

West Circassian bare nouns are full DPs

Evidence from nominal possession

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12 June 2025

CaucLing, Lyon, France

Download handout: bit.ly/EBCL2025

The premise: case marking and syntactic structure

- ▶ In some languages with overt case marking, **nominals can appear without case in certain contexts**.
- ▶ Cross-linguistically robust connection between absence of case and **diminished nominal structure**:

Generalization about case and nominal structure

Caseless nominals lack functional structure associated with definiteness (DP) and number (NumP).

- ▶ **Correlates with:** narrow scope, indefiniteness, formal valency reduction, word order constraints, and **number neutrality**
(\approx pseudo-noun incorporation)

(Massam 2001, 2009; Öztürk 2005, 2009; Collins 2017, a.o.)

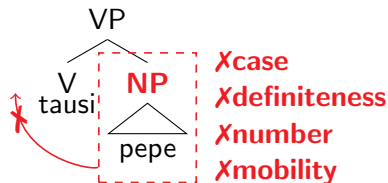
Diminished nominal structure in Samoan

NP object:

Sā tausi pepe le teine.

PST care baby the girl

‘The girl took care of babies/a baby.’



DP object:

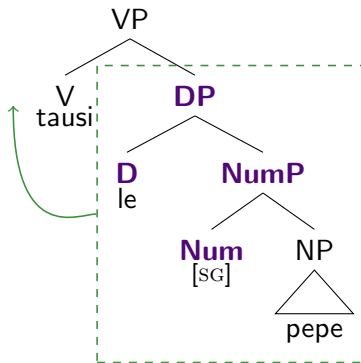
Sā tausi e le teine le pepe.

PST care ERG the girl the baby

‘The girl took care of the baby.’

(Collins 2017:12)

✓case ✓definiteness
✓number ✓mobility



Bare nominals in West Circassian

- ▶ Arkadiev and Testelefs (2019): bare nominals in West Circassian are NPs = structurally diminished
- ▶ One of the diagnostics = number neutrality.

Our claim

Number neutrality is not a reliable diagnostic for lack of DP structure.

In West Circassian, nominals may lack NumP, but still be full DPs.

Evidence: Presence/absence of NumP is diagnosable with local interaction between case markers and possessive morphology.

Background on West Circassian

Differential argument marking (Arkadiev and Testelefs 2019)

Number neutral DPs lack NumP

Conclusion

Background on West Circassian

Differential argument marking (Arkadiev and Testelelets 2019)

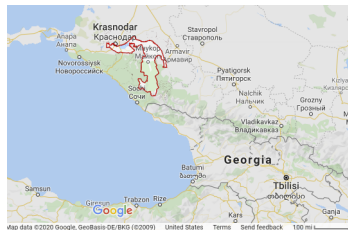
Number neutral DPs lack NumP

Conclusion

West Circassian

West Circassian (or Adyghe):

- ▶ Northwest Caucasian
- ▶ Republic of Adyghea, Russia
- ▶ agglutinating, polysynthetic
- ▶ ergative case and agreement



Data:

- ▶ fieldwork on the **Temirgoy dialect** in the Shovgenovsky district of Adyghea (2017-2019)
- ▶ West Circassian Corpus by Timofey Arkhangelskiy, Irina Bagirokova, Yury Lander, and Anna Lander (<http://adyghe.web-corpora.net/>)
- ▶ previously published work

****Note:** No new data since 2019; some generalizations are preliminary. Glosses and segmentation are simplified for exposition.

Case marking

-r (ABS):

- ▶ intransitive subject
- ▶ theme of transitive verb

S

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

‘This girl dances well.’

-m (OBL):

(+ some allomorphs)

- ▶ agent of transitive verb
- ▶ applied object
- + complements of P
- + possessors

A **O**

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

‘The children saw the dogs.’

IO

a-š’ tač’ke-**m** məž^we rjəš’eš’t
that-OBL wheelbarrow-**OBL** stone will carry

‘S/he will transport stones in the wheelbarrow.’

Case marking may be omitted

Indefinite, nonreferential nominals may appear without case marking:

mə bzəlfəʁe-m bere **qəʁaʁe** qəratə
this woman-OBL much **flower** they give
'They frequently give **flowers** to this woman.'

(ABS)

ç'el-jə-š'ə-r **txəλ** Ø-Ø-je-žə
child-LNK-three-ABS **book** 3ABS-3SG.IO-DAT-read
'Three boys are reading **a book**.'

