

A Stationary Field Trip: Class Language Survey

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- **Linguistic domain:** Syntax
- **Language name:** Kartuli ena
- **Spoken in:** Georgian
- **Approximate number of speakers:** 4,000,000
- **Informant name:** Otto Tchigladze

A. Is the subject obligatory in this language? If it is, is it possible to omit it at least with verbs where it does not receive a theta-role?

Georgian, as a consistent Null Subject Language (NSL), or pro-drop language, exhibits syntactic features allowing the omission of explicit subjects in sentences. Similar to other consistent NSLs like Italian, Greek, and Spanish, Georgian leverages a rich verbal agreement system that helps reconstruct the intended subject even when it is not explicitly stated. This feature provides the language with a degree of syntactic flexibility and efficiency.

In sentences, the subject can often be omitted across various contexts, extending beyond specific verb types. The verb form, enriched with its inflectional properties, typically implies the subject, enabling the speaker to communicate effectively without the need for explicit subject mention.

For example, weather expressions such as "it rains" are succinctly conveyed in Georgian with "წვიმს" (tsvims), translating directly to "rains". In this instance, the subject 'it' is not stated but understood from context (see Example 1). Similarly, in expressions like "it seems that", the subject is integrated within the verb, as shown in "ეგეობა წვიმს" (Etkoba tsvims - "it seems rains"), where the subject is again inferred rather than explicitly stated (see Example 2).

- (1) Tsvims
rain.3.SG
"It rains"
- (2) Etkoba tsvims
seem.3.SG rain.3.SG
"It seems it's raining"

This feature of Georgian, where subjects can be omitted yet understood, exemplifies the language's syntactic flexibility and stands in contrast to languages like English, where subject omission can lead to ambiguity.

B. What is the most normal order of the various elements within the DP?

In Georgian, the structure of the Determiner Phrase (DP) displays some similarities to Italian, particularly in the order of elements, despite Georgian's inherent flexibility and the absence of articles. Demonstratives typically precede the noun, as seen in the phrase "ის ხალხი" (Is khalkhi - "those people"), mirroring the order in Italian (see Example 3).

Cardinal numerals generally precede the noun as well, followed by adjectives. However, it's noteworthy that nouns often appear in the singular form even when the meaning is plural, as in "სამი მოხუცი ძაღლი გალიაში" (Sami mokhutsi dzaghli galiashi - "three old dog in the cage"), which differs from the plural usage in English and Italian (see Example 4).

The position of possessors in Georgian also aligns with the noun, as demonstrated in "ბიჭის სამი საუკეთესო მეგობარი" (Bitchis sami sauketeso megobari - "the boy's three best friends"), where the possessor precedes the number, adjective, and noun, a structure somewhat akin to English (see Example 5).

Relative clauses in Georgian follow the noun, similar to both English and Italian. An example of this is "ბიჭი რომელსაც ვიცნობ" (Bitchi romelsats vitsnob - "a boy that I know"), where the relative clause is placed after the noun (see Example 6).

Prepositional modifiers in Georgian are often fused with the nouns, as seen in "გოგო წითელი შარფით" (Gogo tsiteli sharpit - "a girl with a red scarf"), diverging from the separate prepositional phrases typical in English and Italian (see Example 7).

- (3) Is_{demonstr.} khalkhi_{noun}
those people
"Those people"
- (4) Sami_{num} mokhutsi_{adj} dzaghli_{noun} [galiashi]_{pp}
three old dog in-the-cage
"Three old dogs in the cage"
- (5) [Bitchis]_{poss.} sami_{num} sauketeso_{adj} megobari_{noun}
the-boy's three best friends
"The boy's three best friends"
- (6) Bitchi_{noun} [romelsats vitsnob]_{rel. clause}
a-boy that I-know
"A boy that I know"
- (7) Gogo_{noun} [tsiteli sharpit]_{prep. modifier}
a-girl red with-scarf
"A girl with a red scarf"

C. Can you have Wh-elements *in situ*? What happens when you have multiple Wh- elements?

In Georgian, Wh-elements typically appear at the beginning of a question, rather than *in situ*. This is evident in questions like "რომელი ბიჭი დაინახა მერიმ?" (Romeli bitchi dainakha merim? - "Which boy did Mary see?"), where "რომელი" (which) is placed at the start, preceding the subject and the verb (see Example 8). The disambiguation of the subject, in this case, is achieved through the verb ending, indicating that Mary is the subject of the sentence.

