

# Tlapanec cases

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## 0. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I shall argue that the Azoyú variety of Tlapanec (meʔpá) has a system of four grammatical cases. Three of these behave much like cross-linguistically well-known cases: the Ergative, Absolutive, and the Dative. The fourth, however, is a novel grammatical case for which I have had to coin a neologism: the Pegative. This encodes an actor involved in an event which also involves a Dative-like undergoer. The motivation for this paper is that the Tlapanec case system is unusual in three respects: (1) the case markers attach

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge brief comments from Denis Creissels which induced me to (try to) strengthen some of my arguments regarding the status of the Tlapanec morphological markers as case markers.

to the predicate, (2) the Ergative is morphologically unmarked, (3) the inventory includes the novel Pegative case.

## 1. Typological profile

By way of a brief typological profile the following characteristics may be highlighted. Tlapanec exhibits a VAO basic word order with the possibility of fronting A or O in a topicalization construction. The language is head-marking, and predicates inflect for aspect, polarity, and person while nouns may inflect for person of possessor. An agentive-patientive distinction is expressed by the presence vs. absence of a specialized set of agentive prefixes: ta- (and allomorphs) in second person singular and u- in the plural (Wichmann 1996). There are seven tones: high (H), mid (M), low (L) and four contour tones (HM, MH, ML, LM), and all are found in both lexical and grammatical contexts although the contour tones rarer so than level tones in the lexical domain.<sup>2</sup> Predicates agree with their arguments in animacy and the argument structure is dependent on whether the predicate takes one inanimate argument (I), an animate and an

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<sup>2</sup> When needed for clarification purposes the symbols H, M, L and combinations thereof are used to indicate tones. For normal purposes, I use diacritics as follows: á = a<sup>H</sup>, a = a<sup>M</sup> (unmarked), à = a<sup>L</sup>, ã = a<sup>LM</sup>, â = a<sup>ML</sup>, ä = a<sup>MH</sup>, â = a<sup>HM</sup>.

inanimate argument (AI), two animate arguments (AA), two animate and an inanimate argument (AAI), or three animate arguments (AAA). There are two interlaced hierarchies which together determine the argument structure. One is the animacy hierarchy: animate < inanimate. The other is the role hierarchy: actor < undergoer < theme. For AI and AAI verbs the animate participant(s) will always rank higher than the inanimate participant on the role hierarchy. The highest-ranking third person animate participant on the role hierarchy is cross-referenced on the verb for a given vs. new distinction, which bears some resemblance to both obviation and switch-reference (Wichmann 2004). The nearest documented equivalent of this system in an Otomanguean language is what has been described as “third” vs. “fourth” person for Chinantec (Foris 2000). This distinction is also expressed by pronouns, possessed nouns, and numerals, which are all elements that behave morphologically, although not syntactically, like predicates. There are no passive or antipassive constructions in the language, the nearest equivalents of passives being resultatives or impersonals. Thus there are no arguments for positing grammatical relations in Tlapanec. There are no adjectives in the language, property concepts being expressed by stative verbs. Apart from a highly productive iterative derivation the synchronically identifiable derivational morphology is largely restricted to some non-productive causative prefixes.

## 2. The morphology of case marking

Azoyú Tlapanec verbs fall into four different morphological classes identified by patterns of suffixation. Sample paradigms of each are given below. The stative verb 'to be tall' is only inflected for person, the other three verbs are additionally inflected for aspect by means of the imperfective prefix na-.

### (1) Examples of four different Tlapanec verbal paradigms

	'to throw down' (tr)	'to be tall'	'to cover' (tr)	'to pass, cross' (intr)
1	na-hfigũ	cidỹ?	na-kogõ	na-nohngò?
2	na-ta-htigù	cidã?	na-ta-kogã	na-(ta-)nohngã?
3N	na-htigù	cidâ?	nu-kogô	na-nohngô
4i	nu-hfigũ=lu?	cidã?=lu?	nu-kogã=lu?	na(/u)-nohngã?=lu?
4x	nu-hfigũ=lò?	cidã?=lò?	nu-kogã=lò?	na(/u)-nohngã?=lò?
5	nu-hfigũ=là?	cidã?=là?	nu-kogã=là?	na(/u)-nohngã?=là?
6N	nu-htigù	cidj?	nu-kogâ	na(/u)-nohngũ

1: first person, 2: second person, 3N: new third person, 4i: first person inclusive, 4x: first person exclusive, 5: second person plural, 6N: new third person plural.

