/+voiced+X  
       X → X-Ø elsewhere

Differences between the morphological approach and the syntactic approach arise when we consider NPs that are not in ordinary argument positions within a verbal clause—NPs that are not subjects or objects in a clause-like domain like TP. For those NPs, the special dependent case rule in (17)-(20) fails to apply, since these rules mentions TP as the domain explicitly (see chapter 4 on domains for dependent case assignment). Therefore, the isolated NP should be in the language’s syntactic default case. According to the morphological approaches in (17) and (19), these isolated NPs should then get morphologically overt case—nominative in Oromo and Choctaw, absolutive in Nias—since syntactic markedness and morphological markedness are reversed. But according to the syntactic approaches in (18) and (20), the isolated NPs should have the morphologically null case: absolutive in Oromo or “ergative” in Nias.

It is the second prediction that is the correct one, as is well documented in my sources. One case in point is NPs that are not contained in a larger syntactic structure at all. For example, in Choctaw,
Broadwell (2006:69) observes that NPs that answer a question are bare, not nominative. This is true even if the question word in the initial question is explicitly nominative.

(20) Q: Kata-sh apa-tok? A: John-at apa-tok or just “John”, NOT “*John-at”.

Similarly, in Nias the NP of a short answer is not marked absolutive, even when the same NP in a full sentence answer would be.


I do not have direct information about this matter in Oromo, but Donahue xx observes for Tukang Besi that a question word cannot be nominative in this language (p. 451), and that an NP fragment answer must match the NP question word used to elicit it (p. 452). We can infer from this that an isolated NP in Tukang Besi can never be marked nominative, although it can bear core (default) case (p. 452). So this kind of data, where available, suggests that marked nominative and marked absolutive are not default cases in these languages, but are explicitly assigned by a structure-sensitive rule.

Another sort of structure to consider is topicalized NPs that appear outside the core clausal domain, in the periphery of the clause, hence outside the purview of clause-internal case rules keyed to TP. In some languages these must match the case of the associated variable or gap position inside the clause (perhaps because they have moved from that position), but in some structures of some languages they do not. When they do not, they might reveal the default case of the language. For example, hanging topic sentences like Him/*he, everyone thinks – has a good chance of succeeding have been used to claim that accusative is the default case in English. If similar elements in other languages are base generated at the edge of CP or outside the clause together, then they get default case. For Oromo, we see this in the so-called “focused possessor” construction described by Owens (xx:xx), and the topic is unmarked, not nominative.

(22) Obbolesá xiyya, makiináa-n isá c’apt’e p. 122

Brother my car-NOM his broke-f-PAST
(As for) my brother, his car broke.

Choctaw is a bit less clear, but it may be similar. It can have a non-subject NP at the left periphery of the clause, before the subject and the rest of the clause, often set off by an intonation break. Such an NP certainly does not show up with marked nominative case; neither is it bare, rather it must be marked by the “accusative” case marker –aN. (Broadwell 2006:39).

(23) Tákkon-aN/?*Tákkon, John-at choNpa-h.

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10 But one can infer it from the fact that question words cannot be nominative (because they are focused, see below), so probably the answer that corresponds to that question word cannot be nominative either (p. 206, 208, see xx).
11 Other isolated NPs that are complete utterances might be curses (“you bastard”, “the devil”), and vocatives that do not have a special case of their own. Broadwell (2006:69) mentions that curses are morphologically unmarked in Choctaw, but other grammars do not mention this point.
Peach-ACC/peach  John-NOM  buy-TNS
John bought a peach.

(Broadwell’s interest is in variations of word order, hence he does not say what topicalization of a subject looks like, if it is possible.) I tentatively take this ~aN to be a switch reference marker (indicating that the referent of N is different from subject of matrix clause) rather than a true case marker (see Jelinek 19xx), explaining why it is used here in clause peripheral position, but often not when the object is in situ inside the VP. Be that as it may, the clause-peripheral topic is clearly not nominative. See also Gordon (xx:74) for topics not being marked nominative in Maricopa, and Donohue (xx:60) for Tukang Besi. Finally, (25) shows a topicalization structure in Nias. Since the topicalized element expresses the object of a transitive verb, it would be marked absolutive case if it were in situ, but on the periphery it is in the unmarked case, otherwise used as ergative.

