

Axel Holvoet

Vocatives in Baltic

Problems of Morphology and Syntax

Academia Grammaticorum Salensis Nona

The vocative — a case?

- This has been called into question by many, starting with Jakobson; cf. especially Chrakovskij (no *zvatel'nyj padež*, only *zvatel'naja forma*).
- even languages that have no case may have a vocative, e. g., Bulgarian, which has lost the Common Slavonic case system but retained the vocative (*Ivane!*)
- morphologically anomalous, e. g., in Proto-Indo-European the vocative was a pure stem (in Lith. *tėv-e* the ending *-e* was originally a thematic vowel followed by a zero ending: *tėv-e-∅*)
- not assigned syntactically (the vocative stands apart from the syntactic structure of the sentence).

What is case?

- Case is “a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads” (Blake 2001, 1)
- This rules out head-marking devices such as the Semitic construct state (Hebr. *bēt 'ēl* ‘God’s house’) or the Iranian *izafet* (*ketāb-e dust* ‘a friend’s book’).
- Though the case-marked noun must be dependent, the “type of relationship” may be taken to be a semantic relationship (semantic case) as well as a syntactic one.
- The vocative might be said to mark a semantic relationship, but at best to the sentence (speech act) as a whole, not to any of its parts.

Case assignment

- How is case assigned? Heads often assign case to their complements, and government is one of the most obvious instances of case assignment. The syntactic valency of verbs, prepositions etc. is the prototypical example: Lith. *dėkoti* ‘thank’ + DAT, *tikėti* ‘believe’ + INSTR, *dalyvauti* ‘participate’ + LOC, *iš* ‘from’ + GEN etc.
- What about modifiers (adjuncts)? They have no obvious case-assigning heads:

Vaikščiojome dvi valandas.

‘We walked for two hours.’

Here the accusative of duration can hardly be said to be assigned by the verb *vaikščioti* ‘walk’ as a lexeme.

Semantic case

- Modifiers (adjuncts) seem to bear semantic case (Kuryłowicz 1949): they are syntactically dependent on their heads but their case is selected to express the semantic relation they bear to the head.
- Semantic case does not exist, e. g., in generative grammar, where case is always assigned. For adjuncts different proposals are on record:
 - zero (phonetically empty) prepositions (Bresnan & Grimshaw, McCawley)
 - adjuncts lexically specified to assign case to themselves (Larson)
 - GG needs a notion of semantic case (Babby)

Discourse-oriented case?

- For the vocative the notion of semantic case is not adequate as vocatives stand apart from the semantic structure of the sentence as well.
- One could therefore link the vocative to discourse structure rather than to the semantic structure of the clause (cf. Daniel' 2008), but are their analoga for this among uncontroversial cases?
- Perhaps there are, cf. the ethic dative (*dativus ethicus*) (Michail Daniel, p. c.).

Quid mihi Celsus agit? 'I wonder what Celsus is doing.'

Three types rather than two?

- If we agree that cases may be integrated in discourse structure rather than in clause structure, we arrive at a tripartite division:
grammatical case > semantic case > discourse-oriented case
- Cases may be sometimes grammatical, sometimes semantic (cf. the object accusative and the *accusativus temporis*). The vocative would be almost exclusively discourse-oriented, though the notion of a governed vocative is conceivable, cf. Greek *ō phíle Sōkrates!* ‘My dear Socrates!’; cf. Arabic, where the vocative marker *yā* is said to govern the nominative of an unmodified noun (*yā Muhammadu!* ‘Oh Mohammed’) or the accusative of a modified noun (*yā ‘Abda ‘llāhi!* ‘Oh Abdullah!’, i. e., ‘Oh servant of God’).

Baltic vocatives

- Of the two Baltic languages, Lithuanian has the most regular paradigmatic vocatives. Lithuanian vocatives
 - usually have non-zero endings parallel to those of other cases, cf. *sūn-au* alongside *sūn-us*, *sūn-ui* etc.
 - show allomorphy, i. e., one abstract case value may be expressed by different morphs, cf. *sūn-au* ‘son!’ alongside *tėv-e* ‘father!’ etc.
- In both cases this is, historically, a secondary development, because the endings were once thematic vowels or suffixes: *tėv-e-∅*, *sūn-au-∅*, and the originally ending was zero; in the modern language, however, segmentation is different.

