

Case-marking in Semitic in the light of the evidence in the Ethiopian language area

Linguistic convergence and divergence

Lutz Edzard | University of Erlangen-Nürnberg

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.48.1oedz>

 Available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Pages 229–244 of

Grammatical and Sociolinguistic Aspects of Ethiopian Languages

Edited by Derib Ado, Almaz Wasse Gelagay and Janne Bondi Johannessen †

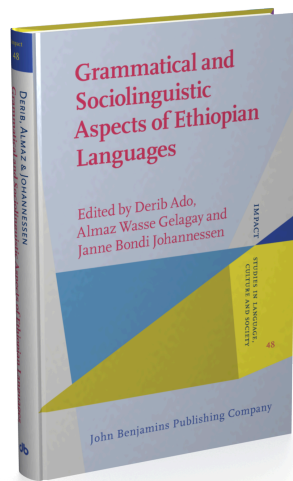
[IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society, 48]

2021. viii, 415 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material, beyond the permissions granted by the Open Access license, written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights



Case-marking in Semitic in the light of the evidence in the Ethiopian language area

Linguistic convergence and divergence

Lutz Edzard

University of Erlangen-Nürnberg

Languages in the Ethiopian language area typically exhibit a two-case system from a morphological point of view. This paper discusses the question as to how this observation can be aligned with the circumstance that, for Semitic in general, a three-case system is usually reconstructed. It will be argued that case endings can also emerge in a secondary process, as is widely recognised in typological linguistics, and that the cyclicity observed in this context can well be framed in terms of processes of linguistic convergence and divergence. Thereby, both the morphological aspects of case as well as the thematic roles of case will be discussed.

Keywords: Amharic, Afroasiatic, Arabic, Berber, case, convergence, Cushitic, Gə'əz, Hebrew, Omotic, re-analysis, thematic roles

1. Introduction

As Tosco (1994) has shown, a two-case system is statistically prevalent in the Ethiopian language area. Given the genetic and linguistic complexity of the Ethiopian area, it is with good reason assumed to be the geographical origin of Afroasiatic, and it is reasonable to explore the likelihood of an early two-case system in the case of Semitic, as well.

There are at least three different concepts of linguistic evolution, which may partially overlap. One model assumes a unidirectional development from one more or less contiguous temporal and geographical origin or state, explaining a situation deriving from the underlying data of that origin and giving an essentially monogenetic picture. A second model allows for parallel developments, referring to one or more scenarios that do not necessarily have to be projected back to a uniform origin or state, amounting to a polygenetic scenario. A third model gives room to

cyclic processes in linguistic evolution. Jespersen's cycle describing the syntactic and semantic shifts in expressing negation is a well-known case in point (cf., e.g. Lucas 2007). The river-delta model developed by Pisani (1952) formally captures such cyclic processes. In the context of this paper, the concept of cyclicity is important insofar as case (i.e., a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads) can emerge secondarily, and does not have to constitute the original state of affairs in a language family. What is more, processes of convergence and divergence have been recognised as playing an important role in language development (cf., Diem 1978; Diem 1981; Edzard 1998). To put it simply, case is a phenomenon that can come and go. In the following, I will discuss this issue with a focus on the Ethiopian language area.

This chapter, which aims at arguing for the precedence of a two-case system, is organised as follows: after an examination of the morphological side of the question of case in Section 2, with data from Semitic, Berber, Cushitic and Omotic, the syntactic-functional side of the question is explored in Section 3 in a comprehensive Afroasiatic framework. Section 4 concludes this chapter.

2. The morphological side of the question

When the morphology and grammatical roles of case are compared within Semitic on the one hand, and Afroasiatic on the other, it is remarkable that one traditionally reconstructs a three-case system (*-u*, *-i*, *-a*) for Semitic (this is the mainstream position, at least), while for Afroasiatic at large (excluding Egyptian and Chadic – without overt marking of case, as far as we know) a two-case model is preferred. Incidentally, the latter model also corresponds better with the situation in the sound plural in Arabic (nominative *-ūna* vs. genitive/accusative *-īna* in the masculine, and nominative *-ātun* vs. genitive/accusative *-ātin* in the feminine) as well as with indefinite Arabic diptotes (nominative *-u* vs. genitive/accusative *-a*). Appleyard (2011: 48; 2012: 205f.) reconstructs a common Cushitic system with nominative **-i*, absolutive **-a*, genitive **-i* in the masculine short vowel conjugation (in the feminine **-a*, **-a* and **(a)ti* respectively). An anonymous reviewer thinks that the feminine data here, in conjunction with the masculine, make an original three-case system more likely, a point with which I disagree. Tosco (1994) considers the nominative marker in Cushitic as going back to an original focus morpheme, a phenomenon typical of Cushitic (cf., Owens 2018: 144). This requires us to be careful with the terminology. In many cases, the term subject case may be more appropriate than the term nominative. In Berber, one finds the following situation, taking Tashlhiyt as an example (cf., Elmedlaoui 2012: 161f.; cf. also Chaker 2018: 166). A free state (independent, marked by an *a*-prefix) is opposed by a construct state (dependent,

marked by a *u*-prefix). The construct case, not to be confounded with the construct state in Semitic, is assigned to the noun in the following syntactic contexts:

- when the noun is the argument of a preposition (other than *ar* ‘until’);
- when the noun constitutes an adnominal genitive (this does not hold for all varieties of Berber);
- when the noun is the first argument (non-focalised subject) in a VSO sentence construction;
- when the noun is determined by a cardinal number from one to ten, or by a [\pm Question] adverb, like *mnnaw* ‘(how) many (?)’