(24) Si’o hō’ō ma=i-taru-’ō ba danō. Brown 2001, from C.
Stick  DIST  PERF-3s.S.R-plant-TR  LOC  MUT.ground
‘That stick, he planted in the ground.’

A third construction type that is relevant to this issue is predicate nominals. Unlike NP fragments and hanging topics, these are found inside the clause proper. However, they have special case properties across languages (see section 5.xx for general discussion.) In conventional nominative-accusative languages, the predicate nominal is typically nominative (bare). In conventional ergative-absolutive languages, the predicate nominal is typically absolutive (bare), as is the subject. If marked nominative and marked absolutive languages have the same syntax as conventional accusative and ergative languages, as the morphological theory claims, then we would expect the predicate nominals to be nominative/absolutive in these languages too, hence morphologically marked in the same way as the subject. But this is not the case; instead, the predicate nominal is consistently in the other structural case in these languages. (26a) shows that the predicate nominal is bare, not marked nominative, in Oromo; (26b) shows the same for Choctaw.12

(25) a. Isii-n obboleettii tiyya. (Oromo; Owen xx:xx)
She-NOM sister  my
‘She is my sister.’

b. John-at Chahta’ (a-ttook) (Choctaw; Broadwell 2006:47)
John-NOM Choctaw  be-RPAST
John is (was) a Choctaw.

Similarly, Brown (2005) shows that predicate nominals are in unmarked case in Nias, not marked absolutive.

(26) Te’ana ya’ia z=a=mira.
Neg  him  MABS:[REL-IMPF-write]
‘The writer is him.’

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12 Yuman is exceptional in this regard, for historical reasons, as discussed by Munro xxx. In that language the predicate nominal bears nominative, and the subject is unmarked, because it comes historically from a sentential subject construction like “John being an Indian is.”
This shows that unmarked is not accusative in Oromo or Choctaw, and unmarked is not ergative in Nias, since it is very rare for a predicate nominal to be accusative and perhaps unheard of for it to be ergative. Rather, the predicate nominal is in the syntactic default case, and that is not the same as marked nominative or marked accusative in these languages.

Particularly interesting on this point is Tukang Besi, because in addition to its marked nominative case marker *na*, it also has an overt exponent for unmarked/default case, namely *te* ‘core’ in Donohue’s terms. In a predicate nominal, the subject can be nominative, as one might expect, and the predicate is not. However, the predicate is not entirely bare either; rather it is marked by *te*. 13

(27) Mbeaka te guru, toka te mia modaga na iaku (Donohue xx:354)
Not CORE teather but core personREC-SI-trade NOM 1SG
‘I’m not a teacher, but rather a trader.’

This shows that the predicate nominal is not totally outside the realm of case theory, but rather it does get default case—at least in Tukang Besi, and hence this is an option in Universal Grammar. So marked nominative cannot be the default case in Tukang Besi, and there must be a positive rule of nominative case assignment. Indeed, (13a)/(18a) can be that rule for Tukang Besi and the other marked nominative languages. The subject of the predicate nominal construction is not c-commanded by any other nominal, so it gets marked nominative; the predicate NP is c-commanded by the subject, so it does not. 14

There are thus clear advantages to saying that it is the nominative case that is assigned by an explicit rule, and the so-called accusative (or absolutive, in Oromo) that is left to be the default case. But nominative case cannot be a dependent case in the normal sense, since it is used in intransitive clauses where there is no other NP in the same domain. My proposal is that this can be fit into the dependent case schema if we say that the c-command condition can be is a negative one like “is not c-commanded by” rather than a positive one.

3.3.2 Negative c-command conditions versus case assigned by agreement

There is another alternative analysis that must be considered, given the results of chapter 2. It could be that the special marked case in languages like Oromo and Choctaw is an agreement-assigned case, given to an NP that enters into an Agree relation with some T-like functional head. We can imagine a system like this: F assigns nominative to NP under agreement, and everything else gets default case. Then at PF nominative is spelled out morphologically as (say) –*n* (in Oromo), and default case is spelled out as null. This option could be particularly attractive for marked nominative languages, since we know that

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13 This is one form of predicate nominal constructions in Tukang Besi, but not the most common/neutral one. The other form is “te Subject te Predicate”, with neither NP nominative. I assume that this is derived from the source “te Predicate *na* Subject” by the normal process of topicalization, which can put any NP (including a subject) clause initial with *te* marking.

