

# 51 Position of Case Affixes

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## 1 Defining the values

This map shows the position of case affixes on nouns, especially whether they are **prefixes**, as in the example in (1a) from Krongo (Kadugli; Sudan), or **suffixes**, as in (1b) from Tsova-Tush (Nakh-Daghestanian; Georgia).

- (1) a. Krongo (Reh 1985: 151)  
       àpá-ŋ        iŋŋ        á-kùufi  
       M.PERF.hit-TR 3SG.M INSTR-baton  
       ‘He hit him with the baton.’  
   b. Tsova-Tush (Holisky and Gagua 1994: 194)  
       Lek'-i-v        že        Dik'-e-r  
       Lek-PL-ERG sheep take.away-AOR-PST  
       ‘The Lekí would take away sheep.’

1. Case suffixes	431
2. Case prefixes	35
3. Case coded by tone	4
4. Case coded by changes within noun stem	2
5. Mixed morphological case strategies with none primary	8
6. Postpositional clitics	95
7. Prepositional clitics	15
8. Inpositional clitics	6
9. Neither case affixes nor adpositional clitics	338
total	934

A morpheme is considered a case affix for the purposes of this map if it attaches to nouns and signals a grammatical or semantic relation to some other word, most commonly a verb. Some case affixes mark arguments of the verb, such as the ergative case affix in (1b), while others signal the semantic relationship of a noun phrase that is not an argument, as with the instrumental case affix in (1a).

While case prefixes are much less common than case suffixes, they are nevertheless attested. In addition to the example in (1a) are those in (2).

- (2) a. Tonga (Bantu; Zambia; Collins 1962: 54)  
       wakaboola a-ŋoni  
       he.came with-John  
       ‘He came along with John.’  
   b. Gurr-goni (Burarran; Australia; Green 1995: 93)  
       burr-mupunj amurr-bogi-ni  
       INSTR-canoe 3AUG.SUBJ-go-PRECONTEMP  
       ‘They all went by canoe.’  
   c. Middle Atlas Berber (Morocco; Penchoen 1973: 54)  
       ičča        u-ryaz        aksum  
       eat.PERF.3SG.M SUBJ-man meat  
       ‘The man has eaten the meat.’  
   d. Prasuni (Nuristani; Afghanistan; Morgenstierne 1949: 220)  
       es'ek        tu-g'ul  
       that in-country  
       ‘in that country’  
   e. Takelma (Takelman; Oregon; Sapir 1922: 241)  
       gmel-danà  
       under-rock  
       ‘under the rock’

In addition to prefixes and suffixes, there are two other morphological processes which are used to code case, though they are fairly uncommon as primary strategies. One of these involves coding case

by **tone**, which is shown on the map as the primary method in four languages: Maba (Maban, Nilo-Saharan; Chad; Tucker and Bryan 1966: 199) plus three Nilotic languages, Shilluk (Sudan; Kohnen 1933: 28), Maasai (Kenya and Tanzania; Tucker and Mpaayei 1955: 175–87), and Nandi (Kenya; Creider and Creider 1989: 41). The examples in (3) from Nandi are both of the form V-NP-NP, with only the tone identifying which NP is subject and which is object. Note that this is not coded by word order: (3a) is VSO while (3b) is VOS.

- (3) Nandi (Creider and Creider 1989: 124)  
   a. kè:r-éy        kipe:t        la:kwé:t  
       look.at-IMPF Kipet.SUBJ child.NONSUBJ  
       ‘Kibet is looking at the child.’  
   b. kè:r-éy        kipe:t        kipro:no  
       look.at-IMPF Kibet.NONSUBJ Kiprono.SUBJ  
       ‘Kiprono is looking at Kibet.’

A second infrequent method for coding case is by **changes within the noun stem**. Two languages are shown on the map that employ this as their primary method for signaling case, both of them Western Nilotic languages spoken in Sudan: Dinka (Nebel 1948: 36) and Nuer (Crazzolara 1933: 29). In both languages, there are genitive and locative case forms that involve changes to the vowels within the syllable nucleus. Stem changes that only involve the initial or final segment(s) of a word are treated here as a form of prefixing or suffixing, respectively. For example, in Nias (Austronesian; Sumatra, Indonesia), there is a process of initial mutation that typically involves changing the initial consonant to a different consonant, though in some instances it involves the addition of a prefixal consonant, as illustrated in (4). Among a variety of uses, the unmutated forms are used as ergative case forms, the mutated as absolutes.

- (4) Nias (Brown 2001: 69–70)
- | unmutated | mutated |          |
|-----------|---------|----------|
| fakhe     | vakhe   | ‘rice’   |
| tanö      | danö    | ‘land’   |
| si'o      | zi'o    | ‘stick’  |
| ete       | nete    | ‘bridge’ |

Nias is treated on the map as an instance of case prefixing.

Some languages combine two or more of the above four methods for coding case. Most such languages combine case prefixes with suffixes. In some languages with more than one morphological method of coding case, one method can be considered primary. For example, in Chukchi (Chukchi-Kamchatkan; eastern Siberia, Russia), there are thirteen cases, all involving suffixes and three involving prefixes in addition to the suffixes (Dunn 1999: 101). Since all case forms involve suffixes, while only some involve prefixes, suffixes can be considered the primary method in this language. In other languages, however, there may be no strong reason to treat one method as primary, and these are shown on the map as languages with **mixed morphological case strategies with no strategy primary**. For example, Mangarrayi (Northern Territory, Australia) employs a mixture of prefixes and suffixes: the case forms for *malam* ‘man’ include nominative *namalam* with a case prefix, ablative *malamgana* with a case suffix, and locative *namalamgan* with both a prefix and a suffix (Merlan 1982: 57). Similarly, Siuslaw (Oregon Coast family; Oregon) has three case affixes, an ergative prefix, a locative suffix, and a genitive suffix (Frachtenberg 1922a: 462, 541, 544); with one prefix and two suffixes, neither is considered primary. A few languages with a mixture of strategies combine one of the minor methods with prefixes or suffixes. For example, Turkana (Nilotic; Kenya and Uganda) employs both prefixes and tone (Dimmendaal 1983: 66–7, 215, 260–5).

