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**Optional Case–Marking and Information
Structure in Eibela:
A typological perspective**

Grant Aiton

PhD Candidate
Language and Culture Research Centre
James Cook University

Overview

- Eibela People and Language
- Grammatical Relations and Case-Marking
- Optional Case-Marking and Information Structure
- Conclusions

Eibela People and Language

- also referred to as Aimele
(Ethnologue code: ALL)
- Speakers live primarily in Lake Campbell, Western Province
- Widespread multilingualism in Tok Pisin, Kamula, and Kaluli



Eibela People and Language

Syntax/Morphology

- SV/AOV constituent order
- Ergative-Absolutive case-marking system
- Open classes of nouns, verbs, and adverbs
- Closed classes of adjectives, demonstratives, postpositions, verbal particles, and quantifiers
- Complex system of verbal inflection for tense, aspect, mood, and evidentiality

Eibela People and Language

Phonology

- 13 consonant phonemes
- 6 simple vowels with phonemic length contrasts
- 4 diphthongs /ou/, /ei/, /ai/, /oi/

	Consonants				
	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	(p), b (β)	t, d		k (x), g (ɣ)	
Nasal	m	n			
Flap		(ɾ)			
Affricate		(tʃ), (dʒ)	(dʝ)		
Fricative	ɸ	s (ʃ)			h
Approximate	w		j		
Lateral Approximate		l			

Parentheses denote phones that may be realized as an allophone of a phoneme.

Vowels	
i, i:	u, u:
ɪ, ɪ:	
ɛ, ɛ:	o, o:
a, a:	

Eibela People and Language

Predicates

- Lexical roots of nearly any word class may form a predicate.
- Only verbs may be inflected with tense, aspect, mood, and evidentiality
- Tense marking is quite irregular and may be expressed by suffixation or suppletion
- Complex predicates can be formed by serial verb constructions or auxiliary constructions

Eibela People and Language

(1) [agɪ φεφε-ja]_s [ɛna]_x [dobosuwe]_x **ti** **a:ni**
dog skinny-ABS there underneath go.down go:PAST

‘The skinny dog went down underneath there.’

(2) [sobolo-wa]_s **tibi** **do-wa**
plane-ABS land PERF-PAST

‘A plane has landed.’

Grammatical Relations

- Syntactic cues showing how the arguments of a predicate are mapped onto various semantic roles
- Every argument is identified as bearing some semantic relationship to the predicate through various methods of changing the structural expression of the argument, e.g.:
 - Transitivity
 - Case marking
 - Number/Person agreement
 - Constituent order

Grammatical Relations

- Any arguments understood due to common knowledge or previous discourse may be elided
- Factors governing the expression or elision of a core argument are driven by pragmatic and discourse variables rather than syntactic constraints
- Case-marking suffixes are often omitted where the semantic roles of the arguments are clear based on previous discourse or constituent order
- Topic and Absolutive suffixes and Ergative and Locative case suffixes are homophonous

Grammatical Relations

Transitivity

Defined by number of core arguments:

- Core arguments:
 - Obligatorily identifiable
- Oblique arguments:
 - Optional arguments

Grammatical Relations

Intransitive clause

- only one core argument, abbreviated as S
- SV constituent order
- S can be an animate agent, as seen in (3), a non-animate quasi-agent as in (4), or a patient, as in (5).
- Optional absolutive case suffix

(3) [a:gi]_s dʒɛ-la kɛi
dog come-IMPERF EMPH
'A dog is coming.'

(4) [sobolo-wa]_s tɪbɪ do-wa
plane-ABS land PERF-PAST
'A plane has landed.'

(5) [ɪ-ja]_s ma gudu
3:SG-ABS NEGdie
'It didn't die.'

Grammatical Relations

Transitive Clauses

- Require two core arguments, abbreviated A and O
- Prototypically an agent (A) and patient (O)
- Both A and O arguments typically precede the predicate, AOV order
- Optional absolutive and ergative case suffixes

(6) [nɪ]_A [da]_O kona
1:SG sago cut:PAST
'I was cutting a sago tree'

(7) [nɪ do bubusuwo-wɛ]_A [oga]_O gila
1:SG father NAME-ERG pandanus plant
'My father Bubusuwo planted pandanus.'

