

The imperfect correlation between morphological exponence and syntactic structure

Two case studies from West Circassian

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Diagnosing syntax through morphological exponence

The premise

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The absence of morphological exponence of a particular category correlates with the absence of the corresponding syntactic category in the structure.

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morphological exponence \Leftrightarrow presence of syntactic category

Example: DP vs NP

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(*Öztürk and Eren 2020 on Caucasian languages!)

If a language lacks overt articles, nominals are NPs (= lack the DP layer).

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Extended to language-internal contexts:

If nominals systematically lacks articles/definiteness marking in particular syntactic environments, these are NPs.

My claim

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The correlation between morphological exponence and syntactic structure is **at best imperfect**.

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- ▶ Such diagnostics **may** render the correct results.

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1. **Verbal cross-reference in nominalizations:**

Does the absence of verbal cross-reference markers correlate with the absence of verbal functional structure?

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1. **Verbal cross-reference in nominalizations:**

Does the absence of verbal cross-reference markers correlate with the absence of verbal functional structure?

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Does the absence of case marking correlate with the absence of a DP layer?

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Evidence: two case studies from West Circassian

1. **Verbal cross-reference in nominalizations:**

Does the absence of verbal cross-reference markers correlate with the absence of verbal functional structure? **No.**

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Does the absence of case marking correlate with the absence of a DP layer? **No.**

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Does the absence of case marking correlate with the absence of a DP layer? **No.**

****Brief teaser:** come hear about this at **CaucLing!**

Background on West Circassian

Case study 1: Absence of cross-reference morphology

Case study 2: Absence of case marking (short teaser)

Conclusion

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Case study 1: Absence of cross-reference morphology

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Conclusion

West Circassian (or Adyghe):

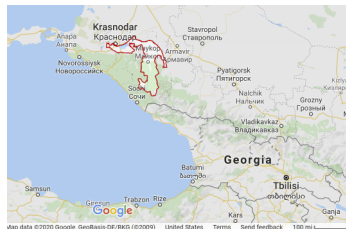
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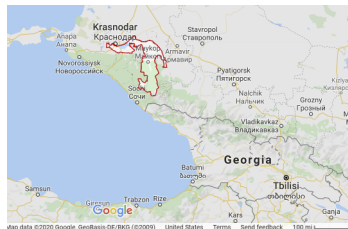
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West Circassian

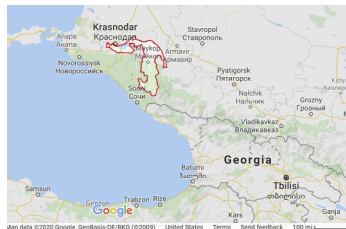
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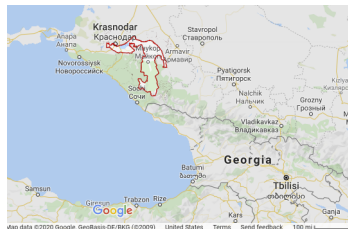
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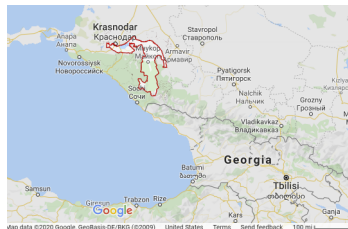
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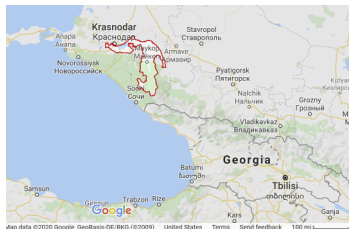


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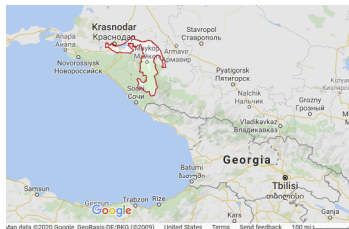


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Disclaimer: Glossing and segmentation may be simplified for exposition.

