

3.3. Projekt P3: Marked Absolutive and Marked Nominative Case Systems in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspective

**Neuantrag auf Gewährung einer Sachbeihilfe im Rahmen der DFG-
Forschergruppe “Grammatik und Verarbeitung verbaler Argumente”
(Universität Leipzig, MPI-CBS, MPI-EVA)**

1. General Information (Allgemeine Angaben)

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1.2. Topic (Thema)

Marked Absolutive and Marked Nominative Case Systems in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspective

1.3. Code name (Kennwort)

Marked nominative/absolutive

1.4. Scientific discipline and field of work (Fachgebiet und Arbeitsrichtung)

Scientific discipline (Fachgebiet): General Linguistics

Field of work (Arbeitsrichtung): Linguistic typology

1.5. Scheduled total duration (Voraussichtliche Gesamtdauer)

6 years

1.6. Application period (Antragszeitraum)

3 years

1.7. Begin of project (Beginn der Förderung)

01.01.2006

1.8. Summary (Zusammenfassung)

The goal of this project is to study the geographical distribution, typology and diachrony of a rare type of case system, which we call ‘marked nominative/absolutive’. The defining characteristic of these systems is that there is an overt case-morpheme for the nominative/absolutive case (i.e. the case that is shared between intransitive and transitive constructions), in contrast to a non-overt (zero) morpheme for the accusative/ergative. This distribution of overt vs. zero marking goes against typological expectations and is even sometimes considered to be impossible. The most uncommon subtype, ‘marked absolutive’, is found mainly in Mesoamerica, and the other, more widely known subtype, ‘marked nominative’, is found mainly in Africa and in the general California area of North America. We shall be investigating commonalities and differences among the anomalous case systems and relate them to case systems in general, to issues of formal vs. functional markedness, and, where possible, we shall seek to shed light on the origins and developments of the case systems. Since the locus of variation among different instances of marked nominative/absolutive is case marking in intransitive clauses, particularly in “minor” clause types such as nominal predication, the investigation of marked nominative/absolutive will be supplemented with a general, typological study of case marking in different types of intransitive clauses. This will be based on a balanced, world-wide sample of languages of all alignment types that involve case-marking.

2. State of the art, preliminary work (Stand der Forschung, eigene Vorarbeiten)

2.1. State of the art (Stand der Forschung)

2.1.1. Background

Greenberg (1956: 95) stated as his universal no. 38 that “[w]here there is a case system, the only case which ever has only zero allomorphs is the one which includes among its meanings that of the subject of the intransitive verb.” When applied to the world’s two most common alignment types, this statement says that while nominative case (in accusative languages) or absolutive case (in ergative languages) may be unmarked (i.e. zero), the possibilities are excluded that nominative is marked against an unmarked accusative (in accusative languages) or that absolutive is marked over against an unmarked ergative (in ergative languages). We shall refer to these two situations respectively as ‘marked nominative’ and ‘marked absolutive’. In spite of Greenberg’s claim, both types exist and are each found in languages sharing remote common ancestors, suggesting that they are

more than fleeting states that may arise, say, because of the loss an accusative or ergative case marker by phonological processes extrinsic to grammatical structure. Although examples of marked nominative arising from pure sound change also do seem to exist, such an explanation can only be applied occasionally.

Among the two subtypes of exceptions to Greenberg's universal, 'marked nominative' is the best known. This is found in some subgroups of the Afroasiatic family, including most Cushitic languages, most Omotic languages, and several Berber languages or dialects. It is also found in some languages of the Nilotic subgroup of Nilo-Saharan, which is geographically contiguous to Cushitic. These African instances of marked nominative have received increasing attention in recent years (Gensler 2000c, Creissels 2004, König *forthc.*). The other area where marked nominative is found is California and contiguous areas. Here it has been described particularly in the 1960's and 1970's for the members of the Yuman family (e.g., Langdon 1970, Munro 1976, Gordon 1986, Miller 2001), for Wappo (Li, Thompson, and Sawyer 1977), and for Maidu (Shipley 1964), but in more recent years the phenomenon has not drawn further attention, a situation which we intend to remedy, partly by carrying out field work on the Yuman languages Paipai and Cocopa in Baja California and making a thorough survey of existing sources. Finally, a scattering of other languages are mentioned in the literature, i.e. the Austronesian language Houailou and the (non-Pama-Nyungan) Australian language Malak-Malak (Plank 1985:302; Mallison and Blake 1981:47-48), as well as the South American language Shokleng of the Jê family (Urban 1985, cf. Dixon 1994: 64). Some earlier stages of Germanic and Old French also exhibit the phenomenon (Plank 2000). In Modern Icelandic, some strong masculine inflection classes still show an overt nominative versus a zero-marked accusative (Müller 2005: 233).

