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Introduction: Case variation and change in the Nordic languages

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Shortly after arriving in Copenhagen five years ago, I realized what many linguists have long understood: the case situation in the Nordic languages is formidably complex. Of course, the broad outlines of inter-speaker (or, cross-linguistic) variation in Nordic nominal case inflection are well known. Within two major language families, (North) Germanic and Uralic, there are dozens of closely related language varieties. The Finnic and Sami languages of Uralic have adpositional case systems, while the North Germanic languages can be further subdivided into the Mainland and Insular groups, partially on the basis of their different case systems. The latter group, namely Icelandic, Faroese, and Älvdalian (which is spoken in a fairly isolated rural community in the interior of Sweden), has ‘rich’ inflectional case morphology on a range of elements comprising nominal phrases, including articles, determiners, demonstratives, nouns, pronouns, *wh*-words, and more. The former group, namely Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish, are ‘case-poor’, maintaining only a vestige of their historically rich case morphology on a subset of personal pronouns, which have Nominative, Oblique, and Possessive forms. Furthermore, certain varieties of Swedish and Norwegian retain vestigial Dative forms of clitic pronouns.

Moreover, quite naturally, no linguist could fail to be aware of the importance of case to linguistic description and theory. Potentially involving aspects of semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology, case has always been a central concern for grammatical theories of every stripe (see e.g., Butt 2006 for an overview and references). Starting in the early 1980s, generative theoretical frameworks have treated abstract syntactic capital-‘C’ Case as an aspect of Universal Grammar, varying only in its language-specific morpho-phonological realization. Although particular analyses have evolved over the years, the essential conception of syntactic Case has not been significantly altered: its role has always been to license the syntactic

position and movement of nominal phrases (see e.g., Lasnik 2008 for an overview and references). Relatively recently, linguists working in Distributed Morphology (DM, Halle & Marantz 1993 and related work) and other frameworks have challenged such analyses. One emerging hypothesis holds that case morphology is determined post-syntactically at the interpretive interface with external systems of Phonetic (or, Perceptual) Form (PF), where nominal elements are provided with language-specific features and phonological exponents based on their argument structure or other (morpho)syntactic properties (e.g., Marantz 2000). In fact, a well observed pattern of intra-individual (i.e., sociolinguistic) variation in North Germanic has been instrumental in spurring alternative morphological approaches to case (e.g., McFadden 2004), namely the (in)famous phenomenon of Dative Substitution, known derogatively as ‘Dative Sickness’ in Icelandic (see e.g., Thráinsson 2007 for a detailed overview and comprehensive references).

It was thus that I had come to the Nordics with theoretical motivations in order to investigate intra-speaker case variation in Danish, which patterns near identically with case variation attested in English. One interesting similarity is that the pronominal Oblique Form (OF) has the distribution of an elsewhere item in Danish and English, appearing by default in a wide range of heterogeneous structures, including, among others, predicates, clefts, and in isolation. More striking still is the little discussed fact that socially salient variable case mismatches (or, ‘incongruence’) on pronouns inside Coordinate Determiner Phrases (CoDPs) are robustly attested in both Danish (e.g., Hansen & Heltoft 2011, among others) and English (e.g., Angermeyer & Singler 2003; Quinn 2005, among others). Implementing ideas of Emonds (1986) within DM, my dissertation (Parrott 2007) develops a post-syntactic theory of the English case variation that correctly predicts the variation in Danish. On this basis, during my first presentation at DGCSS, I confidently predicted that pronominal case variability would pattern the same way in closely related Swedish. After all, Swedish is case poor and has virtually the same pronouns as Danish. Furthermore, there is a high degree of contact between the languages, especially in the Øresund metropolitan region. However, a Swedish colleague at the meeting quickly disabused me of this erroneous expectation, informing me that not only is case variation inside CoDPs impossible in Swedish, but that Nominative Forms are the apparent default, appearing in predicates and other structures where OFs would occur in Danish (see e.g., Sigurðsson 2006).

My interest now piqued even more than before, I set out to learn as much as possible about the inter- and intra-speaker case variation attested among the languages of North Germanic. And who better to teach me than my generous new Nordic colleagues? Toward these ends, I organized a workshop on ‘Case Variation and Change in Scandinavian’ at the 5th International Conference on Language Variation in Europe (ICLaVE), which was held at the University of Copenhagen in June 2009. Nanna Haug Hilton and I co-presented, joined by Þórhallur

Eyþórsson, Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson, Henrik Jørgensen, and Einar Freyr Sigurðsson. This workshop was the original impetus for the present special issue on case, and most of the workshop's participants have contributed a paper, some of them joined by collaborators. Additional participants, both authors and reviewers, were recruited at other meetings, particularly the September 2011 workshop on 'Case and Case-related Issues', organized by Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson at Lund University, and the June 2012 conference on 'Non-canonically Case-marked Subjects within and across Languages and Language Families' held in Iceland and organized by Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson, Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson, Höskuldur Thráinsson, and Margrét Guðmundsdóttir of the University of Iceland, and Jóhanna Barðdal, Tonya Kim Dewey, and Stephen Mark Carey of the University of Bergen.

The resulting collection of papers provides a fairly good, if far from complete representation of the considerable range of perspectives on case variation that have been adopted by Nordic linguists. The first two contributions highlight the diversity of inter- and intra-individual case variation on display in the Nordic languages, while the second two showcase the importance of Nordic case variation as a laboratory for linguistic theory.

In the first paper, entitled 'Dative case in Norwegian, Icelandic and Faroese: Preservation and non-preservation', co-authors Þórhallur Eyþórsson, Janne Bondi Johannessen, Signe Laake, and Tor A. Áfarli investigate the loss of Dative case in North Germanic, treating inter-speaker variation between the titular languages as hypothetical stages in a diachronic process of change. To assess its current state of health, they examine the extent to which Dative case is preserved after both passive and topicalization movements. Drawing on the literature, but especially utilizing recent fieldwork conducted on the Faroe Islands and in Norway, the authors show that Icelandic indeed displays no Dative case variation under either kind of movement. Faroese Dative is somewhat less vigorous, exhibiting variable non-preservation in passives, but fully preserved after topicalization. The most remarkable results come from the Norwegian Dative-dialect areas, where the authors find a clear pattern: Dative case is completely lost in passives, but variably preserved after topicalization for speakers who are strong users of Dative pronouns 'in situ'.

In the next paper, entitled 'Incongruent pronominal case in the Swedish dialect of Västra Nyland (Finland)', Henrik Jørgensen reports on fieldwork he conducted in 1994 to investigate a fascinating instance of case variation and change in Mainland North Germanic. As documented by Lundström (1939), Swedish speakers in the Finnish region of Västra Nylanda displayed pronominal case incongruence, or 'mismatched' OF pronouns occurring variably in a range of Nominative-related positions. Surprisingly, this pattern of case was unlike other Swedish varieties and instead resembled the one found in contemporary Danish and English varieties (as mentioned above). Over half a century after Lundström's fieldwork, Jørgensen found that variable case incongruence has disappeared from this Finland-Swedish dialect,

and the pronominal case system is now just like ‘standard’ Swedish. Although some speakers he interviewed could remember case-incongruent forms, no one used them. This diachronic change, from variable pronominal-case incongruence to categorical congruence, stands as an apparent counter-example to Emonds (1986); thus Jørgensen suggests that the case variation leading to these changes may have been caused by language contact.

In the penultimate paper, entitled ‘Case alternations in Icelandic “get”-passives’, Einar Freyr Sigurðsson and Jim Wood show again why the rich case inflectional morphology found in Insular North Germanic is an invaluable empirical resource for syntactic theory. The authors provide new Icelandic data on Germanic ‘get’-passives (e.g., *The editor got the article sent to her*), utilizing known patterns of Icelandic case marking (e.g., the preservation of Dative in verbal but not adjectival passives) as a probe into argument structure. This allows them to argue convincingly that, among other things, Icelandic ‘get’-passives are verbal with a Nominative subject that originates as an external argument of ‘get’. On this basis, Sigurðsson & Wood go on to discuss a decompositional syntactic analysis of Germanic ‘get’ verbs as a sequence of light-verbal heads that form semantic predicates.

The fourth and final paper in this special issue is a fresh contribution from Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson bearing the evocative title ‘Case variation: Viruses and star wars’. Continuing his program of inquiry into the externalization of syntactic objects to sensory-motor systems, Sigurðsson develops a unique morphosyntactic theory to account for cross-linguistic variation in patterns of morphological case markedness (with a focus on the hierarchies observed in Blake 1994). Sigurðsson argues that NPs are event licensed by agreement with a series of functional heads in syntax, for example Voice, Appl, v, and n. These event-licensing heads can be post-syntactically augmented by ‘case star’ marking, where the number of diacritics assigned to particular heads corresponds with morphological cases at PF (e.g., ‘v*’ is Accusative and ‘v*+’ is Dative, while Nominative is a zero case with no stars, ‘v’). Changes in case marking patterns arise because case stars behave like viruses, fighting to expand from one type of head to another (e.g., when an ‘invasion’ of the n heads introduces nominal Genitive case). Sigurðsson’s analysis is evidently a radical departure from standard treatments of case in syntactic theory, but serves as a provocative invitation to consider the perhaps unexpected influence of ‘3rd factors’ (Chomsky 2005) on case morphosyntax.

There are obviously plenty of remaining places to go, and plenty of remaining things to do, as linguists continue to explore case variation and change in the Nordic languages. The reader will have already noted the regrettable lack of Uralic in this special issue, and more work on adpositional case variation and change in Finnish and especially the Sami languages is sorely needed. Personally, I would like to see additional empirical research on, and theoretical analyses of, inter- and intra-speaker pronominal case variation patterns attested in mainland North Germanic, especially

among dialects of Norwegian. The study of case variation and change in the Nordic languages might also benefit from engagement with the emerging ‘nano-syntax’ theory of case developed at the Center for Advanced Study in Theoretical Linguistics (CASTL) at the University of Tromsø (e.g., Caha 2009).

I will conclude my introduction by apologizing for the excessive delay in publishing this special issue, for which I assume full responsibility. Turning to the more pleasant task of grateful acknowledgements, I must first and foremost give many thanks to Sten Vikner, Catherine Ringen, Ewa Jaworska, and Cambridge University Press for allowing me this editorial opportunity and for their seemingly inexhaustible patience in seeing the project through. I thank all of the contributors to the special issue, obviously the authors but especially including the peer reviewers, for their interest in the project and their hard work seeing it completed under difficult circumstances. All of my research on case variation in Danish and the Nordic languages, as postdoc and professor, was made possible by generous support from DGCSS, or the Danish National Research Foundation Centre for Language Change in Real Time (LANCHART) under director Frans Gregersen, to whom I will always owe a debt of gratitude. I am extremely thankful to the several Nordic research consortia that sponsored my participation in numerous conferences, courses, workshops, and fieldwork expeditions over the last several years: the Scandinavian Dialect Syntax project (ScanDiaSyn), the Nordic Language Variation Network (NLVN), the Nordic Center of Excellence in Micro Comparative Syntax (NORMS), and the Nordic Collaboration on Language Variation Studies network (N’CLAV). In addition to those already mentioned, I would also like to thank Maia Andréasson, Elisabet Engdahl, Søren Beck Nielsen, Henrik Rosenkvist, Helge Sandøy, Peter Svenonius, Jacob Thøgersen, Øystein Alexander Vangsnes, and all of my other Nordic and LANCHART colleagues who are too numerous to name here.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this special issue to my father, Keith Adrian Parrott (11 April 1946 – 12 February 2012). He is dearly loved and deeply missed.

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