Grammatical Relations

A/S Subjecthood Properties

Three syntactic properties qualify as subjecthood indicators:

- Person Agreement
- Co-referential arguments in serial verb constructions
- Switch reference

Grammatical Relations

Person Agreement

- Person agreement in the future tense agrees with the person of the A or S argument

(8) [kolu-wa]_S tobo [gi-jε]_X kudu mi-εΙ κει
man-ABS all 2:SG-LOC follow come-**3.FUT** EMPH

‘All of the men will follow you.’

(9) [gi κεσα:λι-μο]_X [a:bo]_O o-μενα
2:SG woman-DAT bird shoot-**NON.3:FUT**

‘You will shoot birds for your wife.’

Grammatical Relations

Co-referential arguments in serial verb constructions

In serial verb constructions with one transitive and one intransitive verb, the co-referential argument always corresponds to the S argument of the intransitive verb, and the A argument of the transitive verb.

(10) [kosuwa-ja]_o di anɪ

cassowary-ABS take go:PAST

‘(I) took the cassowary and went.’

*‘(I) took the cassowary and it (the cassowary) went.’

Grammatical Relations

Switch reference

When sequential clauses contain a differing S/A argument, a switch reference suffix signals the shift

- (11) a. [I]_S ka la mi-ja
3:SG FOC TOP come-PST
'That one came.'
- b. ε-ta-**bi**-ja [ni-ja]_A sugulu hongoja di-ja
do-RESULT-S/R-TOP 1PL-ABS school big get-PST
'When he did that, we got the big school'

Case-Marking

- Case shown by concatenative suffixation, vowel changes, or suppletion
- Concatenative case suffixes are attached to the final element of the noun phrase

(12) [agɪ φεφε-**ja**]_A [ɛna]_x [dobosuwɛ]_x tɪ anɪ
dog skinny-ABS there underneath go.down go:PAST

‘The skinny dog went down underneath there.’

Case-Marking

A sub-class of noun roots change the final vowel to the vowel corresponding to the appropriate case form, in lieu concatenative case suffixation.

- (13)
- a. *dogo* 'house'
 - b. *dogα* 'house:ABS' (cf. *-ja* '-ABS')
 - c. *dogε* 'house:ERG/LOC' (cf. *-jε* '-ERG/LOC')

Case-Marking

- Demonstrative determiner *ena* has two distinct forms for the core cases absolutive and ergative
- Determiners do not co-occur with concatenative case marking

(14) [dɛdanɪ ena(*-ja)]_o soφu
prawns that:ABS(*-ABS) cook:PAST

‘We cooked those prawns on the coals.’

ena ‘DEM:Absolutive’

emɛ ‘DEM:Ergative’

Case-Marking

Case-Marking in transitive clauses

- Transitive clauses in Eibela rarely show two overt arguments. Instead the more topical argument, typically the A argument, will be elided.

Absolutive

- When both arguments are overt noun phrases, O arguments may bear the absolutive suffix.

(15) [nɪ]_A tɪφɛ [oga ɛ-ja]_O oge di anɪ
1:SG after pandanus seed-ABS pick.up take go:PAST

‘I went after him, taking the pandanus seeds in a bilum.’

Case-Marking

Ergative

- A arguments may be suffixed by the ergative case.
- It is very rare for both A and O arguments to include case-marking suffixes in the same clause.
- Ergative case-marking of A arguments is frequently found in clauses with OAV word order.

(16) [ni]_O [sigai-jɛ]_A sina ma kɛɪ
1:SG Sigai-ERG hit NEG EMPH

‘Sigai did NOT hit me.’

(17) [hɛba]_O [dulumi-jɛ]_A dɪ sa-lɛ
half:ABS NAME-ERG take pack-IMPERF

‘Dulumi was packing half (of a wallaby).’

Case-Marking

Case-marking for Oblique Arguments

Optional arguments denote roles such as location, source, destination, time, beneficiary, etc.

Instrumental

- (18) [bɪnɪ-**kɛɪ**]_x [ɛna φi-ja]_o ola ka la
arrow-INST that:ABS thigh:ABS shoot:PAST CON DEF
'I had shot it in the thigh with an arrow.'

Case-Marking

The instrumental case may also denote non-animate objects that cause an effect without being controlled by an agent, as in (31) and (32).

(19) [dʒɛ masɪ-**kɛɪ**]_x [ɸosu jabɪ]_o bola
tree branch-**INST** back here hit:PAST
'A tree branch hit me here in the back.'