## Position of Case Affixes

The first four values on the map all involve morphological methods for coding case. The next three values involve what are treated here as adpositional clitics and on Map 85 as adpositions. In general, the difference between case affixes and adpositions is that the former are phonologically attached to nouns, while the latter are separate words that combine syntactically with noun phrases. **Adpositional clitics** are intermediate between these two in that, while they attach phonologically to some word, the word they attach to need not be a noun, and which word they attach to is determined syntactically. The example in (5a) illustrates a **prepositional clitic** attaching to the first word in a noun phrase from Cayuvava (isolate; Bolivia), while the example in (5b) illustrates a **postpositional clitic** attaching to the last word in a noun phrase in Ungarinjin (Wororan; northwestern Australia).

- (5) a. Cayuvava (Key 1967: 51)  
*ji=[ka'reeča dat]*  
 OBL=[other place]  
 'in another place'
- b. Ungarinjin (Rumsey 1982: 58)  
*[dambun budaga]=ra*  
 [camp their]=LOC  
 'at their camp'

Because such adpositional clitics are very often described as case affixes (especially when they are postpositional) and since in the simplest examples they do attach to the noun, they are shown on this map. There are probably many more languages with prepositional clitics than those shown on the map. An unusual sort of postpositional clitic is used in Somali (Cushitic; Somalia) for marking subject: it is realized by a change in tone on the last syllable of the noun phrase (Saeed 1993: 142). A few languages have **inpositional clitics** which appear inside the noun phrase, most commonly attaching to the end of the first word in the noun phrase, as in the example in (6) from Yawuru (Nyulnyulan; Western Australia).

- (6) Yawuru (Hosokawa 1991: 36)  
*[kayukayu=ni buru]*  
 [soft=ERG sand]  
*i-na-nya-rn-dyarra-jirr mudiga*  
 3-TR-catch-IMPF-1AUG.DAT-PL motorcar  
 'The soft sands caught our car.'

If a language has both case affixes and adpositional clitics, the map shows the type of case affix rather than the type of adpositional clitic. For example, Russian has both prepositional clitics and case suffixes, but is shown on the map as having case suffixes.

The final value shown on the map is for languages which do not employ case affixes or adpositional clitics. This type is somewhat underrepresented on the map relative to its apparent frequency among the world's languages.

The criteria assumed here for case affixes lead to the inclusion of morphemes that might not be considered case affixes by some linguists. For example, Welsh has a system of initial mutations on nouns, which in many environments has nothing to do with case; but the system is such that when object noun phrases beginning with nouns occur in immediately postverbal position or after the

subject, they occur in mutated (lenited) form, while postverbal subjects do not (Williams 1980: 79). In (7), the object *fram* is the lenited form of *bram* 'fright'.

- (7) Welsh (Williams 1980: 79)  
*Cafodd Ifan fram.*  
 get.PST.3SG Ifan OBJ.fright  
 'Ifan got a fright.'

These mutations are thus considered a form of case prefix for the purposes of this map. Also, many Bantu languages have locative prefixes which formally belong to the set of noun class prefixes but which serve the same function as clear instances of locative case affixes; hence these are also treated here as instances of case prefixes, as illustrated by the example in (8) from Zulu (South Africa).

- (8) Zulu (Ziervogel et al. 1981: 38)  
*Ni-phuma e-Goli na?*  
 2PL-come LOC-Johannesburg Q  
 'Do you come from Johannesburg?'

In fact, in some Bantu languages, such locative prefixes co-occur with a noun class prefix, e.g. Hunde (Democratic Republic of the Congo; Mateene 1992: 70).

## 2 Geographical distribution

The map shows that case suffixes are overwhelmingly more common cross-linguistically than case prefixes. Apart from isolated instances, the map shows a few areas where more than one language with case prefixes occurs, some of these areas involving only languages which are closely related to each other genealogically, others more heterogeneous. In Africa, case prefixes occur among Bantu languages in the south and in Berber languages in the north. There is a scattering of instances in the area around Sumatra in Indonesia. They are found in Salishan languages in the Pacific North-West and in a scattering of languages in Mesoamerica. Both case by tone and case by stem change as primary strategies are restricted to Africa in the sample of languages examined.

Languages with postpositional clitics tend to occur in areas in which case suffixes are common, such as Australia, North America, and South America. Analogously, prepositional clitics seem to often occur in areas close to where case prefixes are found, but both of these types are sufficiently uncommon that no firm conclusions are possible. The six languages with inpositional clitics are all spoken in Australia, where case suffixes and postpositional clitics are common.

Languages without either case affixes or adpositional clitics are widely distributed. They are particularly common in an area stretching from South-East Asia through the Pacific. Except in eastern Africa, they are the dominant type throughout Africa, though there are many languages of other types. In many areas they are widely scattered among languages that do have case affixes or adpositional clitics, such as the Americas. They are especially infrequent in (i) an area covering eastern Europe and most of Asia, except the South-East and Middle East, and (ii) in most of Australia, except in the far north.