Project proposal: The alignment system of Beria – split-S or middle system?

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This talk will present a research proposal on the alignment system and its interaction with valence changing operations in Beria (Nilo-Saharan, Sudan/Chad). Beria exhibits a typologically exceptional system of argument coding which has been the object of diverse analyses in the past (verbal form classes, alignment system, semantic verb classes, derivations). None of these analyses is satisfying, and the objective of the research proposal is to conduct a systematic analysis of the morphosyntactic and semantic properties of a larger number of verbs and the valence changing operations applied to them.

In particular, the proposed project aims to disentangle the interrelation of two grammatical phenomena: split intransitivity and middle marking. Beria's argument coding system has been claimed to be split-S. At the same time, it shows an intimate connection to the middle domain on various levels. A solution which integrates all phenomena involved is missing. The hypothesis pursued in the proposed project is that Beria exhibits a middle inflection within a NOM-ACC alignment system. The split-S features of the alignment system in this account then are a corollary of a middle marking system. The project foremost intends to enhance the description of Beria. For typology, new insights into the understudied relation between split-S phenomena and voice/valency alternations are to be expected. The results of the project will also be of major interest for our knowledge of African languages as such a system has not yet been described for the continent.

The talk will delineate the linguistic facts, previous analyses, and their shortcomings. The second part introduces the basic hypothesis underlying the proposal. In the last part the objectives and the methods to be used will be outlined.