Adding an example of the adnominal genitive to Elmedlaoui’s examples (again: this is not to say that the Berber genitive construction can be equated with the Semitic construct annexation), one arrives at a group of examples as follows (1):

(1) State/case in Tashlhiyt Berber

i-ssuda₁ u-rgaz₂ (CS) *f=₃w-ag^wmar₄* (CS) ‘the man₂ rode₁ on₃ the horse₄’
a-xam₁ u-rgaz₂ ‘the tent₁ of the man₂’
uššan-n ‘jackals’ (FS) vs. *sin₁ w-uššan-n₂* (CS) ‘two₁ jackals₂’
mnnaw₁ w-ag^wmar-n₂ (CS) ‘(how) many₁ horses₂ (!/?)’

Within Semitic linguistics, one finds positions that reconstruct a three-case system (*-u*, *-i*, *-a* in the singular; *-ū*, *-ī* in the plural) to Common Semitic (Proto-Semitic) on the one hand, and positions that reconstruct a system in which an absolute case (ending in *-a*) stands in contrast with a nominative case (ending in *-u*). The former position (e.g., Hasselbach 2013; Weninger 2011; Al-Jallad & van Putten 2017; Huehnergard 2019) can be associated with reconstructing methodologically according to what Robert Hetzron has called the ‘principle of archaic heterogeneity’, i.e., orienting oneself at the historically most complex morphological situation, as being found mainly in Old Babylonian Akkadian and Classical Arabic. Huehnergard (2019: 61) also reconstructs a locative *-u(m)* and a directional *-isa* (> **-ah(a)* in West Semitic), with the caveat that the latter two could also be considered adverbial endings (in themselves, of course, good candidates for the origin of case endings). What is more, Hasselbach (2013: 69f.) argues that the commonalities in the case system of East Semitic Old Babylonian and West Semitic Classical Arabic are too clear to be merely coincidental. In support of this position, one can also adduce evidence of residual case marking in languages that are only (or mostly) attested in consonantal script, notably Ugaritic (cf., Al-Jallad and van Putten 2017: 95f.), marginally also Epigraphic South Arabian, or in languages that have lost case marking (also from the perspective of the evidence of extant vowel markers), notably Biblical Hebrew (for a summary presentation of possible examples, cf., e.g., Cassuto 2018).

The latter position (e.g., Rabin 1969; Retsö 1997, 2006; Owens 1998, 2018), which takes a reductionist approach, allows for the secondary emergence of case (or at least parts of the case system) and is in better congruence with the situation found in parts of other branches of Afroasiatic, notably Berber, Cushitic and Omotic, in which a morphological three-case system is untypical (see above). Assyriologists from Gelb (1965) to Streck (2000) have also expressed sympathy for this view, pointing to the irregular distribution of case endings (especially as regards names) in Old Akkadian and Amurrite, respectively.

Or, as Rabin (1969) argued, case represents a later development of what originally was termed state (as still holds for Berberology), according to the following model (apud Hasselbach 2013: 16):

- (2) State in Semitic and Afroasiatic
 - a absolute state (unmarked)
 - u emphatic state
 - Ø predicative state
 - i governed state

Case, if attested at all, may also be quite randomly distributed, e.g., in later stages of Akkadian (cf., Idasiak 2018). Owens (2018, following Versteegh 1981) makes much of the (also attested) circumstance that final vowels on nouns, even if existent, may be either randomly distributed or the result of vowel harmony. The first observation is supported by vowel distribution in Amorite (cf., Waltisberg 2011: 29, apud Owens 2018: 108; cf. also Streck 2011) (3):

- (3) Distribution of final vowels in Amorite
 - Ø: agent of transitive verb; subject of intransitive verb; PRED; VOC; GEN
 - a: agent of transitive verb; subject of intransitive verb; PRED; VOC; GEN
 - u: agent of transitive verb; subject of intransitive verb; PRED; VOC
 - i: GEN

The second observation pertaining to vowel harmony is supported by an example provided by the grammarian al-Farrā', who juxtaposes the apparent alternatives *al-ḥamd-u lu-llāhi* vs. *al-ḥamd-i li-llāhi* (*Ma'āni* I: 4). Similar phenomena can be observed in verbs, e.g., Cairene *zurt-a-ha* 'I/you visited her' vs. *zurt-u-hum* 'I/you visited them' (cf. Owens 2018: 105).

