

Lesson 18

Identifier Case

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You may not be used to talking about the “case” of noun phrases. Case is the term that refers to the role the noun phrase has in a sentence—that is, whether it is something that acts, something acted upon, something used to act, etc. [...] (A Case Phrase is just a noun phrase plus its case-marker ending; a noun phrase is any sequence that can fill a case role, such as a noun or a pronoun.)

Another way to think about Case is that Case defines the relation that a noun phrase has to the verb. The Subject does the verb. The Identifier specifies what the Subject is. The action of the verb is performed upon the Object (we’ll discuss the Object in the next lesson). The other Cases we will be studying during these lessons define other relationships that nouns have to the verb in a sentence.

[(Aux) Ø-Verb (Neg) CP–S CP–ID]

Note also that the abbreviation “CP” now stands for a Case Phrase—either with or without a Possessive included.

–m

Suffix (noun phrase): Identifier Case

An Identifier identifies the Subject by profession, gender, nationality, etc. The rule for forming an Identifier in Láadan is to add the suffix “–m.” Of course, if we’re adding this suffix to a Noun Phrase that ends in a consonant, we’ll need to add an “e” to separate the consonants.

When Suzette Haden Elgin first created Láadan, she opted for a zero-suffix (no apparent suffix) for the Identifier Case. This falls neatly in line with English, wherein Identifier structures are formally rendered in Subject Case:

Q: “May I speak to Mary?”

A: “I am she.”

In ancillary materials, she allowed as how she didn’t *think* that would be a problem; in practice, however, it occasioned some unnecessary confusion. The decision was taken by the next generation to change from the zero-suffix to “–m.”

The other item of note about a sentence using an Identifier Case structure is that there is no apparent verb. Láadan doesn’t have a “copula” (the stand-alone verb “to be” that English uses, among other things, to equate two things). The Láadan Identifier structure appears to have no verb (linguist-speak: the verb *presents a null surface form*); we simply present the Subject (the one being Identified) and the Identifier (what the Subject is being Identified as). If we’re placing the Identification in another time and/or denying the Identification, the Auxiliary will precede, and/or the negative will follow, the invisible verb.

Examples

To make it clearer in the examples to follow, we’ll insert a “•” where the invisible verb is.

Bíi • le withem wa.

I am a person.

Bíi • le wothal wowithem wa.

I am a good person.

Bíi • le wothalehul wowithem wa.

I am an extremely good person.

Notice that the Subject Case Phrase comes before any other Case Phrase.

Bíi • háawith Ána bem wa.

The child is Anna.

Note that personal names do not receive Case endings. When the name of a person or animal fulfills the role of a Case that would take a suffix, the name is followed by the pronoun “be” which accepts the Case ending instead. This rule applies to the names of living and once-living persons and creatures but not to the names of places or times.

Bíi • Ána omám wa.

Anna is a teacher.

Bíi • Ána omám i thulem wa.

Anna is a teacher and a parent.

Notice that the Subject—“Ána” (Anna) in the example set—can be Identified with more than one other noun.

Báa • with thulem?

Is the person a parent?

Bíi eril • ra with thulem wa.

The person was not a parent.

Bíi • ra with thulem wa.

The person is not a parent.

Bíi aril • with thulem wa.

The person will be a parent.

We can also deny the Identification by inserting “ra” after the verb, just as usual—except that the verb is invisible. Notice that in the Identifier Case structure, just as usual, the auxiliary comes before the verb and the negative comes after the verb; the only difference here is that the verb has that “null surface form” (it’s invisible and inaudible).

Identifying Conjunction

Along with the Case suffix comes a new conjunction: “úmú.” It implies that the Subject of the sentence can be Identified with something, and that the clause to follow explains what that something is. “Úmú” stands for the Identifier in the clause it introduces, and that clause is the Identifier of the larger sentence.

“Úmú” will most often be translated “who” or “what”—but not the forms of “who” or “what” that pose questions. This form introduces a clause that fulfills the Identifier case-role, as in the English sentences, “I know who you are,” or “I know what you are.” You will notice, in the examples below, that the clauses introduced by “úmú” have only a noun phrase; just as the Identifier uses no apparent verb, the clause introduced by “úmú” shows no apparent verb. Since Láadan doesn’t use the form of the verb “to be” known as a “copula”; for the purposes of translation into English, “úmú” acts as the copula as well as the “who/what.” In effect, “úmú” could be translated “who/what [noun phrase] is/are/was/were/will be.”

Bóo di beye úmú • belidá, lu.

Please, someone, say who the carpenter is.

Of course, the Possessive is one noun phrase, so it is perfectly reasonable to use a Possessive after “úmú.”

