

Case Frames of the Old English Impersonal Construction: Conceptual Semantic Analysis

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1. Introduction: Case/Type alternations in the OE impersonal construction

- Old English (=OE) impersonal construction = the experiencer subject construction = the dative subject construction (Gaaf 1904; Fischer & van der Leek 1983; Anderson 1986; Lightfoot 1991; Wahl?n 1925; Visser 1963; Elmer 1981; Ogura 1986; Allen 1995)
- Three types of the OE impersonal construction in terms of the case frame (Allen 1995, 68; Elmer 1981; Fischer & van der Leek 1983):

(1)	EXP(erienter)	TH(eme)	Label (Elmer 1981; Allen 1995)
	DAT	NOM	Type I
	DAT/ACC	GEN/PP	Type N
	NOM	GEN/ACC	Type II

- Verbs lexically decide which pattern(s) they belong to.

(2) a. Type I: DAT-NOM

ac **him** ne ofhreow na þæs deofles **Hryre**
 but him(DAT) not pitied not the(GEN) devil's(GEN) fall-NOM
 'But he did not feel sorry about the fall of the devil'
 ((COE) ÆCHOM I, 13 192.17)

b. Type N: DAT-GEN

... him ofhreow þæs **mannes**
 him(DAT) pitied the(GEN) man-GEN
 'He felt sorry for the man'
 (Ælc.Th.I.p.192.16)

c. Type II: NOM-GEN

and **ic** þæs næfre ne sceamige
 and I(NOM) this(GEN) never not shame(1Sg)

'and I am never ashamed of that'

((COE) Ps 24.1)

(Allen 1995, 68)

- Research question: How can we account for each case frame under a given theory?

- ① Why is the theme marked nominative instead of accusative in Type I?
- ② How are dative subjects or genitive objects licensed?
- ③ How can account for the case alternations between dative and accusative for the experiencer and between genitive and PP for the theme in Type N?
- ④ How can we account for the case alternation between the genitive theme and the accusative theme in Type II?

- (3) a. Type N: ACC-GEN

for ðæm þynge **men** lyst ælces þara
 for that reason men(ACC) desires each-GEN the-GEN
 gooda þe **hi** lyst
 goods-GEN that them(ACC) Desires

'For that reason do men desire each of the goods which they desire'

((COE) Bo.34.88.10; Allen's p. 105)

- b. Type N: DAT/ACC-PP

and ... us nu w latað **wið þysne leohtan mete**
 and us- now nauseates with this light Food
 DAT/ACC

'And we are now nauseated with this light food'

(Ælc.P.XX.313; Allen's p. 70)

- c. Type II: NOM-ACC

... swa heo maran **læcedom** behofað
 so it greater leechcraft(ACC) Needs

'... so it requires greater medicine'

((COE) ÆCHOM I,33 496.30; Allen's p. 135)

- (4) Possible case frames for EXP-TH in OE:

- a. DAT-NOM (Type I)
- b. DAT-GEN/PP (Type N)
- c. ACC-GEN/PP (Type N)
- d. NOM-GEN (Type II)
- e. NOM-ACC (Type II)

- (5) a. Type I only:

losian 'to be lost, lose', *gelician* 'to feel pleasure', *mislician* 'to feel displeasure', *oflician*

- 'to feel displeasure', *lician* 'to feel pleasure', *eglian* 'to bother/ail', *gehreowan* 'to feel pity',
lapian 'to feel loathing'
- b. Type N only: *lystan* and *langian*
lystan(?) 'to feel desire', *langian* 'to feel longing'
- c. Type II only:
behofian 'to need', *wilnian* 'to desire', *giernan* 'to yearn'
- d. Types I & N
ofþyncan 'to feel regret', *þyncan* 'to think/seem', *hreowan* 'to feel pity'
- e. Types N & II
sceamian 'to feel shame', *tweonian* 'to feel doubt'
- f. Types I, N & II
ofhreowan 'to feel pity'
- (Reorganized from Allen's p. 85)

- There is an important thing to notice concerning Type N and Type II. According to Allen, except for the dubious verb *lystan* 'to desire', which also occurred once in the *ACC ACC* frame, and the rare verb *langian*, all verbs that occur in the Type N frame also occur in the Type II frame, but not *vice versa*. Type N implies Type II, but Type II does not imply Type N, since several verbs in Old English do occur only in Type II. Thus, Type N seems to be the subset of Type II.

