COMMON DECLENSIONS AND CASES:

Modern English is an **analytic language**. It primarily makes meaning by word order. To show that a word is in the nominative case, (i.e., the word functions as the subject of a clause), modern English speakers put that word in front of the verb. To show that a word is in the accusative case (functioning as a direct objective), modern English speakers put that word after the verb. For instance,

<div align="center">The <u>*teacher*</u> (nominative) graded the <u>*tests*</u> (accusative/direct object).</div>

Word order thus becomes very important in analytic languages. It makes no sense in modern English to write, "The tests graded the teacher."

However, Anglo-Saxon (Old English), Latin, Greek, and many other languages are or were **synthetic**. These languages require that the case or function of each word be visibly marked through **inflections** or **declensions**. An inflection, generally speaking, is any change in a word--whether that word is a noun, adjective, verb, adverb, or whatnot. A noun might inflect to show a singular or plural meaning, for instance. Inflections in verbs fall into patterns called **conjugations**. When you conjugate a verb, you show all its inflections for a particular tense and mood, for instance. **Declensions** are inflections to words that show what their **case** is. (The term *case* simply means what part of speech a word and its modifiers are in--for instance, subject, object, etc.).

NB: You always *conjugate* verbs. You always *decline* nouns and their modifiers. Grammarians will make fun of you if you talk about "conjugating nouns" or "declining verbs."

In synthetic languages, word order does not matter. Synthetic languages primarily show case by inflecting words (i.e., changing the form of the words in pre-established patterns called inflections). Often this takes the form of some special ending added to the word or its stem. Such special endings are often called *declensions* by teachers of Latin, Greek, or Old English. Most synthetic Indo-European languages make use of the following cases:

Nominative Case: Words in this case usually function as the subject of a sentence, or in some cases as a predicate nominative. For instance, "<u>John</u> arrives tonight" would require the word *John* to be in the nominative case since *John* functions as the subject of the clause. On the other hand, "<u>It</u> is <u>I</u>, <u>Hamlet</u> the Dane," would require both the word *I* and the word *Hamlet* to be in the nominative case, since these are functioning as predicate nominatives for the subject *it*.

Accusative Case: Words in this case commonly function as the direct object of a verb, though often certain prepositions will require an object of the preposition to be in the accusative case. For instance, "Darth Maul struck <u>Obi-Wan</u>" would require the word *Obi-Wan* to be in the accusative, since that poor Jedi is the object directly affected by the verb *struck*.

Genitive Case: Words in this case are functioning in a possessive manner, though often certain prepositions or special verbs will require an object to be in the genitive. In English, we often show this relationship by either an apostrophe 's or we create it artificially by using the pronoun *of*. For instance, we might see either "This is <u>Bob Miller</u>'s house," or we might see "This is the house of <u>Bob Miller</u>." Synthetic languages would convey the same idea by putting the name "*Bob Miller*" in the genitive case. More rarely, some Indo-European languages like Latin might use the ***genitive of material*** to indicate the material substance of an object. Thus, English speakers refer to Superman as "the man of <u>steel</u>," or architects speak of "a house of <u>stone</u>."

Dative Case: Words in this case are functioning as the indirect object or the recipient of a direct object, though often certain prepositions or special verbs will require an object to be in the dative. For example, in this sentence, "Carla gave <u>Sandy</u> a gift," the word *Sandy* would be the indirect object or recipient, and thus that word would be in the dative case.

Ablative Case: Words in this case typically indicate source, origin, separation, or causation, though certain prepositions or special verbs will require an object to be in the ablative. For instance, "*He came from <u>Mantua</u>*"

would require the word *Mantua* to be in the ablative of origin. Likewise, "He left <u>Mantua</u> at 2:00 p.m." would require the word *Mantua* to be in the ablative of separation. "*Because of <u>rain</u>, he left*," would require a synthetic speaker to use an ablative of causation for the word <u>*rain*</u>.

Vocative Case: Words in the vocative case typically indicate that the word is being specifically addressed or spoken to. For instance, consider this sentence: "<u>*John, would you be a dear and take out the garbage*</u>?" In this example, the word *John* would be in the vocative case in a synthetic language while *you* is the subject of the verb would. The vocative (from Latin "*voco*" or "I call") is the "hey-you!" or the attention-getter of the various cases and declensions.

RARER DECLENSIONS AND CASES:

More rarely, some Indo-European languages like Sanksrit, Old Norse, Anglo-Saxon and others may use these cases in addition to the Nominative, Accusative, Genitive, Dative, Ablative, and Vocative:

- **Adessive Case:** Words in this case show that one noun is adjacent to another. It is found in Lithuanian and Hungarian.
- **Causative Case**: Words in this ancient case function to show what caused another event. In most IE languages, the causative has been absorbed into the modern ablative.
- **Locative Case**: Words in this case function to show location; for instance, "Joe went <u>home</u>." The word *home* would be in the locative case in a synthetic language. Many synthetic languages simply use the dative case here.
- **Instrumental Case**: Words in this case are functioning to illustrate how or by what means an action was taken; for instance, "Joe smashed in the door with a <u>hammer</u>." The word *hammer* would be in the instrumental case in many languages to show what means Joe used to smash in the door. [Note that many Indo-European languages simply use the ablative case here.]
- **Interjective Case**: Words in the interjective case are outbursts or exclamations separate from the rest of the sentence's syntax. Examples in English might be, "*Gee-whiz*!" or "*Yikes*!" or "*Golly*" or "*Damn*!" or "*Ah*!" Some languages would put these interjections in their own separate case, but most simply use non-declinable words for interjections.
- **Partitive Case**: Used to show a partial amount out of a larger total, such as "four out of five speakers." It is common in Russian, Estonian, and Finnish, and was probably once common in proto-Indo-European, though most modern IE languages and classical Latin simply use the genitive case here.

Finally, non-Indo-European languages sometimes have scores of other cases to show motion, location, emotion, or other relationships. Here are a few exotic examples out of many:
- **Inessive Case**: Words in this case indicate one object is inside another; e.g., "the *food* in her mouth." The case is common in Basque, Estonian, and Finnish.
- **Pertingent Case**: Words in this case indicate one object is touching another; for instance, "Sue is hugging *Joe*." In a language with pertingent cases, both *Sue* and *Joe* would be in the pertingent case. The case is common in Tlingit and Pacific Northwest Amerindian tribal languages.
- **Comitative Case**: Words in this case indicate the nouns are accompanying something else; for instance, "I went with *Joe*." The case appears commonly in Estonian and various Sami languages, more rarely in Finnish and Ossetic. In classical Latin, the ablative of accompaniment absorbed the comitative case.
- **Distributive Case**: Words in this case indicate a noun has been distributed out among various places or recipients—"I gave *a cookie* to each student." The case is common in central Asian languages like Manchu.
- **Equative Case**: Words in this case indicate a comparison to something else or treated as equal to something else. The case was common in ancient Sumerian.
- **Benefactive Case**: Words in this case indicate they are for the benefit of someone or something else. The case is common in Basque.
- **Aversive Case**: In languages like Yididny, this case indicates the noun is something to be feared or avoided.