When dealing with multiple Wh-elements in a single question, Georgian maintains this fronting of Wh-elements. For instance, in the question "რას ფიქრობ, ვინ რა იყიდა ვისთვის?" (Ras pikrob, vin ra ikida vistvis - "What do you think, who bought what for whom?"), the Wh-elements "რას" (what), "ვინ" (who), and "ვისთვის" (for whom) are placed at the beginning of their respective clauses (see Example 9). It is noteworthy that the general question "რას ფიქრობ" (What do you think) is not specifically linked to the latter part of the sentence but rather introduces the question in a broader sense.

- (8) Romeli bitchi dainakha merim?
which boy saw Mary
Which boy did Mary see?
- (9) Ras pikrob, vin ra ikida vistvis
What think, who what bought for-whom
What do you think, who bought what for whom?

D. Do adjectives agree with nouns in this language? If so, do they also agree when in predicative position?

In Georgian, adjectives do not conform to the number of the nouns they modify, marking a notable distinction from languages where adjectives agree in both number and gender with the nouns. This characteristic is evident in phrases like "რბილი ვარდები" (Rbili vardebi - "the soft roses"), where "რბილი" (soft) remains singular even though "ვარდები" (roses) is plural (see Example 10).

Furthermore, this lack of agreement extends to predicative positions. In sentences such as "ვარდები არის რბილი" (Vardebi aris rbili - "The roses are soft"), the adjective "რბილი" (soft) remains in the singular form, irrespective of the plurality of "ვარდები" (roses). Additionally, the verb "არის" (aris - is) also maintains its singular form, a feature consistent in Georgian, even when referring to multiple inanimate objects. Thus, both the verb and the adjective retain their singular form regardless of the plurality of the noun (see Example 11).

- (10) Rbili_{sing.} vardebi_{plur.}
soft roses
"The soft roses"
- (11) Vardebi_{plur.} ari_{sing.} rbili_{sing.}
roses is soft
"The roses are soft"

This linguistic phenomenon in Georgian highlights a unique aspect of the language where the agreement between adjectives and nouns in terms of number is not observed, a contrast to many other languages where such agreement is a grammatical necessity.

E. In natural language heads can take their complements either left or right. But not all languages are consistent in this choice. In this language, do verbs, prepositions, complementizers and determiners take their complement in the same direction? If not, illustrate case where they do not.

In Georgian, the direction in which heads take their complements varies depending on the category of the head. This inconsistency is a notable feature of the language's syntactic structure.

For Determiner Phrases (DP), particularly when a numeral functions as a determiner, Georgian demonstrates a leftward orientation. In the phrase "სამი მოხუცი ძაღლი" (Sami mokhutsi dzagli - "three old dogs"), the numeral "სამი" (three) precedes the noun "ძაღლი" (dog) and the adjective "მოხუცი" (old), thus taking its complement to the left (see Tree 1 in Figure 1).

Prepositional Phrases (PP) in Georgian can either integrate the preposition as a suffix to the noun or have it as a separate word. When the preposition is suffixed, it does not exhibit a clear left or right directionality, as in "მერისთან" (Meristan - "with Mary"). However, when used as separate words, prepositions precede their objects, as in "მერისთან ერთად" (Meristan ertad - "with Mary"), showing a consistent leftward orientation (see Tree 2 in Figure 1).

Verb Phrases (VP) in Georgian typically show a rightward directionality, with the verb following its object. This is observed in "კატის დანახვა" (Katis danakhva - "see the cat"), where "დანახვა" (see) follows the object "კატის" (the cat) (see Tree 3 in Figure 1).

