

On Case Grammar

John M. Anderson

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COREPRESENTATION OF GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE

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ON CASE GRAMMAR

PROLEGOMENA TO A THEORY OF
GRAMMATICAL RELATIONS

JOHN M. ANDERSON



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to
Nicola
Samantha
Miranda

PREFACE

The chapters which follow had their ultimate origin in research contributing to the first part of a longer work, still uncompleted, on quantification in a case grammar. As such they were to be devoted to a description and justification of the particular grammatical framework invoked in the subsequent discussion of quantifiers. However, it seemed to me that the phenomena dealt with were of sufficient intrinsic interest and the conclusions offered sufficiently provocative to warrant a more extended presentation in their own right. Such is the present volume. It represents an attempt to arrive at a preliminary definition of the role of case and grammatical relations in the grammar.

An earlier version of parts of ch.1 appears as Anderson, 1975c, and an intermediate version of §§1.8-9 as Anderson, 1975d. Some idea of the direction the discussion might take following on from the present work can hopefully be gained from the preliminary versions in Anderson, 1974b, 1973d, 1974a (in that order).

I am grateful to Maurício Brito de Carvalho, Paul van Buren, Ramu Reddy and Dave Roberts for their many insightful comments on the manuscript which forms the basis for this version. To the last in particular the reader should be grateful for a number of important improvements in content and presentation. Parts of the material have been presented before audiences at Aarhus, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, Lancaster and Odense. These more formal occasions and numerous informal ones have made significant contributions to the present work. Among my many interlocutors I would like to thank especially Paul van Buren, John Dienhart, Hans Hartvigsson, Leif Kvistgaard Jakobsen, John Lyons, Jim Miller, Sheena Macrae and Dave Roberts. Thanks too to Roger Lass, who is responsible for the removal of many imperfections, and to Colin Ewen, who suffered some proof-reading. My wife would like to express her gratitude to me for having finished this before it drove her quite crazy. So too Anne MacDonald, who womanfully transformed into typescript the ancient Venutian calligraphy of the original manuscript.

My absolutions on them all of course.

J.M.A.

Edinburgh
December, 1975

1 GRAMMARS OF CASE

1.1 A Traditional Notion of Case

The grammatical terminology of most languages which incorporate the European tradition in such matters displays a systematic ambiguity in the use of the term 'case'. Usually, it is employed to refer both to a certain inflexional category (and the forms that manifest it) and to the set of semantic distinctions carried by the forms of that category. We can differentiate these as case-forms and case-relations or case-functions respectively. Thus in *Lutetiam veni*, it might be said that the noun is in the ACCUSATIVE form and that in this instance it indicates, or functions as, the 'goal'. Much controversy has depended simply on the confusion of these two senses. Certainly, such an ambiguous usage has the disadvantage that case-functions clearly can be expressed in other ways, notably by prepositions or postpositions, by word order or in the morphology of the verb rather than the noun. In what follows I shall use the term CASE-FORM (henceforth CF) more inclusively, to cover any form that serves to express a CASE-RELATION (henceforth CR), where the latter are interpreted as labels for the semantic role that a particular NP fulfils in the predication.

Most traditional accounts posit a complex mapping between the set of CRs and the set of CFs (either in the narrow sense or interpreted, as I propose, more widely). For instance, the same accusative form of Latin we noted above as a marker of the goal relation can also express the (DIRECT) OBJECT, as in *puellam amo*. And the goal can alternatively be associated with a form which includes a preposition: *ad urbem veni*. There have been rather few attempts to arrive at more NATURAL accounts, that is, descriptions of the CR/CF relationship which involve less of a discrepancy. Notable, however, have been various LOCALIST proposals, the character of which we shall return to below.

All such accounts encountered considerable difficulties in attempting to provide a unitary, or even unified function for such CFs as (particularly) the accusative and NOMINATIVE. Even if the goal/object distinction is disregarded, it is apparent that it is difficult to attribute to the objective accusative itself a constant semantic value, as reflected in a set like that in (1):

- (1) a. The policeman struck the student

- b. Marilyn gave John the whisky
- c. My uncle built a chalet
- d. John killed Bill
- e. Columbus discovered America
- f. The procession crossed the square
- g. Fred left home

Compare the even greater diversity of the SUBJECTIVE nominatives in (2):

- (2) a. The student was struck by the policeman
- b. The student tickled the policeman
- c. Nobody knew the truth
- d. That trunk contained eight books
- e. My dentist suffered terribly
- f. John received the whisky from Marilyn
- g. The truth was known to nobody

In each instance, the set of NPs partake of a range of semantic roles, some of them traditionally distinguished as subtypes of subject or object, such as 'object of result', 'indirect object', etc. But what (if anything) these different types of subject or object have in common semantically has remained uncertain.