(OBL)

+ Some types of nominals are incompatible with case: personal pronouns, proper names, possessed nominals **(TBD!)**

= differential argument marking (Arkadiev and Testelests 2019)

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Empirical generalization: Caseless nominals in West Circassian share properties with pseudo-incorporation

- ▶ indefinite and nonspecific
- ▶ number neutral
- ▶ low scope

Explanation: caseless nominals are NPs (=lack DP and NumP)

Pseudo-incorporation properties of caseless nominals

- Non-specificity/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 Testelets 2019:731)

- Low scope:

tjetrad-pepč **wəs-jə-t̚^w** Ø-Ø-de-tə-B

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 Testelets 2019:733)

Differential argument marking: summary so far

Caseless nominals display properties of pseudo-incorporated NPs:

- ▶ indefiniteness / nonspecificity
- ▶ low scope
- ▶ number neutrality

However, unlike pseudo-incorporation, caseless nominals

- ▶ are not constrained in word order (no adjacency requirement)
- ▶ may appear in any argument position
(not just internal arguments)
- ▶ do not affect valency/transitivity
- ▶ trigger regular cross-reference marking
- ▶ may antecede pronouns

A&T's solution: Caseless nominals are NPs which syntactically and semantically function like DPs.

Caseless nominals don't behave like pseudo-incorporation

- ▶ can be any argument, e.g. ergative agent
- ▶ no adjacency requirement
- ▶ no valency reduction
- ▶ trigger regular cross-reference marking

ʔaze-deb^wə-m w-jə-be-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)

ʔaze-deb^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)

An alternative: caseless nominals are DPs

Caseless nominals display a **mixed profile**:

- ▶ some properties associated with smaller (=NP) structure
- ▶ some properties typical of larger (=DP-sized) nominals

Arkadiev and Testelets (2019):

- ▶ caseless nominals are NPs
- ▶ NPs can have certain DP-like properties: denote individuals, participate in case algorithms and ϕ -agreement

Our alternative: Caseless nominals are DPs

NP-like properties are **compatible** with DP analysis.

Case study: Number neutrality (= absence of NumP) is independently observed in DP-sized nominals.

Roadmap

Background on West Circassian

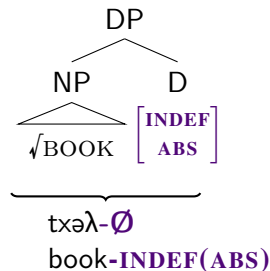
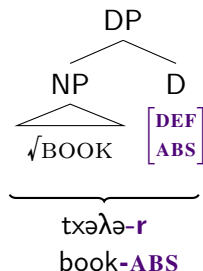
Differential argument marking (Arkadiev and Testelefs 2019)

Number neutral DPs lack NumP

Conclusion

The proposal: Caseless nominals are DPs

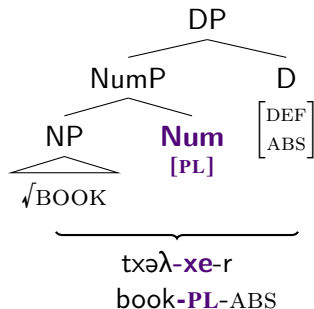
- ▶ Caseless nominals are full DPs.
- ▶ Case suffix = definite D + case
- ▶ No case suffix = (mostly) indefinite D + case



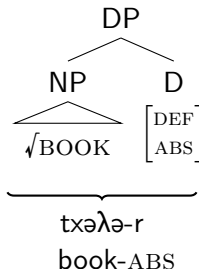
The proposal: DPs without NumP

Number is structurally present **only when it is overtly expressed**.
(Contrast with unpronounced case!)

Plural form:



“Singular” form:



Evidence from interaction between case and possession.

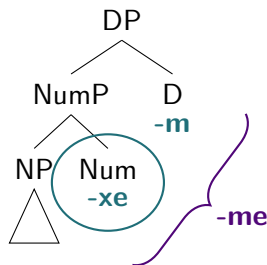
Morphologically conditioned allomorphs of D

Case exponence (= D) is affected by structurally adjacent heads.

Example: Plural + oblique case

Two suffixes: č'ale-**xe-m**
 'boy-PL-OBL'

One suffix: č'ale-**me**
 'boy-PL.OBL'



(Arkadiev 2014; Bagirokova et al. 2022; also Peter Arkadiev's talk)

(+ Another example in the Appendix.)