Complementizer Phrases (CP) also exhibit a leftward orientation, where the complementizer precedes the clause. An example is "ვინც ასრულებს დავალებას" (Vints asrulebs davalebas - "that do the tasks"), with "ვინც" (that) appearing before the verb and its object (see Tree 4 in Figure 1).

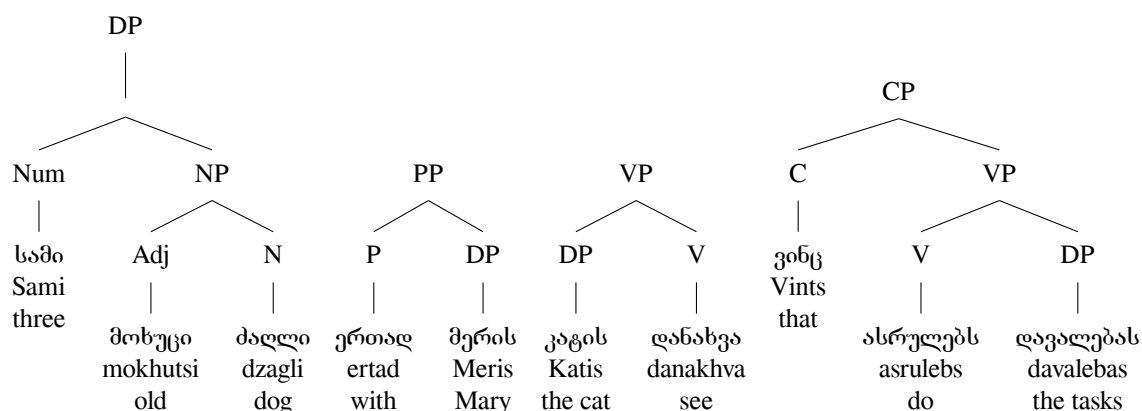


Figure 1: Syntax trees for Georgian phrases

In summary, Georgian displays a mixed approach to the directionality of head-complement structures. While Determiner Phrases, Prepositional Phrases (as separate words), and Complementizer Phrases predominantly show a leftward orientation, Verb Phrases exhibit a rightward directionality. This variation indicates that Georgian does not adhere to a consistent pattern in the orientation of its head-complement structures, contrasting with languages that maintain a uniform directionality across different syntactic categories.

F. Is there Case (nominative/accusative/dative/...) in this language? Test by asking to put a noun X in various relations with respect to the verb and see if it changes (e.g. “N sleeps”. “N eats an apple”, “I see N”, “I give N a book”). Test with pronouns and full nouns separately, they could differ. Check whether the subject of intransitive verbs has the same case as the subject of transitive ones.

In Georgian, the case marking system demonstrates distinct patterns for nouns and pronouns, depending on their syntactic roles. The language exhibits a clear distinction in case inflection, which is particularly noticeable with pronouns.

1. **Nominative Case with Intransitive Verbs:** For sentences like “N sleeps,” the nominative case is used for both nouns and pronouns. In “ოტოს სძინავს” (Otos sdzinavs - “Otto is sleeping”), the noun “ოტო” (Otto) remains unchanged. However, with pronouns, the nominative form “ის” (is - “he”) changes to the accusative form “მას” (mas - “him”) in “მას სძინავს” (Mas sdzinavs - “He is sleeping”) (see Examples 12 and 13).

(12) Otos sdzinavs
Otto sleeps
“Otto is sleeping”

(13) Mas sdzinavs
He sleeps
“He is sleeping”

2. **Nominative Case with Transitive Verbs:** In transitive constructions like “N eats an apple,” the nominative case is similarly employed. “ოტო მიირთვამს ვაშლს” (Oto miirtvams vashls - “Otto eats an apple”) and “ის მიირთვამს ვაშლს” (Is miirtvams vashls - “He eats an apple”) show that the subject remains in the nominative case for both nouns and pronouns (see Examples 14 and 15).