(6) Possible case frames and possible memberships for representative verbs disregarding the problematic *lystan* and *langian*:

Possible Case Frames	Types	<i>lician</i> 'to feel pleasure' (Type I)	<i>behofian</i> 'to need' (Type II)	<i>þyncan</i> 'to think/ seem' (Types I & N)	<i>sceamian</i> 'to feel shame' (Types N & II)	<i>ofhreowan</i> 'to feel pity' (Types I, N & II)
DAT-NOM	I	YES	No	YES	No	YES
DAT-GEN/PP	N	No	No	YES	YES	YES
ACC-GEN/PP	N	No	No	YES	YES	YES
NOM-GEN	II	No	YES	No	YES	YES
NOM-ACC	II	No	YES	No	YES	YES

(7) The actual case patterns reported by Allen:

	EXP	TH	Membership in (6)	Appropriate Type
a. <i>tweonian</i>	DAT	GEN/PP	N & II	N

	ACC	GEN/PP		N
	NOM	PP		EXP(II)+TH(N)
b. <i>sceamian</i>	DAT	GEN/PP	N & II	N
	ACC	GEN		N
	NOM	GEN/PP		II or EXP(II)+TH(N)
c. <i>lician</i>	DAT	NOM	I	I
d. <i>ofþyncan</i>	DAT	NOM	I & N	I
	DAT	GEN		N
e. <i>þyncan</i>	DAT	NOM	I & N	I
	DAT	GEN/PP		N
f. <i>ofhreowan</i>	DAT	NOM	I, N & II	I
	DAT	GEN		N
	NOM	GEN		II

(Reorganized from Allen's p. 137)

- Except for the two lines with case frame in bold in *tweonian* and *sceamian*, everything is clear from the discussion so far. Why is the NOM-GEN/PP frame in *tweonian* and *sceamian* a problem, then? As I indicated in the *Appropriate Type* column, the NOM-PP frame is the mixture of Type N and Type II frames; i.e. NOM is the case for EXP in Type II, and PP is for TH in Type N. Precisely speaking, this is not an alternation between Types N and II. Rather, it is the mixture of both types. It would be nicer for any case theory to be able to predict such mixture of two different case frames than to posit an *ad hoc* case frame like NOM-GEN/PP.
- Since the mixture of the nominative experiencer (from Type II) with the PP theme (from Type N) exists, a natural question is whether we can find the mixture of the dative/accusative experiencer from Type N with the accusative theme from Type II (i.e. *EXP_{DAT/ACC}-TH_{ACC}). The answer seems to be *No*. First, Allen did not report any such case frame in her study except for a problematic verb *lystan*. Secondly, I searched the Brooklyn corpus for impersonal verbs taking advantage of the morphological annotation tags, and found no such case frame.

(8) Empirical/Theoretical issues of the Old English impersonal construction:

- Principled account for each type of the construction; i.e.
 - Why is the theme object marked nominative rather than accusative in Type I (i.e. DAT-NOM)?
 - How are dative subjects and genitive objects licensed in all three Types?
- Case alternations between dative and accusative for experiencer and between the genitive theme and the PP theme in Type N, and between genitive and accusative for theme in Type II

- c. Type alternations in Types I & N (e.g. *hyncan*), N & II (e.g. *sceamian*), and I, N & II (*ofhreowan*);
- d. Type N \subset Type II, but not *vice versa*;
- e. Why is the mixture of Type N and Type II possible in only one direction (i.e. $\text{EXP}_{\text{NOM}}\text{-TH}_{\text{GEN/PP}}$, but $\text{*EXP}_{\text{DAT/ACC}}\text{-TH}_{\text{ACC}}$)?

2. Allen's (1995) LFG analysis

- Allen's (1995) proposed analysis is couched on the lexical mapping theory (Bresnan & Kanerva 1989; Bresnan & Moshi 1990) plus the C/T theory (Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987). The idea of adopting C/T theory to LFG was attributed to Andrews's (1990) study of the Icelandic case system.

