Speaker:	**Tom McFadden**
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Title:	**Morphological case and Germanic syntax: a historical and comparative survey**
Date:	Monday, February 20, 2006
Time:	4:00pm
Place:	Rosenfeld Hall, corner Temple & Grove Streets

Abstract:

An often-discussed topic in historical and comparative linguistics is the relationship between various syntactic processes and morphological case, for which the Germanic languages present a rich and well-studied source of data.

Synchronically, among the modern languages, one can look for syntactic differences between relatively case-rich German and Icelandic and case-poor English, Dutch and Mainland Scandinavian. Diachronically, the loss of rich case morphology can be observed within the recorded histories of the latter group of languages and related to various apparently parallel changes in their syntax.

In this talk, I will examine a number of the phenomena within Germanic where a dependence of syntactic processes or relationships on morphological case has been posited, with a view to determining what the nature of the connection actually is. First I will consider word-order phenomena which have been argued to depend in some way on rich case-marking: object shift, verb-object ordering and certain kinds of basic word-order freedom. Then I will discuss the status of verbal arguments bearing non-structural (sometimes called 'inherent') cases, whose special syntactic behavior has, in some analyses, been tied to the kind of case that they receive.

Presenting evidence from various sources including my own corpus-based research, I will show that, in each instance, a direct dependence of syntactic operations or relationships on morphological case is not actually supported. In certain cases, the empirical details of the changes do not fit with a direct dependency. In others, proposals based on one set of languages turn out not to hold up in the face of further comparative evidence. In the matter of oblique verbal arguments, evidence from German, Icelandic and the history of English shows that case-assignment is actually orthogonal to the relevant syntactic phenomena, which are rather sensitive to argument structure. A recurring theme will be that previous analyses which posited a dependence of something syntactic on morphological case have rested on imprecise ideas about the morphology and its connection to the syntax. The conclusion is that clearly syntactic operations are not sensitive to morphological case, and thus perhaps do not have access to it. The generalizations of the relevant kind that have some validity - e.g. that certain kinds of word-order freedom depend on the availability of rich case-marking - do not seem to be susceptible to a treatment in terms of constraints on synchronic grammars. I will suggest that they should instead be handled within a theory of language change.