The four classes are not arbitrary,<sup>1</sup> but are defined by suffixed markers in which the categories of person and case are fused. In Table 1 I have extracted the suffixes in question.

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<sup>1</sup> Suárez (1983: Section 4.2, esp. p. 127) treats the corresponding paradigms in Malinaltepec Tlapanec as paradigms essentially marking arbitrary verb classes. He labels the paradigms (or sets of “desinences”) D1-D7. His “D7” corresponds to the Azoyú Ergative paradigm, his “D1-D3” are allomorphs corresponding to the Azoyú Absolutive, his “D5-D6” are allomorphs corresponding to the Azoyú Pegative, and finally his D4 corresponds to the Azoyú Dative.

Table 1. Case markers of monopersonal verbs

	Ergative	Absolutive	Pegative	Dative
1	-∅	-y?	-u /-o	-u? /-o?
2	-∅	-j? / -ǵ?	-a / -i	-a?
3N <sup>2</sup>	-∅	-i / -a	-u /-o	-u /-o
4-5	-∅	-ǵ?	-a / -i	-a?
6N	-∅	-j	-a / -i	-y

In standard definitions of case (e.g., Blake 2001) it is either overtly stated or (more commonly) implicitly assumed that case marking is a phenomenon restricted to nouns. Potential candidates for case markers found on verbs are customarily described under other rubrics—as pronominal agreement markers or valency-affecting derivational morphemes such as applicatives. Since the

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<sup>2</sup> “N” stands for “new” and contrasts with “G” for “given” and is, as mentioned in section 1, similar in many respect to obviation (and to a lesser degree to switch reference). Although morphologically the New form is more basic, I normally use as citation form the third person singular Given, the reason being that this form can constitute a whole sentence in itself, whereas the N form must be followed by an overt mentioning of the pivot argument of the verb. The G form is derived from the N form by tonal affixation and, for verbs subcategorizing for the Ergative, additionally by a suffix -i which merges with the stem vowel.

Tlapanec markers listed in Table 1 are neither just pronominal agreement markers nor valency-affecting derivational morphemes we do not have to deal with the issue of whether such kinds of elements are best seen as pertaining to a grammatical category of case or not. Nevertheless, we briefly return to the question towards the end of this section. The argument that the Tlapanec markers are really case markers has two parts. One part consists in arguing that they are not something else and another part in arguing that they resemble case marking functionally. Each will require a rather extensive discussion.

As to the first part of the argument, the only other potential candidate for a function of the Tlapanec markers is person marking. Clearly this *is* part of their function, but I would argue that it is not their main function. If we look at one of the paradigms in (1) above, for instance that of the stative verb ‘to be tall’, we see that tonal patterns contribute to person marking also. In ‘to be tall’ LM tone indicates non-third person and HM indicates (new) third person. In spite of the homophonies causing neutralization of first and second person and of singular vs. plural, tonal affixation must be considered the prime locus of person marking in the sense that this is the only part of the morphology that specializes in person marking only. Neutralization caused by homophonies are in some cases disambiguated by agentive prefixes (when present), but these are not primarily person markers. Similarly, neutralization may also be disambiguated by case

markers, but again these are not primarily person markers only. Finally, as seen in the paradigms in (1), the affixal machinery is supplemented by the enclitics =lu?, =lò?, and =là?, which specialize in distinguishing among plural speech act participants, and for agentive verbs also by the prefixes ta- (and allomorphs) in the second person singular and u- in the plural (among the examples ‘to be tall’ is patientive, ‘to throw down’ and ‘to cover’ are agentive, and ‘to pass cross’ may be treated as either agentive or patientive). While contributions to person marking are made by four different parts of the morphology (agentive prefixes, tonal affixation, case markers, plural SAP enclitics) I would argue that *the* locus of person marking is tonal affixation. One argument is that tonal affixation has no other associated function than person marking. Another argument is that in the case of verbs subcategorizing for the Ergative the marker is zero, so in this case it is clear that tonal affixation is the main responsible for marking the person category. A third argument is the independence of case markers and tonal affixation, which is best appreciated in the complex paradigms of the bipersonal transitive (AA, AAI or AAA) verbs. For lack of space, however, these paradigms cannot be illustrated and discussed here.

