
Case government: a canonical typology

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1 Splits in case government

Splits in case government, as when a given adposition may govern accusative or dative, are pervasive. Our theory of such splits is patchy. I therefore propose a basic typology, to open the way for a fuller understanding of the phenomenon, from minor splits eventually to differential argument marking. As a manageable but illuminating pilot study, I focus on case as governed by adpositions. I set up the canonical situation as our baseline (§2), then analyse splits in government, first categorical (§3) then gradient (§4).

2 Canonical interaction of adposition and governee

A well-grounded analysis of case (Zaliznjak 1973, Goddard 1982, Corbett 2012: 200-222) “should” predict the appropriate case value in any circumstance. A reasonable expectation is that a single case value will be predicted. In adopting this starting point, I follow the basic scientific method of measuring from the simplest instances of each dimension of variation (Round & Corbett 2020). This simplest instance is that in which all adpositions behave alike as do all governees. This is the logical baseline to calibrate from. And we find, surprisingly, that simple canonical instances exist. For instance, in North Saami all adpositions take the genitive case for all governees (Grünthal 2019: 12, 16).

3 Categorical splits in the interaction of adposition and governee

Typically we need to calibrate beyond the canonical situation, to recognize splits in government. These may require us to **partition the adpositions** according to the case values they govern: see (1), where ‘A’ and ‘B’ are case values. Thus the Russian preposition *okolo* ‘near’ (ADP₁) takes the genitive of all governees (*okolo škol-y* ‘near (the) school-SG.GEN’). In

(1)	Split adpositions (Russian)	
	governee ₁	governee ₂
ADP ₁	A	A
ADP ₂	B	B

contrast, the preposition *za* ‘behind’ (ADP₂) takes the instrumental: *za škol-oy* ‘behind (the) school-SG.INS’. The governee plays no role, all depends on the particular preposition.

Conversely, in other systems, we need to **partition the governees**. We see this in Mari (2), where the government of postpositions is split according to the governee (Riese, Bradley & Yefremov 2022: 156). Personal pronouns (governee₁) stand in the genitive: *memnan ončâlnô* 1PL.GEN in.front.of ‘in front of us’. However, nouns (governee₂) usually stand in the nominative: *škol ončâlnô* school[SG.NOM] in.front.of, ‘in front of the school’.

(2)	Split governees (Mari)	
	governee ₁	governee ₂
ADP ₁	A	B
ADP ₂	A	B

Then we find examples where we need to **partition both adpositions and governees**, represented in (3). Thus some Russian prepositions (not all, see (1)) govern the locative, and within those, there are two (*v* ‘in’ and *na* ‘on’) which in locational use govern an additional case form, the ‘second locative’ (*na most-ú* on bridge-LOC2 ‘on the bridge’ vs *o most-e* about bridge-LOC ‘about the bridge’). However, only some nouns have a dedicated second locative;

(3)	Split adpositions and governees (Russian second locative)	
	governee ₁	governee ₂
ADP ₁	A	A
ADP ₂	A	B

other nouns use the normal locative irrespective of the preposition; for instance, *na / o žurnal-e* ‘on / about the magazine’. Thus we need to partition both the prepositions (according to the case they govern: *na* ‘on’, which takes the second locative vs *o* ‘about’ which does not) and the nouns (according to whether they have a

dedicated second locative form: *most* ‘bridge’ which has a second locative and *žurnal* ‘magazine’ which does not).

We progress by the common-sense route of using clear-cut examples of adpositions (Svenonius 2007: 67-77, Dryer 2013, Libert 2013 and Herce 2023) and case values (Zaliznjak 1973, Goddard 1982, Corbett 2012: 200-222). Some might object that the existence of indeterminate examples blocks our way. This is an instance of the “coast fallacy”: the coast exists as an indeterminate area, neither clearly land nor sea therefore, fallaciously, we cannot use the constructs ‘land’ or ‘sea’. Taking clear adpositions (= taking Berlin for ‘land’) and clear case values (= the middle of the Atlantic for ‘sea’) allows progress, avoiding this fallacy.