Bíi ril dibáa le úmú • hena netha wa.

I’m asking who your sibling is.

Bíi ril dibáa le úmú eril • hena netha wa.

I’m asking who your sibling was.

Bíi eril dibíi behid úmú • hal betho wa.

He stated what his work was.

Bíi eril dibíi behid úmú aril • hal betho wa.

He stated what his work will be.

Possessive Identifier

Báa • hena thulem?

Is the sibling a parent?

Báa • hena netha thulem?

Is your sibling a parent?

Báa • hena thul halátham?

Is the sibling the worker’s parent?

Báa • hena netha thul halátham?

Is your sibling the worker’s parent?

Regardless of Case, the Possessive becomes *part of the Case Phrase*. Since the Possessive Noun Phrase is a single unit (and so nothing can be inserted between its elements), the Case Suffix must be added to the end—on the Possessor, not on the thing possessed.

The Case Suffix for the Subject (the only Case we’ve addressed up until now) is what’s known as a “null suffix” or “zero suffix” (or, in Linguist-Speak, the suffix is said to “*present a null surface form*”). That “null suffix” on a Possessive in the Subject is attached to the end of the Possessive sequence; however, since it’s a “null suffix” (which cannot be seen or heard), we haven’t had to address concerns around its placement until now. Perhaps it’ll be a little clearer if presented in morphemic analysis of the first and fourth examples above. We’ll insert “Ø” where the Subject’s null-suffix is.

Báa

Q

•

henaØ

SIBLING + SUBJ

thulem?

PARENT + IDENT

Báa

Q

•

hena

nethaØ

SIBLING

YOU1 + POSS_{BIRTH} + SUBJ

thul

halátham?

PARENT

WORKER + POSS_{BIRTH} + IDENT

A multiply-possessive structure is still a single unit, and so the Case Suffix belongs at the end of the Possessive structure. Note the changes in the Possessive endings as the ownership of the dog evolves through the examples.

Bíi • hi woléli wolanemidem wa.

This is a yellow dog.

Bíi • hi woléli wolanemid lethem wa.

This is my (chance) yellow dog.

Bíi • hi woléli wolanemid lanethi lethem wa.

This is my (other reason) friend's (chance) yellow dog.

Bíi • hi woléli wolanemid lanethi edinetho lethem wa.

This is my (birth) cousin's (other reason) friend's (chance) yellow dog.

As you've no doubt noticed in the above examples, in addition to making declarative statements about Identifications, we can inquire about them; we can also make promises about them or requests about them—we can use any available Type-of-Sentence word available to us.

Bíi nezh lan lethem wa.

You are my friends.

Bé nezh lan lethem wa.

Upon my honor, you are my friends.

Báa nezh lan lethem?

Are you my friends?

Bóo nezh lan lethem.

Prithee, be my friends.

Bíi • bezh halám wa.

They-few are workers.

Bíi • bezh hizhem wa.

They-few are these/those.

Bíi • bezh halám hizh wa.

They-few are those workers.

Bíi • bezh beyezhem wa.

They-few are something.

Bíi • bezh halám beyezh wa.

They-few are some workers.

Bíi • bezh zhem wa.

They-few are that same thing.

Bíi • bezh ram wa.

They-few are nothing and no-one.

Bíi • bezh halá ram wa.

They-few are anything but workers.

Bíi • bezh hizh hizhem wa.

They-few are each other.

In contrast to the Possessive structure, when using Demonstrative or Indefinite pronouns (*hi*-forms or *beye*-forms, respectively) postpositionally to modify a Case Phrase, the Case ending remains on the noun modified; the postposition takes no Case suffix.

Notice the pair of examples using “ram” [*ra-* (NON) + *-m* (IDENT)]. The first of these is a straightforward statement that the Identifier Case does not apply. The second, on the other hand, states that the case does apply, but that the noun it would be applied to absolutely does not. In effect, this example *excludes* this noun from the Identifier Case function.

There is an idiomatic usage in English “each other” (also “one another”) that is no less idiomatic in Láadan. However, the Láadan idiom looks quite different from the English. In Láadan, we use a pair of demonstrative pronouns (“*hi*” forms), one in Subject case and the second in whatever case describes the role “each” has to the “other.” Of course, both “*hi*”-forms would be in the same plural form since both refer to the same people/things. In the seventh example above, this would be “*hizh hizhem*” (each other, few, as Subject and Identifier). Granted, the circumstances where “*hizh hizhem*” would apply would not be common; however, the mechanism exists to say that thing when required.

