# TGIF:
# The NTU Linguist Chatroom
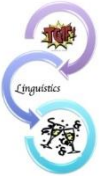
## Optional case marking in Sinitic and beyond:
## Mainland Southeast Asia and China

Optional case marking refers to the situation where a case marker can be present or absent in a particular context without affecting its role interpretation (see Kittilä 2005, McGregor 2010, 2013). An example from an Australian language, Umpithamu, illustrates this principle for optional ergative marking in its contrastive treatment of the agent noun, *waypala* 'whitefella' in (1) and (2):

Umpithamu (Pama-Nyungan, Cape York, J.-C.Verstraete)

(1) *wayapala-***mpal***   maarra-n=antyangku*   *motoka-nti*
    whitefella-**ERG**   take-PST=1PLEXC.ACC   car-COMIT
    'The whitefella took us in the car.'

(2) *waypala-**∅***   *maarra-n=antyangku*
    whitefella   take-PST=1PLEXC.ACC
    'The whitefella took us.'

Languages of Southeast Asia and China present a rich and diverse set of constructions involving optional case marking for either agents or objects. The aim of this talk is thus to provide an areal survey of the typology of this kind of case marking, in the context of a range of phenomena typically associated with it, and which appear to trigger it, such as animacy- and tense-based splits, 'unexpected agents' and its use with non-canonical word order. Much recent work in this area has been driven by text-based approaches to language description, as well as quantitative and areal approaches to typology, with the domain remaining, nonetheless, somewhat diffuse both terminologically and conceptually. In fact, these related phenomena can be treated as another reflection of asymmetry in grammar, as argued in Chappell & Verstraete, (2016).

I show that the Southeast Asian languages families of Tai-Kadai, Hmong and Austroasiatic in general pattern similarly for optional direct object marking (DOMs), typically making use of *take* verbs as the source of their markers. This resembles the situation in Sinitic for the two areas of Northern and Far Southern China, while in the Central and Southeastern linguistic areas, an array of sources is to be found including *give* and *help* verbs, and oblique markers (Chappell 2015). Tibeto-Burman stands out with the widespread use of both optional agent and optional object marking, the former being also known as optional ergative marking, as in (1) above.

Chappell, Hilary & Jean-Christophe Verstraete. 2016. Optional and differential case marking: Typology and diachrony. Workshop on « Asymmetrical grammar: Optional and differential case marking» held at the European Summer School in Linguistic Typology, CNRS, Porquerolles, Hyères, 4-17 September 2016. To appear in *Linguistic Compass*.
_____. 2015. Linguistic areas in China for differential object marking, passive and comparative constructions. In H. Chappell (ed.) *Diversity in Sinitic languages.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.13-52.
Kittilä, S. 2005. Optional marking of arguments. *Language Sciences* 27. 483-514.
McGregor, W. 2010. Optional ergative case marking systems in a typological-semiotic perspective. *Lingua* 120: 1610-1636.
McGregor, W. 2013. Optionality in grammar and language use. *Linguistics* 51: 1147-1204.

## Speaker

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The TGIF seminar series is organised by the Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies, HSS