

Disappearance of Accusative: either the Areal or the Universal Tendency?

I. Main regularity which defines the appearance of verb arguments in marked forms (resp. cases) can be defined on the basis of following general linguistic tendency: *The arguments close to prototypes strive for unmarkedness while deviations from the prototypes mostly are formally marked.* The regularity clarifies the nature of Silverstein's hierarchies (1976): Markedness of the Patient, which is a prototypically inanimate noun, is increasing (consequently, the possibility of appearance of accusative is increasing as well) according to the following universal hierarchy:

Inanimate (Indefinite) nouns < // Inanimate (Definite) nouns < Animate (Indefinite) nouns < // Animate (Definite) nouns < Persons < Proper nouns < III-person < II-person // I-person

II. The main typological feature for the Caucasian languages, which are defined as, so-called, Ergative languages, is unmarkedness of the Patient. That is: no accusative is found in the most Caucasian languages.

III. Some languages from Caucasus (and not only those) represent the tendency of accusative disappearance; and the above given hierarchy has the controversial direction: First of all, accusative disappears for inanimate (and/or indefinite) nouns and the process is completed when it disappears for I/II personal pronouns. A cross-linguistic data show different stages of accusative disappearance; e.g.:

Armenian - Inanimate nouns are unmarked (resp. they are in Nominative);
English - All nouns except I/II pronouns are unmarked (resp. in Nominative);
Finno-Ugric - Indefinite nouns are unmarked (resp. in Nominative);
Ossetian - Inanimate indefinite nouns are unmarked (resp. in Nominative);
Russian - Inanimate masculine and neutral nouns are unmarked (resp. in Nominative);
Turkish - Indefinite nouns are unmarked (resp. in Nominative);
and so on.

IV. What causes the disappearance of accusative? It could be the influence of the Caucasian languages in the case of Ossetian, Armenian and Turkish languages, but the same tendency takes place when such influence of non-accusative languages should be excluded. So, it seems better to speak about the general tendency of dynamic processes of the linguistic structuring where the universal hierarchies play an important role. Yet, it is clear that the language influences definitely give an appropriate grounds for the realization of the tendencies.

V. The changes could be the result of the information structuring as well as far as the conceptual foregrounding of the Patient means putting it in unmarked (resp. nominative) case. Cognitively this is more natural for the prototypical (or close to prototype) Patient and this could be the proper condition for accusative disappearance as well. The paper discusses such approaches for clarifying and better understanding the cross-linguistic data.