(9)

lician	EXP	TH
	DAT_{Lex}	
	-r	intrinsic
	-r	default

	S/O	S/O

(Allen's p. 141)

- In (9), TH is intrinsically classified as [-r], and EXP, which is the Θ^{\wedge} , is [-r] by default. Since [-r] defines the natural class for SUBJ and OBJ, both EXP and TH are S/O. Since EXP is higher than TH in thematic hierarchy, it is the subject. EXP gets dative as lexical case. The remaining argument TH gets nominative following the basic idea of the C/T theory.
- Besides lexical case (e.g. DAT_{Lex} and ACC_{Lex}), the lexical information of verbs may specify such features as [+o] and [+r]. These lexical features block the intrinsic or the default classification of [-o] or [-r]. For instance, verbs like *sceamian* (Types N & II) have the upper part of the following lexical information.

(10)

sceamian	EXP	TH	
		+o / +r	(E^{E} either, but not both)
	$\text{DAT}_{\text{Lex}}/\text{ACC}_{\text{Lex}}$		

	S	O / OBL	

- The TH of *sceamian* is lexically specified for either [+o] or [+r] (*but not both*). Allen assumes without justification that the lexically specified $[\text{+o}]_{\text{Lex}}$ must get genitive. Hence, when the TH chooses [+o], it is realized as a genitive object. When it is [+r], it is realized as an oblique (i.e.

PP). The EXP of *sceamian* is either DAT_{Lex} or ACC_{Lex} . This way, we get the case alternation between dative and accusative for the experiencer argument with Type N verbs. Finally, the lexical case on EXP of *sceamian* is entirely optional, which is why $\text{DAT}_{\text{Lex}}/\text{ACC}_{\text{Lex}}$ is in parentheses in (4.133). When the lexical case is entirely absent, the experiencer subjects structurally gets nominative. This is how we get the alternation between Type N and Type II.

- Allen devised $[\text{+o}]_{\text{Lex}}$ just for the purpose of the genitive object, and stipulated that $[\text{+o}]_{\text{Lex}}$ gets dative. This does not look better than specifying it simply as GEN_{Lex} . As for the five questions posed in (8), she could manage to provide explanation for (a) and (b), but not for (c), (d), and (e).

3. Proposal: An alternative approach by J. S. Jun (2003)

3.1. Syntactic and semantic bases of case assignment

- The key idea is that case is both syntactic and semantic. In many theories including GB, minimalism, LFG, GPSG, HPSG, etc., case is determined in syntax. On the other hand, many others do believe that case is determined in semantics; e.g. cognitive linguists, Role and Reference Grammar, such LFG studies as K-S Hong (1991) and Alsina (1996, 1997).
- Case is described by its function and meaning, i.e. syntax and semantics. Since case is explained by both syntactic and semantic terms equally well or badly, the null hypothesis should be that function and meaning are the head and tail of case. An NP gets nominative/accusative simply because its function and meaning collaborate to mark it so.
- The Case-in-Tiers approach (Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987; Maling 1993; Maling, Jun & Kim 2001) and the syntactic case-mapping in tiers:

(11) Syntactic Hierarchy: $\text{NP}_{\text{SUBJ}} > \text{NP}_{\text{OBJ}}$

□ □

Case Tier Hierarchy: $\text{NOM} > \text{ACC}$

- The semantic case-mapping in tiers:

(12) Semantic Hierarchy: $\text{Thing}_{\text{actor}} > \text{Thing}_{\text{theme}}$

□ □

Case Tier Hierarchy: $\text{NOM} > \text{ACC}$

- The crucial aspect of my theory is the *surface case resolution*. In most cases, syntactic case matches its corresponding semantic case. A problem occurs when syntactic case conflicts with the semantic case. When syntactic case does not match the semantic case, **languages differ in choosing syntactic case over semantic case, semantic case over syntactic case, either**

syntactic or semantic case, both syntactic and semantic cases, etc.

