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# CASE ALIGNMENT(S) IN SINYAR

*Pascal Boyeldieu*

## 1 Introduction

The Sinyar language (*tàar fàmɲà*) is spoken in an area that is shared between Chad (main settlement: Mongororo, Waddai province) and Sudan (main settlement: Foro Boranga, South to Darfur). For Chad only the number of speakers was estimated 12,300 in the year 2000 (Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2013). A roughly similar amount may be suggested for Sudan. Their closest neighbours are Daju of Sila (Chad) and Fur (Sudan).

Up to now Sinyar has been classified within the (Sara-)Bongo-Bagirmi (henceforth SBB) sub-branch of Central Sudanic (Tucker & Bryan 1956: 14; Haaland 1978; Doornbos undated; Doornbos & Bender 1983, Bender 1992). However this position relied on very limited data and recent fieldwork of my own revealed that things are not so straightforward. Sinyar does indeed share many lexical and morphosyntactic features with SBB languages but, as shown in table 1 below, it also differs from them in other features of the same domains, the origin or relationship of which remains undetermined, so that the social and historical genesis of Sinyar still represents an open question in the present state of research.

**Table 1: Sinyar features converging with/diverging from SBB features**

SBB-like	SBB-unlike
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• part of the lexicon (including ‘basic’)</li><li>• part of the personal pronouns</li><li>• personal indices 2 &amp; 3 distinguished for number by plural suffixes on the verb</li><li>• infinitive in <i>t-</i> (vowel-initial verbs)</li><li>• relative verb forms in <i>k(V)-</i></li><li>• adjectives in <i>k-</i> (vowel-initial verbs)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• part of the lexicon (including ‘basic’)</li><li>• no tonal alternation on verbs</li><li>• some double (related) radicals for verbs</li><li>• intensive verbs in <i>-r-</i></li><li>• factitive verbs suffixed with <i>-oo/-uu</i></li><li>• noun plural in <i>(-ɲà)</i></li><li>• some noun plurals in <i>-àar</i> (animates)</li><li>• <i>case marker system</i></li></ul>

The aim of this paper is to give an account of Sinyar’s (double) case marker system, probably the most original and striking feature in comparison with the SBB language group. After displaying the markers and their complementarity (section 3), and commenting on morphosyntactic principles (section 4), I will review the way cases are involved in the expression of the different functions<sup>1</sup> that may be assumed by noun phrases (section 5), summarize the relations between function and case (section 6), and finally give concluding remarks (section 7).

## 2 Preliminary remarks

Sinyar contrasts two level tones (Low/High) and has frequent downstepped Lows (the tonal transcriptions should not be considered as definitive).

Kind of ‘floating’ tones – symbolised by (L) / (H) put after the term – condition the tonal realisation of subsequent toneless suffixes (or clitics), a property which is, among others, the case of certain case markers. Contrast for instance the behaviour of the Nominative Singular *-Ni* after *bís* (L) ‘cat’ (1) and *lél* (H) ‘donkey’ (2):

<sup>1</sup> In doing so I was appreciably inspired by an article of Kießling (2007) on the marked nominative in Datooga.

- (1) *bís-nì*  
cat-NOM:SG  
'cat' (Nominative)
- (2) *lél-lí*  
donkey-NOM:SG  
'donkey' (Nominative)

The nominal Plural *-ɲà* however is transparent in the sense that the 'floating' tone 'jumps' it and shifts its effect onto the following unit (*-ɲà* may be dropped, especially when it is followed by a case marker whose plural number is explicit). Compare the behaviour of the Nominative Plural *-sì* after the two nouns *ìngà* (L) 'mountain' (3) and *màasì* (H) 'spear' (4).

- (3) *ìngà(-ɲà)-sì*  
mountain(-PL)-NOM:PL  
'mountains' (Nominative)
- (4) *màasì(-ɲà)-sí*  
spear(-PL)-NOM:PL  
'spears' (Nominative)

Basic syntactic order is SVO with great freedom as to the main constituents (pragmatic effects are likely but not well known).

Numerous examples have been elicited.<sup>2</sup>

### 3 Case markers

Sinyar is characterized by two sets of case markers according to the nature of the head of the noun phrase.

i.) The first set concerns phrases whose head is a common noun, except if modified by a deictic (see below). This set, that includes the dummy noun *ɲàkwà* (H) 'thingy, thingummy, what-do-you-call-it' and the partial interrogative *ìngá* (H) 'what?', contrasts an unmarked form ('Absolute'), a Nominative, and an Adverbial (a label that covers all values of 'locative', 'instrumental', and 'comitative').

The specific markers of set i. are illustrated in table 2 below:

**Table 2: Case markers for phrases whose head is a common noun**

	Absolute form	Nominative	Adverbial
Sg.	∅	-n / -Ni <sup>3</sup>	-ti
Pl.		-sì	

ii.) The second set concerns phrases whose head is a proper name, a deictic or a personal pronoun, as well as cases where a common noun is modified by a deictic modifier. 'Proper names' include personal names – and names of personified animals –, 'God', 'chief', 'grandmother', names of places, rivers, mountains, and countries, the dummy noun *ɲàkwà* 'what's-his/her-name, So-and-So' and the partial interrogative *dɛ<sup>h</sup>e-* (L) 'who?', some animal names: '(home) cat', '(home) duck', 'fox', 'owl

<sup>2</sup> Data were collected on the occasion of two recent fieldworks in Khartoum (2010, 2011) with the kind assistance of MM. Bakheet Abdulkerim and Zakaria Abdulkerim. The research was supported by the Llacan (UMR 8135), a joint research unit of the CNRS and Inalco (France). I am especially grateful to the Department of Linguistics of the University of Khartoum for its warm welcome and help.

