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# LACUS FORUM XXXVII

**COMMUNICATION AND COGNITION:  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES**

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III



# Morphology





## IS SIDAAMA (SIDAMO) A MARKED-NOMINATIVE LANGUAGE?

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**Abstract.** This study describes the case system of Sidaama, a Highland East Cushitic language of Ethiopia, and shows that it is not a marked-nominative language, as the literature describes it, but rather is an accusative language, if a marked-nominative language is defined in terms of the unmarkedness of the accusative case. In Sidaama, unmodified nouns and adjectives in the accusative case are functionally marked; morphologically, the accusative case is also marked with a suprafix, which emerges as a high pitch on the final vowel, and the nominative case is marked with a suffix, which may or may not be zero, depending on the gender. The present study also shows how difficult it is to determine which grammatical case is unmarked in this language.

**Keywords:** case, marked-nominative, accusative, markedness, Sidaama (Sidamo)

**Languages:** Sidaama (Sidamo), Kambaata, Cushitic

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The goals of the present study are (i) to provide an accurate description of the morphological case-marking system of Sidaama, which has been incorrectly or insufficiently described in the literature (e.g., Tucker 1966; Hudson 1976; Teferra 2000), and (ii) to discuss whether this language is a marked-nominative language. Researchers seem to have assumed the answer to be affirmative in cases based on the data in the literature, if it is defined in terms of the unmarkedness of the accusative case, as König (2006, 2008) claims.

Section 1 reviews previous studies on marked-nominative languages. Section 2 describes the case marking system of Sidaama. Section 3 discusses the notions of markedness and unmarkedness, especially, that of functional unmarkedness, with which previous researchers characterized the accusative case in marked-nominative languages. Section 4 concludes the paper.

1. PREVIOUS STUDIES. According to Dixon (1994:56-58), there are two types of markedness, formal markedness (the presence of morphological marking in a linguistic form) and functional markedness (the limitations of the function of a linguistic form). Three types of morphological case marking systems, accusative, ergative, and marked-nominative systems, exhibit different patterns of marking the subject of an intransitive verb (S), the subject of a transitive verb (A), and an object (O). In a prototypical accusative system, S and A are treated the same way, and are morphologically and functionally unmarked, whereas O is morphologically and functionally marked. In a prototypical ergative system, S and O are treated the same way, and are morphologically and functionally unmarked, whereas A is morphologically and functionally marked. The marked-nominative system differs from the accusative system

in- markedness. In this system, S and A are treated the same way, but they are morphologically and functionally marked, and O is functionally unmarked (O is often also morphologically unmarked) (König 2006, 2008). According to König, this type of language is found mainly in East Africa and only rarely in other places. It is also found in Afro-Asiatic, especially East Cushitic and Western Omotic, and in Nilotic, which is geographically close to Cushitic and Omotic. It is occasionally found in other language families.

In Dixon’s (1994:63-67, 204) view, the marked-nominative system is a mixture of the accusative system and the ergative system, because S and A are treated the same way, as in the accusative system, and O is functionally unmarked, as in the ergative system. The marked-nominative system is cross-linguistically unusual in that S is both morphologically and functionally marked in this system. This is unlike the accusative and ergative systems, where S is functionally as well as morphologically unmarked. The morphological markedness of S in the marked-nominative system contradicts Greenberg’s Universal 38 (1963:95): “Where there is a case system, the only case which ever has only zero allomorphs is the one which includes among its meanings that of the subject of the intransitive verb.” The functional markedness of S in the marked-nominative system is also incompatible with the fact that citation forms are usually the same as the forms for S.

König (2006, 2008) argues that there are two types of marked-nominative languages, one where the accusative case has no morphological marking, and the other where the accusative case has morphological marking, as in Table 1, with the former type being far more common than the latter.