Truncated vocatives

- In some vocatives, however, the zero ending strategy (known from IE) has apparently been applied a second time, regardless of regular phonetic development:

mamyt from *mamytė* 'mum'

- We will call these truncated vocatives. Some of them occur alongside regular forms:

mamyt alongside *mamyte* 'mum'

- In other instances the truncated forms are the only available ones:

berniuk from *berniukas* 'boy' (there is no **berniuke*)

Latvian vocatives

- Latvian vocatives (to the extent that they have special forms distinct from the nominative) have undergone considerable phonetic erosion; through regular phonetic developments they have become similar to Lithuanian truncated vocatives:

māt from *māte* 'mother' (with additional change from even to falling tone *māt* vs. nom. *māte*)

mās from *māsa* 'sister' (final *-a* > \emptyset , cf. Latv. *ved* = Lith. *veda* 'leads')

- In other instances a non-zero ending is retained: *brāli* from *brālis* 'brother' (*-i* < *-ī*), *Edžu* from *Edžus* 'Edward, Edgar'.
- But other forms cannot be explained phonetically: *brālīt* instead of *brālīti* 'little brother' (*-i* is from *-ī* as in *brāli*).

Latvian vocatives

- As a result of regular phonetic development and irregular changes the character of the formation of the vocative has changed. Apparently there is allomorphy, e. g., we have the endings $-\emptyset$, $-i$, $-u$, but if we recognise truncation (“drop something”) as the formative principle underlying vocatives, this diversity reduces to fundamental unity.
- This truncation (in a wider sense, i. e., regardless of whether the zero ending results from regular phonetic development or not) may consist in
 - zero ending: *brāl!* ‘brother’
 - ending shortened by dropping the final sibilant: *brāli!* ‘brother’

Latvian vocatives

- The Latvian vocative is therefore less case-like than that of Lithuanian: one of the main reasons compelling us to posit cases is, according to Spencer and Otaguro (2005), variable exponency.
- E. g., Lith. *-o*, *-aus*, *-ies* etc. representing an abstract case value (“genitive singular”) would be a typical example of case, whereas, e. g., Hungarian *-ban/-ben* ‘in’ does not fundamentally differ from a postposition; the same would apply to the Old Lithuanian spatial cases, cf. allatives like *Dievo-p(i)*, *sūnaus-p(i)* etc.

Asyntactic vocatives

- The deviant properties of vocatives are sometimes restricted to morphology, but sometimes they extend to syntax. Take a vocative like Lith. *Adom*:

Ak, Adom, tu pirm-s žmog-us
Oh Adam.voc 2sg.nom first-nom.sg.m man-nom.sg
išdykusi-o sviet-o! (Donelaitis)
profligate-gen.sg.m world-gen.sg
'Oh Adam, you first man of this profligate world!'

- Vocatives like *Adom* are not amenable to modification:
 - *brangusis Adomai!*
 - **brangusis Adom!*
 - *brangusis berniuk!*

Asyntactic vocatives

- This is a curious fact, as the lack of an ending should not preclude the noun from being modified (cf. *brangusis berniuk*)
- This means that forms like *Adom* arise not in morphology, but in phonology, and the process of truncation affects isolated phonological words.
- Cf. the “new Russian vocative” (also truncated), which is not morphologised, shows deviation from phonotactic constraints and is not amenable to modification:

Jur! (from *Jura*, dim. of *Jurij*)

Serjož! [sʲiɟoʒ] (without word-final devoicing!)

**dorogoj Jur!*

Vocative agreement in Latvian

- Latvian vocatives (truncated or not) show a strange pattern of agreement. Grammars formulate the rules as follows: nouns may have a special form for the vocative (*brāli* vs. *brālis*) or they may use the nominative form instead of the vocative
 - *draugs* = nom and voc. ‘friend’
 - *draudziņ* voc. ‘friend’ (diminutive; nom. *draudziņš*)
- If a special vocative is used, the adjective may either be in the nominative-like form, or it may be in a special form identical with that of the accusative. If there is no special vocative for the noun, there is no special form for the adjective.

Vocative agreement in Latvian

mīļ-ais dēl-s ‘dear son’

mīļ-ais dēliņ ‘dear son (dim.)’

mīļ-o dēliņ ‘dear son (dim.)’

**mīļ-o dēl-s* ‘dear son’ (impossible)

- This rule is formulated in Mühlenbach and Endzelin’s 1907 grammar, is not repeated in Endzelin’s 1951 grammar (where actually the counterexample *mīļo kungs* ‘dear Sir’ is given), but is again repeated in the 1957 Academy Grammar.

The wrong type of rule

- This rule is strange in that it contradicts Zwicky's principle of "morphology-free" and "phonology-free" syntax.
- Normally only the morphosyntactic features of the noun should be visible to the adjective, not the combinations of phonemes realising them. A language with an agreement pattern like

boni viri

**bones milites*

**bonae agricolae*

where the endings would be determined not by declension class but by the phonological substance realising the morphosyntactic features of the noun, is impossible according to Zwicky's principle.