(20) [si-ja]_o [jɛto-**kɛɪ**]_x gada la
eye-ABS/TOP branch.stub-**INST** impact:PAST DEF
'That branch stub hit my eye.'

Case-Marking

Locative and Associative Case

There are two cases which overlap semantically with regard to locative functions, *-jε* and *-mi*.

-jε

- Locative case
- Prototypical function of specifying a precise or punctual location
- Semantic reference includes allative and genitive functions
- Homophonous with the ergative case suffix

(21) [kɪsɪgi-**jε**]_x *sugulu-la* lε-ki
NAME-**LOC** school-IMPERF be.at-CONT
'I was still at school in Wawoi Falls/Kesigi.'

Case-Marking

Associative Case *-mi*

- Extends to more general meanings such as temporal setting or association
- Referred to as the associative case due to varied semantic uses
- Used for diffuse locative reference, denoting a larger and more general area

(22) [nɪ]_s [uludija isa-**mi** la]_x wɪ la
1:SG NAME land-**ASS** DEF here be
'I am here in the area around Uludija.'

Case-Marking

- Also used for temporal rather than locative settings

(23) [ɛna-**mi**]_x [ɛsidi konu]_o sulɛ-labi
DEM-**ASS** plant.type shoots eat-REP
'Then it (a pig) was pulling up esidi shoots to eat.'

Case-Marking

Dative

The dative case is marked by the suffix *-mo*, and is used for prototypical dative arguments such as:

Recipients:

- (24) [tɪbɛsɪ mo soso ko]_o [nɪ-**mo**]_x dɪmɪ-no
orchid bottom root that 1:SG-DAT give-IMP
'Give me the bottom of that orchid vine!'

Addressees:

- (25) [woko-**mo**]_x sɛ-ja [ɪsa anɪ]_o dɪ-mɛni-ogu kɛɪ ɛ sɛ-ja
NAME-DAT say-TOP bag:ABS two take-NON.3:FUT-INT EMPH do say-PAST
'(I) told woko, I said, "I will take two bags."'

Case-Marking

Dative

Beneficiaries (43):

(26) [gɪ kɛsa:lɪ-mo]_x [a:bo]_o o-mɛna
2:SG woman-DAT bird shoot-NON.3:FUT

‘You will shoot birds for your wife.’

Complex systems of case-marking

A typology of asymmetries in case marking systems.

	Lexically or grammatically conditioned	Not lexically or grammatically conditioned: “free” variation
Accidental identity	Syncretism	
Different case systems	Split Case Marking (SCM)	
Different marking of same grammatical relation		Differential Case Marking (DCM)
		Optional Case Marking (OCM)

Syncretism: “...circumstance in which the marking of two separate cases that are normally accorded different markings in a language is the same, and when this is not grammatically conditioned.”

- e.g. lexically determined case restrictions
- neutralization of two or more cases

Split Case Marking: “...grammatical roles in a language are marked according to different case systems in different lexico-grammatical environments.”

- Separate case-marking systems conditioned by TAM, Negation, etc.

(Table and quotations from McGregor 2010, p. 1613-1614)

Optional Case-Marking

Differential case marking and Optional case-marking

- two or more case-marking options for a single grammatical relation
 - Either discrete case-markers (DCM) or presence/absence of case-marker (OCM)
- See discussions of differential case marking in Nilo-Saharan (Dimmendaal 2010), Romance (Bossong 1991)
- Optional case marking widespread in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and the Himalayas (McGregor 2010, Verstraete 2008, Rumsey 2010)

Optional Case-Marking

Three motivations (among others) for optional case marking (McGregor 2010):

- Discriminative
 - Additional specification of semantic roles
- Pragmatic
 - Specifying topicality/focus/definiteness
- Semantic
 - Specifying agentivity, affectedness, individuation

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

- All core case-marking suffixes are optionally expressed
- Two core cases:
 - Ergative *-jε* for transitive subjects
 - Absolutive *-ja* for intransitive subjects and transitive objects (homophonous with topic clitic)
- Expression of case, argument ellision, and constituent order determined primarily by information structure considerations

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Optional ergative case-marking conditioned by Discriminative and pragmatic functions:

- Non-canonical word order
 - which is in turn governed by definiteness and topicality
- Contrastive Focus
 - Highlighting an argument in opposition to another actor in the narrative

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Non-canonical word order

- Definite, topical arguments fronted
 - Resulting non-canonical constituent order requires overt specification of semantic roles

(27) [bagɪ ɛna]_O [kolu-wɛ]_A ka di-o-la-bi
kina.shell that man-**ERG** CON take-COMP-REP-S/R

‘So the man took that kina shell, so they say.’