Taken together, the three arguments just given show that the Tlapanec markers are not fundamentally something else, such as person markers. Potentially one might argue that since they attach to the predicate they cannot be



case markers, but must be something else. Such a potential complaint must be discarded too. It is by now well known (Nichols 1986) that languages preferentially either mark relations between a head and a dependent within a phrase on the head, on the dependent or on both, that is, in three different possible ways, so there is no a priori reason to assume that the category of case could not also be expressed either on the head, the dependent, or both in different languages.

We may now turn to the second part of the argument for the status of the Tlapanec markers, the one that concerns their functional similarity to case markers. Blake's definition, according to which case is a category which "marks the relationship of a noun to a verb at the clause level" (Blake 2001: 1) provides a suitable starting point. The definition, however, conflates formal and functional characteristics by presupposing that case marking requires a noun to be present in the clause. In a situation of head-marking, where case is marked on the verb and where the referential status of pronominal markers obliterates the need for overt noun phrases except when new participants are introduced, case does not necessarily mark "the relationship of a noun to verb". Rather, what is more generally true of case marking is that it signals the relationship of a participant to a predicate at the clause level. As we deal with the morphosyntax of the Tlapanec markers and their semantics in the following two sections, we shall see

that their function is precisely to signal such relationships. The question could be raised whether the argument for the status of the Tlapanec markers as case markers has consequences for general, morphosyntactic typology. Does it imply, for instance, that we should generally treat verbal applicative affixes or nominal possessive affixes as case markers? I would argue that it is impossible to give a general answer, since it is necessary to address such questions taking into account language-specific facts regarding how the markers in question pattern within the morphology as a whole. For instance, in a language where an applicative marker is paradigmatically aligned with markers for causative, passive, and the like, it would be more appropriate to treat the marker as a valency-changing marker than, say, a Dative case marker. And it would be inappropriate to treat nominal possessive affixes as Genitive case markers unless they are formally distinct from and form a paradigmatic set with other core case markers.

### **3. The mechanisms of case assignment**

Verbs assigning the Absolutive are intransitive, including stative verbs. Verbs assigning the Ergative and Pegative are transitive, and verbs assigning the

Dative may be either transitive or intransitive. Furthermore, the Dative is used for marking nominal possession, as demonstrated in the following paradigms:

(2)

	biʔi 'day'	ištuʔ 'basket'	miša 'shadow'
1	biʔyùʔ	ištùʔ	mišòʔ 'my day / basket / shadow'
2	biʔyâʔ	ištâʔ	mišâʔ 'your... etc.'
3G	biʔyú	ištúʔ	mišó
3N	biʔyû	ištû	mišô
4/5	biʔyàʔ=	ištàʔ=	mišàʔ= (add =luʔ, =lòʔ, làʔ)
6G	biʔyǔ	ištǔʔ	mišǔ
6N	biʔyǔ	ištǔ	mišǔ

The use of the Dative for marking possession is not uncommon cross-linguistically.

Events that involve just one animate participant are thus classified linguistically into four different kinds corresponding to the four different case assignments.

When there are two animate arguments one will be the agent and the other the patient or one will be the source/stimulus and the other the recipient. (I use terms for semantic roles in a broad sense that does not imply strict conformity to

semantic criteria of assignment). Corresponding to these two fundamental types of relations there are two types of paradigms for dipersonal verbs (i.e. verbs taking two animate arguments, either AA or AAI<sup>5</sup>), which are shown in Table 2 below. Verbs involving the agent-patient relation are organized in an ergative pattern since the Absolutive endings refer to the patient. For the source/stimulus-recipient relation the organization is split ergative in the person dimension. When no third person singular recipient is involved, the verbs take the Dative endings, referring to the recipient. (One exception to this is the marker -eʔ for third person given acting on first person. This marker is in a sense not truly part of the paradigm since third person given is derived from first person new by tonal affixation or, in the case of verbs subcategorizing for the Ergative, a suffix -i, in addition to tonal affixation. That is, the new/given distinction is also formally an outgrowth on the third person new form, not an integrated part of the person paradigm as a whole.) When a third person singular recipient is involved, the verbs take the Pegative case endings referring to the source/stimulus.

