SOUTH ASIA SYNTAX-SEMANTICS NEWSLETTER
Volume 4, Number 1 Fall 1994
Volume 4, Number 2 Spring 1995

Published by
Rutgers-The State University
18 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08903
USA

First of all, we'd like to apologize for the gap between the last issue of SASSN and the present one. As you will have noticed, this is a joint 4.1 and 4.2 issue. While the primary responsibility for this is ours, we also received fewer submissions than in the past. However, there does not seem to be a drop in the work being done on South Asian syntax and semantics. Please do make it a point to send us your contributions since there are many out there who stand to benefit. As in the past, contributions should be sent to the Rutgers address in the interests of organizational order. Email submissions are preferable since it cuts down on our typing out material.

As mentioned in earlier issues, SASS Newsletter has been supported by the Department of Linguistics, Rutgers University since its inception in 1991. In order to reduce the burden on the home department we had requested voluntary subscriptions of $5. Unfortunately, we only got one check. With this issue we are therefore cutting down on mailing costs by moving to email transmission. Many of you have expressed interest in receiving the issue by email so this should not be too much of a problem. Please make sure that you send your current correct email address to Rajesh (email: bhatt@babel.ling.upenn.edu). Of course, we will continue to mail copies to those who are not on email. From now on, the newsletter will also be available on the WWW at the following URL: http://www.ling.upenn.edu/sassn.html .

In this issue, we have included a section on forthcoming/unpublished work. Since the publication process is slow, it is helpful for other people in the field to be aware of work that is ready for circulation but not yet in print. Thanks to all of you who contributed.

Veneeta Dayal
Editor, SASSN

Department of Linguistics
Rutgers University
18 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08903
Phone: (908) 932-6903
email:dayal@zodiac.rutgers.edu

Rajesh Bhatt
Associate Editor, SASSN

Department of Linguistics
University of Pennsylvania
Room No. 619, Williams Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Phone: (215) 546-9343
email:bhatt@babel.ling.upenn.edu

1 Books

Lakshmanan, Usha. UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR IN CHILD SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION. NULL SUBJECTS AND MORPHOLOGICAL UNIFORMITY. John Benjamins 1994

This book examines child second language acquisition within the Principles and Parameters framework of linguistic theory. Its focus is the null subject phenomenon, a property that has received considerable attention within linguistic theory and linguistic acquisition. It takes a current theory of null subjects, namely the Morphological Uniformity Principle, and investigates the extent to which its predictions are supported in the context of child second language grammar. The book demonstrates the value of child second language acquisition data in evaluating specific proposals within linguistic theory for a Universal principle and thus contributes to the growing body of research on the role of Universal Grammar in second language acquisition.

Theoretical Perspectives on Word Order in South Asian Languages Edited by: Miriam Butt, Tracy Holloway King, Gillian Ramchand 1994, CSLI Publications, Stanford, California (pubs@csli.stanford.edu)

Contents:

The problem of word order and word order flexibility remains one of the most difficult and problematic areas for formal theories of grammar. The modern linguistic goal of arriving at an invariant and regular set of structures for natural language in general (Universal Grammar) is in tension with the palpable variability in surface word order among and within particular languages. This volume presents a collection of papers on word order variation in the languages of South Asia. These languages are interesting precisely because they exhibit such great flexibility in their word orders while not being completely non-configurational; and data from these languages has been the source of much recent research and controversy in this domain. The papers embody widely differing theoretical perspectives and concerns, and this is in part a reflection of the far reaching effects and problems associated with word order possibilities for many different linguistic domains: morphological, lexical, syntactic, semantic and discourse/pragmatic. However the reader chooses to interpret these facts, or assess these theoretical proposals, we believe they cannot be ignored in any general analysis of the status of precedence relations and word order variability within languages.

Overview of Individual Papers: In 'Bangla Correlative Pronouns, Relative Clause Order and Discourse Linking', T. Bagchi examines the different discourse properties of the correlative construction in Bangla depending on whether the correlative is expressed in a standard or right-dislocated structure. Not only are these distinct orders seen to have different semantics, but the interpretation of deictics and anaphors also varies depending on precedence relations.

