YANYUWA NOMINATIVE AND ERGATIVE-ALLATIVE CASES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Yanyuwa[1] is one of the Australian Aboriginal languages which has an ergative type case marking system; that is, ergative case marks transitive subject, and nominative[2] case marks non-transitive subject and also object. The purpose of this paper is to present the hypothesis that in Yanyuwa the nominative case marker has a single meaning relevant to its various grammatical occurrences, and that the ergative-allative case marker also has an area of meaning common to its various occurrences.

Yanyuwa is different from most Australian Aboriginal languages the author is aware of in that it generally marks transitive subject, allative and purposive with a single marker, but if the hypothesis proves valid for Yanyuwa, there may well be implications for other languages with ergative case systems also.

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2. CASE MARKING SYSTEM

In relation to ergative versus accusative case marking systems,
Yanyuwa has an ergative system which is neutralised at one place in the
language. The nominative-ergative distinction is apparent in the mor-
phology of nouns and adjectives, demonstrative, interrogative and pos-
sessive pronouns, and there are evidences of it in the person marker
sets occurring with transitive verbs. The distinction is neutralised
in the free pronoun set so that the same form occurs for both ergative
and nominative, although it is rare for a free pronoun to occur as a
transitive subject. In most areas affected by the case marking system,
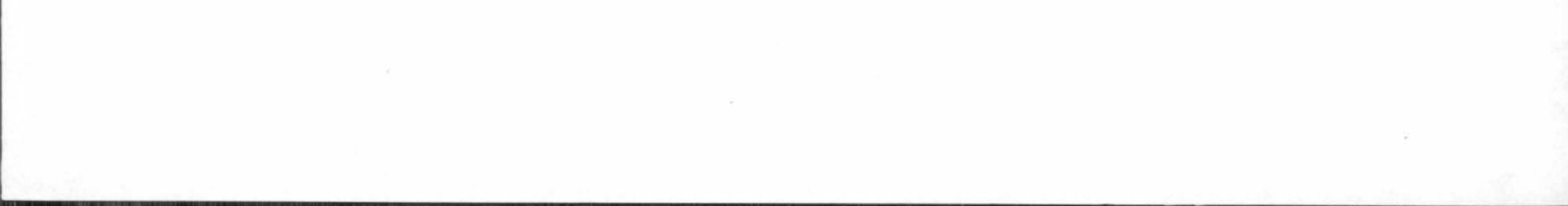ergative and allative have a single marker, but free pronouns distin-
guish between the two, and participles are marked for ergative only
(see chart). This suggests that there is an added complexity that can
be expected in the meaning of ergative-allative, that there is a mea-
sure of sameness and a measure of difference.

CHART OF YANYUWA NOMINATIVE, ERGATIVE, ALLATIVE SUFFIXES

	Nouns, Noun Modifiers, Interrogatives	Free Pronouns	Participles
Nominative	-ø	-ø	/////
Ergative	-lu		-lu
Allative		-lu	/////

3. CASE MARKERS

Yanyuwa has four case marking suffixes which occur on nouns and their
modifiers and certain other word classes. The suffixes are: -ø 'nom-
inative', -lu 'ergative-allative', -la 'ablative', -wu 'genitive'. The
nominative is always realised by -ø. The remaining case markers have a
series of allomorphs (described in detail in "Complexities of Yanyula
Nouns", Kirton 1971).[3] The class marking prefixes which occur on nouns
and their modifiers also change in agreement with the case marking suf-
fixes with which they co-occur but some distinctions are lost. Prefixes
make no distinction between ergative and ablative cases, and in the four
commonest classes, male, masculine, female and feminine, prefixes only
distinguish nominative and non-nominative (or oblique).

Nominative marks the subject of all clauses except transitive, and marks the object of transitive clauses. Ergative-allative marks transitive subject, allative (to a person or place) and purposive functions. (The chart illustrates the distributional limitations placed on the use of this marker.) Ablative marks accompaniment, instrument, locative (*in, at, on, by*) functions, and it also marks the locative phrase occurring with the preposition nagari *'from'*. Genitive marks possession at word and phrase level, and on a syntactic level marks indirect object function.

