



# THE CASE SYSTEM IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN: A COMPARATIVE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the case systems of English and Russian, focusing on their functions, forms, and communicative roles. English, as an analytic language, has largely lost morphological case marking, retaining it only in pronouns and possessive nouns. Russian, as a synthetic language, has preserved a full system of six cases. A comparative analysis, supported by tables of pronouns and nouns, demonstrates how these differences affect syntax, word order, and meaning.

## 1. Introduction

In linguistic theory, case is a grammatical category marking the role of nouns, pronouns, or adjectives within a sentence. English and Russian present strikingly different approaches to case. English, having lost most inflections, depends heavily on word order and prepositions, while Russian employs a robust system of case endings that allows flexible syntax. This study explores the similarities and contrasts between these two languages.

## 2. The Case System in English

Modern English recognizes three main case distinctions in pronouns:

**1. Nominative (subject):** *I, he, she, we, they.*

**2. Objective (object of verb or preposition):** *me, him, her, us, them.*

**3. Genitive (possessive):** *my/mine, his, her/hers, our/ours, their/theirs.* Nouns mark possession with -'s (e.g., *John's book*).



Outside pronouns, nouns remain uninflected for case, except for the possessive form (-'s). Word order therefore carries primary importance:

- *The dog bit the man* ≠ *The man bit the dog*.

Historically, Old English possessed four cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative), but these distinctions eroded by the late Middle English period.

### 3. The Case System in Russian

Russian, a synthetic language, preserves six productive cases:

1. **Nominative (именительный)** – subject.
2. **Genitive (родительный)** – possession, negation, quantity.
3. **Dative (дательный)** – indirect object.
4. **Accusative (винительный)** – direct object.
5. **Instrumental (творительный)** – means, tool, or accompaniment.
6. **Prepositional (предложный)** – used with certain prepositions (location, topic).

Case endings apply across nouns, pronouns, and adjectives, permitting word order flexibility. For example:

- *Мальчик любит девочку* = The boy loves the girl.
- *Девочку любит мальчик* = The boy loves the girl (with emphasis shift, but same meaning).

### 4. Comparative Tables

#### 4.1. Pronouns in English and Russian

Case	English Pronouns	Russian Pronouns
Nominative (Subject)	I – he – she – we – they	я – он – она – мы – они
Objective / Accusative (Object)	me – him – her – us – them	меня – его – её – нас – их



Case	English Pronouns	Russian Pronouns
Genitive (Possessive)	my/mine – his – her/hers – our/ours – their/theirs	мой / моя / моё / мои – его – её – наш / наша / наше / наши – их
Dative (Indirect object)	to me, to him, to her, to us, to them	мне – ему – ей – нам – им
Instrumental (Means/with)	with me, with him, with her, with us, with them	мною – им – ей – нами – ими
Prepositional (About/in/on)	about me, about him, about her, about us, about them	обо мне – о нём – о ней – о нас – о них

#### 4.2. Noun Example: *Book* vs *Книга*

Case	English	Russian (singular)	Example Sentence
Nominative	book	книга	<i>Книга на столе.</i> = The book is on the table.
Genitive	of the book	книги	<i>Нет книги.</i> = There is no book.
Dative	to the book	книге	<i>Я подошёл к книге.</i> = I approached the book.
Accusative	book	книгу	<i>Я читаю книгу.</i> = I am reading the book.
Instrumental	with the book	книгой	<i>Я пишу книгой.</i> = I write with the book.



Case	English	Russian (singular)	Example Sentence
Prepositional	about the book	о книге	Я думаю о книге. = I am thinking about the book.

## 5. Comparative Analysis

The English and Russian case systems illustrate two distinct typological models:

- **English:** analytic, minimal case morphology, heavy reliance on word order and prepositions.
- **Russian:** synthetic, rich case inflections, flexible word order with emphasis determined by syntax.

This comparison underscores how languages may evolve toward greater reliance on syntax (English) or retain complex morphology (Russian).

## 6. Conclusion

English and Russian represent two ends of the spectrum in case marking. English maintains vestiges of case only in pronouns and possessives, while Russian employs a full system of six cases. This structural difference impacts word order, syntax, and style. Studying these languages side by side reveals the diverse strategies human languages use to encode grammatical relations.

## References

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