Case exponence conditioned by possessor

“Singular” DP w/possessor: no overt case marking

(Rogava and Keraševa 1966:70)

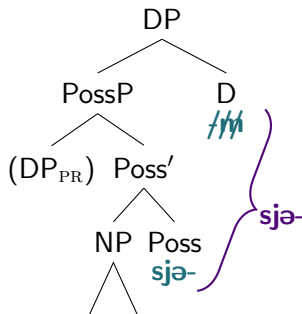
sjə-nəbžɛʁ^{wə}(*-m) ‘my friend’
1SG.POSS-friend(*-OBL)

- Possessor in Spec,PossP under DP

(Szabolcsi 1983, 1994)

- possessive prefix = Poss
- Cf. literature on Turkic (Kharytonava 2011;

Tat 2013; Lyutikova and Pereltsvaig 2015; Öztürk and Taylan 2016; Ótrott Kovács 2023)



Poss triggers allomorphy on D

D is unpronounced when adjacent to Poss.

Overt number disrupts Poss-D allomorphy

Possessive + plural suffix: overt case marking

sjə-nəbžɛʁ^wə-xe **-m** 'my friends' (Adyghe Corpus)
1SG.POSS-friend-PL-OBL

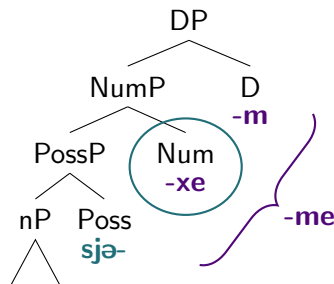
Explanation:

Num intervenes between Poss and D

PL+OBL effect possible:

sjə-nəbžɛʁ^wə-**me**
1SG.POSS-friend-PL.OBL

'my friends' (Adyghe Corpus)



Confirms: D and Num are adjacent, Poss is below Num.

+ Num scopes over Poss (**Appendix**).

Even unpronounced Num disrupts Poss-D allomorphy

Possessive + numeral: overt case marking

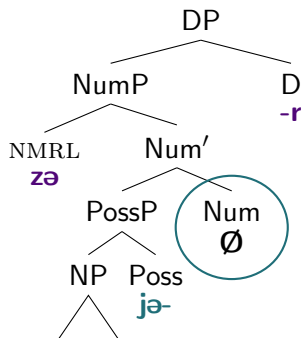
jə-zə-šolk-žene-daxe-r

3SG.POSS-one-silk-dress-beautiful-ABS

'one beautiful silk dress of hers' (Lander 2017:84)

Explanation:

- ▶ numeral zə is in Spec,NumP
- ▶ Num is unpronounced
- ▶ unpronounced Num intervenes between Poss and D



Generalization: If Num is present, Poss-D allomorphy is disrupted.

Confirms: In DPs without overt number, NumP is absent!

The role of high Num

- ▶ In West Circassian, high Num denotes restrictive plurality
- ▶ Num-less DPs are ambiguous wrt number

(Kumakhov 1971; Arkadiev and Testelefs 2019; Bagirokova et al. 2022)

with overt case: ɕəfə-**m** 'the person/people'

(Kumakhov 1971:12, but see Bagirokova et al. 2022)

with possessor: ə-ʔex^wambe 'his/her finger(s)'

(Bagirokova et al. 2022:296)

No morphological number marking ⇒ **no NumP**

DPs without NumP: summary

- ▶ The presence/absence of NumP can be diagnosed with interaction between case (D) and possessive marking (Poss).
- ▶ When Num is absent, Poss triggers allomorphy on D.
- ▶ When Num is present, Poss-D allomorphy is disrupted.
- ▶ Correlates with number neutral interpretation.*

*with some caveats

Conclusion

NumP may be absent in full DPs.

Number neutrality is not a reliable diagnostic for absence of DP structure.

...and other diagnostics are compatible with DP analysis (**Appendix**).

Background on West Circassian

Differential argument marking (Arkadiev and Testelefs 2019)

Number neutral DPs lack NumP

Conclusion

Main takeaway: they're all DPs

Typological unusual pattern of **differential argument marking** in West Circassian can be analyzed as a paradigm of exponence on D.

In a nutshell:

- ▶ Overt case marking = definite D
- ▶ Apparent absence of case = unpronounced D

The (non)correlation between NumP and DP

Typical diagnostics for the absence of DP are unreliable.