West Circassian is polysynthetic

Head marking and pro-drop:

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səqəpfaɾjəβeləβ^wəβ

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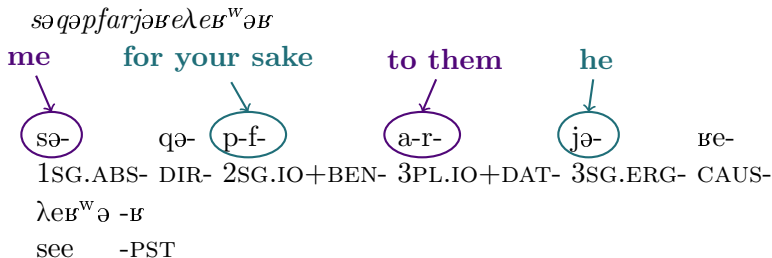
sə-	qə-	p-f-	a-r-	jə-	be-
1SG.ABS-	DIR-	2SG.IO+BEN-	3PL.IO+DAT-	3SG.ERG-	CAUS-
ləb ^w ə -b					
see	-PST				

‘He showed me to them for your sake.’

(Korotkova and Lander 2010:301)

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Head marking and pro-drop:

səqəpfarjəβeləβ^wəβ

me		for your sake		to them		he	
↓		↓		↓		↓	
sə-	qə-	p-f-		a-r-		jə-	βe-
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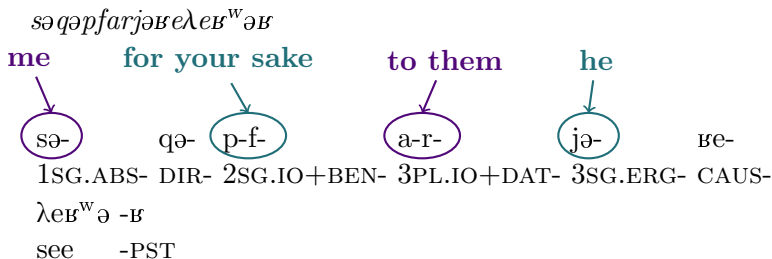
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Order of cross-reference markers:

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$$s\partial q\partial p f a r j\partial B e \lambda e B^W \partial B$$

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for your sake

to them

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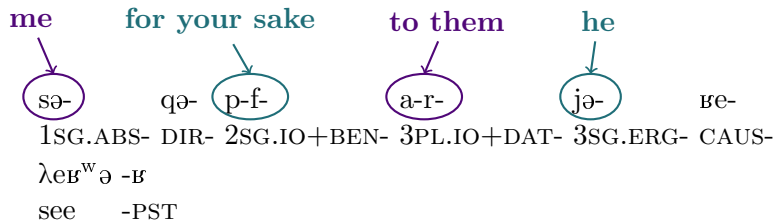
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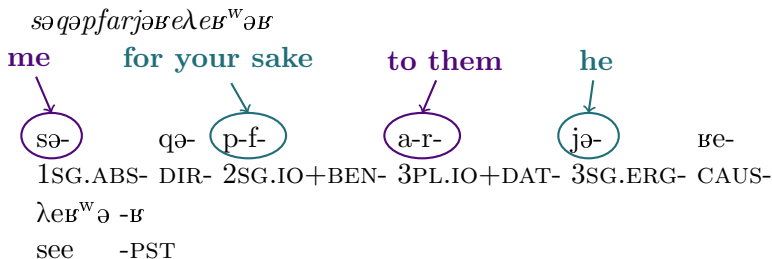
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[c^weqe- əç'jə- š'əʁən]- t^weç'an -xe -r
footwear- and- clothes- shop -PL -ABS

'shops of shoes and clothes' (Lander 2017:93)

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[abʒexe]- šəw -jə- š'
Abzakh- horseman -LNK- three

'three Abzakh horsemen' (Lander 2017:83)

Head marking on nominals

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s- šəpχ^wəxer
1**SG.PR**- sister.PL.ABS

‘my sisters’

INALIENABLE

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t- jə- ɛ^wəneɛ^wəxem
1PL.PR- POSS- neighbor.PL.OBL

‘our neighbors’

ALIENABLE

Case marking

-r (ABS):

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- ▶ intransitive subject

S

mə pšaše-**r** daxew qaš^we
this girl-**ABS** well dances

‘This girl dances well.’