In 'Word Order, Configurationality and the Structure of the Kashmiri Clause' R. Bhatt argues that Kashmiri, a verb-second language, is configurational. The existence of VP-internal and external hierarchical structure in Kashmiri, which has been previously analyzed as nonconfigurational, contributes to the debate as to whether universally all languages project their arguments configurationally and argues against the notion that 'free' word order is synonymous with nonconfigurationality.

In 'Complex Predicate Scrambling in Urdu', M. Butt uses word order variability to demonstrate the ambiguous constituency structure of two complex verbal sentential types in Urdu. Butt argues that while scrambling possibilities reflect constituent structure, this does not seem to distinguish predicational structures on the basis of argument structure or functional structure differences. The data from Urdu argue that differences in argument structure between two constructions are not reflected in the constituent structure representation, but that these distinctions are effectively lost at that level.

In 'Topicalization in Hindi and the Correlative Construction' V. Dwivedi argues that topicalization in Hindi comprises two structures. Topic dislocation involves a topic base generated under TopicP, outside of CP, and binds a pro within CP. Topicalization involves movement of an NP to a position adjoined to IP, which binds a trace within the clause. Dwivedi further proposes that there is a semantic difference between the two positions: referential NPs are dislocated, while all other XPs and non-referential NPs are adjoined to IP.

In 'Afterthoughts, Antitopics and Emphasis', S. Herring presents a theory of the discourse functions associated with the post-verbal position in Tamil. The post-verbal position is associated with emphasis, backgrounding, and afterthoughts. Herring shows that these three functions are not only functionally distinct but are also positionally distinct, with the 'emphasis' position being most closely connected to the sentence, and the 'afterthought' being the furthest out and most loosely connected to the sentence.

In 'Issues in Word Order in South Asian Languages', K.P. Mohanan and T. Mohanan examine many of the crucial questions that arise from a discussion of word order variability in these languages and present two main theoretical alternatives for capturing the basic facts. These alternatives involve the choice between an enriched phrase structure approach, which encodes a variety of syntactic information in a single phrase structure, and a more multidimensional approach, which provides a different representations for different types of information. They present a particular kind of multidimensional theory, which they argue represents most clearly and adequately the facts from a number of South Asian languages.

In 'Case OCP: A Constraint on Word Order in Hindi' T. Mohanan argues that word order relations are encoded at a level logically independent of syntactic hierarchical structure and of lexical and phonological levels of linguistic representation. Mohanan argues that the Obligatory Contour Principle can operate at the level of word order. She argues that identically case marked arguments of a predicate are prohibited when prosodically adjacent. These data present a challenge to theories in which the interactions between different levels of representation are more constrained.

In 'Thematic Roles, Word Order and Definiteness' M. Singh shows that there are correlations between the scrambling possibilities of direct objects and the possibility of definite interpretations for those objects. When an object that would otherwise be ambiguous between a definite and indefinite interpretation is scrambled out of its canonical position adjacent to the verb, it can no longer have an indefinite interpretation but must be interpreted as a definite.

In 'Binding Facts in Hindi and the Scrambling Phenomenon' Srivastav Dayal argues against the claim advanced by Mahajan (1990) that scrambling in Hindi can be an instance of A-movement. Taking a closer look at binding facts, she shows that scrambling can only be considered an instance of A' movement. However, quantifier float and weak cross-over propoerties of scrambling differ from those of standard A' movement. Thus scrambling calls for a three-way distinction in movement types.

In 'Compound Typology in Tamil', K. G. Vijayakrishnan uses scrambling, adjacency facts, and the possible intrusion of focus phrases to distinguish between different types of compound verbs in the language. Word order possibilities make crucial distinctions between the types of compounds in Tamil, and this is used to motivate phrase structural and morpholexical differences. Of particular theoretical interest is the claim that non-zero level categories participate in compound formation within the lexicon.