14 For Nias, this is less straightforward: we have to say that the predicate nominal is invisible to the marked absolute rule, so it does not get absolute itself, and it doesn’t count against the subject getting absolute. This is parallel to the fact that a predicate nominal does not trigger ergative on the subject in a language with a positive c-command condition either; see section 5.xx for discussion.

According to Brown (xxx), Nias also uses “marked absolute” as the case of an NP in most PPs and for the possessor in NPs. However, pronouns in these environments have a distinct genitive case form, different from the absolute form used as objects or intransitive subjects. Therefore, I assume that this is a different case feature in the syntax, not assigned by the same rule as marked absolute, but genitive and marked absolute are syncretic on common nouns. (This might mean that they do share a feature in common; see (xx) in section 1.2.2.)
subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs are the easiest phrases for a high functional head to agree with. If this alternative is successful, we could do without negative c-command conditions after all.

But this alternative is not successful; rather, there is evidence that agreement is independent of case in these languages. The evidence for this is different in different languages, however. Consider first Oromo. Oromo does indeed have overt subject agreement on finite verbs (see (14)), and the distribution of case and agreement is reasonably close in several respects. For example, embedded subjunctive clauses have verbs that agree with their subjects and those subjects are in nominative case, whereas verbal nouns (gerunds) do not have subject agreement and have subjects in genitive case. However, these facts are easy to account for with the rule of marked nominative too: for example, we can plausibly say that subjunctive clauses contain TP projections and gerunds do not, and (13a) applies only in TPs, by hypothesis (see chapter 4). And there are also some constructions in which a direct 1-to-1 relationship between case and agreement breaks down. For example, Oromo has certain paradigms in which there is no phi-feature agreement realized on the verb, but the subject is still nominative. One is the past negative, formed by prefixing *hin* with a high tone on the first syllable of the verb and using an invariant suffix that, in other paradigms, would express the first person plural.

(28) Inniï isá n-árki-n-e
   He.NOM him.ABS NEG-see-(1pS)-PAST
   He didn’t see him.

Another case in point is clauses meaning ‘it is possible’, which are formed from a nonagreeing verbal noun plus an invariant particle *oolu*; even though neither element manifests agreement, the subject is still marked nominative (Owen xx:79). Yet another such context is predicate nominals, which do not have a copula and bear subject agreement in Oromo (see (26a)). One might of course insist that all of these Oromo clauses have T and it undergoes agreement in the syntax, but it cannot be spelled out at PF, for morphological reasons. But this idea somewhat hard to maintain especially for the past negative in (29), because a normal realization of T is present (-e ‘past’), and so is the agreement slot (-n), although its exponent does not vary. The negative c-command approach does not need to posit agreement where we do not see it, so it has a slight advantage here.

The one-to-one relationship between nominative case and subject agreement also breaks down in another way in Oromo: it has clauses with more person-number-gender agreement than nominative subjects. This arises with periphrastic tenses consisting of a past or imperfective main verb and an auxiliary verb. In such constructions, both verbs agree with the subject in phi-features, including person, but presumably both cannot assign the subject nominative case.

(29) a. Isaa-f xanni-té tur-t-e. p. 74
   Him-DAT give-2sS-past wad-2sS-past
   You HAVE given it to him.

b. Joollée-n beelaw-té hin-jír-t-u
   Children-NOM get.hungry-f-past neg-exist-f-dep
   ‘The children haven’t gotten hungry.’

In terms of Baker (2008), these examples imply that Oromo is a CDAP: no language, where agreement is not contingent on the agreeing head assigning case to the agreed-with NP. But if T does not assign

15 Similar auxiliary plus main verb constructions with multiple agreement imply that T does not assign marked nominative under agreement in Maricopa (Gordon xx:xx). In addition, Maricopa also has embedded clauses in
case to NP in the course of agreeing with it, then the nominative case must come from elsewhere. The
rule of marked nominative case assignment tells us from where.  