Case marking

-r (ABS):

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- ▶ direct object

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A

O

sabəjxe-**m** haxe-**r** qaləw^wəw
children-**OBL** dogs-**ABS** saw

‘The children saw the dogs.’

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IO

mafe-qes ježape-**m** seḵ^we
day-each school-**OBL** go

‘I go to school every day.’

Case marking

-r (ABS):

- ▶ intransitive subject
- ▶ direct object

-m (OBL):

- ▶ transitive subject
- ▶ applied object
- + complements of P

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- + possessors

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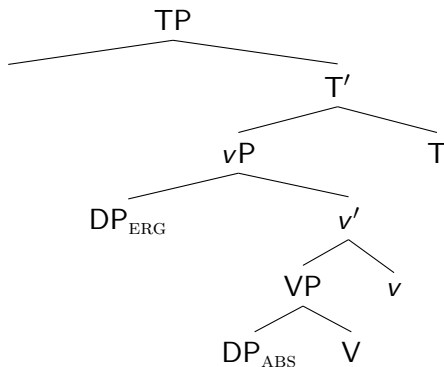
‘I go to school every day.’

Case marking on possessors

pšaše-**m** Ø-jə-pšeşe^w
girl-**OBL** 3SG.PR-POSS-female.friend

'the girl's friend'

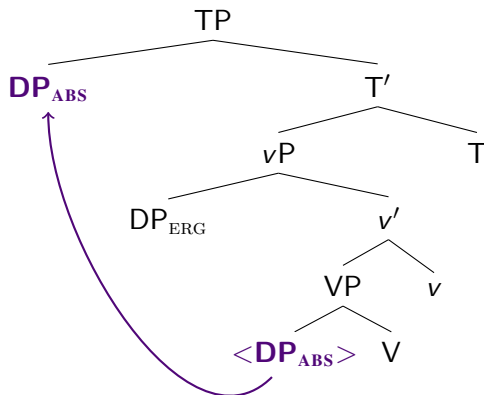
High absolutive



(Bittner and Hale 1996; Manning 1996; Baker 1997; Aldridge 2008; Yuan 2018, 2022;
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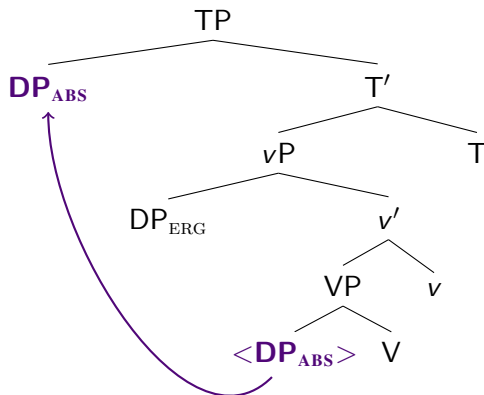
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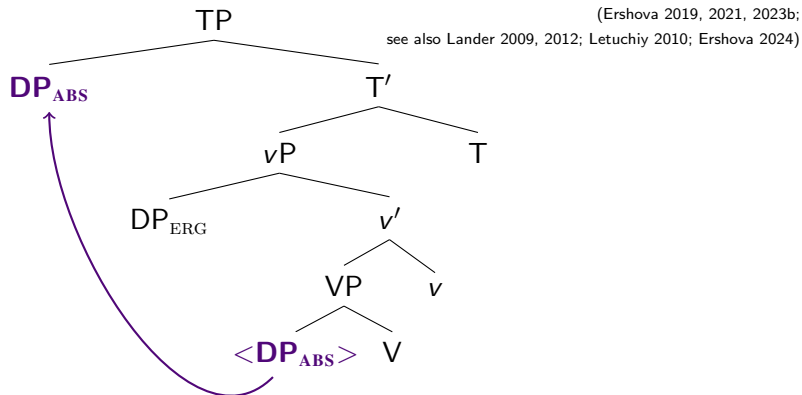
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High absolutive