Case-marking system \ Markedness	Morphological markedness			Functional markedness		
	Syntactic Function			Syntactic Function		
	A	S	O	A	S	O
Ergative (prototype)	marked	unmarked		marked	unmarked	
Marked-nominative	marked		unmarked or marked	marked	unmarked	
Accusative (prototype)	unmarked		marked	unmarked	marked	

Table 1: Morphological and Functional Markedness of A, S, and O.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the accusative case may be morphologically unmarked or marked in marked-nominative languages. However, it is functionally unmarked in either type of marked-nominative language. Therefore, according to König, it is primarily the functional markedness of the accusative case rather than its formal unmarkedness that defines marked-nominative languages. König characterizes functionally unmarked forms of nouns as those that are likely to be used as their citation forms, to be used in predicates, and to be used as default forms in various situations (for example, used for case doubling, possessor in possessive constructions, and indirect object).

König (2006, 2008) seems to regard Sidaama as a marked-nominative language of the type with a morphologically unmarked accusative case, based on Tucker’s

<sup>1</sup> After König 2006, 2008



description, which in turn seems to derive the information from Moreno (1940): “The Absolute form of the Noun is in the Accusative; both Nominative and Genitive sometimes have the Suffix *-i* or *-u*” (Tucker 1966: 514). However, this description of the accusative in Sidaama is incorrect, as will be seen.

2. CASE MARKING SYSTEM OF SIDAAMA. Sidaama belongs to the Highland-East branch of the Cushitic language family (Kawachi 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2011, 2012 a, b, 2013), which, in addition to Sidaama, includes Hadiyya, Kambaata, Gedeo (Darasa), and Burji. Speakers of Sidaama are in the Sidaama Zone, whose capital, Hawassa, is located 273 km (170 miles) south of Addis Ababa. According to the 2007 Ethiopian Census, the population of the Sidaama people is about 2.9 million.

The syllable structures attested in Sidaama are V, VC, CV, and CVC. In this language, two consecutive different vowels (e.g., [ai]) are interpreted as a sequence of two different vowel phonemes (e.g., /a+/i/) constituting two syllables, rather than as a diphthong. Similarly, a long vowel (e.g., [a:]) is also interpreted as a sequence of two identical vowel phonemes (e.g., /a+/a/) constituting two syllables.

Sidaama follows SOV word order, though OSV and other orders are also possible in some discourse contexts. It is a suffixing language and uses suffixes and suprafixes for case marking (cf. section 2.1). Whether suffixed or not, all words end in a vowel. The attributive adjective agrees with the noun phrase in case, number, and gender.

This section describes the case-marking system of Sidaama. Section 2.1 examines the morphological marking of the nominative and accusative cases and section 2.2 looks at whether the accusative case can be regarded as functionally unmarked.

2.1. MORPHOLOGICAL MARKING OF NOMINATIVE AND ACCUSATIVE CASES. In Sidaama, nouns in the nominative case can be marked with a suffix, depending on the gender of the noun. Adjectives may be marked with a suffix, depending on the gender of the noun modified. Because nouns and adjectives in the accusative case carry no suffix, the case-marking system of this language may look like marked-nominative. In fact, this is the assumption made in previous studies, which describe the accusative case as morphologically unmarked, under the label “absolute” (e.g., Hudson 1976, Sasse 1984) or “absolutive” (e.g., Tosco 1994, Teferra 2000). However, the accusative case is actually marked with high pitch on the final vowel of both nouns (unmodified common nouns and proper nouns) and adjectives.

Section 2.1.1 describes the pitch-accent patterns of nouns and adjectives and shows that, unlike the nominative, the accusative is marked with a suprafix. Section 2.1.2 describes the nominative case suffix, which occurs only on masculine nouns and adjectives modifying masculine nouns.

2.1.1. PITCH-ACCENT PATTERNS AND THE ACCUSATIVE CASE SUPRAFIX. Most previous studies on Sidaama have assumed that it is a stress language, where stress usually falls on the penultimate syllable of a word (Hudson 1976:248-49, Wedekind 1980:137-40, Teferra 2000:16). However, Sidaama is actually a pitch-accent language, where prominence is indicated by a high pitch rather than stress. The location of high pitch in a word is predictable, and high pitch is not associated with the duration of a vowel.