The other subtype, 'marked absolutive', was until quite recently not known to exist. As late as 1994, R. M. W. Dixon stated that this phenomenon appears not to occur, explaining its apparent absence by the "slender semantic link between O and S" (Dixon 1994: 67; cf. Dixon 1987: 2 for a similar statement). In fact, marked absolutive is not absent from the record of the world's languages. Lea Brown has documented its existence in the Austronesian language Nias (Brown 2001, 2005; Donohue and Brown 1999) and Søren Wichmann has shown that it occurs in the Otomanguean language Tlapanec, spoken in southern Mexico (Wichmann 2005). Another Otomanguean language exhibiting this pattern is Chinantec (Foris 2000). More marginal cases are those of Yukaghir, where the pattern is restricted to focused noun phrases, or Chukchi, where for some nouns the ergative is not zero-marked, but where it is nevertheless less morphologically complex than the absolutive (Plank 2000).

2.1.2. *Area-by-area introduction to past research by ourselves and others*

2.1.2.1. *Marked absolutive in Mesoamerica*

Like a number of North American languages, e.g. of the Muskogean and Caddoan families, certain languages of the Otomanguean family in Mesoamerica express case relations by means of pronominal markers affixed to the verb. Two of the languages, Chinantec and Tlapanec, have a zero-marked ergative and a marked absolutive. This pattern, however, might turn out to be more pervasive among the languages of the family.

The Chinantec case is discussed by Foris (2000: 254), who explicitly notes the typologically rarity of the marked absolutive pattern. Tlapanec case marking has been discussed by Wichmann (2005), who has been studying the language since the early 1990's (cf. Wichmann 1996a). We shall briefly describe the situation in Tlapanec, which will be one of the focal points of the project.

Tlapanec distinguishes four cases: an ergative, an absolutive, a dative, and the 'pegative', a sort of anti-dative, which indicates the role of the actor in a transitive action where the undergoer is less directly affected than is the case for prototypical direct objects. Among these four cases, only the ergative is phonologically unmarked.

- (1) *ni-hti^Mgu^L*
PFV-throw.down.3PL.**ERG**
'They threw it down.' (Wichmann, field notes)
- (2) *či^Ld-ĩŕ^{HM}*
tall-3PL.**ABS**
'They are tall.' (Wichmann, field notes)
- (3) *ni-ko^Mg-a^{ML}*
PFV-cover-3PL.**PEG**
'They covered it.' (Wichmann, field notes)
- (4) *ni-no^Mhg-ũ^{LM}*
PFV-pass-3PL.**DAT**
'They passed.' (Wichmann, field notes)

The absolutive, pegative, and dative are each marked by a whole paradigm simultaneously marking distinctions of person (the examples exhibit the various case forms of the third person plural). The ergative, however, is not expressed by a suffix. In paradigms for verbs subcategorizing for the ergative the vowel which is part of the verb stem will be retained throughout, whereas in paradigms of verbs subcategorizing for the other cases the final stem vowel fuses with the suffixed vowel of the case affix.

In addition to expressing the O role of animate transitives, the absolutive is used for S arguments of certain stative verbs (others take the dative) and for nominal predication. For instance, *čaŕ^Lgu^M* is a noun meaning 'girl', and this may be turned into a nominal predicate by adding the third person singular case absolutive marker *-i*, as in the following example.

- (5) *čaŕ^Lgw-i^M*
girl-3SG.**ABS**
'she is a girl.' (Wichmann, field notes)

Only a few nouns may be turned into predicates in this way—in the majority of cases the copular verb is used. A copular construction may also alternatively be used in case just mentioned.

- (6) $\check{c}a\?^L gu^M$ $ya^M h-\tilde{u}\?^H$
 girl be-3SG.DAT
 ‘She is a girl.’ (Wichmann, field data)

As seen, the copular verb subcategorizes for the dative. While the fundamental grammatical difference between $\check{c}a\?^L gw-i^M$ and $\check{c}a\?^L gu^M ya^M h-\tilde{u}\?^H$ is clear enough (in the first expression ‘girl’ is treated as a predicate, whereas in the latter it is treated as a noun), the difference in interpretation remains to be investigated further. It is likely that in the predicative expression ‘girl’ is treated as an inherent quality of the (absolutive) argument, whereas in the copular construction ‘girl’ is treated as a somewhat more ephemeral role which the (dative) argument assumes.

