This dissertation is about case competition in headless relatives. Case competition is a situation in which two cases are assigned but only one of them surfaces. One of the constructions in which case competition takes place is in headless relatives, i.e. relative clauses that lack a head. This dissertation has two goals: (i) to give an overview of the data, and (ii) to provide an account for the observed data.

The grammaticality of a headless relative is determined by two aspects. The first aspect concerns which case wins the case competition. In all languages with case competition that I am aware of, this is determined by the case scale in NOM < ACC < DAT. A case more to the right on the scale wins over a case more to the left on the scale. This scale is not specific to case competition in headless relatives, but it can also be observed in syncretism patterns and morphological case containment. I show that that the case scale can be derived from assuming the cumulative case decomposition (cf. Caha 2009). A case wins over another case when it contains all features that the other case contains.

The second aspect of case competition in headless relatives concerns whether the winner of the case competition is allowed to surface when it wins the case competition. The winning case can be either the internal case required by the predicate in the relative clause, or the external case required by the predicate in the main clause. It differs from language to language whether they allow the internal and the external case to surface.

All language types I discuss allow for a headless relative when the internal and the external case match. The unrestricted type of language allows both the internal case and the external case to surface when either of them wins the case competition. Examples of this language type are Old High German, Gothic and Ancient Greek. The internal-only type of language allows only the internal case to surface when it wins the case competition, and it does not allow the external case to do so. An example of this language type is Modern German. The external-only type of language allows only the external case to surface when it wins the case competition, and it does not allow the internal case to do so. To my knowledge, there is no language that behaves like this. The matching type of language allows neither the internal nor the external case to surface when either of them wins the case competition. An example of this language type is Polish.

To account for the data, I set up a proposal that generates the attested patterns and excludes the non-attested ones. I let the variation between languages follow from properties of languages that can be independently observed. By investigating the morphology of the languages, I suggest differences between the lexical entries in the different languages. These different lexical entries ultimately lead languages to be of different types. In my proposal, I assume that headless relatives are derived from light-headed relatives. Light-headed relatives contain a light head and a relative pronoun. In a headless relative either the light head or the relative pronoun is deleted. The necessary requirement for deletion is that the deleted element (either the light head or relative pronoun) is structurally or formally contained in the other element.

I motivate the analysis for the internal-only type of language for Modern German, for the matching type of language for Polish and for the unrestricted type of language for Old High German. I first identify the morphemes that the light heads and relative pronouns in the languages consist of, and then I show to which features each of the morphemes correspond. The crucial difference between the internal-only type of language Modern German and the matching type of language Polish is how the phi and case features are spelled out. In Modern German they are spelled out by a phi and case feature portmanteau, and, in Polish, the same features are spelled out by a phi feature morpheme and a case feature morpheme. Old High German differs from the other two languages in that it has light heads and relative pronouns that are syncretic. I show how these differences in the morphology of the languages ultimately leads to different grammaticality patterns in headless relatives.

Comparing my account to others shows that all proposals account for the case facts using some kind of case hierarchy. The proposals differ in how they model the variation, both in the technical details of the proposal, but more importantly, also in empirical scope and predictions they make.