The relationship of case and agreement in Choctaw is a particularly complex topic (see Davies
1986 for an older analysis). I will not attempt anything like a full discussion here, but will sketch briefly
one relevant consideration. Nominative subjects normally trigger type I agreement in Choctaw and non-
nominative objects trigger type II agreement, as seen by comparing (31a) and (31b). (We need to
compare across sentences because third person nominals trigger a Ø form of agreement, whereas first
and second person pronouns are pro-dropped and so do not display case.)

(30) a. Chì-pìsa-li-h. p. 33
   2sI-see-1sI-TNS
   I see you.

b. Pam-at John-(a) O-O-pìsa-tok. (based on p. 74; find better?)
Pam-NOM John-(ACC) 3sO-3O-see-PAST
‘Pam saw John.’

There is evidence that agreement with the subject is associated with the tense-mood of the clause,
whereas agreement with the object is not. This comes from negation: negation appears near the tense
marker in the morphological structure of the verb (they are adjacent suffixes), and it triggers a special
form of subject agreement, while leaving object agreement unchanged, as shown in (32).

(31) O-Sa-pìsa-tok vs. lk-sa-pìs-o-tok.
    3sI-1sO-see:N-PAST  3N-1sO-see:L-NEG-PAST
    ‘She/he/it/they saw me’ She/he didn’t see me.

Now the crucial facts come from intransitive verbs in Choctaw. If the argument of the verb is an agent,
it triggers the same class I agreement as transitive subjects do (compare (33a) with (31). But Choctaw
also has many intransitive verbs with nonagentive verbs, where the sole argument of the verb triggers
object agreement on the verb, not subject agreement, as in (33b) (compare with (31a)).

(32) a. Iya-li-ttook
    Go-1sS-DPAST
    ‘I went.’

b. Sa-niya-h
    1sO-fat-TNS
    I am fat.

The negation test confirms that sa- in (33b) is a true instance of object agreement, not a quirky
morphological realization of subject agreement. When an example like (33a) is negated, we get the
special negative form of agreement with the subject, as expected, parallel to (32). But when an example

which the verb agrees with the subject in the usual way, but the subject is not marked nominative, but rather bare
(Gordon xx:xx).

16 There is also a breakdown between case and agreement in possessor raising constructions in Oromo, which can have two nominative NPs but only one agreeing T; see below for data and analysis.
like (33b) is negated, the object agreement remains unaffected, just as normal object agreement does in (32).

(33)  a.  Ak-iiy-o-kii-ttook.  p. 149
    1sN-go.:L-NEG-NEG-DPAST
    ‘I didn’t go.’

   b.  Ik-sa-niiy-o-h.
    N(3S)-1sII-fat:L-NEG-TNS    (p. 149)
    ‘I’m not fat.’

Furthermore, a striking fact about (34b) is that a negative agreement prefix shows up as well, but it is an invariant third singular form ik- (compare (32)), not one that agrees in person and number with the theme subject (not ok-, as in (34a)). My interpretation of these facts is that the theme subject, because it is generated inside VP, lower than an normal agentive subject, triggers agreement on v. Since this NP has already agreed with v, T cannot also agree with it; the first agreement renders the NP inactive (cf. Chomsky 2000, 2001). T is still present and it has unvalued phi-features, so it is spelled out as default (third person singular) agreement. In affirmative clauses this is null, so it is not discernible, but in negative clauses there is an overt morpheme ik- for third singular, and that shows up overtly in (34b). T and v are therefore both present as agreement hosts, but only v actually agrees with the nonagentive argument in (33b) and (34b). Now if this reasoning is approximately correct, we can draw a clear conclusion for case assignment: nominative is not assigned by agreement with a designated functional head. (35) shows that when the sole argument of an intransitive verb is overt, not pro-dropped, it is clearly nominative, regardless of which head agrees with it, T (in (35a) or v (in 35b).

(34)  a.  John-at Oklahoma 0-iya-ttook.  p. 68
    John-NOM Oklahoma 3S-go-DPAST
    ‘John went to Oklahoma.’

   b.  John-at 0-niya-h  (Broadwell p. 32)
    John-NOM 3O-fat-TNS
    ‘John is fat.’