In Sidaama, a high pitch is normally assigned to the penultimate vowel segment (i.e., the vowel of the penultimate syllable) of the citation form of a noun or adjective (e.g., *sú.ma* ‘name’, *sál.to* ‘bowl’, *bal.gú.da* ‘ostrich’, *dán.ča* ‘good’, *múl.la* ‘empty’). When the penultimate syllable consists only of a vowel, and the antepenultimate syllable ends in the same vowel, the vowel of the penultimate syllable is more prominent than that of the antepenultimate one (e.g., *ka.á.lo* ‘help’, *ku.ú.la* ‘blackish blue’, *se.é.da* ‘long’). When the ultimate syllable consists only of a vowel, and the penultimate syllable ends in the same vowel, the vowel of the penultimate syllable is more prominent than that of the ultimate one (e.g., *hun.ké.e* ‘sweat’, *me.á.a* ‘woman’, *ro.dó.o* ‘sibling’).<sup>2</sup> When the penultimate syllable starts with, or consists only of, a vowel, and the antepenultimate syllable ends in a different vowel, the vowel of the penultimate syllable, rather than that of the antepenultimate one, has a high pitch (e.g., *ba.ič.čo* ‘place’, *ha.í.t’e* ‘barley’).

Nouns and adjectives shift their pitch-accent patterns, depending on their syntactic environment in a sentence. Like their citation forms, their nominative forms have high pitch on their penultimate vowel segments, as in *beétto* in (1a), *beét-u* in (2a), *búša* in (1b), and *bús-u* in (2b). In fact, *beétto* in (1a) and *búša* in (1b), which are not suffixed, have the same forms as their citation forms.

- (1) (a) *beétto* / (b) *búša beetto* *dag-g-ú.*  
 child.NOM.F/bad.NOM.F child(NOM.F3.mod) come-3sg.f-r.prf.3sg.f  
 ‘(a) The girl/(b) The bad girl came.’
- (2) (a) *beét-u* / (b) *bús-u beett-i* *da-ø-í.*  
 child-NOM.M/bad-NOM.M child(NOM.M.MOD) come-3SG.M-R.PRF.3SG.M  
 ‘(a) The boy/(b) The bad boy came.’

On the other hand, a high pitch occurs on the final vowel segments of nominal and adjectival stems as a suprafixed when they are in the accusative case, as in *beettó* in (3a) and *bušá* in (3b).<sup>4</sup>

- (3) *íse* (a) *beettó* / (b) *bušá beetto* *la’-’-ú.*  
 3SG.F.NOM child.ACC/bad.ACC child(ACC.mod) see-3SG.F-R.PRF.3SG.F  
 ‘She saw (a) the child/(b) the bad child.’

Note that when a noun is modified by an adjective, a demonstrative, a genitive noun phrase, a relative clause, or some combination of these, the modified noun has a flat pitch accent, regardless of the case of the NP, like *beetto* in (1b) and (3b) and *beett-i* in (2b).

<sup>2</sup> When such a word is a masculine noun and is in the nominative case, the quality of its final long vowel is replaced by that of the nominative suffix (-u or -i), and the final long vowel becomes -úu or -íi (e.g., *rod-úu* [sibling-NOM.M]).

<sup>3</sup> ABBREVIATIONS. D.PRF: distant perfect, LV: lengthened vowel, mod: (syntactically) modified, MOD: Modified (modified by modifier(s) and/or accompanied by the possessive pronominal suffix), R.PRF: recent perfect

<sup>4</sup> This pattern applies also to personal pronouns (e.g., *áni/ané* ‘1SG NOM/ACC’, *íse/isé* ‘3SG.FEM NOM/ACC’) and demonstratives (e.g., *tíni/tenné* ‘this (FEM) NOM/ACC’, *hákku/hakkonné* ‘that (MASC) NOM/ACC’).

2.1.2. NOMINATIVE CASE SUFFIX. The nominative case suffix on adjectives takes the form of *-u* as a replacement for the final vowel of their stem, which is *e*, *a*, or *o*, when the noun that they modify is masculine and is in the nominative case, as *búš-u* in (2b). Otherwise, the nominative case suffix on adjectives is zero, and the adjectives take their citation forms, as *búša* in (1b).

On the other hand, the nominative case suffix on nouns can have different forms, depending on three factors: (i) the gender of the noun or that of the referent of the noun phrase, (ii) whether the noun is common or proper, and (iii) (in the case of a common noun) whether the noun is Modified by another element.

