

Hebrew את and Typology, p. 1

The facts in Hebrew are illustrated by the following examples:

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|------------|--|----------------|----|-----|
| קראתי ספר. | | קראתי את הספר. | .a | (1) |
| מה ראית? | | את מי ראית? | .b | |

The particle את marks objects. A form that indicates the function of a NP in the sentence is called **case**, and the form that marks that an NP is the object is called **accusative case**. So את is accusative case. But it is only used when the object is definite, or, in the case of question words, animate.

Definiteness / Specificity

(2) Turkish

objects have accusative suffix only if they are specific

- a. Hasan öküz- ü aldı.
Hasan ox- ACC bought
'Hasan bought the ox.'
- b. Hasan bir öküz aldı.
Hasan a ox bought
'Hasan bought an ox.'
- c. Hasan bir öküz- ü aldı.
Hasan a ox- ACC bought
'Hasan bought a (specific) ox.'

Other factors (often referred to as animacy)

(3) Russian

masculine singular nouns (declension 1a) have accusative suffix only when animate.

- a. Ja videl mal'čik- a / begemot- a.
I saw boy- ACC / hippopotamus- ACC
'I saw the boy/hippopotamus.'
- b. Ja videl dub / stol.
I saw oak / table
'I saw the oak/table.'

(4) Dyirbal

objects are accusative only if they are 1st or 2nd person

- a. ŋana jaja ŋamba- n.
we child hear- NFUT
'We heard the child.'
- b. ŋana n^yurra- na ŋamba- n.
we you.PL- ACC hear- NFUT
'We heard you.'

(5) English

objects are accusative if they are pronouns and (in the singular, where there is a difference in form) animate.

- a. I saw him (*he).
- b. I saw it.
- c. I saw the student / the book.

Hebrew

(6) Catalan

objects are accusative if they are pronouns

- a. No m' havien vist a mi.
NEG 1sgOBJ they.have seen ACC me
'They hadn't seen me.'
- b. A ell no el vul.
ACC him NEG 3msgOBJ I.want
'Him, I don't want.'
- c. No havien vist l' alcalde.
NEG they.have seen the mayor
'They had not seen the mayor.'

(7) Pitjantjatjara

objects are accusative if they are pronouns or proper names. (ERG is ergative Case, a Case used in this language to mark (some) subjects)

- a. Tjitji- ngku ngayu- nya nya- ngu.
child- ERG me- ACC see- PST
'The child saw me.'
- b. Tjitji- ngku Billy- nya nya- ngu.
child- ERG Billy- ACC see- PST
'The child saw me.'
- c. Billy- lu tjitji nya- ngu.
Billy- ERG child see- PST
'Billy saw the child.'

Both

(8) Spanish

objects are accusative iff they are both animate and definite (or specific)

- a. El director busca el carro / un empleado.
the manager look.for.PRES the car / a employee
'The manager is looking for the car/an employee.'
- b. El director busca a (e)l empleado / a un empleado.
the manager look.for.PRES ACC the employee / ACC a employee
'The manager is looking for the employee / a certain employee.'

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(9) Persian

objects have accusative suffix if they are specific, or, optionally otherwise, preferably if they are animate

- a. Hasan ketāb- rā did.
 Hasan book- ACC saw
 'Hasan saw the book.'
- b. Hasan yek ketāb did.
 Hasan a book saw
 'Hasan saw a book.'
- c. Hasan yek ketāb- rā did.
 Hasan a book- ACC saw
 'Hasan saw a (specific, important) book.'
- d. Mard- i- rā did.
 man- INDEF- ACC he.saw
 'He saw a man.'

Phenomena of this kind are widespread!!!

This handout covers the following language families: Afro-Asiatic, Altaic, Indo-European, and Pama-Nyungan. It is also found in Dravidian languages, Uralic languages, and elsewhere.