The paradigm of absolutive case markers also recurs in the free personal pronouns $i^L k-\tilde{u}\?^{LM}$ ‘I’, $i^L k-\tilde{a}\?^{LM}$ ‘you’, etc. The stem to which they are suffixed appears to be identical to the general demonstrative $i^L ki^M$, which is most commonly used for spatial anaphoric purposes (Wichmann 1993). In agreement with the overall omnipredicative nature of Tlapanec, the demonstrative is best analyzed as an intransitive verb taking an inanimate argument, and thus really means ‘it is t/here’. Similarly, the real meaning of $i^L k-\tilde{u}\?^{LM}$, $i^L k-\tilde{a}\?^{LM}$, etc. are ‘I am t/here’, ‘you are t/here’ etc.

In transitive clauses the dative is typically used for expressing the case role of mildly affected undergoers. In addition, certain stative and other intransitive verbs take the dative. Finally, the dative is used for expressing possession, as in (7)

- (7) $\check{c}a\?^M g-y-\tilde{u}\?^L$
 girl-CLAS-1SG.DAT
 ‘My girl.’ (Wichmann, field data)

Summing up, while the ergative is phonologically unmarked, it does not behave as a functionally unmarked case by evincing a default occurrence in various grammatical contexts. In fact, its only function is to encode the A of transitive verbs. As we have seen, the absolutive is used for non-copular nominal predication, including pronominal predication, and the dative is used for copular nominal predication and possession. In this respect the unmarked ergative behaves differently from the unmarked nominative in most of the North American and African languages where this occurs.

2.1.2.2. Marked absolutive in Austronesian

Nias, an Austronesian language spoken on the Barrier Islands off the west coast of Sumatra, has a basically ergative alignment where S and O are expressed by the same phonological mutations of the nominal and pronominal arguments, whereas A is unmarked in the sense that the A argument is unmutated. Information given in the following is from Brown (2005: 562-589), which builds on the author’s Ph.D. dissertation (Brown 2001).

- (8) *la-bunu* *mbaβi* [*mbaβi* is the mutated form of *baβi*]
 3PL.REALIS-kill pig.ABS
 ‘They killed the pig.’ (Brown 2005: 567)

- (9) *aukhu nidanö* [nidanö is the mutated form of *idanö*]
 hot water.ABS
 ‘The water is hot.’ (Brown 2005: 567)

The absolutive case occurs on O arguments of transitive verbs (as in 8) and on S arguments of intransitive verbs (as in 9), as well as on possessors in possessive phrases, objects of most prepositions, and on both experiencer and stimulus arguments with certain experiencer verbs. The ergative case (unmutated form) occurs where we would expect it, i.e. on A arguments of transitive verbs (as in 8). Interestingly, it also occurs on the nominal predicate of equational clauses whereas the argument of the nominal predicate carries absolutive case:

- (10) *te’ana ya’ia* *z=a-nura* [z= mutated form of rel. cl. marker s=]
 NEG 3SG.ERG REL=IPF-write.ABS
 ‘The writer (of it) is not him. (Brown 2005: 569)

- (11) *tome ndrao* [*ndrao* mutated form of pronoun *ya’o*]
 guest.ERG 1SG.ABS
 ‘I am a/the guest.’ (Brown 2005: 596)

Additionally, the unmarked, ergative case occurs on the O argument of transitive verbs in dependent clauses, on the argument of the negative existential verb *löna*, after certain prepositions, on topicalized arguments, and in a few more syntactic contexts. Thus, in Nias the formally unmarked ergative is also functionally unmarked, in the sense that it applies in a broader set of syntactic contexts than the absolutive.

2.1.2.3. *Marked nominative in North America*

Marked nominative has been documented for the general California area, i.e., for several languages of the Yuman subgroup of the Hokan family as well as for Maidu and finally for the near-extinct Wappo. The following three examples from Jamul Tiipay illustrate the basic marked nominative case pattern typical of Yuman languages.

- (12) *peya-ch* *we-nall-x-a*
 this.one-NOM 3-fall-IRR-EMPH
 ‘This one is going to fall!’ (Miller 2001: 151 [ex. 5a])

- (13) *Juan-ch* *uusha*
 Juan-NOM stab
 ‘Juan stabbed him.’ (Miller 2001: 155 [ex. 14d])

- (14) *llyexwiiw-Ø* *wiiw*
 skunk-ABS see
 ‘I saw a skunk.’ (Miller 2001: 155 [ex. 16a])

As can be seen, A/S is marked by a *-ch* nominative suffix, whereas O is zero-marked. Cognates of these two case suffixes are easily recognized across Yuman languages and their distribution in prototypical transitive and intransitive clauses is similar. A syntactic area where more variation is found is that of predicative nominal constructions. The following Cocopa example exhibits a type of construction which is widespread.