- ▶ DP_{ABS} moves to Spec,TP
- ▶ DP_{ERG} (and DP_{IO}) remain in situ
- ▶ evidence from parasitic gaps and **reciprocal binding**



(Bittner and Hale 1996; Manning 1996; Baker 1997; Aldridge 2008; Yuan 2018, 2022;
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Reciprocals are covert and trigger **reciprocal agreement** on the predicate:

(Ershova 2019, 2023b)

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- ▶ correlates with syntactic position of the reciprocal

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Reciprocals in West Circassian

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(Ershova 2019, 2023b)

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Reciprocals are subject to Condition A

= must be bound by a local c-commanding antecedent

(Ershova 2019, 2023b)

Reciprocal agreement

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ABS external argument binds **IO**

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⇒ REC replaces IO agreement

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⇒ REC replaces IO agreement

š^wə- qə- d- de- š^weš't
2PL.ABS- DIR- 1PL.IO- COM- dance.FUT

BASELINE

'You(pl) will dance with us'

Reciprocal agreement

ABS external argument binds **IO**

⇒ REC replaces IO agreement

you

↓
š^wə-

2PL.ABS-

with us

qə-

↓
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↓
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RECIPROCAL

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Reciprocal agreement does not affect transitivity

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axe-me ?eg^wəb̂ze-r Ø- ze- r- a- təž'ə
that.PL-ERG cup-ABS 3ABS- REC.IO- DAT- 3PL.ERG- give

‘They pass the cup to each other.’

(<http://adyghe.web-corpora.net/>)

Reciprocal agreement does not affect transitivity

ERG binds **IO**

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sabəjxe-**r** Ø- **z-** e- pλəž'əx
child.PL-**ABS** 3ABS- **REC.IO-** DAT- look.PL

‘The children are looking at each other.’

Reciprocal agreement does not affect transitivity

ABS binds **IO**

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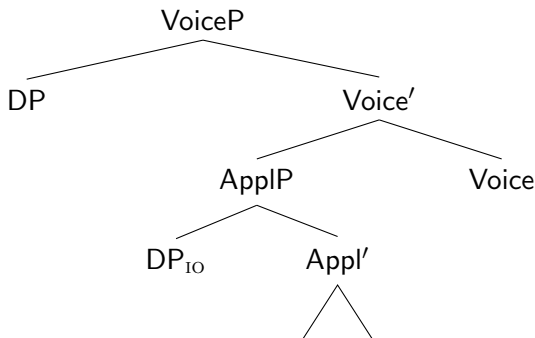
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Reciprocal binding is established via c-command

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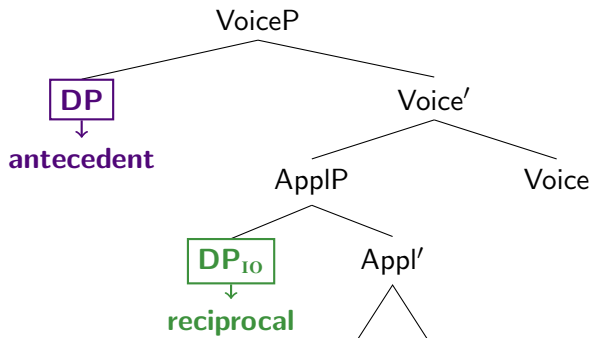
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Syntactic ergativity in reciprocal binding

Reciprocals provide evidence for high absolutive syntax:

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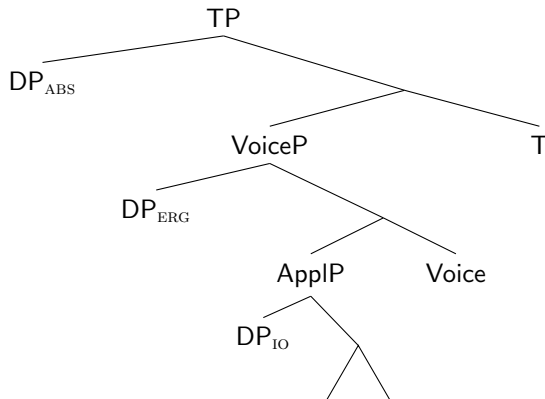
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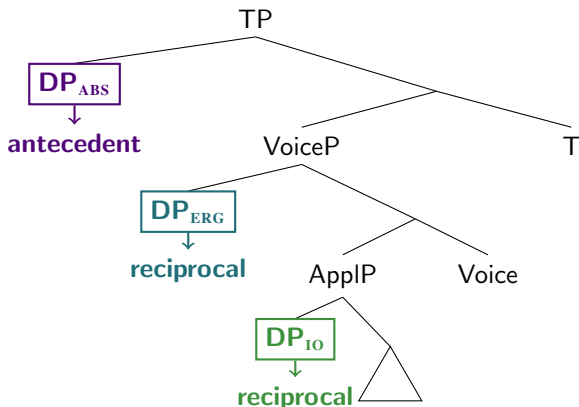
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Syntactic ergativity in reciprocal binding

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- ▶ reciprocals are bound by a c-commanding antecedent
- ▶ **ABS** binds **ERG** and **IO** \Rightarrow **ABS** c-commands **ERG** and **IO**



High ABS binds IO

tə- ze- f- jə- š'aɞ
1PL.ABS- REC.IO- BEN- 3SG.ERG- bring.PST

'S/he brought us together (= to each other).'

Literally: 'S/he brought each other us.'

High ABS binds IO

us each other
↓ ↓
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↓
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REC.ABS-

us

↓
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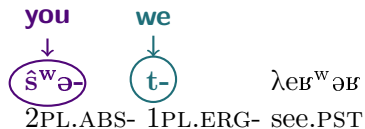
High ABS binds ERG

$\hat{s}^w\text{-}$ $t\text{-}$ $\lambda e\mathfrak{B}^w\text{-}$
2PL.ABS- 1PL.ERG- see.PST

‘We saw you(pl).’

BASELINE

High ABS binds ERG



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‘We saw you(pl).’

High ABS binds ERG

we each other
↓ ↓
tə- zere- λeɸ^wəɸ
1PL.ABS- REC.ERG- see.PST

RECIPROCAL

'We saw each other.'

Obligatory high ABS: ERG cannot bind ABS

each other we

↓ ↓
* **zere-** **t-** $\lambda e \mathcal{B}^w \partial \mathcal{B}$
REC.ABS- 1PL.ERG- see.PST

***ABS = REC**

Intended: 'We saw each other.'

Reciprocals: summary

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West Circassian displays syntactic ergativity in reciprocal binding:

Reciprocals: summary

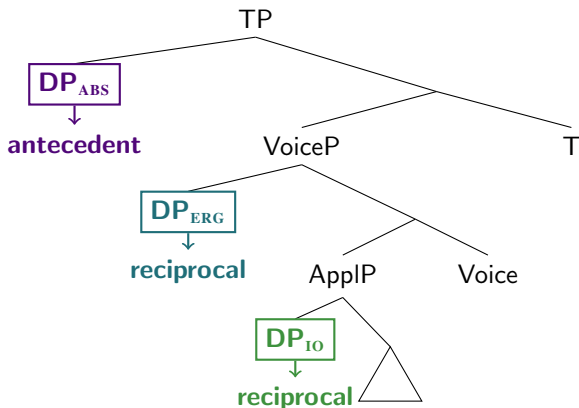
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- ▶ ergative case marking and agreement
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Roadmap

Background on West Circassian

Case study 1: Absence of cross-reference morphology

Case study 2: Absence of case marking (short teaser)

Conclusion

Diagnosing verbal structure in nominalizations

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Nominalization = (some) verbal functional structure embedded under nominal functional structure

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Diagnosing verbal structure in nominalizations

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- ▶ **How much** verbal structure is included in the nominalization,
- ▶ and **how is this reflected** in the morphosyntax (and semantics) of the resulting construction?