In Sidaama, noun phrases are sensitive to whether a modifier or the possessive proanominal suffix, or neither, accompanies the noun.<sup>5</sup> Note that modification, normally a syntactic notion, has to be used here in a sense specific to Sidaama common nouns, and it is capitalized as **Modification** (and its related forms are also capitalized whenever the distinction is relevant, as in: Modified, Unmodified, Modify, and Modifier). Though affixation is not modification and nouns are not described as modified (in the ordinary sense) by an affix, Sidaama common nouns accompanied by the possessive pronominal suffix behave the same way in the selection of allomorphs of the nominative case suffix (and also two other case suffixes) as those that have dependents (in other words, those modified (in the ordinary sense) by genitive NPs or adnominals). These Modified common nouns behave differently from Unmodified common nouns, namely those with neither a dependent nor the possessive pronominal suffix. Thus, the use of the possessive pronominal suffix on a common noun counts as Modification of the noun.

As shown in Table 2, only masculine common nouns and *a*-ending masculine proper nouns can be marked with the nominative case suffix, which replaces the final vowel of the basic stem of the noun, which is *e*, *a*, or *o*. The nominative suffix is *-u* for Unmodified, masculine common nouns, as *beétt-u* in (2a). It is *-i* for Modified, masculine common nouns, as in *beett-i* (2b), which is modified by *búš-u*, or *beétt-i-se* in (4a), which is Modified by the third-person singular feminine pronoun, and for masculine proper nouns ending in *a*, as in *dangúr-i* in (4b).

Noun types	Common nouns		Proper nouns	
	Unmodified	Modified	ending in a	ending in e or o
Masculine	<i>-u</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-i</i>	unmarked
Feminine	unmarked			

Table 2: Different Forms of the Nominative Case Suffix on Nouns.

- (4) (a) *beétt-i-se* / (b) *dangúr-i* *sagalé*  
 child-NOM.M.MOD-3SG.F.POSS / Dangura-NOM.PROP.M food.ACC  
*beettó-te* *u-ø-í.*  
 child-DAT.F *give-3SG.M-R.PRF.3SG.M*  
 ‘(a) Her son / (b) Dangura gave the food to the girl.’

<sup>5</sup> They make several grammatical distinctions (e.g., allomorphs of a case suffix) in terms of this criterion (Kawachi & Tekleselassie 2012).

Note that all feminine nouns (e.g., *beétto* in (1a), *beetto* in (1b)) and *e-* or *o-*ending masculine proper nouns (e.g., male names such as *garsamo*, *laammiso*, *suwe*, and *bassabbe*) are not marked for the nominative case. Also, the nominative forms of (syntactically) unmodified feminine nouns or nouns denoting feminine entities (e.g., *beétto* in (1a)) and *e-* or *o-*ending masculine proper nouns, which have a high pitch on their penultimate vowel segments, have the same forms as their citation forms.

2.2. FUNCTIONAL MARKEDNESS OF THE NOMINATIVE AND ACCUSATIVE CASES. As mentioned in section 1, König (2006, 2008) states that functionally unmarked forms have a wide variety of uses and frequently appear as citation forms and in predicates. In a marked-nominative language, the accusative case is functionally unmarked, and accusative forms show these properties.

However, in Sidaama the accusative case is functionally marked, and thus this language cannot be regarded as a marked-nominative language if the functional unmarkedness of the accusative case distinguishes this type of language from an accusative language. In Sidaama, the citation forms of common nouns and adjectives are also used as predicates directly followed by the predicative noun-phrase clitic (FEM: =*te*), as in (5a) and (5b).<sup>6</sup> (Note that its masculine form is =*ho*.) If functionally unmarked forms of nouns are the citation forms or predicate forms, they are never the same as their accusative forms. Therefore, it is not appropriate to call the accusative case in Sidaama “absolute” or “absolute”. The citation and predicate forms of Unmodified feminine nouns and *e-* or *o-*ending masculine proper nouns are exactly the same as their nominative case forms.

- (5) *tii'i* (a) *beétto=te* / (b) *búša=te*.  
 that.one.over.there (FEM) child=PRED.F / bad=PRED.F  
 ‘That one (FEM) over there (a) is a girl/(b) is bad.’

