

# The imperfect correlation between morphological exponence and syntactic structure

Two case studies from West Circassian

Ksenia Ershova

University College London  
(k.ershova@ucl.ac.uk)

28 April 2025  
CNRS & Paris 8

Download handout: [bit.ly/KECNRS2025](https://bit.ly/KECNRS2025)

# Diagnosing syntax through morphological exponence

## The premise

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

**morphological exponence  $\Leftrightarrow$  presence of syntactic category**

# Example: DP vs NP

**Bošković (2005, 2008, 2012), a.m.o.:**

(\*Öztürk and Eren 2020 on Caucasian languages!)

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

**Extended to language-internal contexts:**

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

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

- ▶ Such diagnostics **may** render the correct results.
- ▶ But they must be applied with care.

**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.**

2. **Exponence of case:**

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

Background on West Circassian

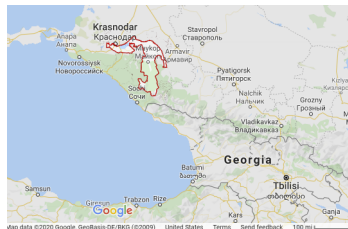
Case study 1: Absence of cross-reference morphology

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

Conclusion

## West Circassian (or Adyghe):

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



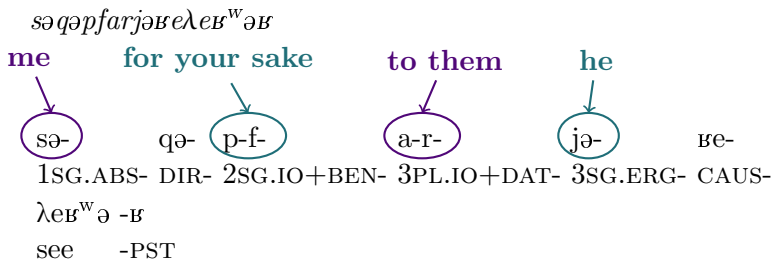
## Data:

- ▶ fieldwork on the **Temirgoy dialect** in the Shovgenovskiy district of Adygea (2017-2019)
- ▶ Adyghe Corpus by Timofey Arkhangelskiy, Irina Bagirokova, Yury Lander, and Anna Lander (<http://adyghe.web-corpora.net/>)

**Disclaimer:** Glossing and segmentation may be simplified for exposition.

# West Circassian is polysynthetic

Head marking and pro-drop:



‘He showed me to them for your sake.’

(Korotkova and Lander 2010:301)

Order of cross-reference markers:

ABS-      (IO+APPL-)\*      ERG-



# Complex nominal morphology

- ▶ complements and modifiers incorporated
- ▶ include a mix of lexical and functional morphology

[c<sup>w</sup>eqe- əč'jə- š'əʁən]- t<sup>w</sup>eč'an -xe -r  
footwear- and- clothes- shop -PL -ABS

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

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

'three Abzakh horsemen' (Lander 2017:83)

# Head marking on nominals

s-            šəpχ<sup>w</sup>əxer  
**1SG.PR-** sister.PL.ABS

‘my sisters’

**INALIENABLE**

t-            jə-    ɛ<sup>w</sup>əneɛ<sup>w</sup>əxem  
**1PL.PR- POSS-** neighbor.PL.OBL

‘our neighbors’

**ALIENABLE**

# Case marking

## -r (ABS):

- ▶ intransitive subject
- ▶ direct object

**S**

mə pšaše-**r**      daxew qaš<sup>w</sup>e  
this girl-**ABS**      well      dances

‘This girl dances well.’

## -m (OBL):

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

**A**                      **O**

sabəjxe-**m**      haxe-**r**      qaləw<sup>w</sup>əw  
children-**OBL**      dogs-**ABS**      saw

‘The children saw the dogs.’

## **IO**

mafe-qes ježape-**m**      seḵ<sup>w</sup>e  
day-each school-**OBL**      go

‘I go to school every day.’

