

## Once Again on the Holistic Meaning of Cases in Latin\*

Ján Horecký

In Slovak linguistics the generalizable meaning of cases was studied from two standpoints. While Miko (1962) developed a localistic conception, Pauliny (1945) and Oravec (1984) based their approach on the presupposition that cases express participation or extent of participation in the action to a differing extent. In this sense, Pauliny distinguished the relationships of affectedness and unaffectedness, and within the following steps full affectedness vs. non-full affectedness, or instrumental vs. non-instrumental relationship. Oravec worked with the notions of central vs. peripheral, active vs. passive, partitive vs. total participation.

Jakobson (1936) took also into consideration the relationship between the process and its object (orientation), but, at the same time, understood the case as a morphological category. Hence he characterized the system of cases by the relationships or oppositions between the particular cases. He attempted to clarify the complexity of case relationships by introducing two kinds of oppositions: the signalization of the presence or the signalization of the absence of the feature, on the one hand, and the signalization of the positive or the negative form of the feature, on the other. His theory was applied to the meaning of cases in Latin by Horecký (1946). He characterized the particular cases by three features: affectedness, extent and marginality. The absence of a feature was indicated by zero, its positive presence by a capital letter (A, E, M), and its negative presence by a small letter (a, e, m):

(1)	N: a Me Mm	A: A Me Mm	D: a Me M
		G: a E Mm	Ab: Ma e M

In this approach, the individual cases are satisfactorily delimited by the three features, but, at the same time, it lacks any unity in the relationships of opposition. While the contrary opposition A – a occurs between A and N, between A and D as well as between A and G, the opposition E – e occurs only in the G – Ab pair and the opposition M – m does not occur at all.

The effort aimed at the delimitation of the holistic meaning of cases has a long tradition in the research of Latin. A good survey is presented by Taraba (1983-84). He points out various starting points of researchers, but also various theories applied. He devotes special attention to the interpretation of case by Hjelmslev and Jakobson, and points out the shortcomings in Horecký's description of holistic meaning.

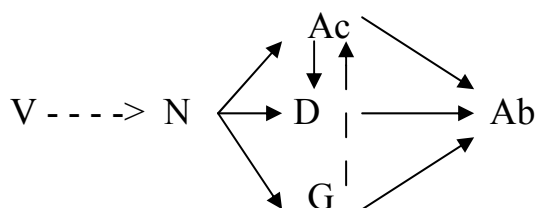
Taraba himself is inclined to accept a theory explaining the holistic meaning of case by participation. Nevertheless, he does not consider the participation in the content of the whole statement (Jakobson), or the participation in the action (Oravec) to be the basic criterion. Instead, he proposes the participation of a certain thing (entity) in the particular phenomenon.

On this basis he primarily defines the nominative against the other cases: the nominative does not express the participation; rather it expresses appurtenance. The other cases express the participation of a given entity in the substance (not in the process) denoted by one of these cases.

Within such attitude it is natural to define the meaning of the accusative as an unlimited participation, of genitive as a limited participation without any further feature, the meaning of the dative as a limited but prospective participation, and finally the meaning of the ablative as a marginal participation. As evident, Jakobson's proposal is adopted here in relation to effectedness and marginality.

Taraba represents these relationships, or the meanings stemming from them, by the following scheme:

(2)



Unfortunately, the scheme blurs the central position of the accusative, and does not explain the secondary position of the dative. Neither does it explain the ‘as if’ central position of the genitive.

The lack of clarity probably stems also from the fact that Taraba combines two criteria: Jakobson’s principle of morphological meaning which should be defined by oppositions, and Fillmore’s principle of the dependence of the meaning of the case on the verb, or, in the case of the adnominal genitive, also on the substantive. In previous research this difference has been rather neglected. Horecký did not take it into consideration at all.

However, Taraba’s conclusions indicate that the definition of the meaning of cases requires the dependence on the verb, i.e. a direction opposite to that considered by Jakobson. While Jakobson conceived of the object as being affected, Fillmore considers the object as being dependent. In other words, all the cases express certain dependence on the verb, of importance being the extent of this dependence, from the highest degree of dependence in the case of the accusative to the minimum degree (approaching zero) in the case of the vocative (so far the vocative has been simply left out!). If we defined the different meanings of the cases according to the degree of dependence, we could mark them by means of a scale: the first degree of dependence is expressed by the accusative, the second degree can be ascribed to the genitive as it expresses neither full dependence nor secondary one as in the case of the dative. The ablative also often goes through the accusative, but on the whole it remains at the periphery. Nevertheless, marking by degrees is rather conventional as it is actually a continuum, hence the degree, the extent of dependence, cannot be exactly localized.

As to the nominative, we agree with Taraba who shows that this case does not actually express dependence, but expresses appurtenance, or rather the ability to perceive the activity, to be its bearer. By implication, it is placed left of the verb in the schematic representation of the degree of dependence. The very extreme left position is assumed by the vocative that expresses a certain relationship to the whole statement.

The scheme looks as follows:

(3) Vc -- N -- Verb -- A -- G -- D -- Ab

Parallel to the above scheme can be constructed the scheme of dependence on the substantive. Here the first place is taken by the genitive (*periculum mortis*), the second place by the dative (*additus litteris*), the third by the ablative (*liber curis*), and at the end there is the accusative (*via Roman*). The nominative is relatively rare (*urbs Roma*).

However, it has to be stressed that – in contrast to the so far existing research – the prepositional cases also belong to the system of cases. Oravec (1984) avoided the solution of this

question by taking into consideration only the prepositionless cases (and thus he actually left out from his considerations the locative as it only occurs with the preposition in Slovak). Pauliny (1947) delimited the locative as an independent, non-instrumental case expressing other relationships. On the other hand, though, he did not take into consideration the nominative. The situation in Latin is more complex because of the fact that the ablative is internally divided into the ablative proper, the locative and the instrumental, while only the prepositionless instrumental and time-based locative occur without the preposition. Nevertheless, it is evident that all types of the ablative take a marginal position.

**Note:**

\* First published as “Again on Entirety Meaning of Cases in Latin.” In *Issues of Valency. Studies in Honour of Jarmila Panevová*. Red. Eva Hajičová. Praha, Karolinum 1998, pp. 181 – 184.

**References:**

FILLMORE, Ch. 1968. The Case for Case. In *Universals in Linguistic Theory*. London, 1968.

HORECKÝ, J. 1946-1948. Poznámky k celostnému významu pádov v latinčine. (Notes on the Holistic Meaning of Cases in Latin). In *Linguistica Slovaca IV – VI*, 1946 – 48, pp. 44 – 55.

JAKOBSON, R. 1936. Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kasuslehre. *Travaux du Cercle linguistique de Prague VI*. 1936, pp. 240 – 288.

ORAVEC, J., BAJZÍKOVÁ, E., FURDÍK, J. 1984. *Súčasný slovenský spisovný jazyk. Morfológia. (Contemporary Slovak Standard Language. Morphology.)*. Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 1984.

PAULINY, E. 1947 – 48. *Systém spisovného jazyka. (System of the Standard Language)*. Bratislava: Filozofická fakulta UK, 1947 – 48.

TARABA, J. 1983 – 84. Quelques principes pour l'étude du sémantisme des cas du latin classique. *Graecolatina et orientalia*. In *Zborník Filozofickej fakulty UK, XV – XVI*. 1983 – 84, pp. 75 – 96.