However, the citation forms of other types of nouns (all Unmodified masculine common nouns and some masculine proper nouns) share the same pitch pattern, but are different in form from their nominative case forms, which are suffixed with *-u* or *-i*.

The citation and predicative forms of adjectives (e.g., *búša* ‘bad’, *búša=te* in (5b)) are also different from their accusative forms (e.g., *bušá* in (3b)). Their citation and predicative forms are identical in form with their nominative case forms when the noun that they modify is feminine and in the nominative case, as in *búša* in (1b), though their citation forms are different from their nominative case forms marked with the nominative case suffix *-u*, which are used when the noun that they modify is both masculine and in the nominative case, as in *búš-u* in (2b).

<sup>6</sup> When a noun modified by an adjective is used as a predicate, the adjective has a high pitch on its penultimate vowel segment, and the noun has a high pitch on its ultimate vowel segment with this vowel segment lengthened, and is followed by the noun-phrase clitic for Modified nouns and proper nouns, =*ti* (e.g., in (5), the predicate can be replaced by *búša beettó-o=ti* [bad.PRED child-LV=PRED.mod] to mean ‘That one (FEM) over there is a bad girl.’).

Therefore, the accusative forms of nouns and adjectives are always different from their citation and predicative forms, whereas their nominative forms may or may not correspond to their citation and predicative forms.

3. DISCUSSION. This section considers the notions of formal or morphological markedness and functional markedness in the Sidaama case marking system and points out that the unmarkedness cannot be invariably associated with either the nominative or accusative case in this language.

The notion of formal markedness seems to be straightforward for case marking with a suffix. The nominative case is marked with a suffix on masculine common nouns and *a*-ending masculine proper nouns, whereas it is not marked with a suffix on other types of nouns. The accusative case is not marked with a suffix at all.

However, the notion of formal markedness is tricky in regard to case marking with pitch accent. Obviously, noun or adjective forms with the accusative suprafix are morphologically marked. On the other hand, it is difficult to determine which pitch accent pattern is morphologically unmarked. Those forms with a high pitch on the penultimate vowel segment may be regarded as morphologically unmarked because they are the same as their citation and predicate forms, which can be regarded as having no morphological marking, and thus as a basic form. However, those forms with a flat pitch accent, which nouns and adjectives take when (syntactically) modified, could also be considered morphologically unmarked because of the absence of a high pitch on them.

The notion of functional markedness in the Sidaama case marking system is also problematic. Although there are forms of a particular word that are functionally marked compared to its other forms, its functionally unmarked form is difficult to identify. Clearly, nominative forms of masculine common nouns, proper nouns ending in *a*, and adjectives modifying masculine nouns, which carry the nominative suffix *-u* or *-i*, are functionally marked because they are different from their citation and predicative forms and can only be used as S or A. Similarly, unmodified nouns and adjectives in the accusative case, where a high pitch occurs on their final vowel segments, are functionally marked. They are different from their citation and predicative forms, and the accusative case is restricted to the marking of O, though it matches the form of the oblique case in this language, which is used for a bare NP adverbial for the goal of motion, as in (6a), and for the possessum noun in the oblique possessum external possessor construction, as in (7).

(6) *ise* (a) *t'awó/(b) min-í-si-ra* *hač-d-ú.*  
 3SG.F.NOM field.OBL/house-GEN.M.MOD-3SG.M.POSS-ALL go-3SG.F-R.PRF.3SG.F  
 'She went (a) to the field/(b) to his house.'

(7) *beét-u* *lekká* *t'ur-ø-í.*  
 child-NOM.M foot.OBL become.dirty-3SG.M-R.PRF.3SG.M  
 'The boy's feet became/are dirty.'  
 (*lit.*, 'The boy became dirty with respect to the foot.')