Therefore, the case of an NP in Choctaw is not determined by what functional head it agrees with. It must be determined by something else, and the negative c-command condition in (13a) does the job well. The absolute position of the subjects in (35a) and (35b) might be different (at least before movement to SpecTP), accounting for the difference in agreement, but their relative positions are the same: neither is c-commanded by another argumental NP in the same clause. Therefore both get marked nominative.

The independence of agreement and case marking is especially clear in Tukang Besi, another marked nominative language. This can be seen by comparing the two examples in (36).

(35)  a.  No-ki‘i-te iko’o na beka.
    3R-bite CORE you NOM cat
    ‘The cat bit you.’

   b.  No-ki‘i-ko te beka na iko’o  (check word order possibilities)
    3R-see-2sO CORE cat NOM you
‘The cat bit you.’

In (36a), the realis verb agrees with the agentive subject in this (approximately) VOS language, and the subject is marked with nominative case. So we could think that T assigns nominative to NP under agreement here. But in (36b) the object has moved to a position higher than the thematic subject—higher being on the right in this (superficially) left-branching language. On its way up, it triggers object agreement on the verb (v), perhaps in the same way that object movement triggers agreement on past participles in French and Italian (Kayne 1989, etc.). The realis prefix still agrees with the agent in (36b), but the case marking is quite different: in (36b) the agent has default case and the theme has nominative case. So T can agree with something that is either in nominative case or in default case, and the NP in nominative case can agree with T (as in (36a)) or with v (as in (36b)). So case is independent of agreement in this marked nominative language too.

This somewhat unusual pattern of facts presumably stems from the known fact that Austronesian languages permit theme arguments to move past agents in Spec vP to land in SpecTP in a way that many other languages do not (see GHT’s xxx classic analysis of Malagasy and Tagalog). Given this, the marked nominative rule in (13a) succeeds where an Agree-based rule fails. If the theme moves to SpecTP then it c-commands the subject and is not c-commanded by anything else in the clause, so the theme gets nominative and the subject does not. If the theme does not move up in this way, then the subject gets nominative and the theme does not. Agreement with functional heads happens, but it is independent of case. See Baker (xxx) for a more detailed discussion of this analysis, as well as other constructions where nominative and subject agreement part ways in Tukang Besi.

Finally, a word on case and agreement in Nias, the marked absolutive language. Here it is a priori less tempting to say that marked absolutive is assigned by agreement with a functional head, since we don’t know why F would agree with the intransitive subject but not the transitive one apart from case. And the empirical facts confirm that we should be suspicious of this. Agreement works differently in Nias depending on the mood of the clause. In realis clauses, the verb agrees only with the ergative subject in unmarked case; there is no agreement with absolutive subjects or objects, as shown in (46).

(36) a. l-toloi z'ilama-gu. (Brown 2003 from C)
   3sE.R-help ABS.village.advisor (ERG)father-1sP
   My father helped the village elders.

   b. Mofanö n-ama-gu.
      Leave ABS-father-1sP
      ‘My father left.’

So if anything it seems like it is ergative case that is assigned by agreement with T (alias mood) in this language, not absolutive. Moreover, in irrealis clauses case marking still follows the marked absolutive pattern, but the verb agrees with all subjects, both ergative ones in transitive clauses and absolutive ones in intransitive clauses:

(37) a. Ndra-m-æge-o n-drao.
    3pS.IR-laugh-TR ABS-me

---

17 Note that dependent case assignment must happen after movement here, whereas it happens before movement in many instances of scrambling the object over the subject. This follows from the proposals in chapter 6 under the assumption that object movement targets a spec position in Tukang Besi (SpecTP?) whereas it targets an adjoined position in normal instances of scrambling.
‘They will laugh at me.’

b. **Ya-te-bato deu.**
   3sS.IRR-RES-stop ABS.rain
   ‘The rain will stop.’

This confirms that case does not come from agreement in Nias either. Rather, we can say that absolutive is assigned by the marked absolutive rule in (13b). In addition, irrealis T agrees with the closest NP regardless of case, and realis T is case sensitive in the sense of section 2.4 above: it can only agree with an NP that has default (‘ergative’) case.

Overall, then, we see that there are mismatches of agreement and case marking in all of the marked nominative and marked absolutive languages. This shows that an Agree-based theory is not a good alternative to a dependent case style theory that uses a negative c-command condition.

### 3.3.3 When c-command fails in languages with Negative c-command conditions

At the beginning of this chapter, I supported the idea that c-command is involved in dependent case assignment (not some less structural prominence relation) by looking at dyadic unaccusative constructions in which there are two NPs in the same clause but neither c-commands the other because the higher argument is a goal or experiencer embedded in a null-headed PP. In languages that have this structure, ergative case does not show up on the higher-seeming NP (Burushaski), and accusative case does not show up on the lower-seeming NP (Amharic). The result is examples with two NPs in unmarked case: double nominative constructions or double absolutive constructions, as the case may be. This special configuration should be revealing in languages with marked nominative or marked absolutive case too. But in these languages, the prediction is that one gets more morphologically marked case in such clauses than usual, rather than less. This turns out to be true.

Consider first dyadic unaccusative constructions in Choctaw, with higher arguments that are goals, experiencers or possessors, rather than agents. These exist, and indeed both arguments of the verb show up in marked nominative case, as shown in (39).

(38) a. John-at iskali-yat im-ásha-h. (Broadwell 2006: 310, 342)
   John-NOM money-NOM 3III-be:PLUR:N-TNS
   ‘John has money.’

b. Pi-tikba’ Abraham-at ... Chihoowa holiittopa-yat at i-hayaaka-ttok. (p. 310)
   1pIII-front Abraham-NOM God holy-NOM come:and III-appear-DPAST
   ‘Holy God appeared to our forefather Abraham.’

c. Hattak-at holisso-t im-ihaksi-tok (Davies xx:8)
   Man-NOM book-NOM 3III-forget-PAST
   ‘The man forgot the book.’

The structure of these examples is presumably something like (40).

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18 Note that Broadwell argues that this dyadic unaccusative construction in Choctaw cannot be eliminated in favor of the possessor raising construction discussed below for two reasons. First, not all of these examples have a natural possessive paraphrase: (39a) might be glossed as ‘John’s money exists’, but (39b) is not plausibly glossed as ‘Abraham’s God appeared’. Second, a difference appears in negative sentences, where the agreement with the
Here nothing c-commands ‘Abraham’, since that is (part of) the highest argument, so that gets marked nominative. But no NP c-commands the theme ‘God’ either, since ‘Abraham’ is embedded in a PP. So ‘God’ gets marked nominative too.\(^\text{19}\)

The marked absolutive language Nias also has relevant experiencer constructions. In this language, both arguments of this special class of verbs bear marked absolutive, as in (41).

The structure is the same as (40), with ‘monkey’ in the place of ‘Abraham’ and ‘boy’ in the place of ‘God’. ‘Boy’ doesn’t c-command any other argument, because it is the lowest argument, so it gets marked absolutive. ‘Monkey’ doesn’t c-command any other argument, because it is embedded in a PP, so it also gets marked absolutive. (And apparently neither can move out of its base position to SpecTP, so these cases are required, unlike in Choctaw (see note 19).)

I emphasize again that there is no requirement that a marked nominative have this particular construction. If it does not, then the distinctive pattern of a clause with two marked arguments will not surface. For example, Oromo and Maricopa have no double nominative experiencer construction (that I know of). So this construction can give confirming evidence in favor of a negative c-command condition when it exists, but we cannot count on it existing. The case patterns found in a language are a function of both the case rules of that language and the syntactic structures that the case rules apply to. Both can vary within certain limits, so in general we need to have some understanding of both.

For completeness, I mention that at least two marked nominative languages also have a second construction in which two NPs in the same clause show up with nominative case. These are possessor raising constructions, where a possessor NP moves out of the theme argument of an unaccusative verb. (42) gives examples from Choctaw: (42a) is the unraised version, and (42b) is the raised version, in which the possessor as well as the theme argument is nominative:

\(\text{(41)}\)

\(\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{John } \text{im-ofi-yat } \text{illi-h.} \quad \text{(p. 303)}
\text{John } & \text{III-dog-NOM die-TNS}
\text{‘John’s dog died.’}
\text{b. } & \text{John-*at) piláashaash ofi-yat im-illi-h.} \quad \text{p. 304.}
\text{John-NOM yesterday } & \text{dog III-die-TNS}
\text{‘John’s dog died yesterday.’}
\end{align*}\)

