The Typology of Case Systems and Inflected Adpositions: evidence from Gàidhlig and Hungarian

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February 6, 2024

1 Abstract

Systems of local cases and inflected adpositions can appear to represent opposite diachronic trends and synchronic structures. In the first instance, original free roots with local meanings become reduced and attached to nominal roots as case affixes. In the second instance, original pronominal forms become reduced and attached to free prepositional roots with local meaning as person inflections. However, we also find cases where the line between the two kinds of developments is not as clear, which raises questions about the typological utility of the distinction between the two forms. This issue will be exemplified with data from (Scottish) Gàidhlig and Hungarian, both of which exhibit systems that share properties of both case systems and inflected adpositions.

1.1 The Data

In Gàidhlig, a set of original prepositions have acquired pronominal inflections (Gillies, 2009), as well as fusing with the definite article and possessive pronouns. For example, from the preposition *ann* 'in' we find forms such as **ann**-*am* 'in me', **ann**-*ad* 'in you', **(ann)s**-*an taigh* 'in the house' and **n**-*am thaigh* 'in my house'.

In Hungarian, original postpositions which hosted pronominal inflections became attached to their dependant nouns to form a paradigm of case suffixes (Kenesei et al., 1998). For example, from a case marker like *-bAn* 'in' we find forms such as **benn**-*em* 'in me', **benn**-*ed* 'in you', *a ház-**ban*** 'in the house' and *(a) ház-am-**ban*** 'in my house' (see Table 1).

1.2 Conflicting Scholarships

These two systems have prompted analyses which seem to work in opposite directions. On the one hand Stewart & Joseph (2009) have argued that the Gàidhlig forms represent a pronominal case system rather than a set of inflected adpositions. On the other hand, (Spencer, 2008) argued that the Hungarian forms are bound adpositions rather than case markers. However, these are not as contradictory as they first seem, and indeed will be shown to exhibit a parallel structure.

	Features	Gàidhlig	Hungarian
'in me'	[CASE: Inessive, PERSON: 1SG]	**ann**-*am*	**benn**-*em*
'in the house'	[CASE: Inessive, DEF]	**(ann)**s-*an taigh*	*a ház*-**ban**
'in my house'	[CASE: Inessive, POSS: 1SG]	**na**-*m thaigh*	*a ház-am*-**ban**

Table 1: Gàidhlig and Hungarian compared

1.3 A Unified Solution

Spencer & Stump (2013) provide a means of reconciling these proposals. Building upon the analysis presented there, I argue that both Gàidhlig and Hungarian exhibit parallel systems in terms of the content of their paradigms and that the splits within and differences between them are at the level of construction of the forms which fill their paradigm cells. Thus both Gàidhlig *nam thaigh* and Hungarian *(a) házamban* (both 'in my house') express the same set of inflectional features ([CASE: Inessive, POSSESSOR: 1SG]), hosted by a covert head, despite the differences in their structure (auxiliary preposition and case suffix respectively).

1.4 How did We Get Here?

These two instances of categorically ambiguous forms should lead us to consider the extent to which the diachronic history of a given set of inflections should inform their synchronic analysis. On the one hand, both systems show morphosyntactic properties which reflect their origins as adpositions, and they could be argued to be such on that basis, however, functionally they behave like a case system, regardless of whether they are affixes or free roots. Therefore, both languages show that changes of function do not always entail alterations of form, reinforcing the point expressed by Stump (2016) in his distinction between the 'content' and 'form' paradigm.

References

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