Accusative forms cannot be used as the default form in any of those situations

where König (2006, 2008) states functionally unmarked forms are used. First, when two case markers occur in the same noun, its genitive form serves as the base for the other case maker. The case markers that attach to a genitive base include the allative suffix, the ablative-instrumental suffix, and one of the allomorphs of the dative-locative suffix. For example, in (6b), the allative suffix *-ra* attaches to the genitive base *min-í-si*. Second, possessors are expressed with the genitive case or with the possessive pronominal suffix in the internal possessor constructions, where the possessor is internal to the noun phrase whose head is the possessum (i.e. the possessor is a dependent of the possessum). Sidaama has two types of external possessor constructions, where the possessor is in a constituent external to the NP whose head is the possessum (i.e. the possessor is not a dependent of the possessum) (Kawachi 2012b, 2013). In one type, dative possessor external possessor constructions like (8), the possessor noun phrase is in the dative case.

- (8) *beettó-ho lékka t'ur-t-ú.*  
 child-DAT.M foot.NOM.F become.dirty-3SG.F-R.PRF.3SG.F  
 'The boy's feet became/are dirty.'  
 (*lit.*, 'To the boy, the feet became dirty.')

In the other type, the oblique possessum external possessor construction, which is exemplified in (7), the possessum noun phrase is in the oblique case, but the case for the possessor noun phrase depends on its syntactic relation. Thus, the accusative case is used for a possessor only when the possessor noun phrase happens to be the object of the verb in this construction (e.g., '*lit.*, He washed the child with respect to the foot.' to mean 'He washed the child's feet.'). Third, the indirect object is always in the dative case, as in (4).

Unlike these forms with the nominative suffix or the accusative suprafixed, forms of nouns and adjectives with a high pitch on their penultimate vowel segments and without any suffix seem to be functionally unmarked. As discussed above, they are used as citation forms and occur in predicates. They can also be used as a vocative form (e.g., *mánna*. 'People.', *dangúra*. 'Dangura.')

or for a bare NP adverbial for a location, as in (9a).<sup>7</sup>

- (9) *íse (a) míne / (b) ros-ú mine no.*  
 3SG.F.NOM house.LOC / education-GEN.M house.LOC.mod come.to.be.located-D.PRF.3  
 'She is (a) at home (b) at school.'  
 (*lit.*, 'She came to be located (a) at home (b) at school.')

However, other than when used as citation and predicative forms, noun and adjective forms with a high pitch on their penultimate vowel segments and without any suffix have only these uses.

On the other hand, forms of nouns with a flat pitch accent could also be considered functionally unmarked forms of modified nouns, though they occur in a smaller

<sup>7</sup> The vocative forms of nouns are different from their nominative forms. However, the vocative forms of pronouns are the same as their nominative case forms (e.g. *áti*. 'You (SG).', *duučínk-u/wo'múnk-u/duučínk-u/baalúnk-u*. 'Everybody.').

range of other environments than noun and adjective forms with a high pitch on their penultimate vowel segments.<sup>8</sup> A flat pitch accent is used for citation forms of modified nouns (e.g. *mine* in *ros-ú mine* (education-GEN.M house) ‘school’). Flat pitch also occurs in a modified noun as part of a bare NP adverbial for a location, as in *mine* in *ros-ú mine* in (9b). Therefore, one could say that functionally unmarked forms are forms with penultimate pitch accent in the case of unmodified nouns and adjectives, and are forms with final pitch accent in the case of modified nouns.

However, although König (2006, 2008) characterizes a marked-nominative system in terms of the functional unmarkedness of forms that are in a particular grammatical case (i.e., the nominative or accusative) rather than that of forms that have a particular shape, it is almost impossible to decide which grammatical case is unmarked in Sidaama. There are no case forms that can be consistently regarded as either morphologically or functionally unmarked. If forms with a high pitch on the penultimate vowel segment are morphologically unmarked, nominative case forms of unmodified nouns and adjectives are unmarked when the noun is feminine, but are marked with a suffix when the noun is masculine. If forms with a flat pitch accent are morphologically unmarked, modified nouns in the nominative case and those in the accusative case are both unmarked; however, unmodified nouns and adjectives are marked in all grammatical cases.