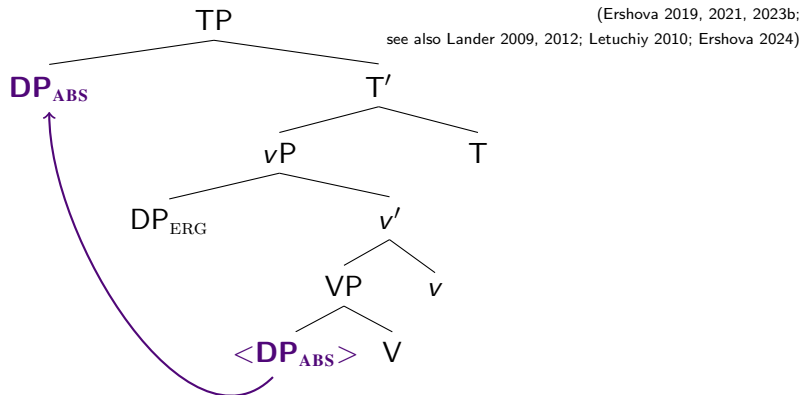
# Case marking on possessors

pšaše-**m**    Ø-jə-pšeşe<sup>w</sup>  
girl-**OBL**    3SG.PR-POSS-female.friend

'the girl's friend'

# 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;  
Coon et al. 2021; Royer 2023, a.o.)

# Reciprocals in West Circassian

Reciprocals are covert and trigger **reciprocal agreement** on the predicate:

- ▶ correlates with syntactic position of the reciprocal
- ▶ does not affect transitivity  $\Rightarrow$  not a de-transitivizing operator

Reciprocals are subject to Condition A

= must be bound by a local c-commanding antecedent

(Ershova 2019, 2023b)

# Reciprocal agreement

**ABS** external argument binds **IO**

⇒ REC replaces IO agreement

**you**

↓  
š<sup>w</sup>ə-

2PL.ABS-

**with us**

qə-

↓  
d-

1PL.IO-

de-

COM-

š<sup>w</sup>eš't

dance.FUT

**BASELINE**

'You(pl) will dance with us'

# Reciprocal agreement

**ABS** external argument binds **IO**

⇒ REC replaces IO agreement

**you**

**with each other**

↓  
š<sup>w</sup>ə-

qə-

↓  
ze-

de-

š<sup>w</sup>eš't

2PL.ABS- DIR- REC.IO- COM- dance.FUT

**RECIPROCAL**

'You(pl) will dance with each other'



# Reciprocal agreement does not affect transitivity

**ERG** binds **IO**

- ▶ REC replaces IO agreement
- ▶ ERG antecedent bears ERG case

axe-me            ?eg<sup>w</sup>əb̂ze-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

**ABS** binds **IO**

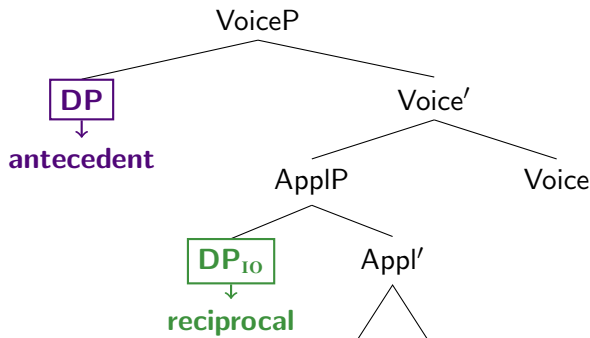
- ▶ REC replaces IO agreement
- ▶ ABS antecedent bears ABS case

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

‘The children are looking at each other.’

# Reciprocal binding is established via c-command

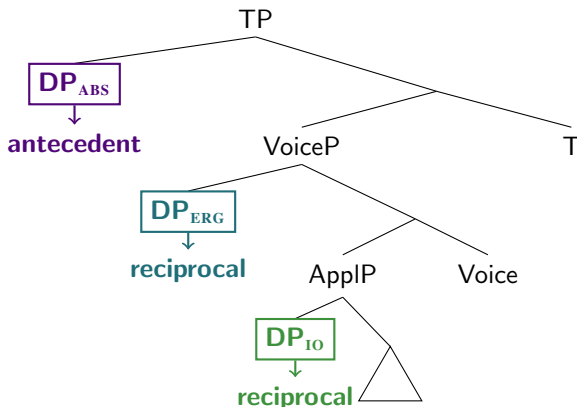
**ABS/ERG** external argument binds **IO**:



# Syntactic ergativity in reciprocal binding

Reciprocals provide evidence for high absolutive syntax:

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



# High ABS binds IO

us      each other  
↓      ↓  
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

each other

↓  
\*ze-

REC.ABS-

us

↓  
t-

1PL.IO-

f-

jə-

š'aB

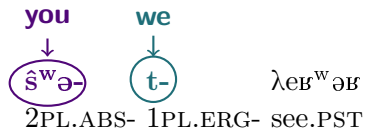
BEN-

3SG.ERG-

bring.PST

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

# High ABS binds ERG



**BASELINE**

‘We saw you(pl).’