4 Gradient splits in the interaction of adposition and governee

Having established that adpositions and governees can be split, and that these splits can coincide, we find that our typology still falls short. We must address gradient splits (Corbett 2023: 113, 119-120). Thus in German, some prepositions govern the dative (like *mit* ‘with’),

(4)	Gradient split of adpositions (German)		
	governee ₁	governee ₂	governee ₃
adposition ₁	A	A	A
adposition ₂	A/B	A/B	A/B
adposition ₃	B	B	B

and there are others which govern the accusative (like *durch* ‘through’). Gradient splits are shown by those prepositions (adposition₂) which govern both dative and accusative; they include *auf* ‘on(to)’, *hinter* ‘behind’, *in* ‘in

(to)’ and *neben* ‘near’. As the glosses suggest, motion is involved in the distinction (though there are further conditions on the distribution).

Less familiarly, there are gradient splits induced by governees (5). Thus in Modern Eastern Armenian (Dum-Tragut 2009), pronouns governed by postpositions stand in genitive and dative, and the resulting case value depends in part on the particular person, namely:

3 (governee₁) vs 1&2 (governee₂). In written and standard Armenian we find *nra het* 3SG.GEN

(5)	Gradient split of governees (Modern Eastern Armenian)	
	governee ₁	governee ₂
adposition ₁	A	A/B
adposition ₂	A	A/B
adposition ₃	A	A/B

with ‘with him’ as opposed to *inj het* 1SG.DAT with ‘with me’. However, In colloquial Armenian, the genitive found with third person pronouns, and demonstratives, is generalized to the first and second persons (Dum-Tragut 2009: 300), hence we have a gradient split, determined by the governee.

Given this methodical groundwork, we can tackle gradient splits whose analysis requires us to appeal to both adposition and

governee. This might seem unlikely, but we have a carefully described instance of just this situation, namely Finnish, as analysed by Lestrade (2010). Finnish has some adpositions which govern the genitive (the more common situation) and some which govern the partitive (see Huumo 2024 for rich data). There are four adpositions which govern both genitive and partitive: *lähe* ‘near’, *keske* ‘in the middle’, *ympäri* ‘(a)round’, and *yli* ‘over’, as these examples show (Lestrade 2010: 604):

- (6) Juoks-i-mme **kaupungi-n** ympäri. (7) Juoks-i-mme ympäri **kaupunki-a**.
run-PST-1PL city-GEN around run-PST-1PL around city-PART
‘We ran around the city.’ ‘We were running around in the city.’

There are two general regularities: (i) these adpositions occur as both postpositions and prepositions; see Huumo (2013) for discussion. As postpositions they more often assign genitive case as in (6), while as prepositions they normally assign partitive case (7); however, this is only a tendency (Lestrade 2006: 27); (ii) we see a more literal meaning in (6) and a more abstract meaning in (7). The main point is that the adposition plays a key role in the split; only some adpositions induce the choice, and the position (preposition or postposition) also has an effect.

What then of the other dimension? Does the governee matter? It turns out that it does. Lestrade (2010) conducted a corpus investigation of five newspapers (around 27 million

(8)	Gradient split of adpositions and governees (Finnish)		
	governee ₁	governee ₂	governee ₃
adposition ₁	A	A	A
adposition ₂	A	A/B	B
adposition ₃	B	B	B

words) and checked the first three adpositions listed above. While these adpositions should in principle be able to assign either case value to many nouns, for any given noun they typically assign one case value. Just 25 nouns are found in both genitive and partitive with the same

adposition (Lestrade 2010: 623). Thus Finnish is a good exemplar of the apparently unlikely situation represented in (8).

5 Conclusions

Our typology covers case government, ranging from simple splits, such as Russian prepositions being partitioned according to the case value governed, right up to the complex Finnish situation, with its interesting set of conditioning factors. By highlighting basic methodology, we ensure that the distinctions between the types of split are securely grounded, and are therefore available for typological comparison. In all instances we need to be explicit about the conditions which influence the choice of case value. This opens the prospect of integrating analyses in the tradition of differential argument marking into a comprehensive account of case. The value of the canonical approach has been to differentiate the different logical types and to highlight the interest of the rarer systems, as in Mari, Armenian and Finnish

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