

Case in Erzya, A synthesis of morphology, semantics, syntactic function, and compatibility with number, person and definiteness

The Erzya language is an agglutinative Uralic language, and from a morphological perspective Erzya can be seen to have three basic word classes: (1) those that generally take no inflection at all; (2) those that generally take only verbal conjugation, and (3) those that, to different degrees, can take either declension or conjugation, or both.

Since the focus of this paper is case, it will suffice to state that the first group consists of particles, interjections and conjunctions, and that the second group consists of finite verbs, whereas members of either of these groups in their own right might be plucked from context as entities and declined as nouns. However, it is the third group consisting of non-finites, nouns, adjectives, pronouns, determiners, numerals, postpositions and adverbs that are consistently subject to the phenomenon of case, be that grammatical or syntactic in nature.

Orientation strategies in Erzya are such that syntactic elements with a head in a member from the third group typically have morphological marking or lack thereof, \emptyset , on that head, the head being right-oriented. In the instance of non-finites and postpositions, the anchor, which typically precedes the head, may also take morphological case marking other than the absolutive, indeterminate nominative singular. The declension of these anchors, as well as other modifiers, quantifiers and determiners is indicative of the semantic functions of these elements and therefore is not determined by the semantic function attributed to the case of the phrase head.

This article will deal with case in Erzya as a phenomenon of morphology, semantics and syntax and its compatibility with definiteness, as well as the grammatical categories of number and person in the frame work of part-of-speech divisions. The grammatical cases can conceivably combine with the three notions of number, person and definiteness. Such is also the situation when dealing with expression of spatial dimensions. Expression of time, state or other semantics, however, might be seen in less frequency with those three notions, but at the same time they might be represented by complex phrase structure.

Issues dealt with include morphology in combination with:

- (a) Part-of-speech,
- (b) Phrase complexity
- (c) Category of number
- (d) Category of person
- (e) Definiteness
- (f) Syntactic function

(1) Enumeration of 15 morphological means	
part-of-speech	attested morphology
nouns	abessive, ablative, comitative, comparative, dative, elative, genitive, illative, inessive, lative, nominative, prolative, temporal, translative
postpositions	ablative, comparative, elative, illative, inessive, lative, locative, prolative
non-finites	ablative, comparative, elative, illative, inessive, locative-nominative, prolative

(2) Cases attested at two syntactic levels		
name	syntactic level	
	NP	VP
abe	kudo+vtomo psaka house/home_N+ABE cat_N.ABS 'homeless cat'	psakaś kudo+vtomo cat_N.NOM.SG.DET house/home_N+ABE 'the cat [is] homeless'
cmp	vazo+ška kiska calf_N+CMP dog_N.ABS 'dog the size of a calf'	kiskaś vazo+ška dog_N.NOM.SG.DET calf_N+CMP 'the dog [is] as big as a calf'
ela	Turku+sto professoroś Turku_N+ELA professor_N.NOM.SG.DET 'the professor from Turku'	professoroś Turku+sto professor_N.NOM.SG.DET Turku_N+ELA 'the professor [is] from Turku'
gen	Purgazo+ń kudoś Purgaz_N-PROP+GEN house/home_N.NOM.SG.DET 'Purgaz's house'	te kudoś Purgazo+ń this_PRON-DEICT house/home_N.NOM.SG.DET Purgaz_N-PROP+GEN 'this house [is] Purgaz's'
ill	jarsam+s kšim araś to-eat_NFV+ILL bread_N.POSS-1SG non-existent_PTC 'I don't have bread to eat'	kšim kadija čokšnes jarsam+s bread_N.POSS-1SG to-leave_V.1SG>3SG evening_N.ILL to-eat_NFV+ILL 'I left my bread for evening to eat'
ine	pakša+so lomań field_N+INE human_N.ABS 'a/the person in the field'	lomańeś pakša+so human_N.ABS field_N+INE 'the person [is] in a/the field'
nom-abs	kiska íevks dog_N.ABS offspring_N.ABS 'puppy'	te kiska this_PRON-DEICT dog_N.ABS 'this [is] a dog'
loc	ikele peś ahead_ADV.LOC end_N.NOM.SG.DET 'the front end'	peś ikele end_N.NOM.SG.DET ahead_ADV.LOC 'the/this/that end is ahead'
prol	čavo pakša+va moľemańt końdamo empty_A.ABS field_N+PROL to- walk_NFV.GEN.SG.DET like_PP.ABS 'like going through an empty field'	kiś moľś pakša+va road_N.NOM.SG.DET to-go_VF.IND.PRETI.3SG field_N+PROL 'the road went through a/the field'
trans 1	kudo+ks čočko house/home_N+TRANSL log_N.ABS 'a/the log for [building] a house'	ramaś čočkt od kudo+ks to-buy_VF.IND.PRETI.3SG log_N.PL.NOM.INDET new_A.ABS house/home_N+TRANSL 'he/she/it bought logs for [building] a new house'