<sup>3</sup> These two complementary variants are respectively suffixed to nouns ending in a short vowel vs. nouns ending in a long vowel or a consonant.

sp.', 'bird sp.', 'stork', etc. as well as the points of the compass borrowed from Arabic, e.g. *Rû* 'North'.

This second set contrasts an unmarked, 'Absolute' form (restricted to proper names *stricto sensu*), a Nominative, a Genitive, an Accusative, and an Adverbial.

The specific markers and specific forms of set ii. are illustrated in tables 3. to 5. below:

**Table 3: Case markers for phrases whose head is a proper name (and assimilated)**

	Absolute form	Nominative	Genitive	Accusative	Adverbial
Sg.	Ø	-n / -lè <sup>4</sup>	-na (L)	-(y)àa (H)	-lèe (H)
Pl.		-ngè (H) <sup>5</sup>		-ngàá (H)	-ngèer (H)

**Table 4: Deictic modifiers (and pronouns)<sup>6</sup>**

		Nominative	Genitive	Accusative	Adverbial
'near'	Sg.	-àní	kín.nàa (L)	kín	(?)íngèr
	Pl.	-àgí	kígí.níngè (H)	kígí	kígí.tí
'far'	Sg.	-àná	wín.nàa (L)	wín	wísèr
	Pl.	-àgá	wísí.níngè (H)	wísí	wísí.tí

**Table 5: Personal pronouns**

	Nominative	Genitive (Associative)	Accusative		Adverbial
			Independent	Indices	
1S	màalé, màalè, (màá)	-ándà (L)	màá	-má/-mà	màárèe
2S	illé, illè	-nûn (L)	làá	-lá/-là	làárèe
3S	nàalé, (nàá)	-náa (L)	nìyàa	-nà	nìyààrèe
1Pd	cìngé	-náakú (H)	cìngáa	-sìngà/-sìngá	cìngáangèer
1P[?]	cìyé		cìyáa		cìyáangèer
1Pp	cèesá	-násà (H)	cèsáa	-sàasà/-sáàsà	cèesáangèer
2P	sìngé	-núkú (H)	sìngáa	-sìngá/-sìngá	sìngáangèer
2P[?]	sèesá		sèesáa		sèesáangèer
3P	nìngé	-níngè (H)	nìngáa	-nìngá	nìngáangèer

As can be seen from tables 1 and 2, case markers are usually but not always distinct for number. Deictics (table 4) and personal pronouns (table 5) have their own, usually irreducible forms. Note however the genitive forms of the Deictics that combine the accusative forms plus the genitive of the Personal Pronouns 3S and 3P. Several other formal links may be observed between the three tables 3 to 5.

<sup>4</sup> These two complementary variants are respectively suffixed to nouns ending in a short vowel vs. nouns ending in a long vowel or a consonant.

<sup>5</sup> Note that the plural markers of proper names do not refer to several individuals bearing the same name (see comment on (29) below) but to the group of people associated to a single individual ('associative plural'), e.g. *Gìndà-ngè* 'Ginaa (man's name) and his mates/his friends/his family/his clan/etc.' (Nominative and Genitive) or, in Arabic, *nas Ginaa*.

<sup>6</sup> Deictic pronouns, the Genitive forms of which have not been systematically registered, are very similar to the deictic modifiers.

#### 4 Morphosyntactic principles

As a general rule case markers appear at the end of the phrase and may be considered as postpositions. Thus the Nominative is suffixed to the sole head noun representing the subject in (5) but to the last modifier (adjective) following the head noun in (6) (as a convention, italics will highlight illustrated *head* and *case marker*, if any):

- (5) *kàjjà-n*      àmbíy<sup>l</sup>à  
sun-NOM:SG 3:go:PST2  
'The time is over' (lit. the sun has gone)
- (6) *kàndìnè-ṅà-náà*    kíccí-sì      àm<sup>l</sup>àn      írrí  
cloth-PL-3S:GEN    old-NOM:PL 3:have:PRS:PL    dirt  
'His old clothes are dirty.'

Since common nouns do not know any accusative markers, objects represented by common nouns appear in the unmarked (absolute) form (7a) unless they are modified by a deictic that must appear in the accusative (7b) in the same way as the deictic pronoun (7c):

- (7) a. ngùbbò-n              tèll<sup>l</sup>è              *kwàrjà*  
old\_woman- NOM:SG 3:twist:PST1    polenta  
'The old woman prepared polenta.'
- b. ngùbbò-n              tèll<sup>l</sup>è              *kwàrjà kín*  
old\_woman- NOM:SG 3:twist:PST1    polenta    this:ACC:SG  
'The old woman prepared this polenta.'
- c. ngùbbò-n              tèll<sup>l</sup>è              *èkín*  
old\_woman- NOM:SG 3:twist:PST1    this\_one:ACC:SG  
'The old woman prepared this one.'

Finally genitive case markers (8) or specific forms (9-10) of set ii. may appear within a noun phrase as modifiers of a common noun and be followed by the last case marker governed by the head:

- (8) báà-ṅà    *Kùnyáà-nà-sì*              wèepìnn<sup>l</sup>àa      firàangà  
father-PL    Kunyaa-GEN:SG-NOM:PL 3:come:PST2:PL    yesterday  
'Kunyaa's fathers (i.e. father and/or uncles) have come yesterday.'
- (9) *kàndìnè-ṅà-náà*    kíccí-sì      àm<sup>l</sup>àn      írrí    (= (6) above)  
cloth-PL-3S:GEN    old-NOM:PL 3:have:PRS:PL    dirt  
'His old clothes are dirty.'
- (10) báà    *céè*    *wín.nâ-n*              úwè  
father    person    that:GEN:SG-NOM:SG 3:FUT:come  
'The father of that person will come.'

Such are the main principles along which case markers function. Further situations and contexts will be illustrated throughout section 5.

#### 5 Function and case

This section will review and comment the use of case along the main functions noun phrases may assume in the Sinyar utterance.

*a. Subject of any predicate and focussed subject of verb predicate*

The subject is normally marked as nominative. Examples (11-14) illustrate subjects of a verbal predicate (with focussed subject in (12)). (15) is an adverbial utterance with an adverbial noun phrase as predicate while (16) is an equative utterance resulting from the mere juxtaposition of both subject and predicate represented by noun phrases in the nominative (see b. below).

- (11) *ngàar-rí wéjní*  
stew-NOM:SG 3:be\_nice:PRS  
'The stew is nice.'
- (12) *ìngá-n k-ùj-l'à*  
what?:NOM:SG FOC-hurt:PRS-2S:ACC  
'What hurts you?' (lit. what is it that hurts you?)
- (13) *Sùdààn-nè ùjñàbí Íngiltàràa*  
Sudan-NOM:SG 3:be\_hot:pass:PRS England:ACC:SG  
'Sudan is hotter than England.'
- (14) *gèe-ní ùmbò-tá tádá*  
child-this:NOM:SG 3:hear:PRS-NEG speech  
'This child is disobedient.' (lit. doesn't hear speech)
- (15) *nqùbbòl-lí ùmmù kàanà-tí*  
snake-NOM:SG inside grass-ADV  
'There is a snake in the grass'
- (16) *Bàkùt-lè cé-k-íjjá'-n*  
Bakheet-NOM:SG person-REL-3:count-NOM:SG  
'Bakheet is the accountant.'

In rare cases subjects have been noted as unmarked, i.e. without any nominative. Although not well understood this behaviour could be restricted to nouns referring to inanimate, maybe non-countable notions whose unmarked form would then express indefiniteness. Contrast (17) and (18):

- (17) *kùcúl úngw'à*  
money 3:not\_be:PRS  
'There is no money (money doesn't exist, e.g. 'I/we have no money.').'
- (18) *kùcúl-lí úngw'à*  
money-NOM:SG 3:not\_be:PRS  
'The money is not here (the money is absent, e.g. 'The money is somewhere else.').'

*b. Nominal predicate*

As already mentioned in connection with example (16) above, the nominal predicate of a simply juxtaposed equative utterance is itself marked as nominative. Examples (19) and (20) illustrate phrases whose head is a common noun or a proper name respectively. In (21) the nominal predicate is modified by a relative clause.

- (19) *Bàkùt-lè cé-k-íjjá'-n* (= (16) above)  
Bakheet:NOM:SG person-REL-3:count-NOM:SG  
'Bakheet is the accountant.'

- (20) èerà-ándâ-n                      Bàkfit-lè  
 name-1S:GEN-NOM:SG    Bakheet-NOM:SG  
 ‘My name is Bakheet.’
- (21) ángá-sí                      kàndìnè-ŋà    k-íngíllé-sí  
 which\_one?:NOM:PL    cloth-PL            REL-3:get\_lost:PST1-NOM:PL  
 ‘Which clothes were lost?’ (lit. which ones (are) the clothes that were lost?)

**c. Complement of èbì ‘be, exist, live’ and úngw<sup>1</sup>à ‘not be, be absent, not exist’**

The complements of two verbs referring – positively or negatively – to class membership, presence, or existence of an entity may themselves be or not be marked as nominative. This difference of behaviour involves a semantic contrast that has not been clearly identified but seems to have something to do with an opposition of temporary or circumstantial (– nominative) vs. permanent or essential (+ nominative). Compare (22a) and (23a) with (22b) and (23b) respectively:

- (22) a. nàalé    èbì            fàmɲà  
 3S:NOM    3:be:PRS    Sinyar  
 ‘He is still a Sinyar (but could change [?]).’
- b. nàalé    èbì            fàmɲà-n  
 3S:NOM    3:be:PRS    Sinyar:NOM:SG  
 ‘He is a Sinyar (and will ever be [?]).’
- (23) a. nàalé    úngw<sup>1</sup>à            gì  
 3S:NOM    3:not\_be:PRS    child  
 ‘He is not a child.’
- b. nàalé    úngw<sup>1</sup>à            gì-n  
 3S:NOM    3:not\_be:PRS    child:NOM:SG  
 ‘He is not a child (i.e. he behaves like an adult [?]).’

**d. Complement of ùbà ‘become’**

Complements of the verb ùbà ‘become’ always behave as objects and appear either unmarked (in the ‘absolute’ form) for common nouns (24-25) or in the accusative, at least in the uncertain example of a personal pronoun (26).

- (24) nàalé    èbì            ùbà                      sìmarfá  
 3S:NOM    3:PRGR    3:become:PRS    man  
 ‘He is becoming a man (of a boy or young man).’
- (25) m-ùbòwàafà                      cé.kúbbò  
 1S-become:wait:PRS:NEG    elder[person.big]  
 ‘I have not become an elder yet.’
- (26) nàalé    ùbà                      màá  
 3S:NOM    3:FUT:become    1S:ACC  
 ‘He will become me.’ [meaning unclear]

**e. Object (patient)**

The object (patient) of a verbal predicate is unmarked when represented by a common noun (27-28) or also by a proper name used with a generic value (29). On the other hand the object is marked as

accusative in (30) (proper name of personified animals with specific value) and in (31) (deictic modifying a common noun).

- (27) *nìngé mbàrà̀n nàfá*  
 3P:NOM 3:love:PRS:PL each\_other  
 ‘They love each other.’
- (28) *nàalé áamá<sup>1</sup>à nî dè<sup>1</sup>e-nà*  
 3S:NOM 3:marry:PST2 daughter who?-GEN:SG  
 ‘Whose daughter has he married (he has married the daughter of whom)?’
- (29) *Bàkî̀t mùṭṭà c-àmà béerè*  
 Bakheet three 1P-have:PRS at\_home  
 ‘We have three Bakheet at home.’
- (30) *Nàmú̀rò-n ámbóngá<sup>1</sup>à Míndéelè-ngàá*  
 Spider-NOM:SG 3:visit:PST2 Rat-ACC:PL  
 ‘Spider has paid a visit to Rat’s family.’
- (31) *màalé m-ìgàakà cèè-kín*  
 1S:NOM 1S-ignore:PRS person-this:ACC:SG  
 ‘I don’t know this person.’

#### *f. Object of ditransitive or applicative verbs*

Objects of ditransitive verbs both behave in the same way like patients: common nouns are unmarked (32) while proper names and assimilated are marked with accusative (33). Note that the order of objects is free.

- (32) a. *nàalé ndóolú<sup>1</sup>ù gî tàar ʃàmɲà*  
 3S:NOM 3:teach:PRS child language Sinyar  
 ‘S/he teaches the child the Sinyar language.’
- b. *nàalé ndóolú<sup>1</sup>ù tàar ʃàmɲà gî*  
 3S:NOM 3:teach:PRS language Sinyar child  
 ‘S/he teaches the child the Sinyar language.’
- (33) a. *nàalé ínjóoy<sup>1</sup>à kùcúl Bàkî̀t-yàa*  
 3S:NOM 3:let\_count:PST2 money Bakheet-ACC:SG  
 ‘S/he let Bakheet count the money.’
- b. *nàalé ínjóoy<sup>1</sup>à Bàkî̀t-yàa kùcúl*  
 3S:NOM 3:let\_count:PST2 Bakheet-ACC:SG money  
 ‘S/he let Bakheet count the money.’

Several verbs may receive an applicative extension that increases the number of their arguments. In such cases the ‘applicative’ object may refer to different values (namely benefactive, locative, or instrumental) and is again unmarked in the case of common nouns (34) or marked in the accusative in the case of proper names (35-36).

- (34) *ìngá áarinnáa wèṛf̣î dúkùm*  
 what? 3:FUTdo:APPL:PL knife blunt  
 ‘What will they do with the blunt knife?’



- (35) m̀aalé m-è̀bì k̀ayyáa Fòrbáráńáà  
 1S:NOM 1S-PRGR be\_near:PRS:APPL F\_B:ACC:SG  
 'I am living close to Foro Boranga.'

- (36) k-ìkàlmbìyáa-tá Zàkàríyà-ngè ngàar  
 2:PRHB-cook:APPL-NEG Zakariya-ACC:PL polenta  
 'Don't cook polenta for Zakariya's people!'

**g. Adverbial (locative, instrumental, and comitative)**

Adverbial adjuncts are usually marked as such, the same markers expressing all the values of locative, instrumental and comitative. Common nouns are illustrated in (37-42) and proper names or assimilated in (43-45). (40-42) exemplify cases of complex adpositions resulting from modified nouns (*kùbàl*...ADV 'near, close to', *tà*... ADV 'because of, according to').

- (37) wèep<sup>1</sup>à kàndìnè-ńà kwíi-tí  
 3S:come:PST2 cloth-PL other-ADV  
 'S/he has come with other clothes.'
- (38) ǹaalé sùdò-tí górnú<sup>1</sup>  
 3S:NOM sleep-ADV 3:snore:PRS  
 'S/he snores while sleeping.'
- (39) mùttà-ńíngè-tí wèepìnnà<sup>1</sup>a  
 three-3P:GEN:ADV 3:come:PST2:PL  
 'They have come in a group of three.' (lit. with the three of them)
- (40) cìjì kùbàl-ándá-tì  
 2:put:IMP nearness-1S:GEN-ADV  
 'Put (it) beside me!' (lit. in my nearness)
- (41) tà cèè-sì t-àd<sup>1</sup>àn-tí ...  
 matter person:PL-NOM:PL DEP-3:say:PRS:PL-ADV  
 'according to what people say...'
- (42) m̀aalé m-è̀bì kùbàl Fòrbáráńá-ná-tì  
 1S:NOM 1S-live:PRS nearness F\_B-GEN:SG-ADV  
 'I live near Foro Boranga.' (lit. in the nearness of F.B.)
- (43) m-ábì Élì-lèe súk-tì  
 1S-FUT:go Ali-ADV:SG market[Ar.]-ADV  
 'I'll go to the market with Ali.'
- (44) illé tàb<sup>1</sup>à-là cìyáangèer  
 2S-NOM 2:leave:IMP-2S:NOM 1P[?]:ADV  
 'Stay with us!' (lit. you (sg.) leave yourself with us!)
- (45) wèepngònnà<sup>1</sup>a dē<sup>1</sup>e-lèe kwíi-tí  
 3:come:again:PST2 who?-ADV:SG other-ADV  
 'With whom else has he come?'

However toponyms remain unmarked when used as absolute locatives (46).

- (46) *nàalé wìndéɲ Sàalé*  
 3S:NOM 3:bathe:PST1 Salih[river]  
 ‘S/he bathed in Salih (river).’

#### *h. Complement of preposition kándáaká ‘like’*

Noun phrases governed by the preposition *kándáaká* ‘like, as’ behave like objects, i.e. they appear complementarily as unmarked (47) or as accusative (48). This fact might suggest a verbal origin for the preposition.

- (47) *nàalé èrfi kándáaká fêk*  
 3S:NOM 3:speak:PRS like chief [Ar.]  
 ‘He speaks like a/the chief.’

- (48) *nàalé èrfi kándáaká ñìngáa*  
 3S:NOM 3:speak:PRS like 3P:ACC  
 ‘He speaks like them.’

#### *i. Associative=Genitive (modifying a noun, including complex adpositions)*

Modifying nouns, i.e. nouns functioning as the associative (genitive) expansion of a head remain unmarked if they are common nouns (49-51). They are marked as genitive in the case of proper names (52-53) and assimilated, e.g. partial interrogative ‘who?’ (54) or deictics (55-56).

- (49) *ñìngé álánn<sup>1</sup>àa kàndìnè ñàfá*  
 3P:NOM 3:put:PST2:PL cloth each\_other  
 ‘They have put on each other’s cloth.’

- (50) *ñìngé èbì àd<sup>1</sup>àn tádá báa-ndà*  
 3P:NOM 3:PRGR 3:say:PRS:PL matter father-1S:GEN  
 ‘They are discussing the matter of my father.’

- (51) *káalítìn tà ùmmà-tì*  
 3:quarrel:PRS:PL matter woman-ADV  
 ‘They quarrel concerning (with the matter of) a/the woman.’

- (52) *érbí térbí Bórɲò-nà*  
 3:run:PRS running fox-GEN:SG  
 ‘He runs like a fox.’ (lit. he runs a running of fox, i.e. very fast)

- (53) *ñìngé èbìn íllè Sàbáà-nà-tì*  
 3P:NOM 3:live:PRS:PL village[Ar.] East-GEN:SG-ADV  
 ‘They live in a village of the East.’

- (54) *ègí ìngè(-ɲà) dē<sup>1</sup>e-ngè-sí*  
 this:NOM:PL house(-PL) who?-GEN:PL-NOM:PL  
 ‘Whose (pl.) houses are these?’ (lit. these (are) the houses of whom (pl.)?)

- (55) *ḡáà céè kín.nâ-n úwè* (= (9) above)  
 father person this:GEN:SG-NOM:SG 3:FUT:come  
 ‘The father of this person will come.’

- (56) *nàalé úwèn báà céè wísí.níngè-tí*  
 3S:NOM 3:FUT:come:PL father person those:GEN:PL-ADV  
 ‘He will come (lit. he, they will come) with the father of those people.’

#### *j. Topicalized subject*

Sinyar has the ability to strengthen the topicalization of the subject – or making it a frame – by duplicating it with a subject pronoun that appears after a light pause. The extraposed subject itself appears in the nominative. Contrast (57a) and (58a) (subject) with (57b) and (58b) (strengthened topicalization):

- (57) a. *wèrfi kiccí-n jùwè-t<sup>l</sup>à jàmmá<sup>l</sup>l*  
 knife old-NOM:SG 3:cut:PRS-NEG 3:be\_nice  
 ‘The old knife does not cut well.’  
 b. *wèrfi kiccí-n nàalé jùwè-t<sup>l</sup>à jàmmá<sup>l</sup>l*  
 knife old-NOM:SG 3S:NOM 3:cut:PRS-NEG 3:be\_nice  
 ‘The old knife, it does not cut well.’
- (58) a. *Kùmúlà-ngè ámbínn<sup>l</sup>àa nùnnúù*  
 Kumula:NOM:PL 3:go:PST2:PL far\_away  
 ‘Kumula’s people have gone away.’  
 b. *Kùmúlà-ngè nìngé ámbínn<sup>l</sup>àa nùnnúù*  
 Kumula:NOM:PL 3P:NOM 3:go:PST2:PL far\_away  
 ‘Kumula’s people, they have gone away.’