While some Semitic languages such as Old Babylonian Akkadian and Classical Arabic indeed exhibit a (morphologically marked) three-case system, the Ethio-Semitic scenario is typologically closer to the Afroasiatic two-case systems. In this context, one must also note the co-existence of diptosis (-u, -a) and triptosis (-u, -i, -a) in Classical Arabic. Gə'əz also exhibits a contrast between an accusative marked by -a (-ä in modern transcription, and phonologically motivated allophones) and a plain non-accusative -Ø (covering nominative, except for numerals,

in which a *u*-ending is found, and genitive). According to Weninger (2011: 1132) ‘NOM and GEN merged due to the phonological merger of **u* and **i* to an ending *-ə that was certainly still present when the written norms of Gəʿəz were established during Aksumite times’. (Interestingly, the form ‘*abu*’ ‘father’, as a representative of Gəʿəz nouns *tertiaef infirmas*, in the construct state represents both nominative and genitive.) Here is the paradigm (cf., Butts 2019: 129) (4):

(4) NON-ACC VS. ACC in Gəʿəz

	NON-ACC	ACC
ending in consonant	<i>nəguś</i>	<i>nəguśä</i>
ending in -i	<i>ṣäḥafi</i>	<i>ṣäḥafe</i>
ending in -e-, -a, -o	<i>ʾarwe</i>	<i>ʾarwe</i>

Morphologically, the *-a* of the accusative overlaps with the *-a*-ending of construct nouns, but the latter probably has to be explained as a relic of an original element *-ya* (cf., Hasselbach 2013: 53f.). Alternatively, Tropper (2000) suggests associating the *-a*-ending of construct nouns with the absolutive case found elsewhere in Afroasiatic. *A priori*, the possibility of a mere epenthetic vowel cannot be dismissed, either. Owens (2018) – unconvincingly, in my view – also glosses the *-a*-ending of construct nouns as ACC. Nöldeke (1862: 758f., apud Hasselbach 2013: 53) argued that the allomorph *-ha* of the accusative in personal names reflected an original (suffixed) word underlying the accusative marker.

Of special interest is the *-u/-a* contrast in numerals (e.g., *xamsät-u* vs. *xamsät-a* ‘five’), in which three perspectives can be found in the literature (cf., Owens 2018: 154ff.). Weninger argues (2011: 1133) that the *-u* is originally a proleptic 3M.SG pronoun. A second perspective (personally transmitted by Jan Retsö) views the *-u* as an *emergent* (as opposed to a relic of a) non-accusative construct marker. In a third (most traditional) perspective, the *-u* is seen as a nominative case relic (Tropper 2002: 80).

The important observation here is that case markers can emerge secondarily, as opposed to being relics of an alleged common (proto) system. Suffixed (and/or grammaticalised) adpositions are – typologically speaking – not unusual sources of case endings. The following model (adapted from Lehmann 1985) illustrates this point (5):

(5) A model of the emerging of case endings

- stage 1: relational noun + adposition or case affix →
- stage 2: secondary adposition →
- stage 3: primary adposition →
- stage 4: agglutinative case affix →
- stage 5: fusional case affix

The examples provided by Kahr (1976) and Lehmann (1985) mostly revolve around location and direction, and do not directly pertain to the elementary cases (see below).

This is, of course, not to deny that case endings can indeed be reduced or vanish. Later stages of Akkadian clearly show a convergence of cases (for a cogent overview, cf., Idasiak 2018). As is well known, in context with the emergence of Arabic diglossia (or polyglossia), scholars have pointed to the loss of both morphological case and case functionality. Important contributions to this topic include papers and monographs by Ferguson (1960) and Fück (1950) (contact with non-Arabic speakers in the aftermath of the Arabic-Islamic expansion), Corriente (1971) and Diem (1991) (loss of case and loss of case functionality), and Blau (1969) (shift from synthetic (Old, including case) to analytic (Neo, including caseless) structures). A sort of push-chain mechanism then accounts for the emergence of analytic case markers for highlighting the genitive (genitive exponents, e.g., Hebrew *šel* and dialectal Arabic *māl*) and the accusative (*notae accusativi*, e.g., Hebrew *’et* and Judeo-Arabic *’ilā*).

Owens (2018), in a response to a paper by Ahmad Al-Jallad and Marijn van Putten (2017), puts forth interesting arguments in favor of an old case-less variety of Arabic that even predates the classical (-*u*, -*i*, -*a*) system. However, he does not provide any explanation for the emergence of the systems in Old Babylonian Akkadian and Classical Arabic.

Ideas that could be advanced in support of the secondary emergence of the elementary cases (as opposed to an original state) are the following. Accusative endings typologically often result from the grammaticalisation of directional postpositions (cf., notably Kulikov 2009; thanks also to Stefan Schaffner, personal communication). The Akkadian ventive suffix on verbs is a clear case in point, even though the Assyriological literature does not discuss this suffix in explicit connection with case (despite its adverbial character, reminiscent of the adverbial functions of the dependent case/accusative in Semitic). The same holds for the so-called *he locale* in Hebrew, a directional *ā*-suffix, which has been associated with the adverbial function of the accusative (or absolutive) (6):

- (6) The ventive and the accusative in Akkadian and Hebrew
illik 'he went' (go.PRET.3SM) → *illik-am* (go.PRET.3SM-VENT) 'he came'
 ('he went hither')
šarr-um 'king' (NOM) → *šarr-am* 'king' (ACC)
'āreš 'earth' → *'āreš-ā(h)* 'to the earth'