4. SYNTACTIC BACKGROUND

Clause level analysis in Yanyuwa is still in progress but in current analysis, clauses are divided into four major types - stative clauses (which are non-verbal), existential clauses (with the verb ∅ *'be'* or one of the other verbs which supplement it), intransitive clauses and transitive clauses. (Reflexive or reciprocal verbs occur in either intransitive or transitive clauses.) This then gives the general framework in which case marking occurs.

Examples (1) - (4) below illustrate the four main clause types. They all utilise the morpheme yabi *'good, well, nice, pleasant'*:

STATIVE

(1) nja-yabi-∅   nja-miṉiṉiya-∅[4]
     m nom-*good*-nom   m nom-*man*-nom
     'the man is good / the man was good'

EXISTENTIAL

(2) djiw-∅-ini[5]   nja-yabi-∅   nja-miṉiṉiya-∅
     he-be-pres   m nom-*good*-nom m nom-*man*-nom
     'he is a good man'

INTRANSITIVE

(3) djiwa-yabiři-njdji   nja-miṉiṉiya-∅
     he-become well-pres m nom-*man*-nom
     'the man is becoming well / the man is improving'

TRANSITIVE

(4) ganj-ilu-yabima-njdji   nja-miṉiṉiya-∅   nju-mařalṉudji-lu
     him-he-make well-pres   m nom-*man*-nom   m nnom-*doctor*-erg/all
     'the doctor makes the man well / the doctor is healing the man'

These four clauses are given as being generally representative of the language. Stative clauses make descriptive or equative statements.

Existential clauses share a meaning component of *'state of being'*. In-
transitive clauses generally share a meaning component of *'a process
occurring'*. Transitive clauses generally share a meaning component of
'a process being effected'. (A process is defined as a sensory or
physical activity as opposed to a state of being.)
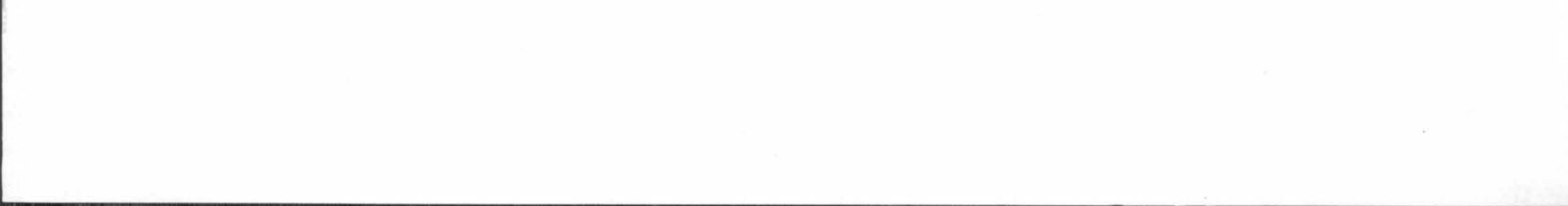

5. A SINGLE MEANING FOR NOMINATIVE CASE

Nominative case marks object of transitive clauses, and subjects of
clauses other than transitive clauses. In considering examples (3) and
(4) again, a common feature emerges for the entities marked nominative.
In both (3) and (4) the experience of the *man* is the same. He becomes
well. In (3) there is no reference to the instigator or cause of
becoming well. There is a simple statement about the process. In (4)
the additional information is given that the action is a caused one and
that it was caused by a *doctor*. In both (3) and (4) the *man* is the ex-
periencer of the process, and so the meaning 'experiencer' is assigned
to the nominative case.

These two examples have a number of parallels with other pairs of
verbs such as waḍiři *'become bad, deteriorate'* and waḍima *'make bad,
spoil, harm'*, lumbuři *'become strong'* and lumbuma *'make strong'*, ŋabu
'go underwater, bathe' and ŋabunjdjama *'push or pull underwater,* wani
'go back, come back' and waninjdjaŋuma *'take back, bring back'*. These
verbs would all substitute for the verbs in (3) and (4) to further il-
lustrate the 'experiencer' meaning of the nominative marking.