(14) Oto miirtvams vashls
Otto eats apple
“Otto eats an apple”

(15) Is miirtvams vashls
He eats apple
“He eats an apple”

3. **Accusative Case:** When functioning as direct objects, as in “I see N,” pronouns demonstrate clear case changes. In “მე ვხედავ ოტოს” (Me vkhedav otos - “I see Otto”), the noun “ოტო” (Otto) changes to “ოტოს” (Otto’s), indicating the accusative case. Pronouns also reflect this change, as “მას” (mas - “him”) in “მე ვხედავ მას” (Me vkhedav mas - “I see him”) is the accusative form of “ის” (is - “he”) (see Examples 16 and 17).

(16) Me vkhedav otos
I see Otto
“I see Otto”

(17) Me vkhedav mas
I see him
“I see him”

4. **Dative Case:** In dative constructions like “I give N a book,” both nouns and pronouns undergo a change to reflect the dative case. “მე ვაძლევ ოტოს წიგნს” (Me vadzlev otos tsigns - “I give Otto a book”) and “მე ვაძლევ მას წიგნს” (Me vadzlev mas tsigns - “I give him a book”) illustrate this case marking, where “ოტოს” (Otto’s) and “მას” (him) are in the dative form (see Examples 18 and 19).

(18) Me vadzlev otos tsigns
I give Otto book
“I give Otto a book”

(19) Me vadzlev mas tsigns
I give him book
“I give him a book”

In summary, Georgian exhibits a clear distinction in case marking for pronouns, depending on their syntactic role as subjects or objects, and whether the verbs are intransitive or transitive. This is a contrast to full nouns, which also show case changes but in a less pronounced manner than pronouns.

G. In English the simple present tense expresses an action that takes places *habitually*. For instance *John smokes* means that he is a smoker. To report an individual event in the present, speakers use the *present progressive*. This is not the case in other languages. Can the *simple present* be used to report a specific, non habitual event in the language you are examining? Is there a separate, progressive form?

In the Georgian language, the distinction between habitual and specific, non-habitual actions in the present tense is not as pronounced as it is in English. The simple present tense in Georgian can describe both habitual actions and specific events occurring at the moment. For example, "ჯონი ეწევა" (Joni etseva - "John smokes") is used to indicate both that John is a smoker (habitually smokes) and that John is smoking at this very moment. This lack of distinction means that Georgian does not employ a separate present progressive form as found in English (see Example 20).

However, an interesting aspect of Georgian is the presence of distinct forms for some verbs to express habitual actions. The verb "to go" exemplifies this, where different forms are used to indicate general versus habitual actions. "ჯონი მიდის" (Joni midis - "John goes") is less specific and typically requires additional context, while "ჯონი ღადის" (Joni dadis - "John goes habitually") explicitly denotes a habitual action. Despite this exception, the majority of verbs in Georgian do not have a specific habitual form (see Examples 21 and 22).

- (20) Joni etseva
John smokes
"John smokes"/"John is smoking"
- (21) Joni midis
John goes
"John goes (generally)"
- (22) Joni dadis
John goes-habitually
"John goes (habitually)"

H. Do you note anything strange or special in the syntax of this language? Which aspects strike you as similar to your own language (if any)

Georgian syntax exhibits several unique features, alongside intriguing similarities to Italian. One notable aspect is the flexibility in word order, a trait shared with Italian. Both languages allow variations in word order for emphasis or conversational context, though the underlying syntactic reasons for this flexibility may differ due to their respective language families.

In terms of case usage, particularly how pronouns change form based on their syntactic role, Georgian shows similarities to Italian. Both languages demonstrate clear distinctions in pronoun forms when functioning as subjects, direct objects, or indirect objects. Georgian's extensive case system, especially for pronouns, mirrors Italian's approach, albeit Georgian applies a more comprehensive case system to nouns as well.

Another parallel is the lack of a distinct continuous tense in Georgian, comparable to Italian's use of the simple present tense for both habitual actions and immediate events. In both languages, contextual cues are crucial in discerning the temporal aspect of an action.

However, Georgian's syntax also includes unique elements. The absence of articles before nouns, contrasting with Italian's use of definite and indefinite articles, marks a significant linguistic divergence. Additionally, Georgian employs specific verb forms to indicate habitual actions, such as with the verb "to go", a feature less common in Italian. These characteristics underscore Georgian's unique syntactic identity within the Indo-European language family.