To summarize, the inflection of dipersonal verbs expressing the agent-patient relation is organized in an ergative fashion, whereas the inflection of dipersonal verbs expressing the source-recipient relation is organized in a split ergative

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<sup>5</sup> Tripersonal (AAA) verbs are derived from the dipersonals by adding a suffix -i indicating the presence in the argument structure of an animate theme.

fashion in the person dimension such that a third person singular recipient triggers nominative-accusative pattern, whereas combinations not involving a third person singular recipient trigger an ergative pattern.

Table 2. Case markers of monopersonal and dipersonal verbs

Monopersonal verbs				Dipersonal verbs		
Person	Absolutive	Dative	Pegative	Person combination	Absolutive	Dative /Pegative
1	-y?	-u? / -o?	-u / -o	2/3N/5/6N-1	-y?	-u? / -o?
				3G/6G-1		-e?
2	-ǵ? / -j?	-a?	-a / -i	1/3/4x/6-2	-ǵ? / -j?	-a?
3	-a / -i	-u / -o	-u / -o	1-3	-a / -i	-u / -o
				2-3		-a / -i
				3-3		-u / -o
				4/5-3		-a / -i
				6-3		-a / -i
4-5	-ǵ?	-a?	-a / -i	3/6-4/5, 2/5-4x, 1/4x-5	-ǵ?	-a?
6	-j	y	-a / -i	1/2/3/4/5/6-6	-j	-u

#### 4. The semantics of case assignment

Here follow a few examples of monopersonal verbs that assign each of the four cases.

(3) Some verbs subcategorizing for the four different cases

ERGATIVE      na-ʔdí 's/he is sowing it'  
                  na-hwé 's/he is selling it'  
                  na-kaʔwí 's/he is hiding it'  
                  na-ʔeké 's/he is smoking/burning it'  
                  na-ʂuʔmbíʔ 's/he is roasting something'

ABSOLUTIVE    bàwí 's/he is alone'  
                  daská 's/he smells bad'  
                  hkamá 's/he is hung up'  
                  na-myahwj 's/he is worrying'  
                  na-wapá 's/he has time'

PEGATIVE	geʔdó 's/he has (something)'
	na-kàšú 's/he is skinning it'
	na-mindúʔ 's/he is seeing it'
	na-çiʔyúʔ 's/he is putting it out' (e.g. light)
	na-rekó 's/he is blocking it' (e.g. road)
DATIVE	bašó 's/he is nude'
	na-mbiʔyú 's/he is called (something)'
	na-ndó 's/he wants it'
	na-hmyúʔ 's/he is using it'
	na-kanú 's/he is given it'

The five verbs in each category has been selected somewhat randomly from much longer lists. My lists of verbs assigning the Pegative is the shortest, with around 50 items. Verbs assigning the Dative number around a 100, and for the other two cases there are several hundred instances.

Ergative and Pegative, on the one hand, and Absolutive and Dative, on the other, make distinctions regarding agency, Ergative or Pegative being assigned to actors and Absolutive or Dative to undergoers. (I have based the term 'Pegative' on the Greek πηγή, which means 'origin, source, emanation, etc.' to

provide a name for a case that proto-typically refers to a giver as opposed to a recipient). The main semantic parameter that is involved in distinguishing the two different kinds of actor and the two different kinds of undergoer seems to be one of the degree of impact of the action, that is, an affectedness/effectiveness parameters. For verbs assigning the Pegative the effect generally seems to be lower than for verbs assigning the Ergative. Often the undergoer is only partially affected. Thus, 'to sow', 'to sell', 'to hide', 'to smoke', 'to roast something' have a direct impact and/or involve the undergoer as a whole, whereas 'to have', 'to skin', 'to see', 'to put out', 'to block something' imply a lesser or partial effect. The verbs assigning the Absolutive often describe more permanent states than verbs assigning the Dative. Thus there is a mirror relationship where Ergative-Absolutive are each other's opposites just like Pegative-Dative are each other's opposites. The relationships are summarized in Table 3.



