

### A cross-linguistically rare case system in Tlapanec

The Azoyú variety of Tlapanec (meʔ<sup>M</sup>pa<sup>H</sup>) 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’ (cf. Gr. *pēgē* ‘fount, source, origin’). This encodes an actor involved in an event which also involves a Dative-like undergoer. So far I have not been able to identify a similar case system in any other language. In the larger context of a conference on typologically rare features it seems worthwhile to seek an explanation for the phenomenon and to throw out the question of whether the type of explanation proposed would be applicable to other *rarissime*. While rare, the Pegative case is not strange. It follows from the conspiracy of different features of Tlapanec that such a category could exist. First, the language prohibits more than one case-marked item per clause. This, in turn, relates to the structural make-up of the language by which cases are signalled on the predicate (rather than the noun) by means of suffixes of which there can only be one present at a time. Secondly, the language has a Dative category. Thirdly, only human undergoers may be case-marked. This means that if the Dative-like status of an inanimate undergoer (i.e., its status as recipient or mildly affected) is to be indicated, this must happen through a special case-marking of the actor. Fourthly, case marking of predicates involving a Dative-like undergoer operates on a split ergative basis where case is assigned to either non-third person undergoers or, when a third person undergoer is involved, to non-third person actors; in the first case the Dative is used, and in the second case its mirror category, the Pegative. From these structural facts a common-sensical motivation for the Pegative could be construed. The point about this type of explanation is that the rarity of the category in question is seen as a consequence of a conspiracy of structural features each of which are not rare. Possibly other *rarissime* may similarly be explained as the results of ‘innocent’ conspiracies.