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Case study: mixed morphosyntactic properties of West Circassian nominalizations

West Circassian nominalizations: the narrative

Ershova (2020): nominalizations have diminished verbal syntax
(=smaller than TP)

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Deceptively “nominal-like” morphosyntax is a result of:

- ▶ category-specific spellout conditions
- ▶ deficiency of some verbal categories (T, Voice, Appl) without indirect licensing by higher verbal structure (C)

Noun phrase structure

tjə- še-n- xebze -daxe -xe -r
1PL.POSS- lead-NML- rule -beautiful -PL -ABS

‘our beautiful rules of conduct’ (Ershova 2020:431)

- cross-reference marking for the possessor

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Noun phrase structure

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Ershova (2020)

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'your stupid manner of dancing...'

... səg^w rjəhərep

'... I don't like'

(Apparently) no high absolute syntax

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The **internal argument** must appear closer to the verbal root than the **external argument**.

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Contrary to prediction of high ABS:

ERG and IO should appear closer to the root than ABS.

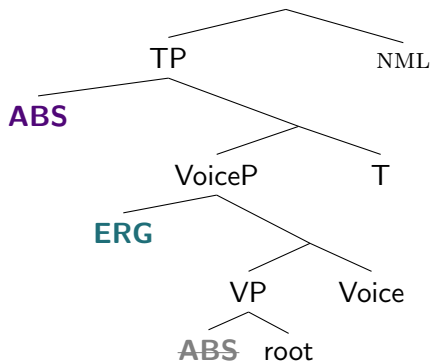
Argument order: High ABS prediction visualized

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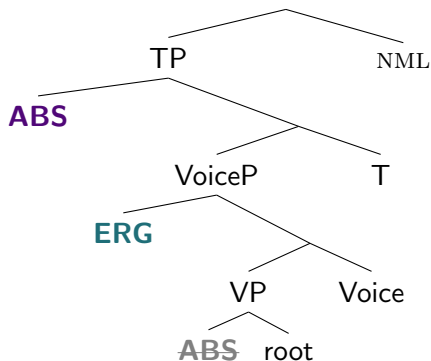
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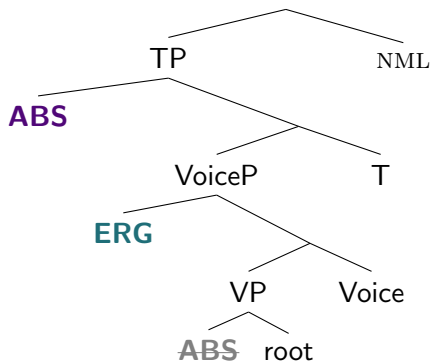


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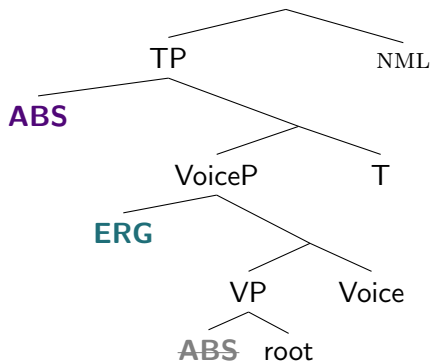
Does not include TP
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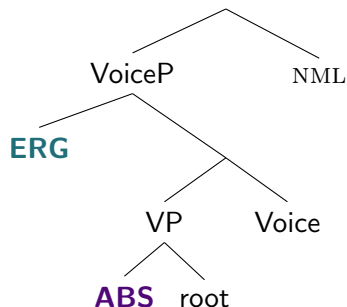
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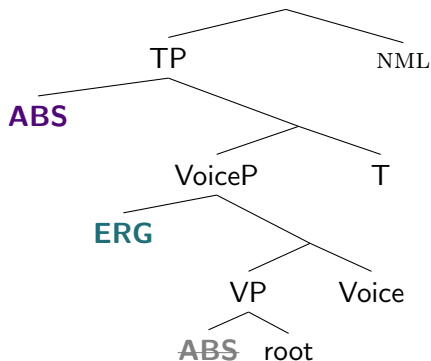
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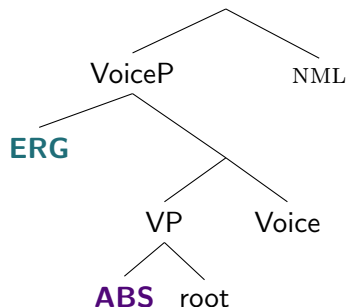
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ERG- ABS-