Papers from The Fifteenth South Asian Language Analysis Round Table Conference, edited by Alice Davison and Frederick M. Smith, University of Iowa press, Iowa City, IA. (To order write to: Publications Order Dept. , University of Iowa, 100 Oakdale, #M1050H, Iowa City, IA 52242-5000, or call 1-8000235-2665)

1. Why explicators are not auxiliaries: Anvita Abbi and Devi Gopalakrishnan (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

2. Another look at correlatives in Hindi/Urdu: Gurprit Bains (Long Island University)

3. Contact Phenomena: The case of Malaysian Tamil: Loga Baskaran (University of Malaya)

4, Classifiers and the Bangla DP: Probal Dasgupta and Tanmoy Sengupta (University of Hyderabad)

5. A compound structure for the pronominal anaphor in Hindi-Urdu: Alice Davison (University of Iowa)

6. Conjunctive Operators in South Asian languages: David Gil (Singapore National University)

7. Agreement system in Telugu: M. Hariprasad (University of Hyderabad)

8. Discourse linkage in Sanskrit Narratives with special emphasis on the story of Nala: Hans

H. Hock (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

9. Marathi relative clauses revisited: Indira Junghare (University of Minnesota)

10. The demise of diglossia in Bengali: M. H. Klaiman (Indiana-Purdue University, Ft. Wayne)

11. On the origin of embedded relative clauses: Patrick Marlow (University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign

12. Some new perspecitives on South-Asia as a linguistic area: Colin P. Masica (University of Chicago)

13. On the correlation between morphological case and semantic functions in Hindi/Urdu: Annie Montaut (Institut national des languages et civilizations orientals, Paris)

14. Is it coordination or subordinaton: Jayashree Nadahalli (New York University)

15. The position of negation in Bengali: An account of synchronic and diachronic variation: Zelmira Nunez del Prado and James Gair (Cornell University)

16. Tamil anaphor binding in distant clauses: Vasu Rengenathan (University of Washington)

17. Tier conflation and bracket erasure: P. Sailaja (University of Hyderabad)

18. If that's the case, I don't agree: Anjum P. Saleemi (National University of Singapore)

19. Case dependencies in Hindi: Joga Singh (York University and South Gujarat University)

20. Clefts in Malayalam: a focussed movement approach: K. Srikumar (Osmania University)

21. Reference and aging in Tamil: Jeyesheree Venkatesan (University of Texas at Arlington)

22. Dissimilition in Meitei: K. Vijayakrishnan (CIEFL, Hyderabad)

23. Phonetic emphasis in Tamil: James E. Vinton (University of Texas at Arlington)

24. Clitic and Case: A cross-linguistic perspective: Kashi Wali (Syracuse University and Cornell University)

25. Normative canons, women's language and translation of the Other: Arlene Zide (Washington College (Chicago) and University of Chicago)

2 Abstracts of Articles

Veneeta Dayal. 1995. "Quantification in Correlatives" in Emmon Bach, Eloise Jelinek, Angelika Kratzer and Barbara Partee (eds)

Quantification in Natural Language, Kluwer Academic Publishers. This paper looks at two properties of Hindi correlatives that appear to be at odds with the claim that their referent is unique. The first phenomenon has to do with Quantificational Variability Effects. The second phenomenon concerns the morpheme "bhii" which forces either a free-choice reading or a reading in which the identity of the individual denoted is irrelevant. It is shown that Quantificational Variability as well as the free-choice readings of correlatives are dependent on the tense supporting a generic interpretation. Uniqueness effects are not absent but diluted due to generic quantification. The identity reading is consistent with uniquness and explained in terms of the theory of NPI's in Kadmon and Landman (1993).

Tara Mohanan. 1995. "Wordhood and Lexicality: Noun Incorporation in Hindi". Natural Language and Linguistic Theory 13.1.

This paper examines the syntactic, semantic, morphological and phonological properties of a certain type of noun-verb sequence in Hindi, and argues that it is an instance of noun incorporation. The sequence must be analysed as a lexical category; yet paradoxically, verb agreement and negation show that this noun is on par with a syntactically independent argument. The paper proposes a solution to this dual behavior of the noun by recognizing grammatical categories and grammatical functions as belonging to distinct but co-present dimensions of syntactic representation.

Jeffrey L Lidz. "Morphological Reflexive Marking: Evidence From Kannada". Lingusitic Inquiry 26.4

In this paper I argue that Reinhart and Reuland's theory of Reflexivity can be extended to handle the properties of the Kannada verbal reflexive 'koL' as well as the Kannada pronominal reflexive 'tannu'. What is required is an extension of the notion of 'reflexive marking', which includes syntactic reflexive marking by an argument and lexical reflexive marking, to also include morphological reflexive marking by an affix like the Kannada verbal reflexive 'koL'.