It is necessary to look at other examples where there is not a
common root involved in the verbs and at examples where verbs of motion
are used. Consider (5) and (6), (7) and (8):

(5) giya-wiŋga-∅   nja-miṇiŋiya-∅
    he-walk-p   m nom-*man*-nom
    'the man went'

(6) ganj-ila-ga-∅   nja-miṇiŋiya-∅   nju-mařalŋudji-lu
    him-he-take-p   m nom-*man*-nom   m nnom-*doctor*-erg/all
    'the doctor took the man'

(7) giw-anba-∅   nja-miṇiŋiya-∅
    he-fall-p   m nom-*man*-nom
    'the man fell'

(8) ganj-ilu-ḻawundama-∅   nja-miṇiŋiya-∅   nju-mařalŋudji-lu
    him-he-make fall-p   m nom-*man*-nom   m nnom-*doctor*-erg/all
    'the doctor made the man fall'

In both (5) and (6) the *man* goes from one place to another - he moves
from place A to B. In (5) there is no indication of the cause of his
going, but his experience of moving from A to B is the same. In (7)
and (8) the sameness of the man's experience is more obvious. In all
four examples he is the experiencer of the action in progress. The
role of *man* in (5) and (7) is etically labelled as 'actor-experiencer'
and in (6) and (8) it is etically labelled as 'object-experiencer' (as
Pike & Pike 1974). (Dr Pike labels the subject of a passive construc-
tion 'actor-undergoer' which would be 'actor-experiencer' in the
writer's terminology.) Discussion of outside causes motivating such
actions as walking is continued in section 6.

Two further examples are given using a reflexive and a transitive
verb which share a common stem and occur in two contrastive construc-
tions:

(9)   gumba-wuduřuma-ø   nja-miṇiŋiya-ø
         he rfl-*feed*-p   m nom-*man*-nom
         'the man fed himself / the man ate'

(10)   ganj-ilu-wuduřuma-ø   nja-miṇiŋiya-ø   nju-mařalŋudji-lu
         him-he-feed-p   m nom-*man*-nom   m nnom-*doctor*-erg/all
         'the doctor fed the man'

In both (9) and (10) the *man* is very apparently the experiencer in the
process of eating. In (10) he has an assistant.

6. AN AREA OF COMMON MEANING FOR ERGATIVE-ALLATIVE

The examples (4), (6), (8) and (10) considered above also illustrate
the use of ergative case marker -lu to mark the transitive subject, and
each of these examples demonstrates the 'causer' function of the *doctor*
(who is marked in that way).

Consider two further examples to see the use of the same ergative
marker to mark purpose in both an intransitive and a transitive clause:

(11)   giya-wiŋga-ø   yařibaṇda-lu
         he-walk-p   *hunting*-erg
         'he went to hunt'

(12)   ganj-ila-ga-ø   yařbaṇda-lu
         him-he-take-p   *hunting*-erg
         'he took him to hunt'

The reasons for or the purpose of the main action in both (11) and (12)
is the *hunting*, which is marked by -lu. The purpose of the action is

the cause for the action, and so in this sense the ergative is still
marking the 'causer' of the action.

Two further factors accord with the view of purpose as 'cause'.
Firstly, purposive occurs much more frequently in intransitive clauses
which have no transitive subject, and secondly, clause analysis to this
point indicates that transitive subject and purposive functions, as
manifested by a word or phrase marked by ergative-allative marking, do
not co-occur in a single clause.

Allative function may be marked by the ergative-allative marker -lu.
It is proposed that there is a component of 'causer' meaning in the
ergative-allative case marker but there is also a contrastive component,
and that this irregularity of meaning component occurrence parallels
the irregularity in the Yanyuwa case marking system for ergative and
allative (see chart again to compare marking of nouns and free pronouns).