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girl- dish- wash -NML -ABS

'the girls' manner of dish-washing' (Ershova 2020:461-462)

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Ershova (2020): nominalizations are smaller than TP (\approx VoiceP)

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- ▶ reciprocals: evidence for **binding by high ABS**

Cross-reference-adjacent morphology is retained

“Directional” prefix *qe-*:

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tə- *q-* *jə-* *ʁe-č'ə-ž'*
1PL.ABS- DIR- 3SG.ERG- CAUS-rise-again

‘s/he raised us again’

FINITE

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‘s/he raised us again’

FINITE

jə- *qe-* *ʁe-č'ə-n*
3SG.POSS- **DIR-** CAUS-rise-NML

‘its raising’ (<http://adyghe.web-corpora.net/>)

NOMINALIZATION

Cross-reference-adjacent morphology is retained

Applicative prefix:

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Applicative prefix:

šheč'afe Ø- a- f- jə- šə-š'təʔ
respect **3ABS- 3PL.IO- BEN- 3SG.ERG-** do-IPF.PST

'He was showing respect for them.'

FINITE

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pš'ə- šheč'efe- fe- šə-č'e
prince- respect- BEN- do-NML

'showing respect for princes'

NOMINALIZATION

(<http://adyghe.web-corpora.net/>)

Nominalizations allow anaphor agreement

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they.ABS 3ABS- **REC.IO-BEN-** DYN- endeavor -PL

‘They work hard for each other.’

FINITE

Nominalizations allow anaphor agreement

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'their manner of working hard for each other'

NOMINALIZATION

Nominalizations allow anaphor agreement

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Nominalizations allow anaphor agreement

- reciprocal agreement **with ergative**

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3ABS- **DIR-** **REC.ERG-** DYN- CAUS- dance -RE -PL

'They are making each other dance.'

FINITE

Nominalizations allow anaphor agreement

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NOMINALIZATION

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⇒ DP_{ABS} binds DP_{ERG}
⇒ **high absolutive!**

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3PL.POSS- **DIR-** **REC.ERG-** CAUS- dance -NML

'their manner of making each other dance'

NOMINALIZATION

- ▶ reflexives are local subject oriented (Ershova 2019, 2023b)

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- ▶ reflexive agreement is possible in nominalizations

Reflexive agreement with absolutive

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mə pšašem zə- q- jə- ɸe- š^we -ž'ə -ɸ
this girl(ERG) **REFL.ABS-** **DIR-** 3SG.ERG- CAUS- dance -RE -PST

'This girl made herself dance.'

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NOMINALIZATION

⇒ **Head responsible for high ABS agreement (T) is present!**

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- ▶ temporal modifiers not marked with -ew (ADV)

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- ▶ temporal modifiers not marked with *-ew* (ADV)
- ▶ CP-sized adjunct clauses

Nominalizations include temporal adverbs

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day-each 2SG.POSS- store- go -NML I am tired

'I'm tired of your going to the store every day.'

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Compare with non-derived nouns:

* **mafe-qes** pjerjedač
day-each broadcast

Intended: 'everyday program'

Concessive clausal adjunct in nominalization

səg^w rjehə [jə- leɤe- thač'ə -č'e
I like 3SG.POSS- dish- wash -NML
[psə š'aməjemjə]]
water despite not having

'I like his/her washing the dishes despite not having water.'

Manner clausal adjunct in nominalization

səg^w rjəhərep [jə- aχš'e- ɸe- k^wa -č'e
I don't like 3SG.POSS- money- CAUS- go -NML
[**njewəš'remafem** **jeməg^wəpšəsew**]]
tomorrow not thinking

'I don't like his manner of spending money without thinking about tomorrow.'