- (15) *Peedro-Ø sayaaw-ch uyu*
 Pedro-ACC singer-NOM will.be
 ‘Pedro will become a singer.’ (Wichmann, field notes 2004)

The occurrence of the nominative marker on the nominal predicate is found in Kiliwa, Diegeño, Mojave, Walapai, Havasupai, Yavapai, and possibly others (cf. Munro 1977: 447). The pattern is not without exceptions, however. In Jamul Tiipay both the logical subject and the predicate take the accusative case (Miller 2001: 184), cf. the following example:

- (16) *nyech’ak-pu-Ø metipay-Ø*
 woman-DEM-ACC Indian-ACC
 ‘That woman is an Indian.’ (Miller 2001: 181 [ex. 71a])

Even within the group of languages that share the pattern where the nominative markers occur on the nominal predicate exhibit differences when it comes to the variant of the predicate nominal construction without copula. Thus, in Cocopa the nominative case marker only appears on the nominal predicate when a copula is present. When it is absent, as in (17), both the nominal predicate and the logical subject are in the accusative.

- (17) *Peedro sayaaw*
 Pedro-ACC singer-ACC
 ‘Pedro is a singer.’ (Wichmann, field notes 2004)

- (18) **Peedro-ch sayaaw*
 Pedro-NOM singer-ACC
 (intended reading: ‘Pedro is a singer’) (Wichmann, field notes 2004)

However, several other Yuman languages—e.g., Yuman, Maricopa, and Mojave—make use of the nominative marker of the nominal predicate even when the copula is absent (Munro 1977: 449). That is, in these languages a sentence such as (17) would be possible. Another area where different case marking patterns appear to occur within and among languages is in nonverbal clauses involving pronouns. In sum, our initial probing into the literature on Yuman languages and some preliminary fieldwork has uncovered a fair amount of variation in case marking patterns, particularly in the area of nominal predication.

Wappo case marking is described by Li et al. (1977: 90), who state that “the morphologically unmarked case in Wappo is the object (accusative) case.” A set of suffixes mark the following additional cases: *-i* ‘nominative’, *-ma* ‘benefactive’, *-thu* ‘dative’, -

thi? ‘instrumental’, *-k’a* ‘comitative’, *-me?* ‘genitive’, *-h* ‘locative’. (19) illustrates the use of some of these case markers.

- (19) *ce pol'e?i ce k'ew-ma kučiya?-Ø t'umta?*
 that boy-NOM that man-BEN knife-ACC buy.past
 ‘The boy bought a knife for the man.’ (Li et al. 1977: 90 [ex. 30])

According to Li et al. (1977: 91) “*-i* is not a marker for a specific semantic role. Rather, it denotes a functional property of an NP which may have the semantic role of agent, experiencer, causer, or patient, depending on the verb of the sentence”. Some illustrative examples are:

- (20) *ce k'ew-i tuč'a:-khi?*
 that man-NOM big-PREDICATOR
 ‘The man is big.’ (Li et al. 1977: 91 [ex. 40])

- (21) *chic-i t'ol-khe?*
 bear-NOM catch-PAS
 ‘The house is big.’ (Li et al. 1977: 91 [ex. 41])

- (22) *ři-me? luč-i lakhi?*
 me-GEN cigarette-NOM lack
 ‘I have no cigarettes.’ (Li et al. 1977: 91 [ex. 42])

The formally unmarked accusative also appears to be functionally unmarked. Thus, Li et al. (1977: 95) show the nominative to be absent from any kind of subordinate clause, and when question-word clauses are embedded, their subjects do not carry the nominative. Moreover, the nominative is absent from equational sentences (Li et al. 1977: 97). It would be possible to claim that the zero-marked accusative is present in these types of constructions, and thus the claim could be made that the accusative extends to a broad range of functions by default. I.e., in Wappo the formally unmarked case is also the one which is functionally unmarked.

2.1.2.4. *Marked nominative in Africa*

The steadily growing descriptive literature on African languages has documented the existence of marked nominative for a wide range of Afroasiatic and Nilotic (Nilo-Saharan) languages. In the following we list most of the languages for which published documentation is available.

- Afroasiatic, Cushitic subgroup: Dirayta [Gidole] (Sasse 1984), Saho (Sasse 1984), Oromo (Tucker and Bryan 1966, Griefenow-Mewis and Bitima 1994), Arbore (Hayward 1984), K'abeena (Crass 2003), Burji (Hayward 1988), Agaw (Sasse 1974).