Vocabulary

áayo	
skirt	
ana	
food	
bini	
gift	
éelen	
grape(s)	
hath	
time	
hoth	
place	
inad	
trousers; pants	
lää	
perception	
radal	
nothing [ra- (NON) + dal (thing)]	
shad	
to be pure; to be perfect	

Exercises

Translate the following into English.

1 Bí berídanizh lethá wothal wolalomám wáa.

E: _____

2 Bóo dī ne úmú wohóoha wodená, lu.

E: _____

3 Báa héena bebáatho ábedám?

E: _____

4 Bí ra wíi yomem wi.

E: _____

5 Bí eríli Therísha edalahám wáa.

E: _____

6 Bí beth letho wolíithi wobelid Mázhareth bethom wa.

E: _____

In #5, did you get the “sense” of “edalahá?” It means “botanist” [e- (SCIOF) + dala (plant) + -á (DOER)]. It also suggests “edala” (botany) [e- (SCIOF) + dala (plant)]. Note that, though “aá” is an allowed Láadan vowel combination, because the “a” comes from “dala” (plant) and the “á” is from “-á” (DOER) they must be separated by an “h.”

Equate the following—in a question and a statement to answer it—using the Identifier Case, and translate both into English.

The first word will be the Subject. The second entry will give time and/or negative for the question. The third entry will give these for the answer.

Example: “with, thul” with “past” and “past, not” give “Báa eril with thulem?” (Was the person a parent?) and “Bíi eril ra with thulem wa.” (The person was not a parent.)

7 inad i woshad woháayo, bini

future

future, not

L:

E:

L:

E:

8 hi, wohowa wohana

present, not

past

L:

E:

L:

E:

9 dan hi, Láadan

not

L:

E:

L:

E:

10 womeénan woyu, mewolula wohéelen

not

L:

E:

L:

E:

11 láa hathethu, radal

past

long ago, not

L:

E:

L:

E:

12 hoth hi, Halishóni e Aranesha

L:

E:

L:

E:

Translate the following into Láadan

13 Is Elizabeth's nephew a short peace-scientist?

L: _____

14 The furry creature is not the alien's niece's cat.

L: _____

15 Being old will be a lot of work.

L: _____

16 The voice of the needleworker is a slow song.

L: _____

17 To laugh and to dance is to be beautiful.

L: _____

18 The sound of the still wind is wisdom.

L: _____

As we see in #15, nouns can also be made “more so” by the addition of “-**hul**,” however, their increase in degree isn’t usually rendered well in English by the word “extremely.”

Also in #15, we see a Degree Marker, “-**hul**” (**extremely**), and a Case Marker, “-**m**” (**IDENT**) applied to the same word. In general, the Degree Marker will be added first, and the [Noun + Degree] compound is treated as one unit. That unit fulfills the Case role, so the Case suffix is added next.

Answers

- 1 My aunt is a good singer.
- 2 Please tell who the weary assistant is.
- 3 Whose heart-sibling is a farmer?
- 4 To be alive is not to be safe (OR Being alive is not being safe. OR Aliveness is not safety.) (obviously).
- 5 Teresa was, long ago, a botanist.
- 6 My home is Margaret's white house.
- 7 Baa aril inad i woshad woháayo binim?
Will the trousers and the perfect skirt be gifts?
Bíi aril ra inad i woshad woháayo binim wa.
The trousers and the perfect skirt will not be gifts.
- 8 Baa ril ra hi wohowa wohanam?
Isn't this warm food?
Bíi eril hi wohowa wohanam wáa.
This was warm food.
- 9 Baa dan hi Láadanem?
Is this language Láadan?
Bíi ra dan hi Láadanem wa.
This language is not Láadan.
- 10 Baa ra womeéнан woyu mewolula wohéelenem?
Isn't the sweet fruit purple grapes?
Bíi womeéнан woyu mewolula wohéelenem.
The sweet fruit is purple grapes.
- 11 Baa eril láa hathethu radalem?
Was the perception of time nothing?
Bíi erili ra láa hathethu radalem wáa.
Long ago the perception of time was not nothing.
- 12 Baa hoth hi Halishónim e Aranesham?
Is that place California or Arkansas?
Bíi hoth hi Halishónim e Aranesham wa.
This place is California or Arkansas.
- 13 Baa sherídanid Elízhabeth betha worahíthi woheshonám?
- 14 Bíi ra woshane womid rul sherídanizhetho néehátham wa.
- 15 Bíi aril balin halehulem wi.
- 16 Bíi dith dathimátha woralóolo wolomem wa.
- 17 Bíi ada i amedara áyam wa.
- 18 Bíi zho wowam woyulethu wothem wa.