Table 3. Semantics correlates of Tlapanec case assignment

MACRO-ROLE	ACTOR	UNDERGOER
E(/A)FFECTEDNESS		
HIGH	ERGATIVE	ABSOLUTIVE
LOW	PEGATIVE	DATIVE

Obviously these semantic characterizations must remain approximations. That some semantic factors are clearly involved in case assignment even if the distinctions are often blurred is only what we might expect from a case-marking system, however. Apart from the added piece of inventory, the Pegative, the system does not diverge functionally to any great degree from commonly attested systems. The following quote from Barry Blake should help to support this observation as well as to introduce some additional characteristics of case marking systems which will shed light on the Tlapanec facts (for ‘accusative’ substitute ‘absolute’).

The accusative is a syntactic case which can encode a variety of semantic roles, but one could take the central and defining function to be that of encoding the affected patient of activity verbs. The dative is likewise a

syntactic case that can encode a variety of roles, but I would suggest that its central function is to encode entities that are the target of an activity of emotion. Traditional definitions refer to the entity indirectly affected as opposed to the entity directly affected, which is encoded by the direct object (at least in the active). The accusative and the dative may be in syntagmatic contrast or in paradigmatic opposition. With verbs like Latin *dāre* 'to give', *monstrāre* 'to show' and *mandāre* 'to entrust', the two cases are in syntagmatic contrast with the accusative encoding the entity that is directly affected in the sense that it is moved or transferred to new ownership and the dative encoding the sentient destination, the one to whom the transfer is directed.

Blake (2001: 144)

When we include dipersonal verbs in the discussion, the Tlapanec case system begins to show its dynamicity and more parallels with other case systems turn up.

Dipersonal verbs take either Absolutive or Dative/Pegative (the latter being subjected to a split pattern in the person dimension, as explained above). Below I give the full list of the Dative-assigning dipersonal verbs that I have recorded along with a partial list of Absolutive-assigning dipersonals. The undergoer-participant cross-referenced on the verb is always the indirectly or partially

affected animate argument. Although one should remember that Tlapanec does not have grammatical relations the system may essentially be equated with primary object languages (Dryer 1986), which rank indirect objects higher than direct objects for purposes of cross-referencing.

#### (4) Examples of case-assignment of dipersonal verbs

ABSOLUTIVE -kugraʔá 'to lock up someone'  
-čìhpá 'to hug someone'  
-nduhtáʔ 'to spit on someone'  
`-ʔgíʔ 'to put someone'  
-guhpràʔá 'to kick someone'  
-hmarawjʔ 'to greet someone (by caressing)'  
-hmìdá 'to shoot someone'  
-hpàʔá 'to put someone inside'  
-hprìgwí 'to shake someone'  
-htaŋgá 'to turn someone over'  
-htuwj 'to grab someone'  
-hŋgawí 'to protect, take care of someone'  
-kaʔwí 'to hide someone'

-mahŋǎ 'to move someone'  
-ʔɕí 'to buy someone'  
-ɕi-hí 'to make someone stand up'  
-ɕuwǎ 'to bathe someone'  
-šiyá 'to kill someone'  
-škuʔ-ŋǎʔ 'to push someone'  
-štubí 'to make someone numb'  
-ŋǎwǎ 'to measure or weigh someone'  
-ŋuhwá 'to sell someone'

#### DATIVE

-ròʔó 'to bind someone'  
-ruʔǔʔ 'to climb onto someone [restricted to third person]'  
-ndiaó 'to give someone a sign of impending death'  
`-šnú 'to give (something) to someone'  
-niyúʔ 'to leave someone'  
-njaú 'to listen to, obey someone'  
-raʔnú 'to meet someone'  
-rekó 'to block, ward off someone'  
-reʔyô 'to answer someone (something)'  
`-skó 'to chase away someone'

- ʔsɲgó 'to teach someone something'
- ɕahmú 'to show someone something'
- ʔtú 'to tell someone something'
- `-skó 'to mount (as a copulating animal)'
- šna-téʔyó 'to borrow (something) from someone'
- šnéʔdó 'to load (e.g. an animal) (with something)'
- ʔyó 'to see someone'
- ɲgiʔtú 'to wait for someone'
- mbàú 'to sell (something) to someone'

There are several examples where one and the same verb may assign different cases. One example is the verb 'to sprinkle' which includes among its instantiations<sup>6</sup> the three forms illustrated in (5).