An apparent exception

- There are, however, apparent exceptions to Zwicky's principle. So-called 'radical alliterative agreement' is reported from several languages.
- Arapesh (Torricelli family, Papua New Guinea) shows so-called -s-agreement: *balus* 'airplane' is a loanword from Tok Pisin and lacks the gender feature any native word has in Arapesh; a phonological feature is exploited in order to establish agreement (Dobrin 1998):

nebebe-s-i *balus* *sa-naki* *Ukarumpa*

very-large-'s'-adj airplane 's'-came.from Ukarumpa

'A very large airplane arrived from Ukarumpa.'

(Corbett 2006, 88–90)

Was the rule made up?

- Arapesh alliterative agreement is, however, a last-resort strategy; we would not normally expect it to occur in natural languages.
- It does not seem likely, on the other hand, that Mühlenbach and Endzelin could have fabricated the rule: they are both noted for their philological accuracy. Their 1907 grammar was not descriptive, though it shows a bias in favour of the language of the folk songs, considered to represent genuine and unadulterated Latvian syntax.
- Even if the ‘rule’ is only a strong tendency, it is a problem.

Vocative agreement

- Daniel and Spencer (2007) express the view that vocative is not a likely agreement feature, though they cite Georgian as an example of a language that distributes the vocative feature within noun phrases through agreement.
- This evidently reflects their conviction that the vocative cannot be assigned syntactically. But surely this asyntactic character means just that the vocative feature cannot be assigned syntactically to noun phrases, not that it cannot be a feature of the noun phrase.

Vocative as m-and s-case

- Spencer (2006) distinguishes syntactic case (s-case, a feature assigned by syntactic mechanisms to a syntactic node) from morphological case (m-case, any form realising this syntactically assigned feature within the noun phrase).
- E. g., Estonian has no accusative case: the (wholly affected) direct object is expressed by the genitive (in the singular) or the nominative (in the plural):

mees tappis karu (GEN) 'the man killed the bear'

mehed tapsid karud (NOM) 'the men killed the bears'

Estonian could therefore be said to have a syntactic accusative morphologically realised by the genitive or nominative.

Vocative as m-and s-case

- Even if a noun phrase like *my good friend* (or the head noun) is not assigned syntactic case, and even if we are convinced that the vocative is not a case, this does not affect the structure of the noun phrase, and if the whole phrase functions as vocative, it will have some kind of s-vocative feature distributed in some (presumably syntactic) way within the noun phrase, for otherwise how can we account for m-vocative appearing in several places in the noun phrase (Latin *care amice*).
- There is therefore nothing unexpected in vocative agreement. A problem, in Latvian, is the claim that the m-case of the adjective is dependent on the m-case of the noun (rather than on its s-case).

A possible explanation: s-case is NOM

- An obvious explanation would be that when a nominative-like form is used, the s-case is really nominative, not vocative, so that **mīļo draugs* is impossible because *draugs* is NOM.
- It is a fact that many languages use nominatives even when vocatives are available, cf. in colloquial Polish a nominative like *Piotr* can replace the vocative *Piotrze*.
- However, vocative and nominative do not seem to be in free variation in Latvian: to the extent that a vocative is available, it seems to be obligatory:

?? *mans mīļais draudziņš* 'my dear little friend'

Is vocative special?

- The exceptional character of the vocative as a case might explain the exceptional behaviour of this category as an agreement feature.
- Usually vocative agreement obeys the general laws of agreement, cf. Latin:

<i>care amice</i>	VOC + VOC
<i>reverende magister</i>	VOC + NOM
<i>nobilis domine</i>	NOM + VOC
<i>benevolens lector</i>	NOM + NOM

The s-case is vocative everywhere, morphological case may be nominative or vocative.

Is vocative special?

- But vocatives show other types of deviant behaviour. Why can some Lithuanian vocatives be modified, others not? This is also an exception from the principle of morphology-free syntax, albeit a less striking one. Latvian vocative agreement is worse, because agreement normally presupposes a mediating syntax.
- But perhaps there is no syntactic mediation here (if there were, it would be blind to phonology)?
- Perhaps we could imagine Latvian vocative agreement as a process operating at phonological level, as a phonological feature spreading to the phonological words surrounding the vocative noun?

Vocative smear

- Let us call this putative phonological spread of the vocative feature *vocative smear* (cf. the notion of *feature smear* in prosodic phonology).
- If this spread of the vocative feature is not mediated by syntax it cannot consist in an abstract case feature but must have a certain phonological substance; the Latvian vocative feature, consisting in truncation, would meet this condition.
- The adjective should also be capable of assuming the vocative feature by itself, without its being mediated by syntax.

Vocative smear

- This seems to be the case with the vocative ending *-o*: it is used mainly as an agreement form but can also be used when no noun is present:

No tevis, man-u mīl-o, spiež man
from.you my-voc.sg dear-voc.sg force.prs.3 me.dat

šķirties, ko es pavisam ne-spēju
part.inf what.acc 1sg.nom at.all neg-imagine.prs.1sg
iedomāt.

imagine.inf

‘They force me to part from you, my dear, which I can’t even imagine.’ (Kaudzītis brothers, *Mērnīeku laiki*)

Why accusative?

