REVIEW ARTICLE

THE CASE REMAINS OPEN
(Some Notes on a New Book on Morphological Case in Russian)


1. At the beginning of the book reviewed the reader gets the impression that this is the book on morphological case to end all books on morphological case. The reader is captured by what seems to be an inevitable logic of the presentation, as it progresses – and this is something to appreciate. In my opinion, there are too many examples of the Slavicist ‘free-style struggle’ of works where any embryonic idea, any vague concept, any half-baked theory is applied to some concrete descriptional purpose, while the author hardly seems aware of the theoretical problems involved or their ramifications. On the other hand, the task of writing ‘definitive books’ is overwhelming and leads mostly to disappointment.

2. The book consists of four chapters. Chapter One is an informative survey and a discussion of metatheoretical problems concerning scientific definitions in general, as well as presentations of certain terms such as intension and extension in logic, the Saussurean/Hjelmslevian concept of the language sign as the unity of expression and content, etc. The main points of Chapter One may be summarized as:

A T-term of science, the logical intension of which is called concept (Begriff), is explicated with the help of a t-term, a technical word or a common, prescientific word of a natural language, used in technical language. As both language signs of natural languages and construed quasi-natural signs are ambiguous and/or vague as regards their meanings, an important notion involved is the notion of stabilization of t-terms. When it is established that a certain definite intension and a certain expression belong together, a t-term is fully determined and becomes a T-term. The author introduces two kinds of T-terms, the so-called a) analog explicatees and b) ‘piscis explicatees’, on the basis of two of Carnap’s criteria for constructing explications:

a) the criterion of similarity – the explicatee (T-term) fits in the majority of instances where the explicator (t-term) has been previously used.

b) the criterion of fruitfulness – the explicatee allows us to formulate as general statements as possible, for example, the explicatee (T-term) Fisch, i.e. piscis, to the German explicator (t-term) Fisch makes such general
statements possible as *Alle Fische haben Kiemen* ‘All fish have gills’, as the T-term excludes such ‘fishes’ of the ‘naive’, common German as whales (Walfische).

Finally, the author introduces a so-called GN-lexeme, invoked frequently in the following chapters, i.e. a set (aggregate) of all forms with the same grammatical number and genus, which, in its turn, is a subset of a set (aggregate) of all flexional forms that are tokens of one and the same noun lexeme. This concept is used in the diagnostic contexts to establish the case paradigms dealt with in Chapter Two and Three, where the genus/number agreement would play havoc with the intended aims otherwise.

3.1 In Chapter Two four distinct explicator candidates, four variants of the traditional t-term ‘case’ are recognized (cf. pp. 36–43):

- *(t)* case₁ – the grammatical category. Nouns are characterized by the grammatical categories of genus, number, and case.
- *(t)* case₂ – the number of members of the oppositions constituted by the grammatical category. Church Slavonic, for example, had seven cases, Indo-European eight. This *(t)* case₂ is the kernel of the problem, as it is unclear and disputed what units of linguistic description constitute the extension of this term, i.e. what are distinct cases in a given case language and what are not. Therefore, it is chosen as the explicator (of the T-term case).
- *(t)* case₃ – i.e. word form.
- *(t)* case₄ – identified as an instance of ‘postpositions’ as opposed to prepositions.

3.2 Here comes my first major objection. Admittedly, the author quotes other linguists as the sources of these four candidates for the explicator. However, everywhere else when he disagrees with some linguist quoted, critical objections are voiced. Thus, silence about *(t)* case₄ has to be interpreted as agreement. *(t)* case₄ concerns one of the most important dichotomies in typology of languages. In an earlier paper, I presented an explicit definition of the morphological case that hinged on the flexion of the head noun in a noun phrase, i.e. mainly on the flexion of nouns. Thus, it encountered difficulties with case languages where there are some residuals of noun flexion only. I quote from another paper with a revised definition, Bily (1989a): “In languages as German or Roumanian it is not primarily the head noun that is inflected. Instead the flexion rests on other parts of speech (word classes) – adjectives and, above all, articles. I have devised a new definition that separates genuine case morphemes from other means of ‘NP-inflexion’, such as prepositions, postpositions, and ‘impositions’: