The Marked Nominative in Arabic, Semitic, and Afroasiatic

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1. Introduction

In standard descriptions of Semitic, the nominative has the role of the unmarked case, typically in the role of the subject, whereas the accusative constitutes the marked case, typically in the role of the direct object. This paper argues that the concept of a “marked nominative” language, which is highly relevant on the Afroasiatic level, also plays an important role in Semitic and especially Arabic, as it catches many roles of the “accusative” (dependent case) that have no connection to the role of the direct object.

Generally speaking, the term “marked nominative” refers to a scenario, in which the nominative constitutes a longer or more complex, or in other words “marked”, form vis-à-vis the accusative. In Gothic and Old Norse, for instance, the nominative exhibits more complexity as compared with the accusative (cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nominative_absolutive_language):

(1) Nominative vs. accusative in Gothic and Old Norse

	Nominative	Accusative	Gloss
Gothic	<i>dag-s</i>	<i>dag</i>	‘day’
Old Norse	<i>arm-r</i>	<i>arm</i>	‘arm’

A comparable scenario is found in Harar Oromo (cf. Owens 1985: 101, 251) :

(2) Nominative vs. accusative in Harar Oromo

- a. *sáree-n adii-n ni iyyi-t-i*
dog-NOM white-NOM FOC bark-F-IPF
‘The white dog is barking.’
- b. *haat-tii okkóttée goot-t-i*
mother-NOM pot.ACC make- F-IPF
‘Mother is cooking (lit. making the pot).’

Next to Cushitic and Omotic, comparable systems also obtain in Nilo-Saharan languages, thus pointing to an areal feature (cf. Dimmendaal n.d.: 1). In the latter case, the nominative is marked by a different tonal pattern:

(3) Nominative vs. accusative in Eastern Sudanic (Nilo-Saharan)

- a. *é-dól émbártá*
3SG-see horse.ACC (two rising accents)
'he sees the horse'
- b. *é-dól émbartá*
3SG-see horse.NOM (one rising accent)
'the horse sees him'

The proper terminology to adequately describe the form and function of the “accusative”, a term that only captures a small subset of the variety of functions of the Arabic *naṣb*, remains a problem (cf., e.g., Haspelmath (2009)). While the term “nominative” appears to be relatively unproblematic, one can point out that the term “accusative” represents a semantically narrowed translation of the more appropriate Greek term αἰτιατική by the Roman polymath Varro. As we will see, marking the direct object is but one function of “accusative” or, better: the “dependent case”; other functions include the marking of predicates, focalized subjects, and even the citation form and the vocative. In short: the functions of the case traditionally called “accusative” by far transcend the marking of the direct object, and the term “absolutive” is therefore preferable, as this term in linguistics refers to the unmarked citation form in “nominative-absolutive languages”. We will not touch upon ergative systems in this paper, as found, for instance, in modern Neo-Aramaic, even though these could be considered a further development of a “marked nominative” system. For the record, here are some standard definitions:

Ergative-absolutive (or simply *ergative*): the argument (subject) of an intransitive verb is in the same case as the patient (direct object) of a transitive verb; this case is then called the *absolutive case*, with the agent (subject) of a transitive verb being in the *ergative case*.

Ergative-accusative (or *tripartite*): the argument (subject) of an intransitive verb is in its own case (the *intransitive case*), separate from that of the agent (subject) or patient (direct object) of a transitive verb (which is in the ergative case or accusative case, respectively).

2. The Afroasiatic frame

Before investigating the situation in Semitic, especially Arabic and Ethio-Semitic, it is instructive to consider the scenario in a wider Afroasiatic perspective. One has argued that Afroasiatic originally had a subject (or “agent”) case associated with an *u*-ending and a predicative/absolute (“non-agent”) case, considered the citation form, which also served for marking the object, associated with an *a*-ending (for an in-depth description of the scenario in Cushitic, cf. Appleyard 2012: 205–206 as well as Mous 2012: 369–373.). In the East-Cushitic language Borana, for instance, one finds an opposition between a subject case terminating in *-i*, vs. an absolute case terminating in *-a* (which also functions as citation case), e.g., *nam-i* ‘(a) man’ (subject) vs. *nam-a* ‘(a) man’ (predicate), as in *kunin nam-a* ‘this is a man’ (cf. Sasse 1984: 112):

- (4) Subject vs. predicate case in Borana (East-Cushitic)
 a. *nam-i* ‘(a) man’ (subject)
 vs.
 b. *nam-a* ‘(a) man’ (predicate)

A comparable functional opposition can be observed in the Berber “state” (elsewhere corresponding to case) prefix system, where the “independent form” characterized by an *a*-vowel designates the direct object, the nominal predicate, and a number of adverbial cases, whereas the “dependent form” characterized by an *u*-vowel designates the non-focalized subject, the adnominal genitive, and the complement of prepositions (see Sasse 1984: 120f.). Here is an illustration:

- (5) Dependent vs. independent “state” (case) in Berber (cf. Sasse 1984)
 a. *ayiul* *iuya-t* *urgaz*
 DEF.donkey.INDEP buy.3M.SG.PRET-it DEF.man.DEP
 ‘The man bought the donkey.’
 b. *argaz* *iuya* *ayiul*
 DEF.man.INDEP buy.3M.SG.PRET DEF.donkey.INDEP
 ‘It was the man, who bought the donkey.’

As we will see, the comparative Afroasiatic perspective lends support to the functional status of the Arabic dependent case (*naṣb*), i.e. it reflects its multifunctionality, e.g., marking the predicate of existential verbs or expressing adverbial function. Thereby, one has to be careful not to mix up the concepts

of “dependent” and “independent” in Berber with the scenario in Arabic grammatical theory, where the term also captures dependency in subordinated sentences (subjunctive). Indeed, many Berber and Cushitic languages have to be considered marked nominative languages in a synchronic perspective.

3. Typological parallels in Indoeuropean

The wide distribution of the dependent case in Arabic (and other Semitic languages) can also be viewed in connection with the ascendance of the oblique case in Semitic in general, notably the replacement of the sound masculine plural ending *-ūn* by *-īn* in the history of Arabic (for an overview of issues associated with case in Semitic, cf. Hasselbach 2013). Other Semitic languages, notably Hebrew, have lost case long ago, or rather only feature minimal residues of case. In Hebrew, the masculine plural ending *-īm* also reflects the historical oblique case. In other words: the oblique case tends to “win” over the nominative in the course of the leveling of a case system. The Romance languages in their ascendancy from Vulgar Latin languages perfectly illustrate this development, e.g., Italian *luce* ‘light’ as compared with Latin *lux* (NOM) ~ *luce* (ABL). Still, one finds residues of the nominative, e.g., the final *s* in French *fil*s ‘son’ as compared with Latin *fil*ius. Of course, it is not claimed here that the merger of independent and dependent (oblique) case is to be considered the same as the scenario in a “marked nominative” language.

The development of the independent pronouns since late Middle English exhibits a comparable kind of convergence towards the oblique form, notably in the second person singular and plural (cf. Lutz 1996):

(6) The development of pronouns since Late Middle English (Lutz 1996)

	Chaucer (Late Middle English)		Shakespeare		Modern	
	Subject	Object	Subject	Object	Subject	Object
1SG	<i>ich/I</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>me</i>
2SG	<i>thou</i>	<i>thee</i>	<i>thou/ye/you</i>	<i>thee/you</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>you</i>
3SGM	<i>he</i>	<i>him</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>him</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>him</i>
3SGF	<i>she</i>	<i>hire</i>	<i>she</i>	<i>her</i>	<i>she</i>	<i>her</i>
3SGNT	<i>(h)it</i>	<i>(h)it</i>	<i>it</i>	<i>it</i>	<i>it</i>	<i>it</i>
1PL	<i>we</i>	<i>us</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>us</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>us</i>
2PL	<i>ye</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>ye/you</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>you</i>
3PL	<i>they</i>	<i>them</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>them</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>them</i>

In this context it is interesting to compare the normative vs. the factual use of the personal pronouns in spoken English. Whereas normative English requires the predicate in a nominal sentence in the independent form (*it is I*), most people would actually use the dependent form for the predicate and say *it is me*. The same opposition holds for normative *you and I* vs. more common *you and me*. The latter version has an obvious parallel in Arabic 'ana wa- 'iyyā-k 'I (INDEP) and you (DEP)':

(7) Normative vs. factual use of personal pronouns

<i>it is I</i>	vs.	<i>it is me</i>
<i>you and I</i>	vs.	<i>you and me</i> (cf. Arabic 'ana wa- 'iyyā-k)

Similar phenomena can also be observed in the development of the pronominal system in the Romance languages (this circumstance was already pointed out by A. Fischer (1922: 145f.); for details, cf. Buridant 2000: 431).

4. The situation in Semitic

Both Biblical and (layers of) modern Hebrew can be adduced to illustrate the central point of this paper, namely that the position of the subject in existential or even possessive constructions can be marked by a *nota accusativi*. Alternatively, one could argue that the slot of the subject is synchronically reanalyzed as the slot of the (direct) object:

(8) Existentials in modern colloquial Hebrew (cf. Glinert 1994: 149)

<i>yeš ... 'there is ...'</i>	>	<i>yeš 'et ... 'there is ...'</i>
EXIST	>	EXIST ACC
<i>gam kan yeš 'et ha-be'ayot ha-'ele</i>		
also here EXIST ACC DEF-problem.PL DEF-DEM.PL		
'Here too there are these problems.'		

Comparable constructions are already attested in Biblical Hebrew, albeit only in the present and future tense:

(9) Existentials in Biblical Hebrew

- a. *'eṭ-šəṇē hag-gōyīm wə-'eṭ-šəṭē ḥā-'ārāṣōṭ*
 ACC-two.M.CS DEF-people.PL CONJ-ACC-two.F.CS DEF-land.PL
l-ī tihyēnā
 for-I.DEF be.NONPAST.3F.PL
w-īrašnū-ḥā
 CONJ-inherit.NONPAST_CONSEC.3PL-she.DEF
 'The two nations and the two lands shall be mine and we shall possess them.' (Ezek. 35:10)
- b. *ha-mə'aṭ lā-nū 'eṭ- 'āwōn pə'ōr*
 INT-little for-we-DEP ACC-sin.CS PN
 'Is the sin of Peor such a small thing to us?' (Josh. 22:17)
- c. *u-ḥnē ḥeṣrōn āšer nōlad-l-ō*
 CONJ-son.PL.CS PN REL be.born.3M.SG.PF-for-he.DEP
'eṭ-yərahmə'el wə-'eṭ-rām wə-'eṭ-kəlūḇāy
 ACC-PN CONJ-ACC-PN CONJ-ACC-PN
 'The sons of Hetzron that were born to him: Jerahmeel, Ram, and Chelubai.' (1 Chron. 2:9)

The situation in Ethio-Semitic is also illuminating. While Gə'əz features existential and possessive constructions governed by a preposition "in", modern Amharic makes use of an existential verb *allä*, which takes the possessor as an object suffix ("is to him"). When comparable experiencer verbs are preceded by an independent pronoun in topicalizing function, a syntactic ambiguity arises as this pronoun can be marked as an object (which it effectively is) or not:

(10) Verboids in Gə'əz and experiencer verbs in modern Amharic

- a. *b-o / b-ottu* 'he has' ("in him [is]")
 in-he.OBJ
- b. *allä-w* 'he has' ("there is for him")
 exist.3M.SG.PF-he.OBJ
- c. *əssu-n rabä-w* 'he is hungry' ("him it hungers him")
 he.INDEP-ACC be.hungry.3M.SG.PF-he.OBJ
- d. *əssu rabä-w* 'he is hungry' ("he it hungers him")
 he.INDEP be.hungry.3M.SG.PF-he.OBJ

Classical Ethiopic, Gə‘əz, also features the dependent case in predicate position, in addition to the object-marking function, as shown by the examples in (11) (cf., e.g., Leslau 1987: 299 and Weninger 1993: 27):

(11) Object marking of the predicate in Gə‘əz

<i>konä</i>	<i>nəgus-ä</i>	
be.3M.SG.PF	king-ACC	
'He became king.'		
<i>rəgəmt-ä</i>	<i>təkun</i>	<i>mədr</i>
cursed.F.ACC	be.3F.SG.JUSS	earth
'The earth shall be cursed.'		

A still puzzling case is the cooccurrence of the dependent case in subject position, even though a focus-marking function cannot be discarded in this case (cf. Waltisberg 2002: 50):

(12) Possible object marking of the subject in Gə‘əz

<i>yəkun</i>	<i>fäqäd-ä-kä</i>	<i>bäkämä</i>	<i>bä-sämay</i>
be.3M.SG.IPF	will-ACC-you.2.M.SG.DEP	like	in-heaven
<i>wä-bä-mədr-ni</i>			
CONJ-in-earth-too			
'Your will be done on earth as in heaven.' (Mt. 6:10)			

Modern Southern Ethio-Semitic, here represented by Amharic, also exhibits a variety of functions of the dependent case that are reminiscent of the scenario in Classical Arabic. Instances (13a) – (13d) illustrate the functions of marking the direct object, the predicate, the adverb, and focus, respectively (cf. Leslau 1995: 189 and 892ff.; cf. also Appleyard 2004):

(13) Functions of the *-n* suffix in Amharic

a. direct object ('accusative):

<i>mäskot-u-n</i>	<i>zəga</i>
window-DEF-ACC	close.M.SG.IMP
'Close the window!'	

b. predicative:

<i>əssu-n</i>	<i>b-əhon</i>	<i>al-adärg-äw</i>	<i>näbbär</i>
he-ACC	in-be.1SG.IPF	NEG-1SG.IPF-it.DEP	be.3M.SG.PF
'If I were him, I wouldn't have done it'			

c. adverbial use:

lağ-u ağğ-e-n yazā-ññ
 child-DEF hand-my.DEF-ACC take.3M.SG.PF-me.DEF
 ‘The child took me by the hand (“handwise”).’

d. focus:

awnāt-wa-n nāw
 truth-her.DEF-ACC be.3M.SG.IPF (COP)
 ‘She is right.’

A survey of the multitude of functions of the dependent case (*naṣb*) in Arabic is useful at this point. Starting with the function of marking the direct object (14a), (14) provides an overview of the various functions in Arabic (the following list is oriented at the survey provided in aš-Šīrbīnī’s treatise *Nūr as-sağīya fī ḥall ‘alfāz al-‘Āğurrūmīya*, as edited, commented, and translated in Carter 1981):

(14) Functions of the *-a(n)*-suffix in Arabic (according to aš-Šīrbīnī)a. the direct object (*maḥʾūl bi-hī*):

ḍarabtu Zayd-an
 strike.1SG.PF Zayd-ACC
 ‘I struck Zayd.’

As the Arabic *maṣdar* typically occurs within the *maḥʾūl muṭlaq* construction (inner object or “figura etymologica”), the dependent case is assumed to be the default case by the Arab grammarians. Hence, the *maṣdar* counts as another typical function of the dependent case (14b):

b. the verbal noun (*maṣdar*):

ḍarabtu ḍarb-an
 strike.1SG.PF strike.MAṢDAR-ACC
 ‘I struck hard.’

The following instances (14c) – (14f), but also instance (14j), the object of reason (*maḥʾūl min ‘ağli-hī*), have an adverbial function, whereby the Arabic grammatical terminology is more specific than the European counterparts:

- c. the time-qualifier (*zarf az-zamān*):

ṣumtu l-yawm-a
fast. 1SG.PF DEF-day-ACC
'I fasted today.'

- d. the space-qualifier (*zarf al-makān*):

ǧalastu 'amām-a-ka
sit. 1SG.PF FRONT-ACC-you.DEF
'I sat in front of you.'

- e. the circumstantial qualifier (*hāl*):

ǧā'a Zayd-un rākib-an
come.3M.SG.PF Zayd-NOM ride.PTC-ACC
'Zayd came riding.'

- f. the specifying element (*tamyīz*):

ṭāba Muḥammad-un naḥs-an
be_content.3M.SG.PF Muḥammad-NOM soul-ACC
'Muḥammad was content of soul.'

The *tamyīz* also affects the morpho-syntax of numbers between 11 and 99, e.g., the example chosen by Sībawayhi '*iṣrūna dirham-an* 'twenty dirham-ACC' (cf. Carter 1972).

Examples (14g) – (14i), as well as (14j) and (14m), illustrate the focus-marking function of the dependent case, notably the focalized subject (cf. also Reckendorf 1921: 108–113 for various cases of the “exclamatory” accusative). The dependent case in (14g) presupposes that the set to which the excepted element belongs has already been mentioned:

- g. the excepted element (*muṣṭaṭnā*):

qāma l-qawm-u 'illā Zayd-an
get_up.3M.SG.PF DEF-people-NOM except Zayd-ACC
'The people stood up except Zayd.'

- h. the noun negated by *lā* (*ism lā*) (“absolute negation”):

lā 'ilāh-a 'illā llāh-u
NEG god-ACC except God-NOM
'There is no god except God.'

- i. the first term of an annexation (*'idāfa*) in the vocative (*munādā*):

yā 'abd-a llāh-i
 VOC servant-ACC.CS God-GEN
 'O 'Abdallāh.'

- j. the object of reason (*maf'ūl min'aḡli-hī*):

qāma Zayd-un 'iḡlāl-an li-Bakr-in
 get_up.3M.SG.PF Zayd-NOM honor.MAŠDAR-ACC for-Bakr-GEN
 'Zayd stood in honor of Bakr.'

- k. the object of accompaniment (*maf'ūl ma'a-hū*):

sirtu wa-n-nīl-a
 travel.1SG.PF CONJ-DEF-Nile-ACC
 'I traveled with the Nile.'

Other examples of the pattern involving the *wāw al-mā'īya* include constructions such as *'ana wa-'iyyā-ka* 'I and ACC.you.DEP' (cf. above section 3).

Instance (14l) reflects the wider distribution of the dependent case in predicative position in Afroasiatic:

- l. the predicate of *kāna* and its related verbs ("sisters")

(*ḡabar kāna wa-'aḡawāti-hā*):
kāna Zayd-un qā'im-an
 be.3M.SG.PF Zayd-NOM stand.PTC-ACC
 'Zayd was standing.'

- m. the subject noun of *'inna* 'indeed' and its related particles

(*ism 'inna wa-'aḡawāti-hā*):
'inna Zayd-an qā'im-un
 FOC Zayd-ACC stand.PTC-NOM
 '(Indeed,) Zayd is standing.'

Instance (14n) represents an entirely expected ditransitive construction, i.e. a verb taking two direct objects:

- n. the two objects of *zanantu* 'I thought' and its related verbs

(*maf'ūlā zanantu wa-'aḡawāti-hā*):
zanantu Zayd-an qā'im-an
 think.1SG.PF Zayd-ACC stand.PTC-ACC
 'I thought Zayd was standing.'

Type (14o) features regular agreement, and would not, in a “Western” perspective be counted as a type of its own:

- o. the concordant of a dependent element, which comprises four things: the adjective, the coordinated element, the corroborative, and the substitute

(*at-tābi* ‘*li-l-manṣūb wa-huwa* ‘arba‘at ‘ašyā’: *an-na* ‘*t wa-l-*‘aṭf *wa-t-tawkīd wa-l-badal*):

ra’aytu Zayd-an il-‘āqil-a

see.1SG.PF Zayd-ACC DEF-intelligent-ACC

‘I saw Zayd, the intelligent (one).’

ra’aytu Zayd-an wa-‘Amr-an

see.1SG.PF Zayd-ACC CONJ-‘Amr-ACC

‘I saw Zayd and ‘Amr.’

ra’aytu l-qawm-a kull-a-hum

see.1SG.PF DEF-people-ACC all-ACC-them.DEP

‘I saw the people, all of them.’

ra’aytu Zayd-an ‘aḥā-ka

see.1SG.PF Zayd-ACC brother.ACC- your.M.SG.DEP

‘I saw Zayd your brother.’

An *a*-ending is also characteristic of the predicate (or predicative state, cf. Lipiński, cf. 2001: 273f.) in Palaeo-Syrian, Old Akkadian, and Amurrite, as well as in some constructions with *‘ammā* in the oldest forms of Classical Arabic: (cf. Lipiński 2001: 495.):

- (15) Nominal clauses with predicate in the dependent case (*naṣb*)

‘ammā ‘anta barr-an fa-qtarib

if you.M.INDEP believing-ACC CONJ-approach.M.SG.IMP

‘If you are believing then come!’

To conclude this (non-exhaustive) list of instances of the dependent case in Arabic, let us cite the erroneously so-called *‘af‘āl ta‘ağğub* ‘verbs of wonder/surprise’ (per the position of the Baṣran grammarians), which in reality constitute frozen relative constructions (per the correct position of the Kūfān grammarians), in which the original subject was reanalyzed as an object due to the

misinterpretation of the elative form as a causative (form IV) (cf. Brockelmann 1913: 12–13 and Diem 2013):

(16) Frozen elatives in Classical Arabic

mā 'akram-a zayd-an
 what noble.ELATIVE-ACC Zayd-ACC
 'How noble is Zayd!'

The dependent case in subject position also occurs in modern Arabic pseudo-verb constructions ("verboids") such as the following:

(17) Verboids in Arabic dialects (cf. Shlonsky 1997, Brustad 2000, Comrie 2008; for Hebrew cf. Kuzar 2013)

'ind-ī... 'with me ...' ('chez moi ...')
 at-I.DEP

> *'and-i* *yyā-ha* 'I have her/it (fem.)'
 at-I.DEP ACC.she.DEP

bi-wudd-ī... 'in my wish ...'
 in-wish-I.DEP

> *bidd-i* *yyā-ha* 'I want her/it (fem.)'
 want-I.DEP ACC.her.DEP

'abū-k *bidd-o* *yyā-k*
 father.CS-you.M.SG.DEP want-he.DEP ACC.you.M.SG.DEP

'Your father requests you(r presence).' (cf. Elihay 2005: 87)

fī-nī... 'in me ...'
 in-I.DEP

> *mā fī-nī rūḥ ma'-ik*
 NEG in-I.DEP go.1SG.IPF with-you.M.SG
 'I'm not able to go with you'

Synchronically, *'and-*, *bidd-*, and *fī-* can be characterized as pseudo-verbs ("verboids") that govern the dependent case or, in the case of the third example, subordinate clauses. *'and-* and *bidd-* take the possessive, not the object form of the pronominal suffix, indicating the possessor and the author of the wish, respectively. In the case of *fī-*, the use as a mere preposition would entail the use of the possessive (independent) *-yi*, *fī-yi* 'in me' (cf. Cowell 1964: 479; apud Comrie 2008: 739).

Further examples, which also govern the dependent case or, in the case of verboids expressing modality, subordinate clauses (which amounts to the same in Arabic grammatical theory), are the following:

- (18) Further verboids in Arabic dialects (Cowell 1964; Brustad 2000)

ba'd-nī b-əl-bēt
still-I.DEP in-DEF house
'I'm still at home' (Syrian Arabic)

lassa't-nī b-əl-bēt
not.yet-I.DEP in-DEF-house
'I'm not yet at home' (Syrian Arabic)

lassā-nī mā 'araḍt-ha b-əl-wāžha
not.yet-I.DEP NEG put_on_view.1SG.PF in-DEF-showcase
'I haven't yet put them on view in the showcase' (Cowell 1964: 546)

xəss-na nṭəyyebu l- 'ša
necessary-US.DEP cook.1PL.IPF DEF-dinner
'We must cook dinner' (Moroccan Arabic)

The original semantics of the particles that constitute the core of the verboids are not always transparent any longer. *ba'd* originally means "after", and *lassa* / *lassa't* derives from *'ilā s-sā'a* "to this hour".

Impersonal passive constructions can likewise attract the dependent case. Retsö (1982–1983: 86) provides the following examples:

- (19) Impersonal passive constructions (Retsö 1982–1983)

mā yinhārab wiyyāh
NEG fight.PASS.IPF.3M.SG ACC.3M.SG
'he cannot be fought with'

mā yinsōlaf wiyyāh
NEG speak.PASS.IPF.3M.SG ACC.3M.SG
'he cannot be spoken with'

An alternative interpretation may have recourse to the use of *wa-* as a preposition (*wāw al-mā'īya*), as, e.g., in the expression *bi-mā yattafiqu wa-hāḍā l-iltizām* 'with what is in congruence with this commitment'.

In the context of impersonal verbs, Retsö (1982–1983) also points to the fact that the object in Arabic passive phrases can remain in the dependent case,

e.g., *'uḥriḡa kitāban* (bring_out.PST.PASS.3M.SG book.ACC) ‘a book was brought out (to him)’. In ditransitive verbal phrases set in the passive voice, the second object remains in the accusative under any circumstances:

(20) Case transfer under passivization

<i>sammā-hu</i>	<i>Muḥammadan</i>
call.3M.SG.PF-he.DEP	Muḥammad.ACC
‘he called him Muḥammad’	
<i>summiya</i>	<i>Muḥammadan</i>
was_called.3M.SG.PF	Muḥammad.ACC
‘he was called Muḥammad’	

5. Case study: the *mas'ala az-zunbūrīya*

In the following, we will consider the famous *mas'ala az-zunbūrīya* (the “hornet question”) (cf. A. Fischer 1922 and Blau 1963) in the light of the previous deliberations. The *mas'ala* involves the grammarians Sībawayhi (d. 180/796?), representing the Baṣran grammatical school, and al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/805), representing the Kūfan grammatical school. This *mas'ala* is a major case in point in terms of the multifunctionality of the dependent case (*naṣb*) in Arabic. The version of the *mas'ala* reported in Ibn al-'Anbārī's (d. 577/1181) *'Inṣāf* runs as follows (p. 292) (as above, the abbreviation/interlinear glossing “ACC” for *'iyyā-* is used here without prejudice to the grammatical function (deictic or object-marking) of this particle):

(21) Ibn al-'Anbārī's version of the *mas'ala az-zunbūrīya*

kuntu 'aẓunnu 'anna l-'aqrab-a
 be.1SG.PF think.1SG.IPF COMP DEF-scorpion-ACC
'ašadd-u las 'at-an mina z-zunbūr-i
 strong.ELATIV-NOM sting.MAŠDAR-ACC from DEF-hornet-GEN
fa-'idā huwa 'iyyā-hā
 CONJ-INTERJ he.INDEP ACC-she.DEP
 (al-Kisā'ī = position of the Kūfan grammarians)

vs.

fa-'idā huwa hiya
 CONJ-INTERJ he.INDEP she.INDEP
 (Sibawayhi = position of the Baṣran grammarians)

'I always thought that the scorpion has a sharper sting than the hornet,
 (however,) the former is (like) the latter (in terms of sting).'

While the grammatical point is clear, the actual interpretation differs, a point which also has to do with slightly divergent versions of the *mas'ala*. Ibn Ḥallikān (d. 681/1282), *Wafāyāt* III, 463–465, in a popularized and anecdotal version of the surrounding story, has the following version: *kuntu 'aẓunnu z-zunbūra 'ašadda las 'an mina n-naḥla ...* 'I always thought that the hornet has a sharper sting than the bee ...'.

The translation above is based on the possible feminine gender of *zunbūr*. Slane, the translator of Ibn Ḥallikān (1842–1871: II, 397) translates *fa-'idā huwa 'iyyā-hā / hiya* as 'and behold! It was so'. Carter (2004: 13) also adopts this interpretation, thus relating *'iyyā-hā / hiya* to the sting (*las'a*), an interpretation which only works with a feminine *mašdar*. Versteegh (2014: 72) translates 'but it was the other way round', an interpretation which matches comparable phrases in ancient Mesopotamian contexts (personal communication by Manfred Krebernik). Incidentally, the phrase *fa-'idā huwa 'iyyā-hā* is also found in exactly this wording in the 35th Maqāma of al-Ḥarīrī (*Maqāmāt* II, 449).

In this context, the Baṣran position essentially pointed to the status of *fa-'idā huwa hiya* as a nominal sentence, with the predicate standing by default in the independent case (*raf*). In contrast, the Kūfan position resorted to the concept of *taqdīr*, i.e. the presupposition of an underlying governing element such a ditransitive verb, which by analogy would trigger the dependent case (*naṣb*). According to Ibn al-'Anbārī, al-Kisā'ī adduced the following (according to him) analogous case:

- (22) Analogous *mas'ala* cited by al-Kisā'ī (according to Ibn al-'Anbārī)

ḥarağtu fa-'idā 'Abd-u llāh-i
 go_out.1SG.PF and-INTERJ servant-NOM.CS God-GEN
l-qā'im-u
 DEF-stand.PTC-NOM

vs.

l-qā'im-a
 DEF-stand.PTC-ACC

'I went out, and (lo and behold) there stood 'Abdallāh.'

Here, the version with the dependent case (*naşb*) can be justified by the presupposition of the ditransitive verb *wağada* 'find':

- (23) Purported analogy between (22) and ditransitive constructions

fa-'idā 'Abd-u llāh-i l-qā'im-a
 and-INTERJ servant-NOM.CS God-GEN DEF-stand.PTC-ACC
 'And (lo and behold) there stood 'Abdallāh.'
wağadtu 'Abd-a llāh-i l-qā'im-a
 find.1SG.PF servant-ACC.CS God-GEN DEF-stand.PTC-ACC
 'I found 'Abdallāh standing.'

Contrary to the account by Ibn Ḥallikān, al-Kisā'ī thus did not go as far as to rule out the independent case (*raf'*) as an admissible option in the *mas'ala az-zunbūrīya*. Rather, he allowed for both possibilities: *al-'arabu tarfa'u dālika kulla-hū wa-taṣṣubu-hū* 'The Arabs set all this in the independent case (*raf'* "nominative") and they [equally can] set it in the dependent case (*naşb* "accusative")' (cf. Ibn al-'Anbārī, *Inşāf*, 293).

6. The distribution and functional breadth of the particle 'iyyā-

Within a modern non-normative linguistic approach to the issue at hand, a viable option is to look at the distribution of 'iyyā- in connection with personal pronouns and at the whole spectrum of functions that this particle can adopt. As we will see, 'iyyā- also occurs in other context than marking the direct object. (For an overview of suggested etymologies cf. Rubin 2005, chapter 5, and Wilmsen 2013b.) At first glance, the prototypical function appears indeed to be the one of the direct object marker as in (24):

(24) Verbs with two pronominal objects

'a 'ḫā-hu 'iyyā-hā
 give.3M.SG-he.DEP ACC-she.DEP
 'He gave her/it to him.'

In this context, the typology of ditransitive verbal phrases in Arabic and Semitic in general established by Jan Retsö (1987: 224) is useful:

(25) Typology of ditransitive verbal phrases in Semitic (Retsö 1987)

construction type A:	Verb	+ O ₂ (IO)	+ O ₁ (DO)
A1:	Verb	+ -PS	+ -PS
A2:	Verb	+ -PS	+ 'iyyā-PS
A3:	Verb	+ -PS	+ IP
A4:	Verb	+ l-PS	+ 'iyyā-PS
A5:	Verb	+ l-PS	+ IP
construction type B:	Verb	+ O ₁ (DO)	+ O ₂ (IO)
B1:	Verb	+ -PS	+ l-PS
B2:	Verb	+ -PS	+ -PS
B3:	Verb	+ -∅	+ l-PS

Abbreviations: O₁ = DO: direct object ("accusative"); O₂ = IO: indirect object ("dative"); PS: pronominal suffix; IP: "independent" personal pronoun; l = a preposition indicating "to/for".

Construction types A2 and A4 on the one hand and A3 and A5 on the other illustrate that the slot of the direct object can be filled either by 'iyyā- followed by a pronominal suffix or by a (bi-)form of the independent pronoun, comparable to the scenario found in the *mas'ala az-zunbūrīya*.

Dialectal Arabic examples of the former type (A2/A4) and the latter (A3) are found in (26a) and (26b), respectively. For the record, Retsö notes that the independent pronouns can also appear in this position in copula function (26c). The examples are originally found in Sabuni 1980, Sasse 1971, and, Jastrow 1979, later compiled in Retsö 1987 (221f.):

(26) Comparable distribution of subject pronouns, object pronouns, and copula in Arabic dialects

- a. *ʾaṭētū-k-iyā* (type A2)
give.1SG.PF-you.M.SG.DEP-ACC.she.DEP
'I gave her/it to you (m.sg.).' (Mossul)
- b. *ʾaṭaytu-hū-wē* (type A3)
give.1SG.PF-he.DEP-he.INDEP
'I gave it (m.) to him.' (Mḥallamiye)
ḡābū-l-o-hūwe (type A5)
bring.3PL.PF-DAT-he.DEP-he.INDEP
'They brought it (m.) to him.' (Aleppo)
- c. *fā-l-bayt-wē*
in-DEF-house-he.INDEP
'He is in the house.' (Mḥallamiye)
hāyi hiya
DEM.F she.INDEP
'That's it!' (Mossul)

The overlap between focus and object markers is even more intriguing. An interesting case in point is an attested deviating reading (*qirā'a*) of *ʾāya* 5 in *sūra* 1 (cf. A. Fischer 1922: 154. Again, "ACC" is used in this paper as a technical gloss without prejudice to the function of *ʾiyyā-* in the given context):

(27) Deviating reading (*qirā'a*) of *ʾāya* 5 in *sūra* 1

<i>ʾiyyā-ka</i>	<i>tu'badu</i>
ACC-you.M.DEP	venerate.2M.SG.IMPF.PASS
'You [God] shall be venerated.'	
instead of standard	
<i>ʾiyyā-ka</i>	<i>na'budu</i>
ACC-you.M.DEP	venerate.1C.PL.IMPF.ACT
'We venerate you [God].'	

Clearly, the first case has to be interpreted with a focus marker (which, after all, is one of the functions of the dependent case).

Accordingly, one can argue that corroborative appositions (*tawkid*) in Arabic – both Classical and Modern Standard – rather reflect a deictic function of the particle *ʾiyyā-* (cf. Wilmsen 2011: 316ff. and Wilmsen 2013a/b) (28):

(28) Standard Arabic appositive constructions with *'iyyā-* (Wilmsen 2011)

dālika *ṣ-ṣawtu* *'iyyā-hu*
 DEM.M.SG DEF-voice ACC-he.DEP
 'this voice itself'
'ahlu *d-dunyā* *'iyyā-hum*
 people DEF-world ACC-they.M.PL.DEP
 'the people themselves'

In modern Hebrew, the analogous construction (which only developed in post-Biblical Hebrew) is entirely regular, with *'ot-* being an allomorph (except before the second person plural) of *'et*, whether or not one considers *'et* to be a cognate of *'iyyā-* (for skepticism in this regard, cf. Wilson-Wright (2016) (29):

(29) Analogous case in modern Hebrew

'ot-o *ha-davar*
 ACC-he.DEP DEF-matter
 'the same matter'

7. Conclusion

Returning to the problem initially exposed, the Semitic and especially the Arabic scenario clearly shows the broad functional range of the dependent (or “absolute”) case. Thus, the variety of functions associated with the dependent case (*naṣb*) in Arabic and elsewhere does not constitute anything idiosyncratic. Rather, this variety reflects many of the functions of this case in “marked nominative” languages, in which the dependent case (*naṣb*) would be called “absolute”. In the Semitic and Afroasiatic languages surveyed, the independent case (“nominative”) is not morphologically more complex, rather the vice versa, as the dependent case may be marked by a *nota accusativi*. Still, in terms of frequency, the concept of markedness makes sense in this context.

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