---

\(\text{third person theme argument is overt, in the form } \text{ik}. \text{ Then agreement with an experiencer-goal arguments in examples like (39), appears inside of the subject agreement with the theme (the expected order), whereas agreement with a raised possessor appears outside of the subject agreement (perhaps suggesting that this is really a clitic, not true agreement).}\)

\(\text{Note also that ‘God’ apparently does not need not move to SpecTP to satisfy an EPP property in Choctaw; if it did, then only it should be nominative. In fact, there are also alternative realizations of the sentence in which either the theme or the goal-experiencer does move to the SpecTP position as well; see section 6.xx for discussion.}\)
Here I suggest that the double nominative marking should be understood in derivational terms, rather than in terms of c-command. It is plausible to think that the theme argument is the highest in the clause before possessor raising happens, and that is why it gets marked nominative case. Then the possessor argument is the highest in the clause after possessor raising, and that is why it gets marked nominative case. The bare bones of this analysis is sketched in (43).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{TP} & \quad \ldots \quad \text{yesterday} \quad \text{[TP [NP [NP John] dog] die]} & \rightarrow & \quad \text{(base structure: ‘x’s dog’ gets MNOM)} \\
\text{TP} & \quad \text{[NP John]} \quad \text{yesterday} \quad \text{[TP [NP [NP John] dog] die]} & \quad \text{(derived structure: ‘John’ gets MNOM)}
\end{align*}
\]

What is tricky about this construction, then, is not the structure per se, but the timing of case marking relative to movement. Here we want case assignment to apply both before and after the movement has happened, different from what I assumed before for (say) Amharic. I return to this when issues of timing take center stage in chapter 6, arguing that the difference follows from whether movement targets a specifier position or an adjoined position. A similar multiple nominative construction is also found in Oromo, when the noun is inalienably possessed and the predicate is adjectival, but some slight differences between these constructions and the one found in Maricopa will be further grist for chapter 6.

Returning to the dyadic unaccusative structures, then, let us step back and compare what we have seen in this section about marked nominative/absolutive languages with what we saw in section 3.2 from normal accusative and ergative languages. In a superficial sense, they are opposites. In accusative and ergative languages we seem to have an underapplication of the case marking rules, in that we find less marked case than we might have expected. We expect a clause with two NPs to have one of them be ergative and/or accusative, but in fact neither is. In contrast, in languages like Choctaw and Nias, we seem to have an overapplication of the case marking rules, in that we find more marked case than we might have expected. We expect a clause with two NPs to have one of them with marked case, but in fact both of them have it. However, from a theoretical perspective we can see that both these outcomes are manifestations of the same underlying cause, given that some languages use a positive c-command condition (normal dependent case) and others use a negative c-command condition (marked nominative/absolutive case). What is special about these constructions, then, is only that

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20 They mention that one can also have possessor raising from a raised possessor, so it is an iterative process, giving examples with three nominatives: Bonnie-NOM 3-house-NOM room-NOM be.five ‘Bonnie has a five room house’, literally ‘The rooms of Bonnie’s house are five.’ Iterative possessor raising giving 3+ nominatives is also possible in Japanese (Kuno 1973).

21 Broadwell (p. 304) reports some speaker variation on whether the possessed noun is marked nominative in an example like (52b) where there is no adverb between the raised possessor and the theme (his (6)). But for speakers who do not like this, the effect seems to be a superficial one: the example is good if an adverb intervenes, as in (52b), or if nominative case on the possessor is the distinct focus form –akoosh (B’s (7)), or in the closely related language Chicasaw (B’s (9b)). I assume that double nominative is the norm for this structure, and some speakers have a surface PF filter that penalizes having two NPs in a row with identical neutral nominal marking –at.

Possessor raising is not possible from the subject of a transitive verb (Broadwell 307, Davies 59), presumably for syntactic reasons, possibly related to the subject island condition/condition on extraction domains, but the details are not clear. It is somewhat controversial whether possessor raising is possible out of the subject of an unergative verb or not. Broadwell tentatively says yes, giving one example with ‘run’ (see also Davies p. 59 with ‘fly’). But he also says that the construction is more lexically restricted than previously described, and the bulk of his examples are pretty clearly unaccusative (‘die’, ‘run’, ‘be hungry’, ‘be thirsty’, ‘be crazy’, ‘sweat’, and ‘cough’). If possessor raising is possible out of an unergative subject, then the raised possessor is clearly nominative, and that is consistent with my view.
neither argument c-commands the other. In languages that use positive c-command conditions, this
takes away opportunities for special case assignment, whereas in languages that use negative c-
command conditions, it creates new opportunities for special case assignment. Therefore, what looks at
first like opposite situations turns out to be essentially the same thing once we understand the factors at
play theoretically—just what one wants a theory to do.