It is noted that analysis to this time indicates that the allative
function, manifested by a word or phrase marked by ergative-allative
affixation, does not co-occur with transitive subject or purposive func-
tions in the same clause. An allative phrase may co-occur only if it
is a prepositional phrase of a kind unmarked by -lu. It is further
noted that in Yanyuwa discourse, the pattern is for the participants
to be introduced at the beginning of the discourse. After this, nouns
or noun phrases are used only to introduce new participants playing
minor roles or to resolve potential ambiguity. Person markers or de-
monstrative pronouns maintain the continuity of reference to participants
otherwise. In current data, the only examples of co-occurrence of a
word or phrase manifesting transitive subject and a prepositional phrase
marked by -lu manifesting allative, is in a *sentence*, with intonation
clearly indicating the completion of one clause and the commencement of
another.

Examples (13) - (15) illustrate the suffix -lu marking allative
function:

(13) giya-wiŋga-ø   yila-lu⁶   nju-mařalŋudji-lu
      he-walk-p   *him*-all   m nnom-*doctor*-erg/all
      'he went to the doctor'

(14) giya-wiŋga-ø   nuŋguw-alanjdji-lu
      he-walk-p   arb abl/erg/all-*camp*-erg/all
      'he went to the camp'

(15) ganj-ila-ga-ø   Muŋgubayi-lu
      him-he-take-p   *Burketown*-erg/all
      'he took him to Burketown'

The suggestion is that there is a way in which 'causer' may apply to the ergative-allative marker as it marks allative function but that there is a measure in which this is unsatisfactory. From the author's observation of the Yanyuwa people, activity is not undertaken without a purpose or goal. A member of Yanyuwa society does not go aimlessly for a stroll. If he goes walking it is with the intention of achieving a purpose or reaching a destination. A person, place or activity must be the goal of a motion activity of coming, going, taking, sending; that is, there is an outside motivation. In this area then the goal of the action may be regarded as an indirect cause or being associated with the cause.

The unsatisfactory element in assigning a 'causer' meaning to the ergative-allative marker for allative function is evident in examples (16) and (17):

(16) giw-anba-∅   djiy-awaṟa-lu
      he-fall-p   msc nnom-*ground*-erg/all
      'he fell to the ground'

(17) gi-wuluma-∅   wuṟa-lu
      it-run-p   *underwater*-erg/all
      'it ran into the water (out of its depth)'

Example (17) is in the context of animals rushing over a cliff into the water and drowning, and the 'causer' in this particular instance is explicitly stated to be evil spirits within the animals.

7. TENTATIVE CONCLUSION

On the grounds of the above evidence, the author tentatively concludes that in relation to nominative and ergative-allative cases, a case may be made for considering that in Yanyuwa case markers basically have a single meaning, even when they mark what have traditionally been thought of as such different grammatical entities as subject and object. If the contrast is viewed as being between 'experiencer' and 'causer' rather than between subject and object, then a logic to ergative marking becomes clear. In this view, subjects of equative and existential clauses also have a function of 'experiencer' as it occurs in opposition to 'causer'.

Other case markers must also be analysed from this viewpoint and analysis must be taken further before more confident conclusions can be reached.

NOTES

1.   Yanyuwa is the only language of the Yanyulan family.   The speak-
ers of the language live mainly at or around Borroloola in Australia's
Northern Territory.   The language is referred to in the literature as
Anyula, Yanyula, Yanyuwa, Wadiri, with variations of orthography for
these names.   Yanyuwa is the name used by the speakers among themselves
in reference to themselves and their language, and is the spelling ac-
cording to current A.I.A.S. conventions.   Yanyuwa has reference
number 28 in Oates' A *Revised Linguistic Survey of Australia.*

This paper is written using data obtained during an approximate total
of fifty months' linguistic field work at both Borroloola and Doomadgee
Mission since 1963, during the author's work under the auspices of the
Summer Institute of Linguistics.

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that they have shared of their language, and is grateful also to senior
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of approximately 19,000 words of Yanyuwa text compiled by the IBM
computer at the University of Oklahoma by the Linguistic Information
Retrieval Project of the S.I.L. and the University of Oklahoma Research
Institute, and sponsored by Grant GS-934 of the National Science
Foundation.

