

Abstract: Her and I, *she and me: Case, person, and coordination
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Some accounts of English pronoun case in coordination (Emonds 1986, Sobin 1997) have argued that the observed data on the phenomenon are the result of a naturally acquired grammar in which coordinated pronouns are universally accusative (Emonds' N[ormal] U[sage]), pitted against an explicitly learned system in which coordinated pronouns are prescribed to be nominative in syntactic environments where a non-coordinated pronoun would be nominative (Emonds' P[restige] U[sage]). The conflict between the natural NU grammar and the allegedly unnatural PU grammar results in a peculiar case distribution in which case interacts not only with syntactic function (and imperfectly so), but also with conjunct ordering (1st conjunct vs. 2nd conjunct) and pronoun agreement features (1sg vs. 3sg), often in ways that are difficult to explain.

Results from a sentence judgment experiment and a corpus study of spoken English reveal a number of conjunct ordering tendencies, most notably the preference for *X and I* over *I and X* and for *s/he and X* over *X and s/he*. With ordering tendencies factored out, the corpus data indicate the following about the interaction between syntactic function, person, and case:

	1sg	3sg
Subject position	82% nominative (n = 624)	57% nominative (n = 184)
Object position	34% nominative (n = 125)	06% nominative (n = 78)

The higher percentage of nominative forms in subject position supports the theory that object-position nominative pronouns arise chiefly through overextension of subject-position nominative pronouns.

To explain the higher percentage of nominative forms for 1sg as compared to 3sg, I appeal to two hypotheses:

1. **Frequency-based prescriptive conformity:** Ceteris paribus, the more frequent a pattern, the more opportunity it has of being exposed to, and thus succumbing to, prescriptive pressure.

Because n is much higher for subject-position 1sg than for subject-position 3sg, the former is more salient for prescriptive pressure. It is therefore more likely to be corrected into nominative, ultimately leading to its more widespread adoption.

2. **Frequency-based overextension:** Ceteris paribus, the more frequent a pattern, the more likely it is to be overextended.

Because nominative 1sg is much more frequent than nominative 3sg in subject position, the former is more likely to be overextended into object position.

This account makes two predictions about the range of possible case-marking patterns employed by individual speakers:

Prediction 1: If 1sg/3sg is nominative in object position, it is also nominative in subject position.

Prediction 2: If 3sg is nominative in subject/object position, so is 1sg.

Assuming that syntactic function and person interact to determine case in coordination, these predictions give rise to six case patterns out of a logically possible 16. The six patterns include Emonds' NU and PU, along with others whose existence is supported by preliminary usage data collected from Google Groups. The account correctly predicts that while instances of case mismatch such as *him/her and I* are well attested in both subject and object position, *s/he and me* is markedly rare.

References

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