Another process – that might be characterized as ‘contrastive topicalization’ – consists of embedding the extraposed noun phrase in the frozen formula *tùbà... cè(n)* ‘as for... (also)’. The extraposed subject is again marked as a nominative (59).

- (59) *tùbà Éli-n cè(n) ámbíy<sup>l</sup>à firàangà*  
 as\_for Ali:NOM:SG also 3:go:PST2 yesterday  
 ‘As for Ali, he has gone yesterday.’

The term *tùbà* obviously derives from the verb *ùbà* ‘to become’ (*t-ùbà* = dependent form?); *cè* ‘also’ is attested elsewhere but it may appear here with an additional *n* according to conditions that are not understood. All instances of this specific construction (see also k. and m. below) concern human proper names.

These cases should not be assimilated to the behaviour of *ùbà* as a plain verb (see section d. above) since the topicalized noun phrase may be marked at least as a nominative, an accusative or an adverbial according to the function copied by the topic (see sections k. and m. below).

#### *k. Topicalized object (patient)*

The object may be topicalized through extraposition to the beginning of the clause. It is unmarked in the case of common nouns (60-61) and marked as accusative in the case of proper names (62) or personal pronouns (63). Note that the inanimate object is not necessarily represented by a pronoun *in situ*: compare (60) (no pronoun) and (63) (object pronoun present).

- (60) *wèrfi kiccí báandâ-n indénj<sup>l</sup>à fàfèré*  
 knife old father:1S:GEN-NOM:SG 3:take:PST2 this\_morning  
 ‘The old knife, my father has taken (it) this morning.’

- (61) *márfá-náà*      *m-àndíj-nà*      *súk-tì*  
 husband-3S:GEN 1S-see:PST1-3S:ACC yesterday  
 ‘Her husband, I saw him on the market.’
- (62) *Kùmúlàa*      *m-àndíj-nà*      *súk-tì*  
 Kumula:ACC:SG 1S-see:PST1-3S:ACC market[Ar.]-ADV  
 ‘Kumula, I saw her on the market.’
- (63) *kàggà-kín*      *náa*      *kùun-nà*  
 tree-this:ACC:SG how? 3:call:PRS:PL-3S:ACC  
 ‘This tree, how is it called? (lit. how do they call it?)’

The topicalized noun phrase (here a personal pronoun) may sometimes be marked either as accusative or as nominative: compare (64a) and (65a) with (64b) and (65b) respectively. In these cases the *animate* feature of the object (patient or experiencer) seems to explain the attraction of a more ‘active’ or ‘controlling’ case – the nominative – although the control is non-existent in both examples (‘be born’, ‘be hungry’).<sup>7</sup>

- (64) a. *nìyáà*    *wìjè-n<sup>1</sup>àa*      *Fòrbáráńá*  
 3S:ACC 3:beget-3S:ACC:PST2 F\_B  
 ‘He, he was born (lit. they have begotten him) in Foro Boranga.’
- b. *nàalé*    *wìjè-n<sup>1</sup>àa*      *Fòrbáráńá*  
 3S:NOM 3:beget-3S:ACC:PST2 F\_B  
 ‘He, he was born (lit. they have begotten him) in Foro Boranga.’
- (65) a. *nìyáà*    *mùsù-n*      *k-ùj-n<sup>1</sup>à*  
 3S:ACC hunger-NOM FOC-3:pain:PRS-3S:ACC  
 ‘He, he is hungry (lit. hunger pains him).’
- b. *nàalé*    *mùsù-n*      *k-ùj-n<sup>1</sup>à*  
 3S:NOM hunger-NOM FOC-3:pain:PRS-3S:ACC  
 ‘He, he is hungry (lit. hunger pains him).’

Finally a contrastive topicalization may appear in a similar way like with the subject (see j. above). The topicalized noun phrase (here a proper name) is marked in the accusative (66).

- (66) *tùbà*    *Élì-yàa*      *cè*    *m-àndíj-nà*      *fìràangà*  
 as\_for Ali:NOM:SG also 1S-see:PST1-3S:ACC yesterday  
 ‘As for Ali, I saw him yesterday.’

### *l. Topicalized object of ditransitive or applicative verbs?*

Sinyar’s ability of topicalizing the supplementary object of a ditransitive or applicative verb is not clear in the present state of the data. Most probably there is a possibility of moving some arguments with pragmatic effects. Contrast for instance (67), where the second object (instrumental) of an applicative verb is put in front of the sentence, with (68), where a similar object appears after the verb predicate (as expected the common noun object is unmarked in either case).

- (67) *wèrfì*    *kíccí*    *ìngá*    *n-áaryáa*  
 knife old what? 2-do:PST1:APPL  
 ‘The old knife, what did you do with (it)?’

<sup>7</sup> In English and French however the experiencer is treated as a subject in these precise cases.

- (68) ìngá áarinnáa wèrɛ̃ɛ́ dúkùm (= (34) above)  
 what? 3:FUTDO:APPL:PL knife blunt  
 ‘What will they do with the blunt knife?’

But other examples, involving both ditransitive and applicative verbs, are contradictory as to the actual possibility to duplicate the presumed topicalized noun phrase – even referring to an animate – with a personal pronoun *in situ*. On the other hand we lack examples of embedded contrastive topicalization (as in j. and k. above) for this type of argument.

