

AGAINST PURE UNINTERPRETABLE FEATURES

Unlike other formal features, Case is considered by many to be “the pure uninterpretable feature *par excellence*” (Chomsky 1995: 278-279), i.e., it is not considered to have an interpretable counterpart with which it is matched in some minimal domain. In my paper, I show that the different case marking possibilities on predicate adjectives in examples like (1) in Russian, however, constitute the uninterpretable counterpart of the interpretable tense and aspect features on the adjective: case agreement (i.e., when the adjective shows the same case marking as its noun phrase antecedent) is the uninterpretable counterpart of interpretable tense, while the instrumental case is the uninterpretable counterpart of interpretable aspect. Building on Richardson (2001), I show that the instrumental case entails an eventive interpretation of the adjective, while case agreement entails that the adjective is non-eventive. In Pustejovskian (1991) terms, a predicate adjective with instrumental case marking is a transition: it denotes that a change of state or transition occurred prior to or during the event time of the primary predicate. Example (1), with the instrumental case marked adjective *p'janoj* ‘drunk’, for instance, could be paraphrased along the lines of: ‘By the time Polina ate the last piece of apple, she had become drunk’. Case agreement, on the other hand, entails that the event time of the secondary predicate is identical to the event time of the primary predicate. Example (1) with *p'janaja* ‘drunk’ (nominative case agreement) could be paraphrased as: ‘Polina ate the last piece of apple and at the time she ate the last piece of apple, she was drunk’. Thus, the instrumental case versus case agreement dichotomy is intimately linked to the tense and aspect interpretation (i.e., features) of the adjective. I claim that case agreement on secondary predicates occurs in conjoined tense phrases in Russian, while the instrumental case occurs in adjoined aspectual phrases. I support this hypothesis with evidence from various movement, word order and semantic constraints on these constructions.

In my paper, I also show that non-eventive secondary predicates occur with non-eventive primary predicates, while eventive secondary predicates occur with eventive primary predicates. This finding explains why, in the absence of a highly defined context, case agreement on the secondary predicate is preferred with processes, as seen in example (2), while the instrumental case is preferred with transitions (example (3)). I suggest that the effect the primary predicate has on the case marking of the secondary predicate is due to the asymmetrical c-command relationship that exists between the two.

I also present a solution for why case agreement on the predicate adjective is obligatory when its noun phrase antecedent has so-called “quirky” case (i.e., genitive, dative or instrumental case versus accusative case on the direct internal argument), while both case agreement and instrumental case are possible with nominative and accusative antecedents (examples (4) and (5) versus (6) and (7)). I show that the event structure of the matrix predicate crucially influences both the case marking of internal direct objects in general and the case marking on predicate adjectives. I also show that the “quirky” versus “non-quirky” case marking of the noun phrase antecedent is irrelevant to the case marking on the predicate adjective. Verbs that take “quirky” case marked objects are *always* “pure” processes, and “pure” processes *always* take secondary predicates with case agreement. The case agreement versus instrumental case dichotomy is only possible on predicate adjectives with aspectually ambiguous verbs. If, for instance, we apply Dowty’s (1979) event structure test *in x time* (test for transitions; accomplishments in his terminology) versus *for x time* (test for processes; activities in his terminology) to the verbs ‘serve’ (takes a dative object), ‘push’ (takes an accusative object) and ‘dance’ (takes an accusative object), for example, we see that ‘serve’ and ‘push’ are always processes, regardless of whether their direct internal objects are present, while the event structure of ‘dance’—with its direct object present—is ambiguous between a process and a transition (examples (8)–(10)). As my analysis predicts, case agreement is obligatory on the predicate adjective with the “pure” processes ‘serve’ and ‘push’ in Russian (examples (11) and (12)), while both instrumental case and case agreement are possible with the aspectually ambiguous verb ‘dance’ (example (6)), depending on whether the context calls for an eventive or non-eventive interpretation of the adjective.

My paper provides a solution for some of the most puzzling case marking phenomena in Russian, while also bringing the checking of uninterpretable Case features into line with the checking of other uninterpretable features in syntax, a welcome outcome of any “minimalist” account of syntactic phenomena.

- (1) Polina_i s'ʒjela poslednij kusoček jabloka p'janaja_i/ p'janoj_i.
 Polina-NOM ate last piece apple drunk-NOM/ drunk-INSTR
 'Polina ate the last piece of apple drunk'.
 (Example taken from Richardson 2001)
- (2) Polina_i poet p'janaja_i/ ?p'janoj_i.
 Polina-NOM sings drunk-NOM/ ?drunk-INSTR
 'Polina is singing drunk'.
 (Note: instrumental case possible when context provides for the eventive interpretation: 'Polina sings whenever she gets drunk')
- (3) Polina našla Vadima_i golym_i / ?gologo_i.
 Polina found Vadim-ACC naked-INSTR /?naked-ACC
 (Note: case agreement possible when context provides for the non-eventive interpretation)
- (4) Ona pozvonila emu_i p'janomu_i/ *p'janym_i.
 She phoned him-DAT drunk-DAT/ *drunk-INSTR
 (Example based on Bailyn and Rubin 1991)
- (5) Ona boitsja ego_i p'janogo_i/ *p'janym_i.
 She fears him-GEN drunk-GEN/ *drunk-INSTR
 (Example based on Bailyn and Rubin 1991. Note those speakers for whom the direct internal argument of *boitsja* 'to fear' has accusative case marking rather than genitive, accept case agreement on the predicate adjective.)
- (6) My_i tancevali p'janye_i/ p'janym_i.
 We-NOM danced drunk-NOM/ drunk-INSTR
- (7) Ja voz'mu ego_i živogo_i/ živym_i.
 I take him-ACC alive-ACC/alive-INSTR
 'I will take him alive'.
 (Example from Richardson 2000, 2001)
- (8) They served (him) in the army for five years/*in five years (process/*transition).
 (9) They pushed (him) for two hours/*in two hours (process/*transition).
 (10) She danced the jig for five minutes/in five minutes (process/transition).
- (11) Oni služili emu_i p'janomu_i/ *p'janym_i.
 They served him-DAT drunk-DAT/ *drunk-INSTR
- (12) Ona tolknula ego_i p'janogo_i/ *p'janym_i.
 She pushed him-ACC drunk-ACC/ *drunk-INSTR