This paper was first presented at the Linguistic Society of Australia
meetings in Sydney, 1975, and has since been revised.

2.   These terms, nominative and ergative, conform to Australian usage
(Hale 1966, 1970; Dixon 1970).   Dr Capell refers to 'operative',
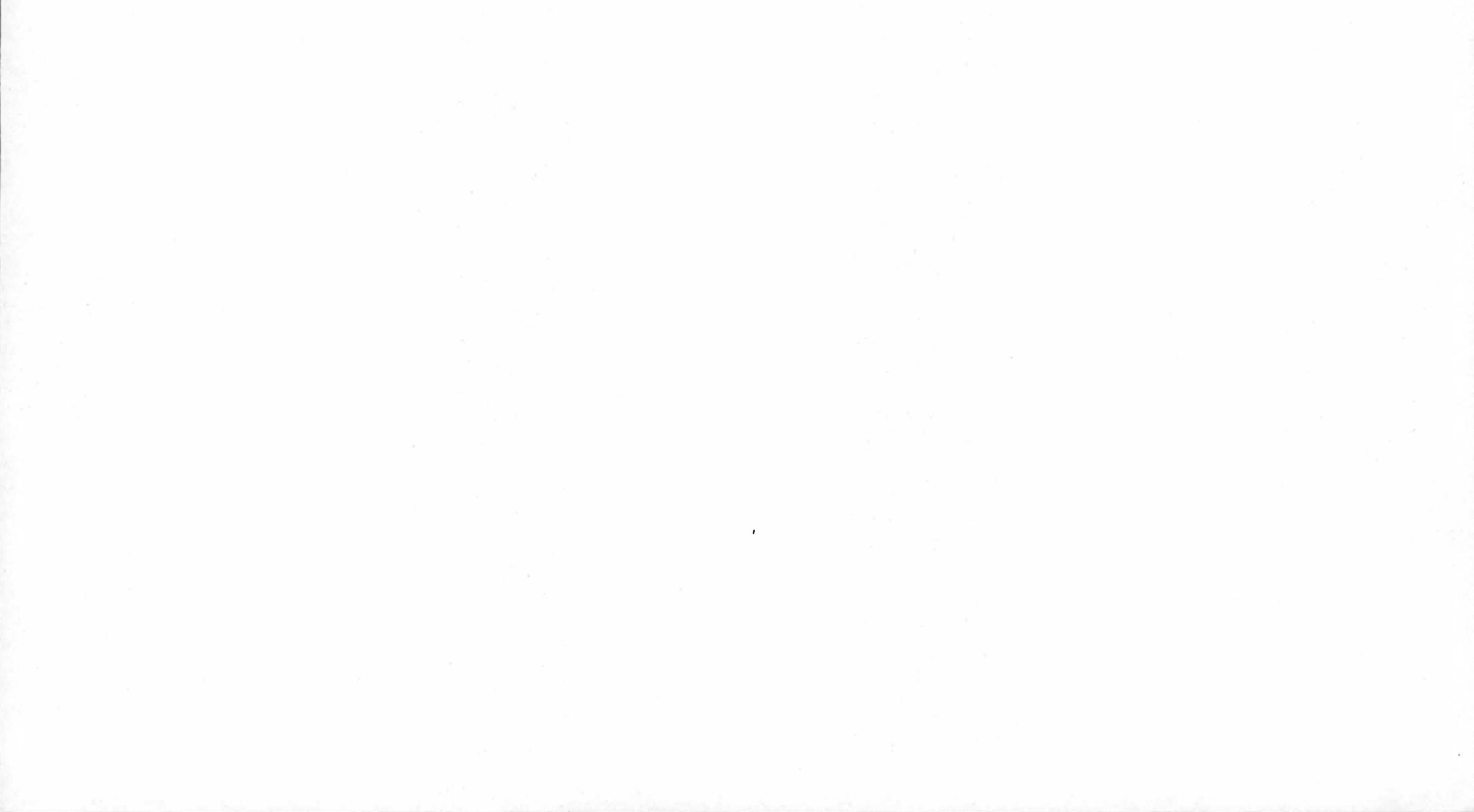'agentive' and 'ergative' in labelling the case marking transitive