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<sup>6</sup> I use 'instantiation' because it is not clear that there is an underived base form from which other forms are derived. Instead, verbs may be seen as being based on general, abstract templates of which the various inflectional forms are instantiations.

(5) a. [Monopersonal, Ergative]

na-ndrèhm-é                      iya?

IPFV-sprinkle-3G.ERG water

‘S/he is sprinkling water.’

b. [Monopersonal, Pegative]

na-ndrihm-ú                      iya?    in-û                      šabù

IPFV-sprinkle-3G.PEG water face-3N.DAT<sup>3</sup> man

‘S/he is sprinkling water on the face of the man.’

c. [Dipersonal, Absolutive]

na-ndrihm-á                      iya?

IPFV-sprinkle-3G>3ABS water

‘S/he is sprinkling water on her/him.’

The monopersonal, Ergative-assigning instantiation -ndrèhmé means ‘to sprinkle something’ (5a). The Ergative case implies an Absolutive-like undergoer. In

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<sup>3</sup> Dative-marking here does not signal a relation between ‘face’ and the predicate ‘to sprinkle’, but rather the relation between the possessed item, ‘face’, and the possessor, ‘man’. The verbal argument is the whole noun phrase ‘the man’s face’.

contrast, the monopersonal, Pegative-assigning instantiation -ndrìhmú means ‘to sprinkle something onto something’ (5b). It acquires this meaning not because there is some valency-augmenting mechanism and/or external possession involved but because the Pegative actor implies a Dative-like undergoer, that is, a partially affected undergoer. In (5c) we see a dipersonal instantiation.

There are several examples of verbs whose instantiations respectively assign Absolutive and Ergative case. The difference is one of transitivity, but again not induced by a valency-changing process but rather by the semantics of the cases, which dictate that monopersonal verb assigning the Absolutive can only be intransitive and a monopersonal verb assigning the Ergative can only be transitive. Some pairs are shown in (6).

(6) Examples of pairs of instantiations of AI verbs that assign Absolutive vs. Ergative case

a. -hpàʔǵ 'to stick one's head out' [Monopersonal, Absolutive]

-hpàʔé 'to throw something inside' [Monopersonal, Ergative]

b. -hmìdí 'to burst' [Monopersonal, Absolutive]

-hmèdé 'to make something burst' [Monopersonal, Ergative]

c. -hpraʔá 'to enter quickly' [Monopersonal, Absolutive]

-hpraʔe 'to chop something in two' [Monopersonal, Ergative]

Pairs of instantiations taking respectively an Absolutive and a Dative human undergoer should exist. For instance, we would expect to find a difference between, say, 'to instruct someone' (Absolutive) as opposed to 'to teach someone something' (Dative). Due to my relatively recent discovery of how the Tlapanec case system works, I have not recorded several such instances. The only example in my corpus is unfortunately not very clear since I was told that the semantics of the two forms were identical, and at the time of elicitation I was not yet aware of the fundamental grammatical difference. The pair is cited in (7).



- (7) Example of a pair of instantiations of an AA verb that assign Absolutive vs. Dative case

-škanačí 'to hurry someone up' [Dipersonal, Absolutive]

-škanàčo 'to hurry someone up' [Dipersonal, Dative]

Possibly the second member of the pair, -škanàčo, means 'to hurry someone up with respect to some chore' whereas the first, -škanačí, just means 'to hurry someone up.' This and similar examples constitute an area of future research.

## 5. Typological parallels to the Ergative vs. Pegative distinction

Although it has not been possible to find direct parallels to the peculiar Tlapanec distinction, phenomena are described in the literature which are somewhat similar. Blake (1977: 16-17) cites the following pair of sentences from Alawa (eastern Arnhem Land, Australia):

(8) a. lilmi tjaw a-ŋataña aka-yi  
man feel he-was.doing fish-DAT  
'The man was feeling for fish.'

b. lilmi-ři tjaw a-ŋatan-na da aka  
man-ERG feel he-did-it fish  
'The man caught some fish.'