As far as the genitive is concerned, it is not unusual that relational adjectives are grammaticalised to *-i*-endings marking this case (Stefan Schaffner, personal communication). Here, the Semitic *nisba*, the *-ī*-suffix of relational nouns and adjectives

across Semitic (and derivational expansions thereof, such as *-awi* in Amharic or *-a'i* in Modern Hebrew), is a perfect case in point (7):

(7) The *nisba* in Semitic

<i>miṣr</i> 'Egypt'	→ <i>miṣrī</i> 'Egyptian' (person or adjective)' (Arabic)
<i>šēm</i> 'Sem'	→ <i>šēmī</i> 'Semitic' (Hebrew)
<i>hajmanot</i> 'belief'	→ <i>hajmanotawi</i> 'religious' (Amharic)
<i>iton</i> 'newspaper'	→ <i>itona'i</i> 'journalist' (Hebrew)

Tosco (1994: 226ff.) shows that four logical combinatoric possibilities of case-marking are attested in the Ethiopian area (8):

(8) Logical possibilities of case-marking in the Ethiopian area

- A: morphological marking of the object only
- B: morphological marking of the subject only
- C: morphological marking of both object and subject
- D: languages with neither object nor subject marking

Possibilities A and B are statistically most relevant in this context: while C plays a role as well, D occurs rarely. A basically reflects the situation in Ethio-Semitic, with object-marking as follows (cf., Tosco 1994: 226) (9):

(9) Object markers in Ethio-Semitic

Gə'əz:	<i>-a ~ -ha; la-</i>
Tigre:	<i>'əgel- 'əl-</i>
Tigrinya:	<i>nə-</i>
Amharic, Argobba, Gafat:	<i>-n</i>
Harari:	<i>-u/-w</i> (after vowel)
Gurage:	<i>ä-, yä-, lä-, nā</i>

As regards Cushitic, object markers (in the absence of subject markers) are found in Central Cushitic (Bilin, Awngi, and Xamtanga) as well as in Eastern Cushitic (Dullay). Omotic languages in this context include Kefa, Basket, Aari, Dime, and Hamar.

The opposite scenario B (cf., Tosco 1994: 226f.) is found in Eastern Cushitic languages, such as Somali, Rendille, Bayso, Dasenech, Arbore, 'Afar, Saho, Oromo, and Dirayta, as well as in Highland East Cushitic, such as Sidama, Burji, Hadiya, Kambata, and Gedeo (cf., also Mous 2012: 369–376). Relevant Omotic languages include Gamo, Wolaytta, Zayse, and Koyra. In addition to vowel affixes, tonal and stress patterns are instrumental in this context. It appears that tonal marking here constitutes an areal feature transcending Afroasiatic. The following is an example taken from Harar Oromo (cf., Owens 1985: 101, 251) (10):

- (10) Nominative vs. accusative in Harar Oromo
- a. *sáree-n adii-n ni iyyi-t-i*
 dog-NOM white-NOM FOC bark-F-IPF
 ‘The white dog is barking’.
 - b. *haat-tii okkóttée goot-t-i*
 mother-NOM pot make-F-IPF
 ‘Mother is cooking (lit. making the pot)’.

Nilo-Saharan languages (which are not Afroasiatic) exhibit clear minimal pairs (cf., Dimmendaal 2014: 1). Again, it is the nominative that is marked by a different tonal pattern (here: an additional high tone on the direct object) (11):

- (11) Nominative vs. accusative in Maasai (Eastern Sudanic)
- a. *é-dól émbártá*
 3SG-see horse.ACC
 ‘He sees the horse’.
 - b. *é-dól émbartá*
 3SG-see horse.NOM
 ‘The horse sees him’.

As regards scenario C, the East Cushitic language Boraana is a case in point. Here, one finds an opposition between a subject case terminating in *-í*, vs. an absolute case terminating in *-a* (which also functions as citation case), e.g., *nam-í* ‘(a) man’ (subject) vs. *nam-a* ‘(a) man’ (predicate) (cf., Sasse 1984: 112) (12):

- (12) Subject vs. predicate case in Boraana (East-Cushitic)
- nam-í* ‘(a) man’ (subject)
 vs.
nam-a ‘(a) man’ (predicate)

Afar displays a similar scenario, with an *i*-ending for the nominative and genitive and an *a*-ending for the absolutive (cf., Appleyard 2011: 48) (13):

- (13) Nominative and genitive vs. absolutive case in Afar
- awk-í* ‘(a) boy’ (NOM, GEN)
awk-á ‘(a) boy’ (ABS)

Omoti languages typically also follow scenario C (cf., Zaborski 1990; Azeb 2012: 450–453).

Again, one must keep in mind that one or two of the three vowels (*-u*, *-i*, *-a*) regularly occur somewhere in a comparative Afroasiatic perspective, but never all three in conjunction (outside Semitic). While the *a*-ending is relatively stable, the *i*- and *u*-endings usually converge to one of the two vowels, e.g., to *-u* and Gə‘əz and, widely, to *-i* in Cushitic.