3.3.4 Korean and Japanese as marked nominative languages

This discussion of multiple nominative constructions in Choctaw calls to mind the famous multiple
nominative constructions in Japanese and Korean. A reasonably standard analysis of these, since Ura
2000:106-107 (also Hiwaira xx?), has been that T agrees with more than one NP, and so assigns (or
checks) more than one nominative under agreement. But there may be reasons to think of them rather
as marked nominative languages along the lines discussed here.

Japanese and Korean are not considered marked nominative languages by Comrie 2005 or König
(2009), simply because they have clear accusative particles too. It is nevertheless true that they do have
a strong nominative morpheme; subjects are clearly not morphologically unmarked, the way they are in
many other nominative-accusative languages.

(43) John-ga Mary-ni hon-o yat-ta (Japanese, Kuno 1973:5)
    John-NOM Mary-DAT book-ACC give-PAST
    ‘John gave Mary a book.’

It is also clear that T does not agree (overtly) with the person-number-gender features of the subject in
these languages, making claims that nominative is assigned under agreement in these languages
abstract and theoretically driven at best.22 A more elegant analysis, closer to the empirical ground,
might be that nominative is assigned apart from agreement by (13a) in these languages as well. The
presence of accusative case as a dependent case in the languages (a dependent case?) need not
interfere with this, just as nonsubjects are marked for Core case in Tukang Besi.

Consistent with this is the fact that the subject of a predicate nominal is marked with ga, but
that predicate itself is not (nor is it marked with accusative o as expected). Recall that this is the
characteristic pattern for marked nominative languages.

(44) John-ga gakusei(*ga,*o) desu.
    John-NOM student (*NOM,*ACC) is
    ‘John is a student.’ (Kuno 1973:37)

From this perspective, we might immediately expect to get multiple nominative constructions in
the same circumstances that we do in Choctaw: with dyadic unaccusatives, and in possessor raising
contexts. This fits quite well with Kuno’s (1973) description of the Japanese facts; see also Koak (2012)
on Korean. Kuno distinguishes three kinds of multiple nominative construction: a possessor raising kind,
like (46), experiencer verbs, and existential/possessive verbs like (47), but in syntactic terms I would
equate the last two.

(45) John-ga otoosan-ga sinda (Kuno p. 69) (also John-no)
    John-NOM father-NOM died (Possessor raising type)

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22 Some treat subject honorification as a kind of agreement between T and the subject in Japanese, including Ura,
but this is controversial.
‘John’s father died.’
(also with ‘be able’, ‘be pretty’, ‘be short’, ‘be many’, ‘exist’, ‘stand-exist’, ‘scold-PASS’)

(46) Anata-ga okane-ga aru koto... (Kuno p. 85, 89)(also John-ni)
You-NOM money-NOM have that
...that you have money.
(also with ‘understand’, ‘can’, ‘hear’, ‘see’, ‘have’, ‘need’, and transitive adjectives)

In the first kind, the outer nominative can alternatively be marked with genitive —no; in the second kind it can (mostly) alternatively be marked with dative —ni (exception: ‘need’ is only double nominative). Kuno also mentions that “stative verbs” like the one in (47) cannot be passivized, which counts as evidence that they are dyadic unaccusative constructions, not normal transitive ones, as Koak (2012) argues for Korean (following Grimshaw 1990). The fact that the experiencer subject alternates between nominative and dative in many instances (Kuno 1973:88f) also suggests the presence of a null P, which can assign dative.

So it is an intriguing possibility that Japanese and Korean might also be marked nominative languages in a relevant sense—with the consequence that this type is more common than it has been taken to be. However, the literature on these languages in general is large and complex, so I leave further development and testing of this hypothesis to the experts on these languages, should any of them see fit to take it up.

[General conclusion?]