The Indo-Iranian languages which occupy a large area in Southern and Central Asia reveal a great diversity of linguistic structures, as well as a certain degree of areal consistency. In the domain of case one of the most prominent features is the presence of two-term systems. Such systems are of particular interest, since they reveal some basic patterns of how language can structure the core grammatical relations, and those semantic relations which are associated with them. In Indo-Iranian there are two-term case systems of quite different morphological and functional types. In this paper I will focus on the functional domain, although some remarks about the formal properties are necessary as well.

Two-term case systems usually arise through reduction of more elaborate systems (Lehmann 1995 [1982]: 121); that is the most frequent case in Indo-Iranian, although newly developed two-term case systems can be found, too (cf. Tati). Old case systems usually have several declension types, often both cases are marked, their markers are either cumulated with number or sensitive to it; the overall degree of fusion of the case marker with the stem is relatively high. On the contrary, in the new case systems one of the terms is formally unmarked, and the Oblique case marker is either a clitic or a loosely attached affix. However, the distinction is quite often blurred through multiple restructurings of the nominal paradigms which occurred in the history of some languages (cf. Khovar, Yagnob).

Turning to the semantic and functional content of two-term case systems in the Indo-Iranian languages, it is necessary to emphasize the great degree of variation in respect both of the functional domains covered by each case and the organization of the core and also a number of recurrent common features.

Although most of the languages exhibit a split-ergative system, there is a minority with a purely accusative system, comprising both some of the Dardic languages in the eastern (Prasun, Khovar) and some of the Iranian languages in the western part of the area (Tati). However, no rigid ergative system similar to that of the Daghestanian languages is attested in Indo-Iranian. Such a situation is due to the origin of the ergative construction in these languages which stems from the ancient passive construction (cf. Estival and Myhill 1988) and at least in some languages (e. g. Urdu) is an innovation of a relatively recent origin. Another common peculiarity of these languages is the so-called differential object marking (Bossong 1985), when the O relation is marked either by the Direct case (when the O is inanimate and/or indefinite) and by the Oblique case or a prepositional phrase (when the O is animate and/or definite).

There is also a tendency to align particular peripheral relations, such as Possessive, Locative, Goal, Temporal, Purpose with the core relations, thus marking them with the ‘bare’ Direct or Oblique case without any adposition. These relations are marked either by one of the cases or are distributed among them, which constitutes one of the main parameters of variation.

Another variable feature is the co-occurrence of the cases with adpositions. In some languages (Kati, Shina, Yagnob) both cases can be governed by certain adpositions, in other (Vaigali, Pashto) only the Oblique case can co-occur with them; there is no language, however, where adpositions would exclusively require the Direct case. It is also interesting to note that Indian languages (Hindi, Nepali) tend not to allow the ‘bare’ Oblique case, the latter always followed by a postposition.

Two-term case systems in the Indo-Aryan region may serve as an excellent polygon for the cross-language study of that phenomenon. It should be kept in mind that some of the features common to these languages may be found elsewhere.
REFERENCES