3 Papers Presented at Recent Conferences

West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics
March 1994. University of California, San Diego.
(Proceedings Published)

Anoop Mahajan (UCLA) "ACTIVE Passives". This paper argues for a derivational analysis of the Passive construction. It is suggested that the agent phrase of Passive constructions originates as a PP internal to the VP. It moves to SPEC AGRPs position in one of the Passive constructions in Hindi while it standard English type Passive, it moves to an adjunct position because English does not allow for PPs in the subject position. The underlying object has to be moved to the SPEC AGRPs position in English not for Case reasons, as is standardly assumed, but to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle.

FAS
March 1994. Berlin.
(Proceedings Published)

Anoop Mahajan (UCLA) "Universal Grammar and the Typology of Ergative Languages". This paper argues against the existence of an independent ergativity parameter as an account for the case marking typologies since it fails to correlate ergativity with factors like word order and agreement and furthermore, it does not account for split ergativity patterns. The paper outlines a unified proposal that accounts for many typological properties of ergative languages and the factors that distinguish such languages from Nom-Acc languages.

GLOW
April 1994, Vienna
(Published in GLOW Newsletter 32, Spring 1994)

Anoop Mahajan (UCLA) "Split Ergativity, Auxiliary Selection and Word Order Directionality". This paper elaborates an earlier proposal (Mahajan, 1993) relating word order and the choice between split ergativity (as found in Indic Indo-European languages) and Auxiliary Selection (as found in certain Germanic and Romance languages). It is suggested that in certain construction types the subjects originate as PPs internal to the VP. The ergative construction results if this PP moves to the SPEC AGRPs position. If the head P of the PP gets incorporated into the AUX (cf. Kayne, 1993), the result is a NOM-ACC construction with AUX 'have'.

Workshop on Burzio's Generalization
June 1994, Utrecht University.
(Proceedings published)

Anoop Mahajan (UCLA) "Oblique Subjects and Burzio's Generalization". This paper first outlines a number of Oblique Subject construction types from Hindi that are inconsistent with Burzio's Generalization and then argues that the existence of these counter examples is systematically related to agreement and word order properties of Hindi. The paper argues that there is no direct correlation between Case and assignment of theta roles (as in Burzio's Generalization) but this apparent connection, whenever it appears, is due to other independent principles that include the Extended Projection Principle.

CLS 31 Parasession on Clitics
(Proceedings published)

Jeffrey L Lidz (UDelaware) "On the non-existence of Reflexive Clitics" Previous analyses of Romance reflexive clitics have claimed that they absorb one of a verb's arguments (Grimshaw 1982, 1990; Wehrli 1986). In this paper, I show that reflexive clitics do not absorb an argument, but rather occur as the result of a mismatch between tiers in argument structure. I further argue that reflexive morphemes in Kannada (Dravidian) as well as Romance indicate argument structure mismatches, and not reflexivity, per se. Thus, reflexivity does not have a unique expression in syntax. Rather, it is realized by a more general argument structure configuration which includes at least external causation and reflexivity.

SALA 17
May 1995, UT Austin

Jeffrey L Lidz (UDelaware) "On the Non-reflexive nature of the Kannada Verbal Reflexive" In this paper I argue that there is not a unified syntax or a unified semantics of the Kannada verbal reflexive 'koL'. Rather, the properties of the verbal reflexive are best understood as indicating a mismatch between tiers in argument structure. On this view, multiple semantic representations can give rise to the verbal reflexive and multiple syntactic representations can occur with the verbal reflexive. But, the verbal reflexive does have a single representation in argument structure, the level of representation that interfaces with both semantics and syntax.

GGS
Jena 1995

Miriam Butt and Tracy Holloway King "Optionality in 'Free' Word Order Languages". Although many word orders are optional from a purely syntactic point of view in that they are not motivated by Case or agreement, they are the result of these languages being Discourse Configurational. Varying word orders in Urdu are motivated by (1) discourse considerations such as topic, focus, and backgrounded information and (2) semantic factors such as specificity. Certain positions in the phrase structure license particular discourse functions; in order to be properly interpreted, constituents must move into these positions, resulting not only in the varied word orders, but also in the concomitant discourse and semantic interpretations Contact: butt@sfs.nphil.uni-tuebingen.de or thking@csli.stanford.edu.