3.2. Possible options for case in UG: Let lexical items decide!

- In my Brandeis dissertation, case is independently motivated in syntax and semantics. Languages may differ in dealing with conflicts between syntactic and semantic case; i.e. a language can choose to prefer either syntactic or semantic case, or keep the choice open, so we can get variant cases as in Korean. Another thing a language could do is to leave it up to each lexical item to decide, so that one verb could prefer syntactic case, another semantic case, and yet another verb does not care (Jackendoff, p.c.). This would give the appearance of quirky case, except that the cases would be motivated by general principles. Finally, there can be really quirky case, for which there is no reason at all. The really quirky case (e.g. the accusative subject) together with the proposed machinery makes the theory expressive enough to account for most complexities posed by the Old English impersonal construction.
- Suppose that the experiencer and the theme arguments are assigned nominative and accusative respectively in syntax, by virtue of the C/T-theoretic *syntactic* case-mapping principles.

(13)		EXP	TH	
	Syntactic Case	NOM	ACC	(motivated by the C/T theory)

- Also, the C/T-theoretic *semantic* case-mapping principles motivate the following case-mapping in semantics.

(14)		EXP	TH	
	Semantic Case	DAT _{Lex}	NOM	

- In (14), dative is lexical, but is not completely quirky, since it is motivated by the NANP experiencer role. The nominative after dative is motivated by the C/T theory. (15) is the combined result.

(15)		EXP	TH	
	a. Syntactic Case	NOM	ACC	
	b. Semantic Case	DAT _{Lex}	NOM	

- In our current view of UG as a toolkit, lexical items can choose whether to use the syntactic case frame or the semantic case frame, or to leave it as an open choice. This allows three case frames in (16).

(16)	a. Syntactic case only:	NOM-ACC
	b. Semantic case only:	DAT _{Lex} -NOM
	c. Either syntactic or semantic case:	Either NOM-ACC or DAT _{Lex} -NOM

- (16a) represents Type II verbs like *behofian*. (16b) represents Type I verbs like *lician*. (16c) represents verbs like *ofhreowan*, which occur in both Types II and I (*plus N*).
- In Types N and II, the theme object can/should be marked by GEN(/PP). In Old English, genitive marks not only adnominal complements, but also verbal/adjectival/prepositional complements. Since we know nothing about genitive in non-adnominal complements, we cannot say much about the GEN(/PP) object in Types N and II. In this paper, I will consider the GEN(/PP) object as lexical choice (i.e. GEN(/PP)_{Lex}) on the theme argument in syntax/semantics without further ado. This simply means that I dare not make rough guesses about the non-adnominal genitive. It is also consistent with Allen's treatment of the genitive theme, since she assumes that [+o]_{Lex} is the lexical feature responsible for the genitive theme.
- Following Allen's proposal that lexical case can be optional rendering alternation between structural case and lexical case on the same argument, I assume that the experiencer can be also marked ACC_{Lex} in syntax -- really quirky case. The GEN(/PP)_{Lex} on the theme in syntax and semantics is italicized to show that I do not have much to talk about it.

(17)	EXP	TH
a. Syntactic Case	NOM or ACC _{Lex}	ACC or <i>GEN(/PP)_{Lex}</i>
b. Semantic Case	DAT _{Lex}	NOM or <i>GEN(/PP)_{Lex}</i>

- (17a) allows four case frames; i.e. (i) NOM-ACC, (ii) NOM-GEN(/PP)_{Lex}, (iii) ACC_{Lex}-GEN(/PP)_{Lex}, and (iv) ACC_{Lex}-ACC. (17b) allows two case frames; i.e. (i) DAT-NOM, and (ii) DAT-GEN(/PP)_{Lex}. (18) is the combined result.

(18)	EXP	TH
a. Syntactic Case:	(i) NOM	ACC,
	(ii) NOM	<i>GEN(/PP)_{Lex}</i>
	(iii) ACC _{Lex}	<i>GEN(/PP)_{Lex}</i>
	(iv) ACC _{Lex}	ACC.
b. Semantic Case:	(i) DAT _{Lex}	NOM
	(ii) DAT _{Lex}	<i>GEN(/PP)_{Lex}</i>

- Now, we are ready to provide account for Old English impersonal verbs' membership for possible case frames. First, verbs like *lician* (i.e. Type I) occur only in the DAT-NOM frame (i.e. (18b-(i))). We can accomplish this by specifying these verbs as *semantic case only* in their lexical information.