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Contrastive Focus

- Unexpected or focused arguments are foregrounded through the use of the ergative suffix

(28) a: sigai-jε sina ma kei
No! NAME-**ERG** attack:PST NEG DECL
'No! It wasn't Sigai that hit (me)'

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Optional absolutive case-marking conditioned by semantic and pragmatic functions:

- Animacy of S arguments
 - Inanimate intransitive subjects most frequently case-marked
 - Animate intransitive subjects often unmarked for case
- Topicality?
 - Overlapping function and form with topic enclitic

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Animacy of S arguments

- Inanimate intransitive subjects nearly always suffixed with case

(28) nɪ wi-ja ugei
1:SG name-ABS NAME

'My name is Ugei.'

(29) φuφesi-ja ja kei
Wind/storm-ABS come DECL

'A windstorm is coming.'

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Animacy of S arguments

- Animate intransitive subjects less often unmarked for case

(30) tuwε gudu
NAME die:PAST

'Tuwe died.'

(31) kolu na:gla
man sick:PAST
'The men were sick.'

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Absolutive case and topicality

- On first glance, absolutive case suffixing appears to occur on topical arguments
- However, morphosyntactic and semantic criteria show two distinct sets of properties
 - this suggests that there are two distinct but homophonous morphemes: a case-marking suffix, and a topical enclitic.

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Absolutive case and topicality

Topics form a distinct syntactic role apart from verbal arguments

- Topics precedes the main clause
- Topics may or may not be co-referential with one of the core arguments of the verb
- Topics generally do not show case distinctions

(32) [doφa=ja]_{TOP} [kosuwa-ja]_O [ami]_x sa:ni di-ja-giŋε
snare=TOP cassowary-ABS ASS kill take-PAST-LINK
'At the snare, (I) killed the cassowary there.'

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Absolutive case and topicality

However, case may be expressed by the suppletive case forms on of the demonstrative *ena*

- (33) [εmε-**ja**]_{TOP/A} [kosuwa φogono ka]_O bulu di-εli
that:ERG-TOP cassowary crest CONcut do-ITER
'That (dog) cut off the cassowarys' crests.'

Nouns which express case through a vowel change are not inflected for case in topic positions

- (34) a. [**uε**]_X [isa]_O dɪ hε-ja middle:LOC bag:ABS take unhook-PAST
'I hung the bag in the middle.'
- b. [usu-**wa**]_{TOP/X} [isa]_O dɪ hε-ja middle-TOP bag:ABS take unhook-PAST
'There in the middle, I hung the bag.'

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Absolutive case and topicality

Semantics of absolutive-marked arguments and topics differ:

- Topics are topical:
 - Definite and given
 - Prominent discourse elements

(35) a. [wawija-jɛ]_A [oga]_O la gi-la ɛna mi-ɛni-ki
NAME-ERG pandanus DEF plant-PAST that:ABS come-FUT:NON.3-

'I was coming near where Wawija had planted pandanus.'

b. [uɟu=wa]_{TOP} [isa]_O wa di hɛ-ja
middle=TOP bilum:ABS thither take hang-PST

'I hung that bag in the middle there.'

Optional Case-Marking in Eibela

Absolutive case and topicality

Semantics of case-marked objects and topics differ:

- Absolutive-suffixed objects often denote new information and may or may not be a prominent discourse element
 - Objects which refer to known referents are often elided
 - Overt, case-marked objects pragmatically unmarked

(36) [gi=ja]_{TOP} ka [sugu:lu wi-ja]_S da: kɛɪ
2:PL=TOP FOC school name-ABS be.at DECL

'The name of YOUR school is there.'

Conclusions

- Optional Case marking of A and O arguments is primarily discriminative, with some additional pragmatic function
 - in non-canonical constituent orders, case-marking of A arguments is nearly always present
 - contrastive focus is a semantic feature of many ergative-marked subjects
- Topics form a distinct syntactic argument slot signaled by an enclitic which is homophonous with the absolutive case-marker
 - topic and absolutive morphemes may be historically related
- Case-marking S arguments in intransitive clauses additionally influenced by animacy

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