- Afroasiatic, Omotic subgroup: Maale (Amha 2001), Haro (Woldemariam 2003), Zayse (Hayward 1990), Gamo (Tosco 1994), Kullo (Tosco 1994), Wolaitta (Tosco 1994); cf. also Hayward and Tsuge (1998).
- Afroasiatic, Berber subgroup: Kabyle (Naït-Zerrad 2001), Shilh (Aikhenvald 1995); cf. also Sasse (1984) and Aikhenvald (1990).
- Nilo-Saharan, Nilotic subgroup: Pări (Andersen 1988), Anywa (Reh 1996, Andersen 2000), Dinka (Andersen 2002), Nandi (Creider and Creider 1989), Datooga (Kießling 2001), Omotik (Fleming 1979), Maa (Heine and Claudi 1986, Tucker and Mpaayei 1954), Turkana (Dimmendaal 1985), Majang (Randal 2000), Tennes (Randal 1998), Chai (Last and Lucassen 1988); cf. also Tucker and Bryan (1966: 443–94).
- Niger-Congo, Bantu subgroup: König (forthc.) also mentions that a few Bantu languages seem to follow a marked-nominative pattern as well, making reference to Blanchon (1998, 1999), Schadeberg (1986, 1990), and Maniacky (2002).

Summing up, the descriptive literature shows Northern/Northeast Africa to be the leading “hotbed” of marked nominative worldwide. This is the dominant or (near-)exclusive case pattern in Surmic and in Eastern and Southern Nilotic (Nilo-Saharan), and in Cushitic (East Cushitic, Beja), Omotic (the large Ometo group), and Berber (all Afroasiatic). Additionally, marked nominative is arguably present in archaic traces in Ancient Egyptian (pronouns) and Semitic, underscoring its great antiquity within Afroasiatic. And far away in Southern Bantu, marked nominative has arisen secondarily from definiteness marking in such languages as Umbundu.

The Northeast African phenomena clearly represent an areal “shared quirk”, and hence almost certainly reflect a shared history of some kind involving ancient and long-standing contact between Afroasiatic groups and Nilo-Saharan groups. The southern African phenomenon seems independent of the others.

The common pattern seen in most of the Northeast African languages involves the existence of one case-form (Nominative) serving primarily or even exclusively as subject, as opposed to another case-form (Absolutive, or Accusative) serving a notably broader spectrum of functions including citation form, direct object, and predicate nominal. Some of the languages also have other cases, i.e. various oblique cases and/or a distinct genitive. Formally, the cases are sometimes realized as affixes, sometimes tonally. Very often (but by no means always) the Absolutive is also the morphologically zero-marked case, while the Nominative bears an explicit marker.

Language-specifically, Nominative marking of the subject can be sensitive to a range of factors not directly belonging to the domain of “case”. Definiteness can play a part in various ways—e.g. a special “Accusative” case used only for definite objects (vs. the unmarked Absolutive for indefinite objects) (as in Haro). Word order can be a major determinant in verb-first languages (Nilotic, Berber), where only post-verbal subjects (i.e. subjects in their normal canonical position) receive Nominative marking; a pragmatically fronted (pre-verbal) subject is marked with Absolutive. And in some languages (Nilotic), the subject of verbless (zero-copula) sentences patterns differently from the subject of verbal sentences, appearing in the Absolutive and not the Nominative.

2.1.3. *Diachronic perspectives*

What is known about the history of marked absolutive and marked nominative and systems is very limited. For the former type of system there are no diachronic studies whatsoever, which is due to the fact that its existence has only been recently documented. For the latter, some preliminary works exist. Gensler (2000c) suggests that proto-Afroasiatic was marked nominative, and will be developing his arguments further during the course of the project. König (forthc.) has summarized various possible scenarios for the rise of marked nominative systems. They all have in common a hypothetical origin of the nominative case marker from a source outside of the case marking system itself. Thus, in given instances, the nominative could be a former marker of peripheral agents in passive-like constructions (for this, König cites Dimmendaal, p.c., regarding Dinka and Maa), a former definiteness marker (Dixon 1994 regarding Anywa and Pări), or a former topic marker (Aikhenvald 1995 regarding Berber).

For Wappo it has been hypothesized that there was an earlier ergative stage where *-i* marked the ergative and the absolutive was unmarked. By an extension of *-i* to also mark subjects of intransitives a marked nominative system could have arisen (Li et al. 1977). One argument in favor of this scenario is that ergativity seems to have been widespread in the area where Wappo was spoken (north of San Francisco Bay). An argument for why, more generally, the case marking system should be innovative is that the nominative marker is absent from subordinate and equational sentences, which could then be exhibiting a more archaic morphosyntactic organization.

