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## Case system vs. Prepositional system: russian and uzbek compared to english

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**Abstract:** Grammatical relations in natural languages are commonly expressed through either morphological case systems or syntactic devices such as prepositions and fixed word order. This article presents a functional-typological comparison of the case systems in Russian and Uzbek with the predominantly prepositional system of English. Russian, an inflectional Slavic language, employs a rich case system to mark grammatical and semantic relations. Uzbek, an agglutinative Turkic language, also relies on case suffixes, though with different structural and functional properties. English, by contrast, has largely lost its morphological case system and compensates through prepositions and rigid word order. The study aims to examine how these different strategies encode syntactic relations, spatial meanings, and semantic roles, and how they affect syntactic flexibility and discourse organization. Using a qualitative comparative methodology based on descriptive grammars and functional-typological theory, the paper demonstrates that while case marking allows greater freedom of constituent order, prepositional systems tend to impose stricter syntactic constraints. The findings contribute to typological research by highlighting the functional trade-offs between morphological and syntactic means of grammatical encoding.

**Keywords:** case system, prepositions, functional typology, Russian, Uzbek, English, grammatical relations, syntax.

**Introduction.** The expression of grammatical relations such as subject, object, possession, and location is a core function of grammar. Languages differ significantly in how they encode these relations, with some relying primarily on morphological case marking and others using syntactic devices such as prepositions and fixed word order. The distinction between case-based and preposition-based systems is a central concern in linguistic typology and functional grammar.

Russian, Uzbek, and English represent three distinct strategies for encoding grammatical relations. Russian employs a rich inflectional case system that marks nouns for a range of syntactic and semantic roles. Uzbek, while also using case marking, does so within an agglutinative morphological framework that differs structurally from Russian. English, by contrast, has largely abandoned morphological case marking (with the exception of pronouns) and instead relies on prepositions and strict word order.

The aim of this article is to provide a functional-typological comparison of the case systems of Russian and Uzbek with the prepositional system of English. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are grammatical relations expressed through case marking in Russian and Uzbek?
2. How does English compensate for the loss of morphological case?

3. What functional advantages and limitations do case and prepositional systems present?

4. How do these systems influence syntactic flexibility and discourse structure?

By exploring these questions, the paper seeks to demonstrate that different grammatical strategies reflect deeper typological and functional principles.

**Literature review.** The study of case systems has a long tradition in linguistic theory. Case is generally defined as a morphological category that marks the grammatical and semantic role of a noun phrase (Blake, 2001). Functional linguists argue that case marking enhances clarity and reduces ambiguity, particularly in languages with flexible word order (Comrie, 1981).

Russian case has been extensively described as a prototypical inflectional system, consisting of six core cases that interact with syntax and semantics (Timberlake, 2004). These cases encode both grammatical relations and spatial or abstract meanings, often overlapping with prepositional usage. Uzbek case marking has been analyzed within the broader context of Turkic languages, which exhibit agglutinative morphology and transparent form–function relations (Johanson & Csató, 1998). Uzbek employs a smaller set of cases than Russian, but each case suffix is highly regular and multifunctional. English, on the other hand, represents a language that has largely replaced morphological case with prepositions and rigid syntactic structure (Quirk et al., 1985). Scholars note that prepositions in English perform many of the semantic functions associated with case in other languages.

Comparative studies suggest that the choice between case marking and prepositional systems is influenced by morphological typology, historical change, and functional pressures (Croft, 2003). However, direct comparisons involving Russian, Uzbek, and English remain relatively limited.

**Methodology.** Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-comparative approach grounded in functional typology. Rather than focusing on quantitative corpus statistics, the research emphasizes structural contrasts and functional motivations.

Data Sources

The analysis draws on:

- Standard descriptive grammars of Russian, Uzbek, and English
- Examples cited in typological and functional linguistic literature
- Constructed examples illustrating canonical and marked structures

Analytical Framework

The comparative analysis focuses on:

- Inventory and functions of case markers and prepositions
- Interaction between case/prepositions and word order
- Functional roles in expressing grammatical and semantic relations
- The IMRAD structure ensures systematic presentation of the findings.

**Results.** The Case System in Russian

Russian nouns are inflected for six main cases: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, and prepositional.

Example:

Student čitaet knigu.

(The student reads a book – accusative case)

Case marking allows Russian to vary word order without losing grammatical clarity. Prepositions in Russian typically govern specific cases, creating a combined system of morphological and syntactic marking.

The Case System in Uzbek

Uzbek employs a set of case suffixes, including nominative (unmarked), accusative, genitive, dative, locative, and ablative.

Example:

Talaba kitobni o‘qiydi.

(Student book-ACC reads)

Uzbek case suffixes are highly regular and attach transparently to noun stems. The agglutinative structure allows clear encoding of grammatical relations while maintaining relatively flexible constituent order.

The Prepositional System in English

English has largely lost noun case inflection, except for possessive -'s and pronominal forms.

Example:

The student reads the book.

Grammatical relations are primarily determined by word order and prepositions such as to, from, with, and in. Prepositions in English carry a heavy semantic load, often corresponding to multiple cases in Russian and Uzbek.

Cross-Linguistic Comparison

The comparison reveals that:

- Russian and Uzbek rely on morphological marking to encode relations.
- English compensates through prepositions and rigid syntax.
- Case systems allow greater word order flexibility than prepositional systems.

**Discussion.** From a functional-typological perspective, the contrast between case systems and prepositional systems reflects different solutions to the same communicative problem: how to encode relations between participants in an event. Case marking reduces reliance on word order, enabling greater discourse-driven variation. Prepositional systems, while syntactically more constrained, offer semantic precision through lexical items.

Russian demonstrates a mixed strategy, combining case marking with prepositions, while Uzbek shows a more purely agglutinative approach. English illustrates a shift from morphology to syntax, consistent with broader diachronic trends in Germanic languages.

These findings support the functionalist view that grammatical structure is shaped by the interaction of economy, clarity, and communicative efficiency.

**Conclusion.** This study has compared the case systems of Russian and Uzbek with the prepositional system of English within a functional-typological framework. The analysis shows that morphological case marking and prepositional strategies represent alternative but equally functional means of encoding grammatical relations.

Russian and Uzbek employ case marking to achieve syntactic flexibility and morphological clarity, while English relies on prepositions and fixed word order. These differences reflect broader typological patterns and historical developments. Future research may extend this comparison through corpus-based analysis or explore implications for second language acquisition and translation studies.

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