There are no case forms that are functionally unmarked, either, though citation and predicate forms of unmodified nouns and adjectives may be regarded as functionally unmarked. Nominative case forms of all masculine common nouns and *a*-ending masculine proper nouns, which are suffixed with *-u* or *-i*, and have a high pitch on their penultimate vowel segment (unmodified masculine common nouns and *a*-ending masculine proper nouns) or a flat pitch accent (modified masculine common nouns), are different from their citation and predicate forms. They have no other function. Nominative case forms of modified feminine nouns, which have a flat pitch accent, cannot be used in predicates, but can be used as their citation forms, and can occur in other grammatical cases. Nominative case forms of unmodified feminine nouns and masculine proper nouns ending in *e* or *o*, which are not marked with a suffix and have a high pitch on their penultimate vowel segment, are identical with their citation and predicate forms, and have a few other functions. However, the nominative case cannot be regarded as consistently either marked or unmarked, and its markedness depends on the type of the noun and modification.

There are no reports of the indeterminacy of which grammatical case is functionally unmarked in Sidaama or any other Highland East Cushitic language. Treis (2008) treats Kambaata as a marked-nominative language. According to her, in this language the accusative form of a word, which can serve as an adverbial, is used as its citation form, unlike in Sidaama. Nevertheless, as in Sidaama, the accusative form is segmentally the same as but differs in pitch pattern from the predicate

<sup>8</sup> For example, unlike common noun and adjective forms with a high pitch on their penultimate vowel segments, forms of nouns with a flat pitch accent cannot occur as predicates (see footnote 6).



form – in the accusative form, the final syllable is accented, and in the predicate form, the penultimate syllable (the penultimate vowel segment) is accented. Thus, unlike Sidaama, where the citation form and the predicate form are usually the same and differ from the accusative form, the accusative form and the citation form in Kambaata are the same in most cases and differ from the predicate form. Another difference is that the nominative is always different both from the accusative/citation form and the predicate form in Kambaata, unlike in Sidaama, where the nominative form can be the same as the citation and predicate form.

It may be that unlike the other Highland East Cushitic languages, only Sidaama is an accusative language. According to Sasse (1984) and Tosco (1994), marked-nominative languages in East Cushitic developed from the accusative type. During this development, the suffix *\*-i/u*, which may have been a topic or definiteness marker, became a nominative marker, whereas there used to be a focus marker, *\*-a*, which later came to be used as an accusative suffix, and then became zero.<sup>9</sup> If this applies to Highland East Cushitic, and if Highland East Cushitic other than Sidaama are marked-nominative languages, Sidaama still seems to be close to the accusative prototype. Nevertheless, there may be a change happening in modified nouns in Sidaama. That is, (syntactically) modified nouns normally have a flat pitch accent, and their accusative forms, which have no suffix, seem to be morphologically as well as functionally less marked than their suffixed nominative forms.

Another possibility is that like Sidaama, the other Highland East Cushitic languages except Kambaata are not marked-nominative languages, either. Previous studies on Highland East Cushitic may have neglected the accusative suprafix. A few researchers (e.g., Hudson 1976:253, Sasse 1984) report that in Highland East Cushitic languages including Sidaama, which they claim to be marked-nominative languages, nominative and accusative forms can be the same. However, if this were the case, confusion would occur between A and O in those languages where SOV and OVS word orders are possible. It may be that they are actually accusative languages, where O is marked with the accusative suprafix and is functionally marked. This is different from marked-nominative languages in East Cushitic, where the nominative and accusative cases are unambiguously distinguished (e.g., by means of different tone patterns in Somali (Saeed 1993); by the use of a nominative suffix in Oromo (Owens 1985)), regardless of the noun type, and the accusative is morphologically as well as functionally unmarked.

Thus, researchers on the case systems in Highland East Cushitic languages other than Sidaama and Kambaata need to carefully investigate (i) whether the accusative form is the same as the citation form (as in Kambaata but not in Sidaama), (ii) whether the nominative form can be the same as the citation form (as in Sidaama but not in Kambaata), and (iii) whether unmarkedness can be associated with the accusative or nominative case.

<sup>9</sup> Before the accusative case marker became zero, it might have gone through the stage of a suprafix (e.g., *\*-á*).



4. CONCLUSION. The present study shows that Sidaama is not a marked-nominative but an accusative language, if the defining criterion for a marked-nominative system is the unmarkedness of the accusative case. It has also pointed out the problem of indeterminacy as to which case forms are unmarked.

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