Thus, to be more particular, grammars written within the classical tradition almost invariably have extensive sections which under one guise or another document at some length the often multifarious 'uses of the cases'. So in Gildersleeve & Lodge (1895), for instance, out of fewer than 200 pages devoted to the 'simple sentence expanded', the description of the cases in their role of 'qualification of the prediction' is accorded almost 100. And Woodcock's (1959) more recent though still traditionalist treatment devotes five of its total of twenty-five chapters to 'the functions' of the cases. For the individual cases Gildersleeve and Lodge are typical in providing a detailed and intricate classification of 'uses'. The accusative, for example, may mark either an inner or outer object (or both in the same clause); and the former divides into the object of result, the cognate accusative and the accusative of extent, the latter may be partitive or not; and so on.

Often, however, such classifications appear to impute to the cases (case forms) distinctions which are signalled elsewhere. For example, it could be argued that rather than an object of result in Latin, we have 'creative' verbs (like English *make*) whose objects (or rather their

denotata) come into existence as a result of the action denoted by the verb. Is it then necessary to recognise a distinct relation/use/function? Many, perhaps all, of the object 'uses' are reducible in this way. A more interesting hypothesis would involve (as we have observed) minimising such recourse to syncretism. And it is some such natural view which has led to attempts to discover where possible a Grundbedeutung (or at least a single source, be it semantic or syntactic) for linguistic elements, including the case forms (cf. e.g. Jakobson, 1936). For the Latin cases this is illustrated already by the work of Key (1958) and Laurie (1859). The latter in particular pursues essentially a localist strategy such as we shall investigate in ch.2. Typically, however, the form that marks the subject in a language appears to be non-reducible. Apart from correlating with subject-hood such a form simultaneously neutralises uses distinguished in other (non-subject) constructions (as in (2)). Nevertheless, it would seem obvious that the least we can expect of any grammatical theory as far as cases are concerned is that it should provide a principled articulation of the relationship between case relation and case form, distinguishing neutralisation and syncretism from the natural. But this is lacking throughout much of the history of studies of case. The two characteristic polarisations are aptly summarised by Haudry (1968, 141):

Le problème central de l'étude des cas est dans la difficulté qu'on éprouve à les décrire en termes de 'signes', c'est-à-dire à poser en face de chaque signifiant (la désinence), un signifié correspondant. La grammaire historique oscille entre deux attitudes: admettre une polysémie du cas, en la justifiant par un syncrétisme, ou tenter de réunir sous un concept les emplois les plus divers.

It is, however, not my intention here to discuss such traditional preoccupations at any length. Rather, I take as familiar such a context for the following investigations, which are concerned in the main with a consideration of specific proposals made within current frames of reference.¹ My concern is simply to sketch in something of this immediate background as a preliminary to an examination of relevant aspects of contemporary linguistic theory. In particular, we shall be concerned with some developments in what has come to be called 'case grammar'; and I shall attempt to maintain the adequacy of a variant of this especially in the face of objections that have been raised to particular aspects. In such a discussion, nevertheless, the traditional theme that we have broached in the present section, viz. the articulation of the relationship between CFs and CRs, will underly much of the debate.

1.2 Case relations and the Aspects theory

1.2.1. It might have been anticipated that the development of generative grammar, and in particular the elaboration of the distinction between deep and surface structure, would lead, if not to more natural accounts, at least to an articulation of how the neutralisation of roles typical of subjects and objects might arise. But this was not the case. In the framework established in the early 1960s and culminating in the position formulated in Chomsky (1965) (henceforth 'the *Aspects* theory'), the ambivalences associated with surface subjects and objects were carried over into their deep equivalents. Transformations like the passive simply redistribute the NPs in a sentence without increasing or decreasing their ambivalence with respect to CRs. And this is not surprising. The passive, for instance, was conceived of as having purely syntactic motivation. What remains mysterious, however, is exactly what this motivation might be.

The arguments invoked by Chomsky (1957, §§5.4, 7.5) involve the avoidance of a duplication of selectional restrictions (in 'corresponding' actives and passives) and the difficulties in specifying restrictions on the distribution of the passive marker *be . . . -en*, together with the problem created for an analysis whereby passives are not derived from the structure more immediately underlying actives but rather vice versa by there being 'no structural way to differentiate properly between [*The wine was drunk by the guests*] and [*John was drunk by midnight*] if both are taken as kernel sentences' (1957, 80). I cannot see that this last assertion can be accorded any force in the absence of any supporting arguments for an analysis which fails to make such a differentiation. Why should we accept that there is 'no structural way to differentiate properly' between such sentences? Moreover, even if it is just, it and the other arguments carry weight only within a grammar one of whose goals is the establishment of a set of 'kernel sentences', which are chosen 'in such a way that the terminal strings underlying the kernel are easily derived by means of a [phrase structure] description, while all other sentences can be derived from these terminal strings by simply statable transformations' (Chomsky, 1957, 48). And they are decisive only against the alternatives envisaged by Chomsky, viz. an analysis whereby 'the passive of "John loves Mary" would be "John is loved by Mary"' (1957, 78) and one in which actives are derived transformationally from passives.