Formal Grammar Conference – Special Session on Clause Union.
Barcelona

Miriam Butt (University of Tuebingen) "Clause Union – then and now". This paper argues that clause union crosslinguistically is subject to a small set of restrictions which closely parallel the syntactic restrictions on control and raising constructions. Within this context, causatives in Urdu are examined, which have long been noted to involve "affected" agents (Saksena 1980), and which have been analyzed in terms of parameters on Argument Fusion that take affectedness into account (Alsina and Joshi 1991). Although the parameters that are posited under this account goes directly against the restrictive account of complex predicate formation proposed, a reexamination of Urdu causatives shows that they do indeed obey the proposed restrictions in light of an alternative analysis which takes into account the interaction between aspect and affectedness (Krifka 1992, Tenny 1987).

Linguistic Society of America, Annual Meeting
January 1995, New Orleans

Rakesh M. Bhatt (University of Tennessee) "Constraints, Optimality and Code switching". This paper develops an optimality-theoretic account (Prince and Smolensky 1993) for the observed patterns of intrasentential code-switching (ICS). The proposal is premised on the simple assumption that ICS strives for well-formedness. It begins with the assumption that when the embedding constituents are mixed into the matrix language, the syntax operates to optimize well-formedness(WF). Optimization of WF in ICS follows from the (violable) ranked constraints: *STRUC(syntactic structure is constructed minimally) ¿¿ FAITHFULNESS(the phrase internal structure must be determined by the WF conditions of the language) ¿¿ *SPEC(Avoid switching specifiers of lexical projections) ¿¿ Maximize switching(preference must be given to larger (structurally) switched units). The patterns of ICS emerge from the interactions among these ranked constraints

Bhuvana Narsimhan (Boston University) proposes a general lexical semantic constraint to account for Dative subjects in Hindi psychological predicate construction: an argument that is higher on the "affectedness" hierarchy is assigned Dative case ina predicate that is a state or an achievment. Hence, Dative case assignment is constrained by aspect and affectedness (Tenny, 1987, van Valin, 1991) - factors that also play a role in other lexical phenomena such as unaccusativity (McClure, 1990). Lexical case is not necssarily "quirky" or "idiosyncratic" case.

Semantics and Linguistic Theory V
February 1995, University of Texas, Austin.
(Proceedings Published by Cornell University)

Utpal Lahiri (UC, Irvine) "Negative Polarity in Hindi" provides an account of Negative Polarity Items in Hindi. He notes that NPI's are morphologically made up of an indefinite existential or a weak predicate and a particle that means "also" or "even". He argues that the NPI and free-choice behavior of these expressions comes about from the way these expressions are made up. He argues that in "positive" contexts the combination of "even" and a weak predicate leads to "implicature-clash". In downward entailing and generic contexts there is no clash involved and these items can occur freely. This approach explains on independent grounds why such items are only possible in certain contexts.

West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics
March 1995. University of Southern California, Los Angeles.
(Proceedings Published)

Utpal Lahiri (UC, Irvine) "The Syntax and Semantics of Indefinite+bhii Phrases in Hindi". This paper discusses the distribution of indefinite+bhii phrases in Hindi that behave like NPIs and free-choice items depending on whether they occur in non- generic or generic contexts. In the first part, the distribution of these items is shown to follow from the meanings of the internal components of these expressions. In the second part it is shown that some of the syntactic constraints proposed for the licensing of NPIs in Hindi are particular instances of constraints on scope- bearing elements and focused phrases.

Diachrony in Generative Syntax 4
University of Quebec at Montreal, Oct. 31 - Nov. 2 1995
(Proceedings Published)

Rajesh Bhatt (Penn) "Phrase Structure Change and The Loss of Narrative Inversion in Kashmiri" In this paper I argue that the gradual loss of Verb-initial word order in Modern Kashmiri is related to the borrowing of the complementizer "ki" into Kashmiri from Persian. I contrast the Kashmiri of Hatim's Tales with Modern Kashmiri - The Kashmiri of Hatim's Tales had abundant V1 word order while in Modern Kashmiri, depending upon the speaker declarative V1 is either unavailable or very restricted. I argue following Pintzuk (1991) for Old English that V1 word order in Old Kashmiri was produced as a result of movement into C, while ordinary V2 word order only has movement into an intermediate head, the one Rakesh Bhatt and James Yoon (1993) call Mood. When the complementizer "ki" was borrowed into Kashmiri, it occupied the C head and changed the feature content of C. Features relevant for Narrative Inversion and Conditional Inversion were lost and consequently Modern Kashmiri does not allow declarative V1.