Earlier stages of some Germanic languages have traces of marked nominative. Thus, Old Norse has a declension class where the accusative carries zero marking, e.g., *hestr* ‘horse-NOM’ vs. *hest-Ø* ‘horse-ACC’. Such a system can still be found in some of the strong masculine inflection classes of Modern Icelandic (Müller 2005: 233). This has variously been seen as remnants of an active-stative case marking system, where the active was marked and the stative unmarked (Schmidt 1979, Krifka forthc.), or simply as the result of the attrition of the old Indo-European accusative marker (Dixon 1994, cf. also Meillet 1917).

The three general kinds of explanations may be summarized as follows.

- (a) The nominative case marker has developed from some element not originally a case marker.
- (b) Marked nominative could arise from a system where both nominative and accusative were marked, but where the accusative marker was lost for phonological reasons.
- (c) A normal ergative system has developed into marked nominative by extension of the overt A marker to also mark S (conversely, a marked absolutive system could conceivably arise from a normal accusative system by an extension of the overt O marker to also mark S).
- (d) Marked nominative could arise from a previous Split-S (active-stative) system, where the agentive (active) case was marked and the patientive (stative) unmarked.

There is no dearth of scenarios for changes in overall alignment systems (e.g., Plank 1985), but they often remain partly speculative because the data rarely tell the whole

story. The specific case of marked nominative systems is no exception. Here we also run into difficulties when trying to reconstruct the nature of the alignment systems prior to the stages that exhibit marked nominative. Thus, although it is interesting to inquire into the origin of both marked nominative and marked absolutive, it is not the type of research question which is viable as *the* focus for a research project. Instead, we hope be able to approach the question as a sort of “fringe benefit” of another research strategy, namely a general typological inquiry into case marking in intransitive clauses. The four avenues of explanations summarized above are of two types: (a-b) explain the rise of marked nominative by factors extrinsic to the case marking systems; (c-d) explain case anomalies as internal changes in case marking systems. The former type of explanation is necessarily highly language-specific, and does not relate to typological research. The latter type of explanation (i.e., both c and d) hinges upon the possibility that case marking in intransitive clauses may change over time. Thus, the typological study of case marking in intransitive clauses would be highly relevant for refining and evaluating this type of explanation, since it would show which possibilities exist. Crucially, it would become clearer whether different types of “minor” intransitive clause types, such as predicative nominal constructions, are particularly prone to variation in patterns within and/or across languages (cf. the case of Yuman). Such an investigation would not only be a goal in itself, it would probably also shed some new light on diachronic pathways of anomalous case systems.

2.1.4. *Theoretical implications*

In what has come to be known as the ‘discriminatory view of case marking’ (e.g., Song 2001: 157-159), which is associated mainly with Comrie (1978, 1989) and Dixon (1979, 1994), the major function of case marking is to distinguish A from O, whereas there is no need to distinguish S from A or O because S occurs alone in the intransitive clause. Following this view, both accusative and ergative alignment fall out as possible, functionally motivated alignment systems. In both systems, A and O are distinguished, whereas S is treated either like A (accusative alignment) or O (ergative alignment). Proponents of this discriminatory view (Comrie 1989: 126-7, Dixon 1994: 11) have drawn attention to the fact, first observed by Greenberg (1956), that when there is a zero case marker, this will be the case marker whose function includes that of marking the S function. Under the discriminatory view it makes sense that this case marker should be the one which is least prone to be marked.

Many more formally oriented theories recognize the commonly observed markedness patterns, but the instances of marked nominative/absolutive are mostly not incorporated in the theory. For instance, the Unmarked Case Constraint of Tsunoda (1981) stipulates that every sentence in every language must have an NP in the unmarked case (nominative or absolutive). Something very similar is argued by Wunderlich (1997: 48). Woolford (2001: 513) translates the typological observation that nominative tends to be the least marked case into an optimality theoretic stipulation that *NOMINATIVE is ranked below all other marked Case constraints. For functional and formal syntacticians alike, then, marked nominative and marked absolutive case systems represent a challenge to theory. This enhances the value of documenting and determining the distribu-

tions of such systems, and, of course, of trying to explain their origins and developments.

2.2 Preliminary work (Eigene Vorarbeiten)

Cysouw has broad experience in typological investigations—both with regard to large-scale investigations of representative samples of the world’s languages (Cysouw 2003a, *forthc.-a*) as well as with regard to the investigation of cross-linguistic ‘oddities’ (Cysouw 2005a,b,c,d). Furthermore, he has published extensively on methodological issues involving the interpretation of typological data (Cysouw 2002, 2003b, *forthc.-b*).