But other possibilities can be and have been envisaged. The original considerations adduced by Chomsky do not enable us to select the simplex-sentence transformational accounts of the derivation of passives

over a lexicalist formulation (Freidin, 1972*a*, 1975; Starosta, 1973) or a complex source in which the 'active' predication is embedded as a complement to the verb *be* (Hasegawa, 1968; R. Lakoff, 1968) or one in which neither the active nor passive variant is structurally closer to their source (Fillmore, 1968*a*). In *Aspects*, Chomsky (1965, 103-6) provides no new argument, but simply the suggestion, based on the observation that some transitive verbs which fail to undergo passivisation also 'do not take Manner Adverbials freely', that 'the Manner Adverbial should have as one of its realisations a "dummy element" signifying that the passive transformation must obligatorily apply'.² It therefore is unwarranted to cite a putative rule like passive as one of 'the traditional battery of transformations' (Jackendoff, 1971, 284) against which proposed transformations are to be evaluated. It is not sufficient to assert 'differences in the kinds of arguments given as motivation' (*ibid.*); this must be shown to be the case. We shall find, on the other hand, as our discussion develops, particularly in ch.2, that a functional view of transformations (as investigated by e.g. Langacker, 1974) will provide us with a means of articulating the CR/CF relation.

1.2.2. We return below to some more recent attempts to provide arguments for the deep structure of the *Aspects* theory (§§1.8-10) and for the passive transformation (there and in §3.3). Let us rather at this point give our attention to the *Aspects* characterisation of underlying (deep) CRs, or 'grammatical functions'. This is of some interest in that although the introduction of such notions as 'deep subject' represents an innovation over most traditional positions (as I shall argue below), their presence does not provide any explanation for the discrepancy traditionally observed between CRs and CFs. The motivation for such an innovation therefore requires careful scrutiny, particularly since it seems to represent a retreat from naturalness in comparison with the traditional view which invoked only semantically relevant CRs and the CFs motivated on simple distributional (and ultimately perceptual) grounds (cf. Postal, 1974, preface). In this section we are concerned with the original arguments offered by Chomsky (1965, ch.2).

At the beginning of ch.2 Chomsky presents three sets of information which, he claims (without exemplification) 'traditional' grammar might provide concerning a sentence like:

- (3) Sincerity may frighten the boy

viz. a categorisation or constituent analysis, a description of functions,

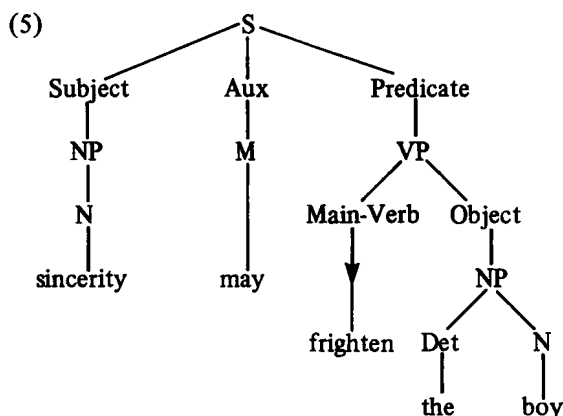
and a subcategorisation or componential analysis of the formatives. The following three subsections in that chapter are devoted to showing how a generative grammar can and should express each of these sets of information. Such a presentation is however somewhat misleading, particularly with respect to the functional information which is our present concern. For the functional descriptions provided by 'traditional' grammars concern what would for Chomsky be 'surface structure' (or perhaps 'shallow structure') and thus the subject of (4):