According to Blake's source for the data, Sharpe (1970: 48), the formal contrast exemplified by the two sentences (Nominative-Dative in 8a vs. Ergative-Objective in 8b) serves to distinguish between an activity that has not attained its goal and one that has. This distinction overlaps semantically with the Tlapanec distinction between an activity where the undergoer is only partially or to a lesser extent affected and an activity where the undergoer is fully or to a greater extent affected. In Galgadungu a similar formal distinction as in Alawa signals a difference between "an action that is being directed towards a goal as opposed to one that has been successfully carried through" (Blake 1977: 17). Again this overlaps semantically with degrees of affectedness/effectiveness.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Oceanic languages would be a place to search for phenomena similar to the Australian cases cited, cf. the Samoan example cited by Primus (1999: 76)

What is interesting about the example is not only the semantic overlap but also that the encoding of the actor covaries with the encoding of the undergoer to express the distinction, just like in the Tlapanec case. A major difference, of course, is that Alawa or Galgadungu do not have a grammatical case specializing in marking the opposition to the Dative like the Tlapanec Pegative.

The reason why it has so far not been possible to find direct typological parallels to the Pegative probably relates to the peculiar Tlapanec system in which (1) case is marked on the predicate, (2) only one argument per clause is cross-referenced for case, and where (3) this argument must be animate. In such a system, the presence of a Dative-like inanimate undergoer can only be signalled indirectly, by assigning the animate actor a case that implies such an undergoer. In normal case marking systems it is possible to assign case to several participants—including inanimate ones. In such a system there is no motivation for having the encoding of the actor co-vary with that of the undergoer. The assignment of Dative case, marking a lowered degree of affectedness or recipient-like status of the undergoer, will automatically imply a correspondingly lowered degree of effect or a source/stimulus-like status on the part of the actor.

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from Cook (1991: 79). For lack of sufficient information towards the full interpretation of the example I do not discuss it further.

## 6. A note on “marked absolutive”

It is a well-known fact that markedness relations in case systems are generally such that the morphologically and functionally unmarked member tends to be the nominative in accusative languages and the absolutive in ergative languages.

The morphological markedness relation was first formulated by Greenberg (1963: 75) as his Universal 38 (“where 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”) and the observation has been elaborated upon in Dixon (1994: 63-96). While marked nominative systems are not uncommon in Africa (e.g., Creissels 2004) very few exceptions to the generalization have emerged with regard to languages that have ergative-absolutive alignment. One language reported to exhibit a case of marked absolutive is Nias, an Austronesian language (Brown 2001). Closer to home, Foris (2000) has noted that the relation between the Ergative paradigm and the Absolutive paradigms in Sochiapan Chinantec is such that the Absolutive is marked. Foris explicitly points out that this represents a typological oddity.

This finding raises a number of typological and historical issues. We might ask, for instance, whether there are common denominators among languages having marked Nominative (primarily found in Northeast and Southern Africa and

within the Yuman family) and those having marked Absolutive. We might also ask how marked Nominative or marked Absolutive systems come about or disappear and whether they are genetically stable features or fleeting phenomena. Such issues far exceed the scope of this paper. But they deserve to be mentioned as perspectives that emerge if my hypothesis, that Tlapanec may be said to truly have a case system, holds.

## **7. Conclusion**

In the above I have argued that the Azoyú Tlapanec verbal suffixes corresponding what is described by Suárez (1983) for the Malinaltepec variety as essentially just arbitrary verb class markers are best treated as case markers. My arguments were, first, that the markers are not basically person markers although this is one part of their function. Secondly, I tried to demonstrate that case assignment operates on a semantic basis quite similar to what is standardly expected from a case system even if it has some structural peculiarities—including a type of case apparently not attested in other languages, namely the case for which I have coined the term *Pegative*. One of the striking parallels to cross-linguistically common case systems is that the Dative is involved in

marking possession. Moreover, I showed that one and the same verb may assign different cases, something which indicates that the system indeed marks different relations between predicates and arguments at the clause level as do case marking systems universally. Thus the system is of grammatical importance and is far from just being a way of grouping different verbs into different classes, as suggested in previous analyses. Finally, I looked briefly at typological parallels to the opposition Ergative-Absolutive vs. Pegative-Dative and to the morphologically unmarked status of the Ergative, two features that stand out as unusual. As it turns out, both have parallels or near-parallels in other languages.

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