### *m. Topicalized adverbial*

Here again Sinyar may move some adjuncts with a likely pragmatic effect, although this does not appear clearly in the translation. Compare (69a) and (70a) with (69b) and (70b) respectively where adverbial phrases are marked as such in either case. Pronominal duplication seems to be excluded in such cases, even with animate nouns (proper names).

- (69) a. ìngá n-áary<sup>1</sup>à wèrɛ̃ɛ́ kíccí-tí  
 what? 2-do:PST2 knife old-ADV  
 ‘What have you done with the old knife?’  
 b. wèrɛ̃ɛ́ kíccí-tí ìngá n-áary<sup>1</sup>à  
 knife old-ADV what? 2-do:PST2  
 ‘What have you done with the old knife?’  
 (or better ‘The old knife, what have you done with (it)?’?)
- (70) a. c-ábì Kùmùlà-lèe súk-tì  
 1P-FUT:go Kumula-ADV:SG market[AR.]-ADV  
 ‘I (lit. we) will go to the market with Kumula.’  
 b. Kùmùlà-lèe c-ábì súk-tì  
 Kumula-ADV:SG 1P-FUT:go market[AR.]-ADV  
 ‘I (lit. we) will go to the market with Kumula.’  
 (or better Kumula, I will go to the market with (her)?)

Here however the embedding construction of the contrastive topicalization may apply and, as shown in example (71), the extraposed proper name may appear in the nominative, in the accusative, or in the adverbial case. Despite some slight variations in these three sentences,<sup>8</sup> the three choices of case marking are clearly possible here.

- (71) a. tùbà Éli-n cè m-ámíbì nìyààrèe súk-tì  
 as\_for Ali:NOM:SG also 1S-go:PST1 3S:ADV market[AR.]-ADV  
 ‘As for Ali, I went with him to the market.’  
 b. tùbà Éli-yàa cè c-ámíbì nìyààrèe súk-tì  
 as\_for Ali:ACC:SG also 1P-go:PST1 3S:ADV market[AR.]-ADV  
 ‘As for Ali, I (lit. we) went with him to the market.’  
 c. tùbà Éli-lèe cè(n) c-ámíbì nìyààrèe súk-tì  
 as\_for Ali:ADV:SG also 1P-go:PST1 3S:ADV market[AR.]-ADV  
 ‘As for Ali, I (lit. we) went with him to the market.’

<sup>8</sup> The plural *c-ámíbì* ‘we went’ (71b-c) is preferred to the singular *m-ámíbì* ‘I went’ as in (71a). Shouldn’t it be the case also in (71a)? As mentioned before (see note 12 above) the possible variants of *cè(n)* ‘also’ are not well understood.

### n. Topicalized associative

The associative (genitive) modifier of a head noun may be extraposed and duplicated by a personal pronoun *in situ* with an effect of topicalization. As illustrated below a common strategy is to mark the topicalized modifier as a nominative in both cases of a common noun (72-73) or a proper name (74-75).

- (72) *wèrfi kiccí-n tàar-nâ-n áffá-tá*  
knife old-NOM:SG edge-3S:GEN-NOM:SG 3:be\_sharp:PRS-NEG  
'The old knife, its edge is not sharp.'

- (73) *ùmmà-n nìngé káalítìn tòor-náà-tì*  
woman:NOM:SG 3P:NOM 3:quarrel:PRS:PL top-3S:GEN-ADV  
'The woman, they quarrel concerning (lit. at the top of) her.'

- (74) *Kùmúlà-n báa-nâ-n ámbíy<sup>l</sup>à nùnnúù*  
Kumula-NOM:SG father-3S:GEN-NOM:SG 3:go:PST2 far\_away  
'Kumula, her father has gone away.'

- (75) *Máamàt-lè màalé c-ámbí gí-náà-tì màarà-tí*  
Maamat-NOM:SG 1S:NOM 1P-go:PST1 child-3S:GEN-ADV hunting-ADV  
'Maamat, I went hunting with his son.'

But accusative (compare (76) with (73) above) or genitive (77) may also be chosen in this context, at least for noun phrases (proper name, interrogative 'who?')<sup>9</sup> that make it possible.

- (76) *Bàkùt-yàa nìngé káalítìn tòor-náà-tì*  
Bakheet-ACC:SG 3P:NOM 3:quarrel:PRS:PL top-3S:GEN-ADV  
'Bakheet, they quarrel concerning (lit. at the top of) him.'

- (77) *dè<sup>l</sup>e-nà èbì àd<sup>l</sup>àn tádá-náà*  
who?-GEN:SG 3:PRGR 3:say:PRS:PL matter-3S:GEN  
'Who are they discussing the matter of?' (lit. of whom, they are discussing his matter?)

A last example (78) illustrates again the free variation of a nominative with an accusative in marking a proper name.

- (78) a. *Bàkùt-ngè màalé m-èrf<sup>i</sup>ì báa-níngè-tí firàangà*  
Bakheet-NOM:PL 1S:NOM 1S-speak:PST1 father-3P:GEN-ADV yesterday  
'Bakheet's people, I spoke with their father yesterday.'
- b. *Bàkùt-ngàá màalé m-èrf<sup>i</sup>ì báa-níngè-tí firàangà*  
Bakheet-ACC:PL 1S:NOM 1S-speak:PST1 father-3P:GEN-ADV yesterday  
'Bakheet's people, I spoke with their father yesterday.'