subject (1956). His own preference is for 'operative' when the same case marker also marks instrument function.
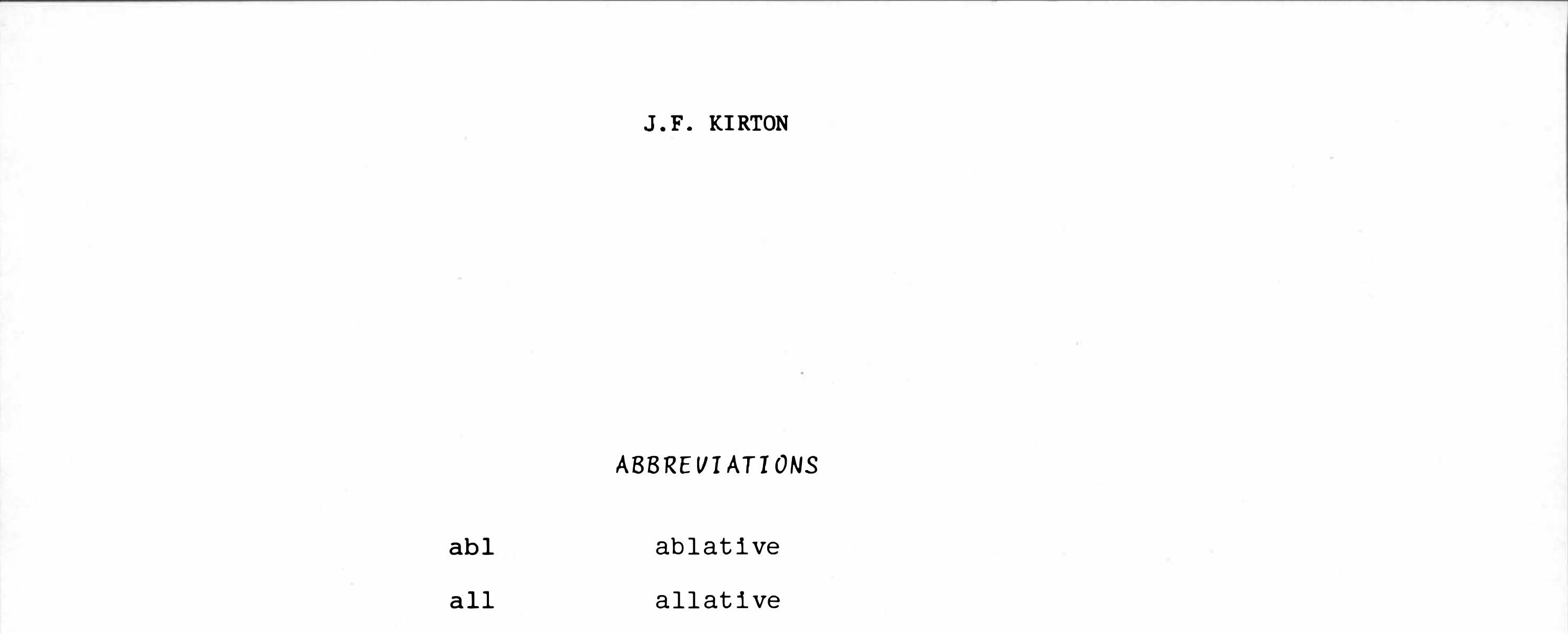
3. In the Yanyuwa noun paper (Kirton 1971) different terminology was used. The nominative of this paper is there referred to as nuclear, ergative-allative as directive, ablative as associative, and genitive as referent.

