

Vocative morphology and case morphology

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In grammars and handbook of linguistics, vocative is often referred to as a case. This is unfortunate. In fact, the Stoic grammarians who first introduced the notion of *ptosis* or cases, did not consider vocative to belong to that category. The only strong reason for that classification is the nature of noun inflection in many Indo-European languages, including Greek and Latin. In those languages, the vocative of some nouns consist of a stem and a vocative suffix, parallel to the case suffixes of the same nouns. For example, the Latin vocative *Marc-e!* 'Mark!' is formed just like the genitive *Marc-i* 'Mark's'.

However, this type of vocative marking is by no means universal. Many languages of the world have morphological markers for vocatives, but this is not dependent upon whether cases have such markers. Morphological case markers are found in some languages and morphological vocative markers are found in some too, but there is no necessary connection. A few examples can be taken up here; several others will be discussed in the oral presentation.

In Bantu languages (Niger-Congo family), noun morphology is complex and consists almost exclusively of prefixation. The prefixes denote number and noun classes (sometimes called genders), but there is no case morphology at all. Most Bantu language also have no morphological vocative markers, but there are exceptions. Zulu, a Southern Bantu language, has the usual extensive set of nominal prefixes, but unlike most other languages, Zulu has disyllabic prefixes: *ama-* instead of the usual *ma-*, *aba-* instead of *ba-* and so on. The Zulu language consistently marks vocatives by deletion of the first vowel of the prefix: *amadoda* 'men', but *Madoda* 'Men!', *abafana* 'boys', but *Bafana* 'Boys!'

In another Southern Bantu language, Tswana, most nouns do not have special form for vocative, but a small group of words for family relations have. Examples are *rre* 'father', but *Rra!* 'Father!' and *ngwanake* 'my child', but *Ngwanaka!* 'My child!' This is a very rare instance of suffixation in a Bantu language.

In Nubian (Nilo-Saharan family), nouns are inflected for case by suffixes much like those of Indo-European languages. There is no vocative suffix; in calls, one uses the nominative, or subject form. However, that form is prefixed by *wo-* or *w-*. It seems that prefixation is otherwise quite rare in Nubian.

Thus, in those three languages, there are morphological vocative markers, but they have nothing to do with case marking, and do not seem to be well integrated into the main morphological structures of those languages. They seem to be specialised, *ad hoc* devices. This may be the typical situation in the languages of the world, while the Indo-European type of marking is exceptional.