Wichmann’s work has mainly focused on Mesoamerican languages, both synchronically and diachronically. He has field experience with languages of all the larger families of Mesoamerica (Mixe-Zoquean, Mayan, Uto-Aztecan, Otomanguean). Of particular relevance for this project is his work on Tlapanec (Wichmann 1993, 1996a,b, 2005, *forthc.-a*). In 2004, as a part of the preparation of this application Wichmann made a brief, but highly successful exploratory visit to Pozas de Arvizu, Baja California, where he interviewed some of the few speakers of Cocopa (known locally as Cucapá). Wichmann has also recently worked on the typology of alignment systems (Wichmann *forthc.-b*) and has organised a large conference on the typology of stative-active languages (MPI-EVA, May 20-22, 2005), which will feature several presentations on diachronic aspects of case marking.

Gensler’s research focuses on historical (morpho)syntax, and on the use of shared typological rarities ("shared quirks") in syntactic reconstruction. He has worked on historical syntactic problems in Celtic, Niger-Congo, Songhay, and above all on the historical syntax of Semitic (his special field of expertise) and Afroasiatic, a very understudied field. Articles on Semitic and Afroasiatic historical (morpho)syntax include Gensler (1997a,b, 1998, 2000a,b, 2005), and on general typology (Gensler 2003). Additionally, he has made many conference presentations on Afroasiatic historical syntax, one expressly devoted to the issue of reconstructing marked nominative to early Afroasiatic (Gensler 2000c). Gensler also worked on Yuman languages earlier in his career (cf. Gensler 1981).

3. Goals and work schedule (Ziele und Arbeitsprogramm)

3.1. Goals

Our study of previous work on both the synchrony and diachrony of marked nominative/absolute case systems, as reported on in 2.1. above, has uncovered two strands of investigation which should each produce valuable new results.

One strand of research consists of documenting marked nominative/absolute case systems for languages where they are little-known or where more information is needed. Thus, Wichmann will be concentrating on the documentation of marked absolute in Tlapanec and will be analyzing published data from other Otomanguean languages which might reveal similar systems that have gone unnoticed by past researchers. He will also carry out fieldwork on Cocopa and Paipai, two Yuman languages of Baja Cali-

fornia, and will supplement these studies with analyses of published descriptions—including text collections—in order to produce a comprehensive overview of case marking in Yuman.

Gensler's work will focus on Northeast Africa, the dominant "hotbed" of marked nominative worldwide, taking an approach complementary to that of Christa Koenig in her forthcoming article on "Marked Nominative in Africa" (*Studies in Language*). Koenig's survey article is largely descriptive and synchronic, and its strength lies in Nilotic (Koenig's specialty area). Gensler will focus on a critical and large-scale reconstruction of the diachrony of marked nominative in Afroasiatic, his own area of specialization. In light of the large number of languages and language groups in Afroasiatic, and its great time depth and structural diversity, this family provides perhaps the best possible "window" onto the overall diachronic dynamics of marked nominative systems, since here—quite unusually—ample comparative material is available, not only for within-group comparison but also for inter-group (out-group) comparison.

The marked nominative case-*pattern*, as a "shared quirk" of Afroasiatic, reliably reconstructs to early Afroasiatic, as sketched programmatically in Gensler (2000c). The present investigation will develop the diachronic argument in depth, tracking not only the functional evolution of the marked nominative pattern per se but also, to the extent possible, that of the actual morphemes used to express the absolute and nominative case relations. Berber is especially intriguing here, with its *pre*-nominal case-markers, unique in Afroasiatic. Data will be drawn from published descriptions and studies not only of the modern languages but of ancient Semitic and Egyptian, both of which arguably show remnant archaic traces of marked nominative. Additionally, there is a reasonable chance that Gensler may spend some time in Ethiopia in 2006, thereby opening up the possibility of fieldwork on Ethiopian languages.

Some general questions that we shall address, then, are the following: Which functions do the various cases have in languages with marked nominative/absolute case systems? How are such case systems instantiated in different construction types? Do such case-systems differ functionally from languages with unmarked nominative/absolute systems? How do marked nominative/absolute case systems arise diachronically? Are they stable through space and time? What is the relation between morphology and underlying structure—is there reason to assume a more abstract notion of Unmarked Case, independent of the morphological spell-out? What is the relation between function and form—is such a notion as 'functional markedness' meaningful?