(19) *lician* (Type I): Semantic Case Only

EXP TH
 Syntactic Case
 Semantic Case DAT_{Lex}

- Secondly, verbs like *behofian* (Type II) allow NOM-GEN and NOM-ACC frames (i.e. (18a-(i), (ii))). We get this result by optionally specifying GEN(/PP)_{Lex} on the theme (i.e. in parentheses), and making the verbs take only the syntactic case as in (19).

(19) *behofian* (Type II): Syntactic Case Only

EXP TH
 Syntactic Case (GEN(/PP)_{Lex}) (☞ parentheses showing optionality)
 Semantic Case

- Thirdly, verbs like *hyncan* (Types I & N) allow DAT-NOM, DAT-GEN/PP, and ACC-GEN/PP frames (i.e. (18a-(iii), b-(i), (ii))). We accomplish this by specifying the lexical information of *hyncan* as (20).

(20) *hyncan* (Types I & N): Either Syntactic or Semantic Case

EXP TH
 Syntactic Case ACC_{Lex} GEN(/PP)_{Lex}
 Semantic Case DAT_{Lex} (GEN(/PP)_{Lex})

- Fourthly, verbs like *sceamian* (Types N & II) allow DAT-GEN/PP, ACC-GEN/PP, NOM-GEN, and NOM-ACC frames (i.e. (18a-(i), (ii), (iii), b-(ii))). We get this result by (21).

(21) *sceamian* (Types N & II): Either Syntactic or Semantic Case

EXP TH
 Syntactic Case (ACC_{Lex}) (GEN(/PP)_{Lex})
 Semantic Case DAT_{Lex} GEN(/PP)_{Lex}

- Finally, verbs like *ofhreowan* (Types I, N & II) allow DAT-NOM, DAT-GEN/PP, ACC-GEN/PP, NOM-GEN, and NOM-ACC frames (i.e. (18a-(i), (ii), (ii), b-(i), (iii))). We get the result by (22).

(22) *ofhreowan* (Types I, N & II): Either Syntactic or Semantic Case

EXP TH
 Syntactic Case (ACC_{Lex}) (GEN(/PP)_{Lex})
 Semantic Case DAT_{Lex} (GEN(/PP)_{Lex})

- My proposed analysis provides explanation for the first three questions of (8); i.e. it explains (i) why the theme object is marked nominative in Type I (i.e. DAT-NOM); (ii) how dative subjects interact with theme, if the genitive on the theme is lexical; (iii) how dative and accusative alternate on experiencer in Type N; (iv) how genitive and accusative alternate on theme in Type

II; and (v) how different verbs have different memberships for each type including such multiple memberships as Types I & N (e.g. *þyncan*), N & II (e.g. *sceamian*), and I, N & II (*ofhreowan*).

- The fourth and the fifth questions in (8) were concerned with Type N verbs; i.e. why most/all Type N verbs alternate with Type II frames, but not *vice versa*; and why the *DAT-ACC frame does not occur with Types N & II verbs. According to my analysis, this is due to the nature of Type N case frames. Type N frames are DAT-GEN/PP and ACC-GEN/PP. From the discussion so far, these frames are possible when we have lexical entries like (21). The DAT-GEN/PP frame comes from semantics, and the ACC-GEN/PP frame comes from syntax. Unlike Type I and Type II, which make use of just semantic and syntactic frames respectively, Type N verbs combine both syntactic and semantic frames. This makes it possible for Type N verbs to be expressed in syntactic frames like NOM-GEN or NOM-ACC. On the other hand, Type II verbs refer to only the syntactic case, and it cannot alternate with semantic frames involving dative. Also, since the *DAT-ACC frame in Types N & II is the mixture of the semantic dative with the syntactic accusative, it is not, strictly speaking, part of the alternation between the syntactic frame and the semantic frame.

4. Conclusion

- The impersonal construction in Old English is a serious challenge to any case theory. Its case/Type alternations are complicated, but not completely arbitrary. From our present understanding of the Old English case system, it is almost impossible to provide a comprehensive account for the construction. Nevertheless, two things are apparent at this stage. First, it is very difficult to explain the case/Type alternations in the Old English impersonal construction with traditional case theories. Second, the proposed analysis in this paper provides some meaningful, though not perfect, insight into the impersonal construction in an interesting way.

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