### o. Citation

Considering the lexical lists that have been previously published as well as my own data, the behaviour of nouns in isolation is not really conclusive: according to their nature (common noun or proper name) they may appear as unmarked, accusative or nominative, without obvious link with a feature of animacy. Citation form should therefore not be taken as decisive evidence in Sinyar.

<sup>9</sup> If the analysis is right, the topicalization of a partial interrogative is rather unexpected.

## 6 Summary of function and case

The different relations between function and case that have been inspected in the preceding section are summarized in Table 6.:

**Table 6: Summary of function and case**

	head = common nouns	head = proper names & al.
a. Subject of any predicate and focussed subject of verb predicate	NOM (/ <i>unmarked</i> )	NOM
b. Nominal predicate	NOM	
c. Complement of <i>èbì</i> ‘be, exist, live’ and <i>úngw’à</i> ‘not be, be absent, not exist’	<i>unmarked</i> / NOM (≈ ‘circumstantial’ / ‘essential’?)	
d. Complement of <i>ùbà</i> ‘become’	<i>unmarked</i>	ACC ?
e. Object (patient)	<i>unmarked</i>	ACC
f. Object of ditransitive or applicative verbs	<i>unmarked</i>	ACC
g. Adverbial (locative, instrumental, and comitative)	ADV	ADV / <i>unmarked</i> (toponyms as absolute locatives)
h. Complement of preposition <i>kándáaká</i> ‘like, as’	<i>unmarked</i>	ACC
i. Associative (modifying a noun, including complex adpositions)	<i>unmarked</i>	GEN
j. Topicalized subject	NOM	
k. Topicalized object	<i>unmarked</i>	ACC (/ NOM)
l. Topicalized object of ditransitive or applicative verbs?	?	
m. Topicalized adverbial	ADV (contrastive topicalization:) ?	ADV NOM / ACC / ADV
n. Topicalized associative	NOM	NOM / ACC / GEN
o. Citation	not conclusive	

## 7 Concluding remarks

In order to conclude this presentation of Sinyar’s case marking system(s), several remarks can be made.

1. From a typological point of view König (2008) makes the following observation concerning African languages:

“[...] two types of marked-nominative languages are to be distinguished with regard to the morphological markedness of nominative and accusative: Type 1 (the most common one), in which the [nominative] is the morphologically marked form and the [accusative] the morphologically unmarked form, and Type 2, in which both case forms, nominative and accusative, are morphologically marked.” (König 2008:254).

If so, Sinyar results from an interesting combination of the two types: the first one is valid for common nouns and the second one is valid for proper names and assimilated (deictics and personal pronouns). They both contribute to establish the specificity of the language under this respect.

2. According to the same author, the distribution of marked-nominative languages is as follows: Berber, Cushitic, Omotic, Nilotic, and Surmic (König 2008: 271). It must then be underlined that Sinyar is spoken in an area that is rather characteristic of accusative languages: Maba, Merarit, Masalit, Tama, and Fur (König 2008:266). This unexpected situation raises again the question of the origin and historical constitution of Sinyar that looks, at first sight at least, as resulting from the contact between different, only partially identified sources (see Introduction).

3. Coming back to the case system, it has been shown that the two sets constituted by common nouns on one hand and proper names, deictics and pronouns on the other hand do not function in a strictly parallel way. This situation does not result so much from the imbalance between the number of cases available for either group as from the features of animacy and specificity that are strongly dominant in the second set.

4. Finally the choices offered – or imposed – by the system for marking the different functions assumed by noun phrases are not equally straightforward. The most uncertain strategies appear in the case of topicalized arguments or adjuncts: variation may appear in the case of topicalized objects and, even more, with topicalized adverbials and associatives. This uncertainty seems to result from the fact that the topicalized element is functionally disconnected from the sentence and unloaded from a syntactic role that is usually taken over by its pronominal duplicate.

### Abbreviations

1P[?]	1 <sup>st</sup> person pl. (?)	FUT	Future
1PD	1 <sup>st</sup> person pl. (dual)	GEN	Genitive
1PP	1 <sup>st</sup> person pl.	H	High tone
1S	1 <sup>st</sup> person sing.	IMP	Imperative
2	2 <sup>d</sup> person	L	Low tone
2P	2 <sup>d</sup> person pl.	NEG	Negative, Negation
2P[?]	2 <sup>d</sup> person pl. (?)	NOM	Nominative
2S	2 <sup>d</sup> person sing.	PL	Plural
3	3 <sup>d</sup> person	PRGR	Progressive
3P	3 <sup>d</sup> person pl.	PRHB	Prohibitive
3S	3 <sup>d</sup> person sing.	PRS	Present
ACC	Accusative	PST1	Past 1
ADV	Adverbial	PST2	Past 2
APPL	Applicative	REL	Relative
AR.	Arabic	SBB	(Sara-)Bongo-Bagirmi languages
DEP	Dependent (verb form)	SG	Singular
FOC	Subject focalizing (verb form)		

N.B. The characterization of TAMs as ‘Present’, ‘Future’, ‘Past 1’, and ‘Past 2’ is tentative and provisional.

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