- The grammars state that the adjectival form in *-o* is an accusative. It would be more accurate to say that this form coincides with that of the accusative.
- No motivation is apparent for the choice of the accusative except that it is a grammatical case that can also (alongside the nominative) be used instead of a special vocative (cf. Arabic)
- The main motive was, however, probably purely phonetic: the ending *-o* was selected for the masculine gender because it was sibilantless, unlike the nominative ending *-ais*; the ending *-o* being common to both genders, it was also extended to feminines.

Why no morphologisation?

- One would normally expect the new adjectival vocative to become morphologised; this would entail its becoming (morpho)syntactically invisible and spreading to any position meeting the specified feature value. This is achieved in the construction *mīļo kungs* cited by Endzelin.
- This morphologisation, however, has been slow in occurring, just as we have seen in the case of Lithuanian truncated vocative like *Adom*, which, attested in the 18th century, have retained to this day their asyntactic character.
- We are dealing here with a transitional stage that defies our understanding of how the levels of phonology, morphosyntax and syntax should be correlated.

Bibliography

Babby, Leonard. 1991. Noncanonical configurational case assignment strategies. *Cornell Working Papers in Linguistics* 9, 1–55.

Bergmane, Anna et al. 1957. *Mūsdienu latviešu literārās valodas gramatika 1. Fonētika un morfolóģija*. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijas izdevniecība.

Blake, Barry J. 2001. *Case*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: University Press.

Bresnan, Joan & Jane Grimshaw. 1978. The syntax of free relatives in English. *Linguistic Inquiry* 9, 331–391.

BW = *Latwju dainas*. Kr. Barona un H. Wissendorffa isdotas, I–VI. Reprinted: Rīga, Zinātne, 1989–1994.

Corbett, Greville G. 2006. *Agreement*. Cambridge: University Press.

Bibliography

Daniel', Michail A. 2008. Zvateľnost' kak diskursivnaja kategorija. Neskol'ko gipotez. In: Valentin Gusev, Vladimir Plungjan & Anna Urmančieva, eds., *Grammatičeskie kategorii v diskurse* (= Issledovanija po teorii grammatiki 4), Moskva: Gnozis, 439–466.

Daniel, Michael & Andrew Spencer. 2008. The vocative—an outlier case. In: Andrej Malchukov & Andrew Spencer, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. Oxford: University Press.

Dobrin, Lise. 1998. The morphosyntactic reality of phonological form. In: Geert Booij & Jaap van Marle, eds., *Yearbook of Morphology 1997*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 59–81.

Endzelīns, Jānis. 1922 [1979]. *Lettisches Lesebuch. Grammatische und metrische Vorbemerkungen, Texte und Glossar*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter. Cited from: Jānis Endzelīns, *Darbu izlase III.1*, Rīga: Zinātne, 176–348.

Bibliography

Endzelīns, Jānis. 1951. *Latviešu valodas gramatika*. Rīga: Latvijas valsts izdevniecība.

Endzelīns, Jānis. 1951 [1982]. *Baltu valodu skaņas un formas*. Rīga 1948. Cited from: Jānis Endzelīns, *Darbu izlase IV.2*, Rīga: Zinātne, 411–619.

Endzelīns, Jānis & Kārlis Mühlenbachs. 1907. *Latviešu gramatika*. Rīga: K. J. Zichmanis.

Kuryłowicz, Jerzy. 1949. Le problème du classement des cas. *Biuletyn Polskiego Towarzystwa Językoznawczego* 9, 1949, 20–43.

Larson, Richard. 1985. Bare NP adverbs. *Linguistic Inquiry* 16, 595–621.

McCawley, James. 1988. Adverbial NPs: bare or clad in see-through garb? *Language* 64, 583–590.

Bibliography

Spencer, Andrew & Ryo Otaguro. 2005. Limits to case—a critical survey of the notion. In: Mengistu Amberber & Helen de Hoop, eds., *Competition and Variation in Natural Languages. The Case for Case*. Oxford: Elsevier, 119–145.

Spencer, Andrew. 2006. Syntactic vs. morphological case: Implications for morphosyntax. In: Leonid Kulikov, Andrej Malchukov & Peter de Swart, eds., *Case, Valency and Transitivity* (= Studies in Language Companion Series, 77). Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 3–21.

Zwicky, Arnold M. 1996. Syntax and phonology. In: Keith Brown & Jim Miller, eds., *Concise Encyclopedia of Syntactic Theories*, Oxford: Elsevier Science, 300–305.