# Ryukyuan languages from a typological perspective:

# with a special focus on marked nominative

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Linguists would all agree that Japanese is one of the most well-known and oft-cited languages in the literature of linguistic typology. By contrast, Ryukyuan, a group of languages which also constitute the Japonic Family, has received much less attention in the typological literature, as if they were almost "invisible." This is particularly unfortunate for linguistic typology, because Ryukyuan languages are full of properties which poses difficult problems for, and often shed new light on, the existing typological generalisations which have been made without reference to Ryukyuan data.

The present study discusses one such issue which demonstrates the potential contribution of Ryukyuan languages to linguistic typology: the *marked nominative alignment*, a pattern of alignment whereby the intransitive subject (S) and the transitive subject (A) are both case-marked whereas the transitive direct object (P) is left unmarked. Cross-linguistically, the marked nominative pattern is known to be extremely rare (Handschuh 2014: 1). This pattern is often considered "unusual" in terms of the distinguishing function of core case marking: given that case-marking of core arguments functions to distinguish between A and P, S should be always unmarked. This view, or Overt Marking Hypothesis (a term following Handschuh 2014), is still very influential in linguistic typology (Comrie 1978, Dixon 1979, de Hoop and Malchukov 2008, etc.). Overt Marking Hypothesis is based on the recurrent pattern exhibited by worlds' languages that if there is an unmarked case for any of S, A, and P, then it is also used (at least) for S, a generalisation known as Greenberg's Universal 38 (Greenberg 1963). The prediction is then made that if A or P is left unmarked in a system, S must also be unmarked. The marked accusative pattern (where only P is marked) and the marked nominative-accusative pattern (where S, A, and P are all marked) do not contradict with this prediction, whereas the marked nominative, where S (together with A) is marked while P is unmarked, clearly goes against this prediction.

It is striking that Handschuh's (2014) comprehensive typology of marked nominative (and a much rarer marked absolutive pattern) disregards the Ryukyuan data entirely, even though, as will be shown in this talk, the marked nominative pattern constitutes a major pattern of this language group. The main purpose of the present talk is then to attract attention to the marked nominative in

Ryukyuan languages, describing basic patterns attested in several languages and discussing how the Ryukyuan patterns are situated within the typology of marked nominative and clarifying the way they diverge from the existing generalisations.