3. The syntactic-functional side of the question

So far, we have concentrated on the morphological side of the question of case. *A priori*, at least within Semitic, both a two-case and a three-case scenario are conceivable as underlying the actual surface scenarios in individual languages in a generativist derivational sense for a theoretical overview, cf. Haspelmath 2009.

Going a step further, a survey of the functional range of the dependent case (accusative) in Semitic and Afroasiatic (mainly Cushitic) is instructive. Next to the elementary function of marking the direct object the dependent (or oblique) case in Semitic (mainly Akkadian, Classical Arabic, Ethio-Semitic: here Gəʿəz and Amharic) has many functions that are reminiscent of the situation in marked-nominative languages, i.e., languages that oppose a nominative and an absolutive case (cf., König 2009; Handschuh 2014; Edzard 2018a/b). Beyond the elementary function of marking the direct object, the following functions of the accusative (dependent, oblique) case can be observed across the Ethiopian language area.

One typical function of the accusative case is the marking of the predicate. Here are examples from Cushitic, Omotic, and Semitic (cf., Edzard 2018a: 187 and 190f.; Edzard 2019: 210) (14):

- (14) Accusative case-marking on the nominal predicate in Cushitic, Omotic, and Semitic
- a. K'abeena (Eastern Cushitic; Crass 2005: 264)
ku manc^u moggaancoh^a
 DIST.M man.NOM thief.ACC.COP.M
 'That man is a thief'.
 - b. Wolaytta (Omotic; Lamberti and Sottile 1997: 225)
he bitann-ey laagge
 that man-NOM friend.ACC
 'That man is a friend'.
 - c. Classical Arabic
kāna Zayd-un qā'im-an
 be.3M.SG.PF Zayd-NOM stand.PTC-ACC
 'Zayd was standing'.
 - d. Gəʿəz
konä nəgus-ä
 be.3M.SG.PF king-ACC
 'He became king'.
rəgəmt-ä təkun mədr
 cursed.F.ACC be.3F.SG.JUSS earth
 'The earth shall be cursed'.

- e. Amharic
əssu-n b-əhon al-adärg-äw näbbär
 he-ACC in-be.1SG.IPFV NEG-1SG.IPFV-it.DEP be.3M.SG.PF
 ‘If I were him, I wouldn’t have done it’.

In (14c–e), the accusative depends on the verb ‘to be’.

Expressing adverbials is another important function of the dependent case. Here are relevant examples from Akkadian, Arabic, and Amharic (15):

- (15) Accusative marking on adverbials in Semitic
- a. Akkadian
šarrāq-am abull-am iṣbatū
 thief-ACC city_gate-ACC seize.3.PL.PRET
 ‘They seized the thief at the city gate’.
- b. Arabic
qāma Zayd-un iğlāl-an li-Bakr-in
 get_up.3M.SG.PF Zayd-NOM honor.MAṢḌAR-ACC for-Bakr-GEN
 ‘Zayd stood in honor of Bakr’.
- c. Amharic (Leslau 1995: 892ff.)
ləḡ-u əḡḡ-e-n yazä-ññ
 child-DEF hand-my-ACC take.3M.SG.PF-me.DEP
 ‘The child took me by the hand (handwise)’.

The marking of the focus by the dependent case is a further case in point. First, here is an example from Eastern Cushitic (Arbore) that illustrates the use of an unmarked nominative vs. a marked nominative in focus (16):

- (16) Focus marking on subjects in Arbore (Eastern Cushitic)
- a. Arbore (Eastern Cushitic; Hayward 1984: 113f.)
faraway zéhe
 horse.PRED/FOC died
 ‘A horse died’. (answer to the question: what died?)
- b. *farawé ?i-y zahate*
 horse.NOM PVS-3SG die.3SG.F
 ‘A horse died’. (unsolicited statement)

In Arabic and Amharic, one finds examples such as the following, with the focused noun in the accusative/absolute (17):

- (17) Focus marking on subjects in Arabic and Amharic
- a. Arabic
inna Zayd-an qā'im-un
 FOC Zayd-ACC stand.PTC-NOM
 ‘(Indeed,) Zayd is standing’.

- b. Amharic
əwnāt-wa-n nāw
 truth-her.DEF-ACC be.3M.SG.IPF (COP)
 ‘She is right’.

In (17a) the accusative depends on the focus marker *inna*.

A focus-marking function is also obvious in the following case taken Gəʿəz, supposed that *fäqäd-ä-kä* ‘your will’ constitutes the subject (cf., Waltisberg 2002: 50) (18):

- (18) Focus marking on subjects in Gəʿəz
yəkun fäqäd-ä-kä bākämä bä-sämay wä-bä-mədr-ni
 be.3M.SG.IPF will-ACC-you.2.M.SG.DEF like in-heaven CONJ-in-earth-too
 ‘Your will be done on earth as in heaven’. (Mt. 6:10)

Thematic roles, as reflected by case, are by no means static. In certain cases, one can observe the syntactic re-analysis of grammatical subjects as objects. This happens, e.g., in the expression of possession in Arabic dialects (19):

- (19) Syntactic re-analysis in Arabic dialects
ʾind-ī hiya > ʾand-i yyā-ha ‘I have her/it (fem.)’.
 at-I.DEF she.INDEP at-I.DEF ACC.she.DEF

Modern Hebrew, mainly in its colloquial registers, features comparable cases, in which the accusative marker *ʾet* precedes the grammatical subject. There are already traces of this phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew, in which *ʾet* precedes the subject in passive clauses and existential sentences (cf., e.g., Edzard 2018a: 196f.) (20):

- (20) Syntactic re-analysis in Modern Hebrew
gam kan yeš ʾet ha-beʾayot ha-ʾele
 also here EXIST ACCDEF-problem.PL DEF-DEM.PL
 ‘Here too there are these problems’.

In Ethio-Semitic verboids, possession is expressed by either a preposition plus dependent pronoun (so in Gəʿəz) or by an existential verb plus dependent pronoun (so in modern Amharic) (21):

- (21) Verboids in Gəʿəz and modern Amharic
 a. *b-o / b-ottu*
 in-3SM.ACC
 ‘he has (lit. in him [is])’
 b. *allä-w*
 exist\3SM.PFV-3SM.ACC
 ‘he has (lit. there is for him)’

Syntactic re-analysis is especially evident in the following example. While (a) represents the expected Amharic version of ‘he is hungry’, with ‘he’ in topicalised position, (b) reflects the re-analysis of the subject as an object (22):

(22) Syntactic re-analysis in Amharic verboids

a. *əssu rabä-w*

3SM be_hungry\PFV.3SM.-3SM.ACC

‘he is hungry (lit. he it hungers him)’.

b. *əssu-n rabä-w*

3SM-ACC be_hungry\PFV.3SM-3SM.ACC

‘he is hungry (lit. him it hungers him)’.

Alternatively, the later example could also be analysed in terms of focus marking (‘as regards him’; cf. Edzard 2016: 153).

Without downplaying the circumstance that the genitive in many Semitic languages is either marked by a final vowel (typically *-i*) or a genitive exponent, it is nevertheless remarkable that native Arab(ic) grammatical theory uses a basic dichotomy with common terminology that applies to both case and mood. While the term *raf* ‘independent case/mood’ refers to both the nominative and the indicative, the term *našb* ‘dependent case/mood’ refers to both the accusative (in its variety of functions) and the subjunctive, the commonality being that both the independent nominative and indicative (in Classical Arabic) are marked by a *u*-ending, and both the dependent accusative and subjunctive by an *a*-ending (23):

(23) Case and mood endings in Classical Arabic

on noun

on verb

raf *al-kitāb-u* ‘the book’ (NOM) *taktub-u* ‘you (MS) write’ (IND)

našb *al-kitāb-a* ‘the book’ (ACC) *‘an taktub-a* ‘that you (MS) write’ (SUB)

While there also exist two terms for the genitive (*ğarr* and *ħafḍ*), the latter case is not part of this classical Arabic relational system, which also refers to mood.

4. Conclusion

When one considers an assumed common or (Proto)Semitic as a direct offshoot of Afroasiatic, it is hard to see how a three-case system (*-u*, *-i*, *-a*) can descend directly from Afroasiatic, unless, of course, one uses the term common or (Proto)Semitic in the sense of prototypical Semitic, with the claim that Old Babylonian Akkadian and Classical Arabic (and vestiges of case in Ugaritic) in its morphological regularity represent the typical Semitic scenario. I would suggest not excluding the possibility that an overt three-case system (represented by *-u*, *-i*, *-a*) may emerge

independently, given that overt two-case systems always feature *-u* or *-i* for nominative and genitive, and *-a* for accusative/absolutive. What is more, statistically, there is a good chance in languages such as Akkadian and Classical Arabic that underlyingly only exhibit the three vowels *a*, *i*, and *u* that the three cases may be represented by precisely these three vowels, and that morphological regularity is the result of processes of analogy and convergence. After all, unless one pursues a Nostratic model, one would not claim a common origin for case endings in the nominal paradigms *šarr-u-m*, *šarr-i-m*, *šarr-a-m* ('king', NOM/GEN/ACC) in Akkadian and *amic-us*, *amic-i*, *amic-um* 'friend' (NOM/GEN/ACC) in Latin.

Taking into consideration that the accusative is as frequent as it is multifunctional, it makes sense to consider the nominative as marked, even in cases in which this does not hold from a morphological point of view. As marked nominative languages can be characterised as 'a mixture of ergative/absolutive and nominative/accusative systems' (cf., König 2009: 535) it is reasonable to argue that case systems in Afroasiatic can diverge from such a system, and then reconverge to such a system again, hence the title of this paper. Convergence is an expected process in a linguistic contact area (Sprachbund) (cf., e.g., Appleyard 2011 for Semitic-Cushitic/Omotc relations), as is evident in the evolution of case-marking in marked-nominative languages in Nilo-Saharan, Cushitic, and Omotic.

Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	JUSS	jussive
CONJ	conjunction	M	masculine
COP	copula	MAŠDAR	verbal noun (Arabic)
DEF	definite	NEG	negation
DEM	demonstrative	NOM	nominative
DEP	dependent (case)	PRET	preterite
DIST	distal	PF	perfect
EXIST	existence	P(L)	plural
F	feminine	PRED	predicate
FS	free state	PVS	preverbal selector (Arbore)
FOC	focus	PST	past
GEN	genitive	PTC	participle
IND	indicative	S(G)	singular
INDEP	independent (case)	SUB	subjunctive
IPF	imperfect	VENT	ventive
IPFV	imperfective	VOC	vocative

References

- Al-Jallad, Ahmad & van Putten, Marijn. 2017. The case for Proto-Semitic and Proto-Arabic case: A reply to Jonathan Owens. *Romano-Arabica* 17: 87–117.
- Appleyard, David. 2011. Semitic-Cushitic/Omotic relations. In Weninger et al. (eds), 38–53.
- Appleyard, David. 2012. Cushitic. In *Semitic and Afroasiatic: Challenges and Opportunities*, Lutz Edzard (ed.), 199–206. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Azeb Amha. 2012. Omotic. In *The Afroasiatic Languages*, Zygmunt Frajzyngier & Erin Shay (eds), 423–504. Cambridge: CUP.
- Blau, Joshua. 1969. Some problems of the formation of the Old Semitic languages in the light of Arabic dialects. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Semitic Studies*, 38–44. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.
- Butts, Aaron Michael. 2019. Gəʿəz (Classical Ethiopic). In *The Semitic Languages*, John Huehnergard & Naʿama Pat-El (eds), 117–144. London: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429025563-6>
- Cassuto, Philippe. 2018. De quelques traces de désinences casuelles et modales en hébreu biblique. In *Case and Mood Endings in Semitic Languages – Myth or Reality*, Lutz Edzard, Manuel Sartori & Philippe Cassuto (eds), 24–44. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Chaker, Salem. 2018. Les marques obligatoire du nom et l'état d'annexion en berbère: Diachronie et reconstruction en contexte de langue de tradition orale. In *Case and Mood Endings in Semitic Languages – Myth or Reality*, Lutz Edzard, Manuel Sartori & Philippe Cassuto (eds), 162–183. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Crass, Joachim. 2005. *Das Kʾabeena. Deskriptive Grammatik einer hochlandkuschitischen Sprache*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Corriente, Federico. 1971. On the functional yield of some synthetic devices in Arabic and Semitic morphology. *Jewish Quarterly Review* 62: 20–50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1453861>
- Diem, Werner. 1978. Divergenz und Konvergenz im Arabischen. *Arabica* 25: 128–147.
- Diem, Werner. 1981. Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie, III: Endungen und Endschreibungen. *Orientalia* 50: 332–383.
- Diem, Werner. 1991. Vom Altarabischen zum Neuarabischen. Ein neuer Ansatz. *Semitic Studies in Honor of Wolf Leslau*, Alan Kaye (ed.), 297–308. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Dimmendaal, Gerrit J. 2014. *Marked Nominative Systems in Eastern Sudanic and Their Historical Origin*. Cologne: University of Cologne.
- Edzard, Lutz. 1998. *Polygenesis, Convergence and Entropy: An Alternative Model of Linguistic Evolution as Applied to Semitic Linguistics*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Edzard, Lutz. 2016. Experiencer constructions and the resultative function of impersonal verbs in Ethio-Semitic. In *Time in Languages of the Horn of Africa*, Ronny Meyer & Lutz Edzard (eds), 138–156. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Edzard, Lutz. 2018a. The opposition 'nominative' vs. 'absolutive' case in a Semitic perspective. In *Case and Mood Endings in Semitic Languages – Myth or Reality*, Lutz Edzard, Manuel Sartori & Philippe Cassuto (eds), 184–203. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Edzard, Lutz. 2018b. The marked nominative in Arabic, Semitic, and Afroasiatic. In *Re-engaging Comparative Semitic and Arabic Studies*, Daniel Birnstiel & Naʿama Pat-El (eds), 105–126. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc4fpo.6>
- Edzard, Lutz. 2019. Amharic. In *The Semitic Languages*, John Huehnergard & Naʿama Pat-El (eds), 202–226. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429025563-9>