4. Alternative word orders are acceptable but the order judged to be that most frequently used is that which is given. Examples are given in the women's dialect which makes distinctions more clearly than the men's.
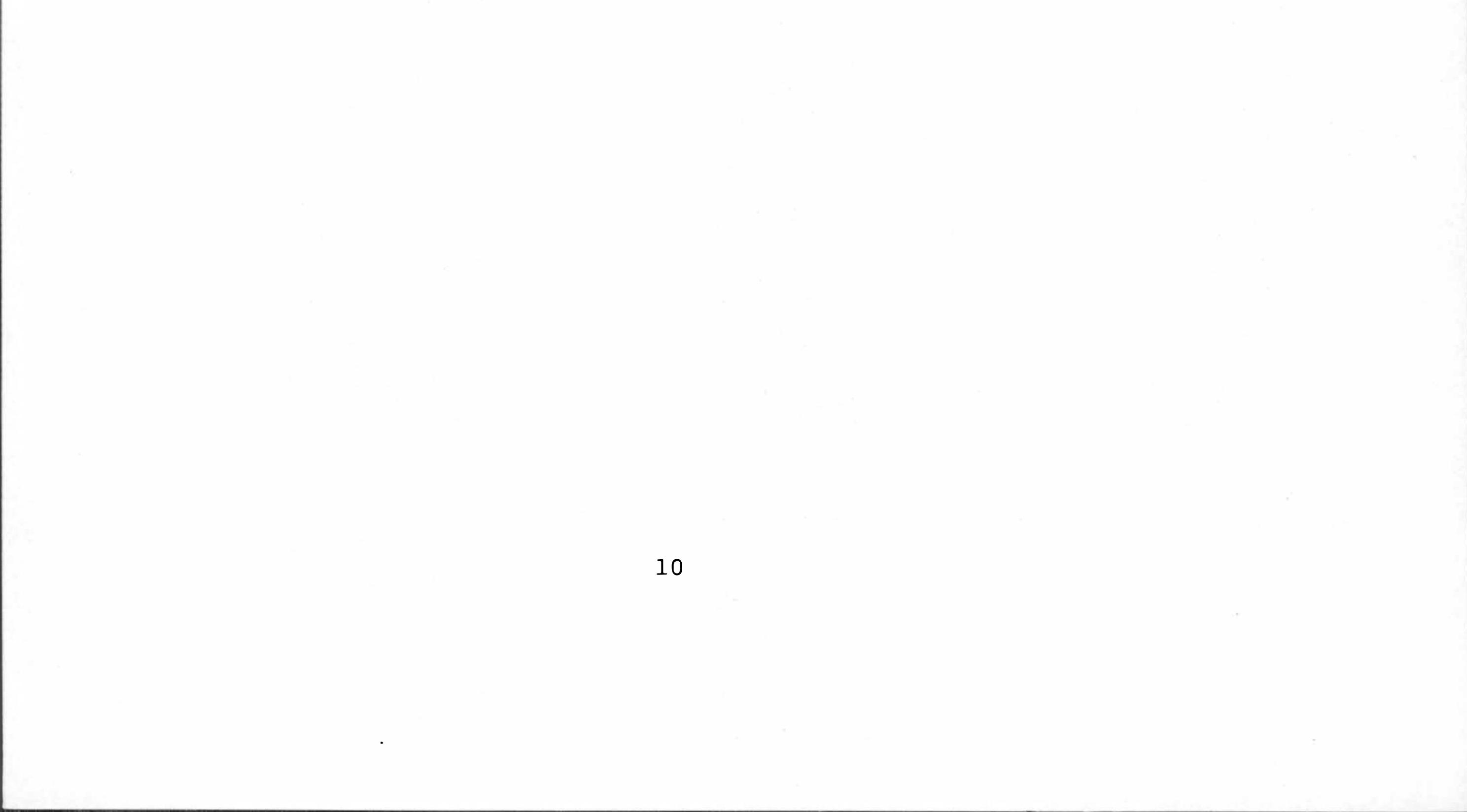
5. Morpheme breakdown of verbs has been simplified so that the reader may more readily focus his attention on the case marking which is being considered.

6. It is noted that for free pronouns -lu marks allative only. (See section 2 and the chart.) The free pronoun and the noun are in apposition in this clause.

ABBREVIATIONS

abl	ablative
all	allative
arb	arboreal noun class
erg	ergative
erg/all	ergative/allative
m	male noun class
msc	masculine noun class
nnom	non-nominative
nom	nominative
p	past
pres	present
rfl	reflexive

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