Hidden syntax in nominalizations: summary

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Nominalizations are incompatible with verbal cross-reference marking

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⇒ cannot agree with / assign case to fully ϕ -specified DPs and cannot license arguments
- ▶ lexical NPs are **licensed by adjacency** to the head that selects them
⇒ illusion of low ABS syntax

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Case study 2: Absence of case marking (short teaser)

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Case marking as a diagnostic for structure

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Absence of case marking is part of a larger pattern of **case allomorphy** ⇒ does not indicate absence of functional structure.

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Correlation between case marking and syntactic structure

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- ▶ may antecede pronouns

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► Indefiniteness and number neutrality:

stolə-m **txəλ** Ø-Ø-tje-λ

table-OBL **book** 3ABS-3SG.IO-LOC-lie

‘There is a book on the table. / There are books on the table.’

(Arkadiev and Testelefs 2019:731)

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► Low scope:

tjetrad-pepč **wəs-jə-t^w** Ø-Ø-de-tə-ɐ

notebook-every **poem-LNK-two** 3ABS-3SG.IO-LOC-stand-PST

‘In every notebook, there were two poems.’

(different in every notebook, $\forall > 2$)

(Arkadiev and Testelefs 2019:733)

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ʔaze-deɸ^wə-**m** w-**jə**-ɸe-χ^wəž'ə-š't

doctor-good-**OBL** 2SG.ABS-**3SG.ERG**-CAUS-recover-FUT

'The good doctor will cure you.' (Arkadiev and Testelefs 2019:729)

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ʔaze-deɤ^wə jebaše-m Ø-j-e-be-χ^wəž'ə
doctor-good always-OBL 3ABS-3SG.ERG-DYN-CAUS-recover

'S/he is always treated by good doctors.' (Bagirokova et al. 2022:288)

Resolving the conflict

The puzzle: How do we reconcile the conflicting properties of caseless nominals?

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****Contrast with pseudo-incorporated NPs in nominalizations!**

Some definite/specific DPs are also caseless

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- ▶ personal pronouns and proper names

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te mǎjeq^wape mə bzəɫfəʋe-m jə-mašjəne-č'e
we(ABS) Maykop(OBL) this woman-OBL 3SG.POSS-car-INS
tə-qe-ḳ^wa-ɐ
1PL.ABS-DIR-go-PST

'We went to Maykop in this woman's car.'

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a š^wəzə-m jə-č'ale dax-ew Ø-qe-š^we
this woman-OBL 3SG.POSS-son beautiful-ADV 3ABS-DIR-dance

'This woman's son dances beautifully.'

Some definite DPs are number neutral

[mə bzəʎfəʁe-m **jə-ha**] zʁešxenuw
this woman-OBL **3SG.POSS-dog** 1SG.ERG.feed.MOD.ADV
jezʁež'aʁ
1SG.ERG.begin.PST
'I began feeding this woman's dog / dogs.'

(See also: Bagirokova et al. 2022)

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txəλ č'el-jə-š'-me Ø-q-a-hə-ɸ
book boy-LNK-three-PL.ERG 3ABS-DIR-3PL.ERG-bring-PST

'The three boys brought a book.'

(all three boys are sharing the same book; $\exists > 3$)

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- ▶ This diagnostic is likely to be accurate in many cases, **but it must be applied with care.**
- ▶ **Case study:** two scenarios of morphological absence in West Circassian which do not correlate with absence in the syntax

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Nuances of unpronounced structure

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...but if the overall picture (syntactic, morphological, semantic) aligns with the existence of an unpronounced category,

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...but if the overall picture (syntactic, morphological, semantic) aligns with the existence of an unpronounced category,

and its absence creates more puzzles than it solves,

Nuances of unpronounced structure

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...but if the overall picture (syntactic, morphological, semantic) aligns with the existence of an unpronounced category,

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positing an unpronounced category is warranted.

Thank you!

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