

Russian case morphology and the syntactic categories

Sometimes it is the oddest facts that provide the best clues to significant properties of language, because their very oddity limits the space in which we are likely to search for possible explanations. In this talk, I argue that the strange behavior of Russian nominal phrases with *paucal* numerals ('two', 'three' and 'four') provide clues of just this type concerning the syntactic side of morphological case.

When a nominal phrase like the Russian counterpart of 'these last two beautiful tables' occupies a nominative environment, the pre-numeral demonstrative and adjective ('these last') bear *nominative plural* morphology, and the numeral itself is nominative. The post-numeral adjective ('beautiful'), however, is often *genitive plural*; and the noun ('table') is *genitive singular* -- a situation that the illustrious Russian grammarian Peshkovsky (1956) characterized as "a typical example of the degree to which grammatical and logical thinking may diverge".

I suggest that the behavior of these phrases is actually entirely logical -- once one adopts a particular structural analysis of the Russian DP, and a particular view of the nature of case morphology. Developing ideas by Richards (2007), I propose that Russian is a covert case-stacking language in which the realization of outer case morphemes suppresses the pronunciation of inner morphemes -- with this process restricted, however, by the phonological freezing effect of phase spell-out (Chomsky 1995; 2001). The case affixes themselves -- traditionally classified using case-specific *sui generis* terminology (nominative, genitive, etc.) -- are actually instantiations of the various syntactic categories: N, P and V. The interaction of this proposal with the theory of phases and spellout raises at least the possibility that there is no special theory of morphological case.