

# Preface

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Pages vii–ix of

**Case and Grammatical Relations: Studies in honor of Bernard Comrie**

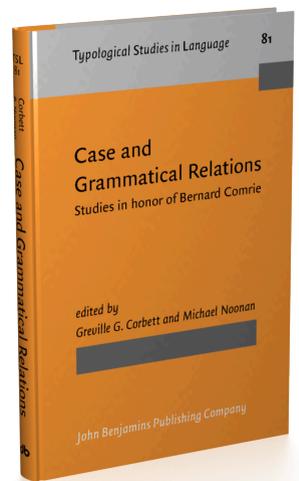
**Edited by Greville G. Corbett and Michael Noonan**

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## Preface

One of the pleasant difficulties of organizing a *Festschrift* for Bernard Comrie was selecting a suitable topic around which to organize a coherent volume. For most scholars, even very distinguished ones, the choice of topic for a *Festschrift* volume is a simple one: choose the subject area in which the scholar has made his or her mark. Since Bernard has made his mark in so many areas of linguistics, there was no one obvious candidate, but rather a host of possibilities. After some deliberation, we chose case and grammatical relations, but there were many other candidates.

Bernard's work in the area of case and grammatical relations spans several decades and retains its relevance. His most important works in this area include Keenan & Comrie 1977, a seminal work which significantly strengthened the field of Relational Grammar and encouraged typologists to investigate grammatical relations in particular constructions; Comrie (1986, 1991) and Comrie & Polinsky (1998) which deal with the issue of how we determine how many cases a language has; and Comrie 1981, one of the first comprehensive works on contemporary linguistic typology, in which numerous issues dealing with case, grammatical relations, the relational hierarchy, and so on are discussed with elegance and clarity. His works dealing with issues of case and grammatical relations in specific languages number in the dozens and represent a broad sampling of the world's languages.

The papers in this volume can therefore be grouped into two broad – though overlapping – classes: those dealing primarily with case and those dealing primarily with grammatical relations. Corbett and Spencer use Comrie (1986) as a starting point for their analyses of the case systems of Russian and Hungarian, respectively. **Corbett** addresses the question of how many cases Russian has. Views on this issue range from the standard six of most grammars of Russian to as many as eleven. He concludes that to answer this question, we have to recognize that case values vary in their status in a language like Russian, with some being more 'canonical' than others. **Spencer** takes on a similar issue, asking whether Hungarian has any cases at all. Analyses of the number of cases of Hungarian vary even more than those of Russian, ranging from 17 to 28. Spencer concludes that Hungarian has no case system at all, employing rather a set of 'fused postpositional portmanteaus'.

Nichols and Hewitt examine the case systems of languages in the Caucasus. **Nichols** describes the case system of Ingush, concluding that the case system and agreement are consistently ergative, the few exceptions exhibiting neutral [not accusative] alignment, while the syntax of argument sharing is split ergative/

(loosely) accusative. **Hewitt** surveys some features of case and grammatical relations on the basis of examples from languages belonging to the North West Caucasian and South Caucasian (or Kartvelian) families.

**Dahl** discusses the retention of the dative case in some dialects of northern Sweden. These dialects have retained the historical dative, which has been lost in the standard varieties of all the mainland Scandinavian languages. The situation described by Dahl is interesting because the historical dative follows a grammaticalization path otherwise unattested: the dative plural develops into an indefinite plural marker in premodified noun phrases.

**Noonan** investigates an issue in typology, namely the issue of case combining. After presenting a typology of the kinds of case combining, he details the modes of case combining found in the Bodic languages of the Tibeto-Burman family. The paper by **Haspelmath and Michaelis** surveys genitive objects in a set of European languages: German, English, Latin, French and Italian. They examine both genitives marked by cases and genitives marked by prepositions and find a common meaning among a diverse range of apparent functions and forms.

The second, related theme of grammatical relations is considered from different perspectives in the following papers. **Hawkins** examines the order of obliques in OV and VO languages, using the data collected for WALS (Haspelmath *et al.* 2005), of which Bernard Comrie is a coeditor. **Bickel** discusses the effects of the referential hierarchy on the distribution of grammatical relations. In line with Bernard's own work on this, he finds weak statistical support for effects on splits in case alignment, but he furthermore shows that there are no such effects on splits in agreement systems and that the available typological evidence is indecisive for other constructions. **Mithun** poses the question: "Does passivization require a subject category?" She shows that languages without a robust subject category generally lack passives, but there are exceptions, for example Pomoan languages which show little evidence of a subject category yet still have a construction typically translated as a passive.

In linguistic theory, especially in its more formal instantiations, attempts have been made to link the distribution of case to aspect (for example, in the Minimalist Program, tense or aspect is often viewed as a case assigner, and languages may differ in allowing such case assignment or not). It is also well-known that aspect or mood are closely linked to case alternations, for example, in Finnish or Slavic, where the partitive is more often than not found in the imperfective, irrealis, or under negation. Case, definiteness, and aspect form another well-known cluster of properties, and Bernard's work has addressed the interaction among all three. The consideration of tense, aspect and definiteness introduces a broader context in which case and grammatical relations can be considered, as shown particularly by two papers in this volume. **Keenan** investigates subjecthood, looking specifically

at Malagasy from the perspective of the generalization that subjects in West Austronesian languages are definite. He examines three types of quantified NPs which could be interpreted as counterexamples to this generalization. Polinsky discusses an extreme case of language reanalysis when both case marking and correlated aspectual distinctions disappear under the incomplete acquisition of Russian by heritage speakers (people who learned Russian as children, but later abandoned it, completely or partially, in favour of another dominant language). Crucially, while the morphological realizations of case and aspect are absent from heritage Russian, new mechanisms come into place which compensate for the absence of morphology and express the conceptual contrasts that are seemingly universal.

Each paper was written especially for this volume, linking to research in which Bernard has been involved, and taking it a step further.

We offer our sincere thanks to Lisa Mack, Tyko Dirksmeyer and Deborah Mulvaney for their careful help in the preparation of the volume and to Edith Moravcsik for numerous helpful comments. And Bernard is involved again here: having received a pre-publication version on his birthday, he made some of his trademark suggestions, which as authors we were all grateful to adopt.

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