Case study:

- ▶ **Prior work:**

Number neutrality (absence of NumP) implies absence of DP.

- ▶ **Our claim:** In West Circassian, full DPs may lack NumP.

(See also: Wiltschko 2008; Kramer 2017; Martí 2020)

- ▶ **Evidence:** Poss triggers allomorphy on D
only if NumP is absent.

- ▶ We have argued that DPs may lack NumP.
- ▶ Others have argued that NumP may be present without DP:
e.g. Danon 2006; Dayal 2011; Levin 2015; Barrie and Mathieu 2016
- ▶ Cross-linguistically, unmarked nominals frequently display mixed properties.
(e.g. Serdobolskaya 2015, discussion in Borik and Gehrke 2015)
- ▶ A one-size-fits-all solution is unlikely.

Thank you!

- ▶ West Circassian consultants: Svetlana K. Alishaeva, Saida Gisheva, Susana K. Khatkova, and Zarema Meretukova
- ▶ Audiences at: LingLunch at MIT, the LASER Workshop at Göttingen, and the CauLaGeNet talk series at CNRS / Paris-8

Appendix: Morphologically conditioned allomorphs of D

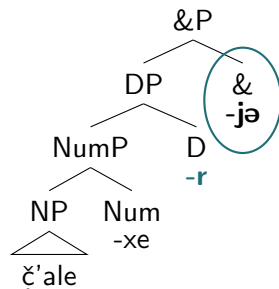
Case exponence (= D) is affected by structurally adjacent heads.

Example #2: absolutive + coordinator -re

č'ale-xe-**r**-jə pšaše-xe-**r**-jə ...
boy-PL-**ABS**-ADD girl-PL-**ABS**-ADD

č'ale-xe-**m-re** pšaše-xe-**m-re** ...
boy-PL-**OBL?**-COORD girl-PL-**OBL?**-COORD

'The boys and girls ...'



š'əg^wə-m qəš'əš^weš'təʁex
yard-OBL were dancing

'... were dancing in the yard.'

(Rogava and Keraševa 1966:403; Ershova 2011)

Morphologically conditioned allomorphs of D

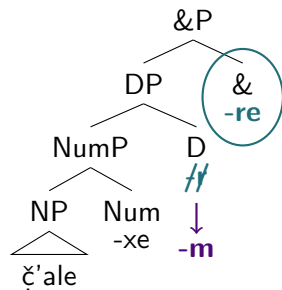
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'The boys and girls ...'



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'... were dancing in the yard.'

(Rogava and Keraševa 1966:403; Ershova 2011)

Other evidence for Num above Poss

Number scopes over the possessor:

(cf. Bošković and Şener 2013)

[Passage from Genesis 34]

Speaking of Simeon and Levi, two out of eleven sons of Jacob:

jaq^wəbe ɔ-q^w-jə-t̪^w

Jacob 3SG.PR-son-LNK-two

'two of Jacob's sons' (2 > Poss) (Adyghe Corpus)

Compare in English:

Jacob's two sons (implies: Jacob only has 2 sons; Poss > 2)

Confirmation that Num is higher than Poss

Structure of DP: D > Num > Poss

Other reasons to think that caseless nominals are DPs

- ▶ Some definite/specific DPs are obligatorily caseless.
- ▶ Scope might not be a reliable syntactic diagnostic.

Some definite/specific DPs are also caseless

- ▶ personal pronouns and proper names

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

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

- ▶ possessed nouns

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.'

Scope might not be a good syntactic diagnostic

Deal et al. (2024): wide scope of ABS is not a good diagnostic for high absolutive syntax

Our conjecture: low scope might not be a good diagnostic for NP/DP distinction

Our data: caseless nominals **may** take wide scope

Caseless nominals may take wide scope

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

'The three boys brought a book.'

✓**Low scope:** each boy brought his own book ($3 > \exists$)

✓**Wide scope:** the three boys brought one book together ($\exists > 3$)

Summary: Caseless nominals are DPs

NP-like properties of caseless nominals are not a challenge for a DP analysis:

- ▶ Scope is not a reliable diagnostic.
- ▶ Caselessness \nleftrightarrow definiteness/specificity:
pronouns and proper names are caseless.
- ▶ DPs can be number neutral \Rightarrow DP can lack NumP.

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