- Elmedlaoui, Mohamed. 2012. Berber. In *Semitic and Afroasiatic: Challenges and Opportunities*, Lutz Edzard (ed.), 13–198. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- al-Farrā', Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād. 1983. *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, ed. by Muḥammad 'Alī an-Najjār & 'Aḥmad Yūsuf Najātī. Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub.
- Ferguson, Charles. 1960. The Arabic koine. *Language* 35: 616–630. <https://doi.org/10.2307/410601>
- Fück, Johann. 1950. *Arabiya*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Gelb, Ignace. 1965. The origin of the West-Semitic *qatala* morpheme. In *Symbolae Linguisticae in Honorem Georgii Kurylowicz*, Witold Taszycki (ed.), 72–80. Krakow: Polska Akademia.
- Handschuh, Corinna. 2014. *A Typology of Marked-S Languages*. Berlin: Language Science Press. https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_533871
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2009. Terminology of case. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, Andrej Malchukov & Andrew Spencer (eds), 505–517. Oxford: OUP.
- Hasselbach, Rebecca. 2013. *Case in Semitic: Roles, Relations and Reconstruction*. Oxford: OUP. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199671809.001.0001>
- Hayward, Dick. 1984. *The Arbore Language. A First Investigation*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Huehnergard, John. 2019. Proto-Semitic. In *The Semitic Languages*, John Huehnergard & Na'ama Pat-El (eds), 117–144. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429025563-3>
- Idasiak, Amandine. 2018. Évolution du système casuel et de la mimation dans la langue akkadienne. In *Case and Mood Endings in Semitic Languages – Myth or Reality*, Lutz Edzard, Manuel Sartori & Philippe Cassuto (eds), 11–23. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Kahr, Joan. 1976. The renewal of case morphology: Sources and constraints. *Stanford Working Papers on Language Universals* 20: 107–151.
- König, Christa. 2009. Marked nominatives. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, Andrej Malchukov & Andrew Spencer (eds), 535–548. Oxford: OUP.
- Kulikov, Leonid. 2009. Evolution of case systems. In *The Oxford Handbook of Case*, Andrej Malchukov & Andrew Spencer (eds), 439–457. Oxford: OUP.
- Lamberti, Marcello & Sottile, Roberto. 1997. *The Wolaytta Language*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Lehmann, Christian. 1985. Grammaticalization: Synchronic variation and diachronic change. *Lingua e Stile* 20: 303–318.
- Leslau, Wolf. 1995. *Reference Grammar of Amharic*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Lucas, Christopher. 2007. Jespersen's cycle in Arabic and Berber. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 105(3): 398–431. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-968X.2007.00189.x>
- Mous, Maarten. 2012. Cushitic. In *The Afroasiatic Languages*, Zygmunt Frajzyngier & Erin Shay (eds), 342–422. Cambridge: CUP.
- Nöldeke, Theodor. 1862. Hebräische Sprache. Book review of *Lehrbuch der hebräischen Sprache* by J. Olshausen (1861). *Orient und Occident* 1: 755–764.
- Owens, Jonathan. 1985. *A Grammar of Harar Oromo (Northeastern Ethiopia)*. Hamburg: Buske.
- Owens, Jonathan. 1998. Case and Proto-Arabic. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61: 51–73; 217–227. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00015755>
- Owens, Jonathan. 2018. Where multiple pathways lead: A reply to Ahmad Al-Jallad and Marijn van Putten. In *Case and Mood Endings in Semitic Languages – Myth or Reality*, Lutz Edzard, Manuel Sartori & Philippe Cassuto (eds), 96–161. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Pisani, Vittorio. 1952. Parenté linguistique. *Lingua* 3: 3–16. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-3841\(52\)90002-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-3841(52)90002-8)
- Rabin, Chaim. 1969. The structure of the Semitic system of case endings. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Semitic Studies Held in Jerusalem, 19–23 July 1965*, 190–204. Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Science and Humanities.

- Retsö, Jan. 1997. State and plural marking in Semitic. In *Built on Solid Rock: Studies in honour of Professor Ebbe Egede Knudsen on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday April 11th 1997*, Elie Wardini (ed.), 268–282. Oslo: Novus Forlag.
- Retsö, Jan. 2006. Thoughts about the diversity of Arabic. In *Current Issues in the Analysis of Semitic Grammar and Lexicon II*, Lutz Edzard & Jan Retsö (eds), 23–33. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Sasse, Hans-Jürgen. 1984. Case in Cushitic, Semitic, and Berber. In *Current Progress in Afro-Asiatic Linguistics*, Papers of the Third International Hamito-Semitic Congress, London, 1978 [Current Issues in Linguistic Theory 28], John Bynon (ed.), 111–126. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.28.08sas>
- Streck, Michael P. 2000. *Das amurritische Onomastikon der altbabylonischen Zeit*, Band 1. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.
- Streck, Michael P. 2011. Amorite. In Weninger et al. (eds), 452–459.
- Tosco, Mauro. 1994. On case marking in the Ethiopian language area. In *Sem, Cam, Iafet: Atti della 7ª Giornata di Studi Camito-Semitici e Indoeuropei*, Vermondo Brugnatelli (ed.), 225–244. Milan: Centro studi camito-semitici.
- Tropper, Josef. 2000. Der altäthiopische Status constructus auf -a aus sprachvergleichender Sicht. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 90: 201–218.
- Tropper, Josef. 2002. *Altäthiopisch. Grammatik des Ge'ez mit Übungstexten und Glossar*. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.
- Versteegh, Cornelis H. M. 1981. A dissenting grammarian: Quṭrub on declension. *Historiographia Linguistica* 8: 403–429. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hl.8.2-3.13ver>
- Waltisberg, Michael. 2002. Zur Ergativitätshypothese im Semitischen. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 152: 11–62.
- Waltisberg, Michael. 2011. The case functions in Amorite: A re-evaluation. *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56: 19–36. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgq057>
- Weninger, Stefan. 2011. Old Ethiopic. In Weninger et al. (eds), 1124–1142.
- Weninger, Stefan, Khan, Geoffrey, Streck, Michael P. & Watson, Janet (eds). 2011. *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook* [Handbücher zur Sprach und Kommunikationswissenschaft 36]. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110251586>
- Zaborski, Andrzej. 1990. Preliminary remarks on case morphemes in Omotic. In *Omotic Language Studies*, Richard J. Hayward (ed.), 617–629. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.