Western Conference on Linguistics
University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, Oct. 1995
(Proceedings Published)

Rajesh Bhatt (Penn) "The Imperfectivity - Genericity Correlation" In several languages, such as Marathi, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Greek, Bulgarian etc. the progressive and the generic are expressed by the same form. I relate this ambiguity to the ambiguity of the simple tenses in English. The simple tenses in English are ambiguous between a generic/intensional reading and an episodic/extensional reading. The ambiguity of the imperfectives under discussion is similar: the progressive reading is extensional while the generic reading is extensional. Based on this similarity, I propose a formal mechanism to derive this ambiguity based on Carlson (1977, 1980) 's analysis of English bare plurals. The generic reading is obtained when the G(eneric) operator applies - while the progressive reading is obtained when the default existential closure applies to the imperfective predicate. I propose a condition on the application of the G operator: the G operator can only apply to predicates that are themselves compatible with states. Thus the English and Hindi progressives which are incomptaible with states lack generic readings. Similarly the Greek, Hindi, Marathi, Bulgarian etc. perfectives which are incompatible with states also lack generic readings. I also discuss some problems raised by this analysis such as the unambiguity of the Hindi habitual which is historically derived from the imperfective and the change of state readings associated with stative perfectives in Hindi, Greek etc. (i.e. 'John tall be-perfective' means 'John became tall' and not 'John is tall'.)

4 Forthcoming Work/ Unpublished Ms.

Bayer, J. (1995) "CP-Extraposition as Argument Shift" unpublished ms, Friedrich-Schiller-Universitaet, Jena.

Bayer, J. (1995). Directionality and Logical Form: On the Scope of Focusing Particles and WH-In-Situ. To be published by Kluwer Academic Publishers (Studies in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory).

Anoop Mahajan (UCLA) "Oblique Subjects" (a series of five lectures, Dutch National Graduate Program, University of Leiden, June 1994). These lectures develop a proposal for a version of categorial uniformity of underlying structures across languages. It is suggested that categorial structures instantiating parallel thematic organizations should be categorially similar (an extension of UTAH). The implications of this proposal are examined by exploring the categorial nature of subjects in a variety of construction types in some sub branches of the Indo-European family. It is argued that the categorial differences between the subjects in these languages can be related to certain other primary differences like word order, agreement and productivity of scrambling operations.

Anoop Mahajan (UCLA) "Against A Rightward Movement Analysis of Extraposition and Rightward Scrambling in Hindi" in Shigeo Tonoike (ed) Kurosio Publishers (Japan). This paper examines the nature and interaction of two putative rightward movement syntactic operations in Hindi. These operations are Rightward Scrambling and Extraposition. It is argued that the properties of these two operations are inconsistent with their standard analysis that treats them as rightward movement rules. On the other hand, the descriptive effects concerning the nature and interaction of these operations follow straightforwardly if extraposition is treated as a clause-stranding operation and rightward scrambling as either a leftward movement rule or as an argument in-situ in conjunction with VP or AGRP preposing operations. The paper presents additional empirical support for the theory of anti-symmetry of Kayne (1994).

Anoop Mahajan (UCLA) "Universal Grammar and the Typology of Ergative Languages" in A. Alexiadu and T.A. Hall (eds). John Benjamins Publications. One of the central goals of linguistics is to construct a model of language that is not only consistent with the observable differences between languages but provides a basis for an explanation of such observable differences. Within the Principles and Parameters approach, differences between individual languages, and between groups of languages, are usually handled by positing parameterization of universal principles. However, differences between individual languages often come in clusters. Recent work within P&P takes the view that several discrete differences between two languages may sometimes be linked to a fundamental difference between such languages. This paper aims to illustrate how a research program can be implemented in the empirical domain of case marking systems. It is suggested that the well known case marking differences between nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive languages are not primary but are merely surface manifestations of certain other fundamental factors which are also responsible for many other typological traits of these two classes of languages.