Another strand of investigation will be a broad typological study of case marking in intransitive clauses, not only including languages of the marked nominative/absolute types. The need for such an investigation emerged both from our initial survey of case marking patterns in Yuman and from discussions in the literature concerning diachronic pathways of case marking systems (cf. 2.1.2-3). In order to discern both peculiarities typical of marked nominative/absolute systems and their commonalities with other systems, languages of all alignment systems involving case marking will be included. In addition to shedding light on case anomalies the investigation will be valuable in and of itself. The general literature on intransitive predication (e.g., Hengeveld 1992, Stassen 1997) typically fails to treat case marking, and the general literature on case marking (e.g., Blake 1994) typically fails to treat intransitive predication. Thus, here is an area that calls out for an extensive typological survey. Towards this end we intend to build up

a database of intransitive clause types for a representative sample of case-marking languages and to report on the result in a larger publication.

3.2. Work schedule (Arbeitsprogramm)

3.2.1. Principal investigator (Cysouw)

Cysouw will be responsible for designing the typological investigation of case marking in intransitive clauses. This includes delineating a suitable sample of languages and identifying the types of constructions to be investigated, e.g. possessives (*my book, I have a book*), nominal/stative predicates (*I am a man, I am cold*), equational clauses (*I am the teacher*), citation forms (*I, the man*), identification replies (*It's me*) and other constructions that might turn out to be relevant. The actual typological survey will be carried out in cooperation with the project members.

The typological survey will not have to start from scratch, since some of the relevant data have already been collected by other typologists, who are willing to cooperate with us—in particular Anna Siewierska and Leon Stassen. The database will be developed in tandem with that of another group within the Forschergruppe, namely the Comrie/Haspelmath group; they too plan to accumulate typological information on case marking, albeit in the different domain of ditransitives. Thus, the two databases could easily share design such that data can be exchanged between them. The typological survey should result at least in one large research paper. Furthermore, the data collected will be prepared in such a way as to be usable afterwards by other researchers (be it through a web-interface or other suitable technology).

The time schedule for this part of the project is as follows. Half a year is planned for the design of the database. For this part, we will build on our own previous experience, but also on the experience from the WALS-project (Haspelmath et al. 2005) and the Autotyp database (Prof. Balthasar Bickel). For the comparison with other case systems, we will employ a diverse sample of at least 25 nominative/accusative languages and 25 ergative/absolutive languages. The database should be structured in such a way that it can be easily made publicly available once the project has ended. The data on the marked nominative/absolutive languages will be collected by Cysouw, Wichmann, and Gensler. 18 months are planned for the gathering and analysis of data. The principal investigator will spend the final year of the application period on evaluating the data and writing a research paper.

RESEARCH (CYSOUW)	TIME FRAME
Design of database	6 months
Gathering and analysis of data	18 months
Production of research paper	12 months

3.2.2. Project member 1 (Wichmann)

Wichmann's work will focus on Yuman and Otomanguean languages. The expected minimal outcome is one large paper and a small monograph, as specified in the over-

view below. Throughout the total period, Wichmann will collaborate with the other two project members by contributing data to the typological database and by analyzing the results of the typological survey together with Cysouw and Gensler.

RESEARCH	TIME FRAME (MONTHS ON HALF-TIME)
Fieldwork on Tlapanec + analysis of data	2 + 4 months
Study of descriptive literature on Otomanguean	3 months
Production of paper (1), <i>The distribution of marked absolutive in Otomanguean</i>	5 months
Study of descriptive literature on languages of Greater California	3 months
Construction of a corpus of sentences from published Yuman texts	4 months
Fieldwork on Paipai + analysis of data	1 + 4 months
Fieldwork on Cocopa + analysis of data	1 + 4 months
Production of a paper (2), <i>The reconstruction of proto-Yuman cases and the inter- and intralanguage variations among specific syntactic constructions, including the copular construction</i>	5 months

3.2.2 Project member 2 (Gensler)

Gensler's work will focus on the Afroasiatic language. The collection of data will principally be conducted through published sources, though there is a reasonable chance that Gensler may spend some time in Ethiopia in 2006 (on invitation), thereby opening up the possibility of fieldwork on Ethiopian languages. The expected outcome will be two large papers: one on the reconstruction of marked nominative for Afroasiatic and one on the typological distribution of marked nominative in pronoun systems.

RESEARCH (Gensler)	TIME FRAME (MONTHS ON HALF-TIME)
Language studies: case and Marked Nom in Berber	4 month
Language studies: case and Marked Nom in Cushitic (possibly including fieldwork in Ethiopia)	6 months
Language studies: case and Marked Nom in Omotic (possibly including fieldwork in Ethiopia)	6 months
Literature study: Marked Nom as case-relic in Old Semitic	2 month
Reconstruction of Marked Nom in Afroasiatic (including morphology insofar as possible), and production of paper	8 months
Typological study on global distribution of Marked Nom in pronoun systems, and production of paper	10 months

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