(4) The boy may be frightened by sincerity

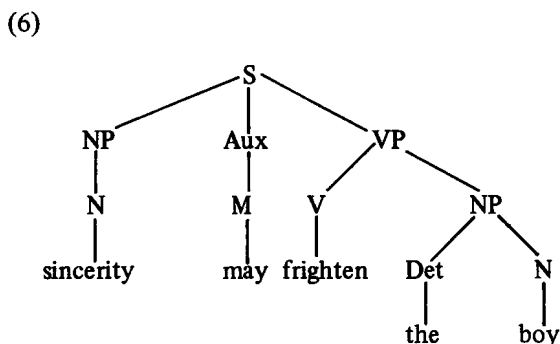
would be the NP *the boy*. Whereas Chomsky's own proposals (as expanded in §2.2 of ch.2) are addressed primarily to the definition of deep structure functions. Thus whether or not the functional information concerning (3) ascribed to 'traditional' grammars is 'substantially correct' (as affirmed by Chomsky), it is quite irrelevant to decisions concerning the character of 'deep functions'; in particular, there is no (empirical?) support for such notions as 'deep subject' of the kind that Chomsky appears to be appealing to deriving from 'traditional' grammars. And unfortunately, no further 'evidence' for Chomsky's conception of 'deep subject' etc. (i.e. for the constitution of the set of 'underlying functions') is offered — except in so far as his own proposals concerning selectional restrictions presuppose such.

Similarly the 'evidence' which Chomsky advances (in ch.2, § 2.2) against a categorial interpretation of 'deep' functions in general also simply does not bear on the point at issue. Chomsky (1965, 68) states that 'functional' notions like 'Subject', 'Predicate' are to be sharply distinguished from categorial notions such as 'Noun phrase', 'Verb', a distinction that is not to be obscured by the occasional use of the same term for notions of both kinds. To include nodes bearing functional labels 'is mistaken in two ways', according to Chomsky. The first way lies in failing to distinguish formally between categorial and functional notions. However, since Chomsky provides no generally applicable criteria whereby this distinction is to be drawn but merely provides a formal means of presenting some 'functional information' in a way that distinguishes it from 'categorial information', on the assumption that it is desirable to draw the distinction in the manner he himself proposes, this 'failure' does not in itself count as evidence against the presence of such nodes. The argument is circular: it is a mistake to collapse 'functional' and 'categorial' elements because it is a mistake not to distinguish between such elements.

Chomsky's second objection looks at first to have more force. He observes that representations like (5):



and the grammar on which it is based are redundant, since the notions Subject, Predicate, Main-Verb and Object, being relational, are already represented in the Phrase-marker (6)



and no new rewriting rules are required to introduce them. It is necessary only to make explicit the relational character of these notions by defining 'Subject-of' for English, as the relation holding between the NP of a sentence of the form NP Aux VP and the whole sentence, 'Object-of' as the relation between the NP of a VP of the form V NP and the whole VP, etc. (1965, 69).'

But this too involves rather a strange argument, which again depends upon the assertion of the relational/categorial distinction. It is not at all clear, for instance, why information that is 'redundant' if introduced by the phrase structure rules ceases to be so if introduced by definitions associated with the configurations specified by the (function-free) rules of the base. However, let us accept that it is somehow preferable to introduce 'functional' specifications in the way that Chomsky suggests.

Unfortunately, the principle of introducing 'functional' information in terms of configurational definitions does not seem to accord with Chomsky's own practice (cf. here Freidin, 1972*b*, 8-9), in so far as this can be evaluated in the absence of any criteria for the notion 'functional'. Consider, for example, rule (ii) in (57) of ch.2 (which constitutes part of 'An illustrative fragment of the base component'):

(7) Predicate-phrase \rightarrow Aux VP (Place) (Time)

(Let us leave aside 'Predicate-Phrase', which looks like a categorial label derived from the function of the category: the distinction 'is not to be obscured by the occasional use of the same term for notions of both kinds' (Chomsky, 1965, 68).) Presumably 'Place' and 'Time' are to be expanded as prepositional phrases (PPs), though this is not illustrated by the fragment. In this case, as far as I can tell, the most plausible interpretation of 'Place' and 'Time' is as functional labels: they indicate the function of these PPs in the predicate phrase. They are not, however, redundant. Since PPs of both types are immediately dominated (in the absence of the 'Place' and 'Time' labels) by the same category, a configurational definition is excluded. Not even the invoking of relative sequence (provided this can be motivated) will suffice, in that either kind of PP may be absent. (For further discussion, see e.g. Meisel, 1973; Starosta, 1974.)

Thus it appears that only some 'functions' are to be excluded from the categorial rules. Of course perhaps it is possible to exclude 'Place' and 'Time' and the like from deep structure configurations and introduce the functional information by an interpretative rule which takes into account the character of the lexical items in the appropriate PPs (though problems are presented by examples like *He turned off the road just after Carlisle*). And the diverse functions associated with subjects and objects (recall (1) and (2)) can be provided for in like manner (cf. Chomsky, 1972*a*). But in neither case do these need to apply to 'deep' configurations rather than 'shallow' (cf. Freidin, 1972*a*, 1975). Under the latter and (in the absence of strong counter-evidence)