# High ABS binds ERG

we      each other  
↓      ↓  
tə-      zere-      λeɸ<sup>w</sup>əɸ  
1PL.ABS- REC.ERG- see.PST

RECIPROCAL

'We saw each other.'



# Obligatory high ABS: ERG cannot bind ABS

each other we

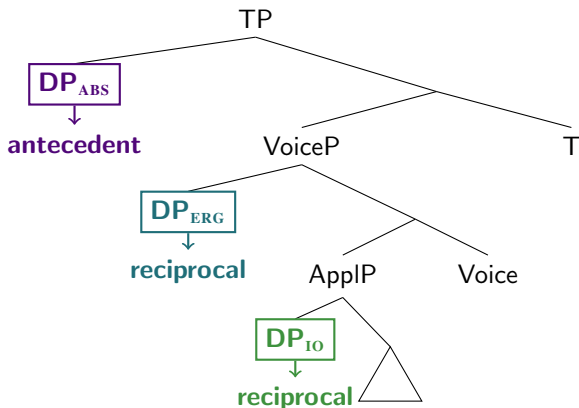
↓      ↓  
\* **zere-**    **t-**       $\lambda e \mathcal{B}^w \partial \mathcal{B}$   
REC.ABS- 1PL.ERG- see.PST

**\*ABS = REC**

Intended: 'We saw each other.'

# Reciprocals: summary

West Circassian displays syntactic ergativity in reciprocal binding:  
ABS binds ERG and IO  $\Rightarrow$  **ABS c-commands ERG and IO**



## West Circassian:

- ▶ polysynthetic: head marking and complex morphology
- ▶ ergative case marking and agreement
- ▶ high absolutive syntax

# 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

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

## The standard question

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

# The danger of morphosyntactic diagnostics

## Typical diagnostic:

If a verbal functional category is morphologically incompatible with the nominalization, **it is absent in the syntax**.

**What I'll argue:** This diagnostic is not always reliable.

Morphological exponents of a syntactic category may be **indirectly dependent** on the presence of higher functional structure.

**Case study:** mixed morphosyntactic properties of West Circassian nominalizations

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

## Supported by:

1. Nominal-like morphosyntax: argument licensing, adjectival modification
2. (Apparent) absence of clause-level morphosyntax: clausal case licensing, high absolutive, adverbial modification, cross-reference marking

## ...but there are some inconsistencies:

- ▶ some cross-reference marking is still possible
- ▶ reciprocals still follow high absolutive syntax
- ▶ some adverbial modifiers are possible

# Reconciling the inconsistencies

**Main claim:** Nominalizations are larger than they appear ( $\approx$ TP)

This means they include TP-level syntax, including:

- ▶ heads responsible for cross-reference marking and case licensing
- ▶ high absolutive syntax
- ▶ adverbial modifiers

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

- ▶ cross-reference marking for the possessor
- ▶ complements and modifiers incorporated

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

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

# Nominalizations: absence of clausal syntax

Ershova (2020)

- ▶ arguments as possessors or incorporated  
⇒ no verbal licensing/case
- ▶ no verbal cross-reference marking  
→ possessor  $\phi$ -marking

**laɤe-xe-r**      **Ø-**      **s-**      e-      thač'ə      **FINITE**  
**dish-PL-ABS**   **3ABS-**   **1SG.ERG-**   DYN-   wash  
'I am washing dishes.'

**wjə-**      **leɤe-**      thač'ə      -č'e      **NOMINALIZATION**  
**2SG.POSS-**   **dish-**   wash      -NML  
'your manner of washing dishes'

# Nominal, not verbal modifiers

Clausal (CP-sized) complement: ✓ manner adverbial

✓ **djelab-ew**      **wə-**      qə-      zera-      š<sup>w</sup>e      **-re**      -r  
**stupid-ADV**      **2SG.ABS-**      DIR-      MANNER-      dance      **-DYN**      -ABS  
'how you dance stupidly...'

Nominalization: \*manner adverbial      ✓ manner adjective

\* **djelab-ew**      **wjə-**      qe-      š<sup>w</sup>a      **-č'e**  
**stupid-ADV**      **2SG.POSS-**      DIR-      dance      **-NML**

✓ **wjə-**      **djeleɣe-**      qe-      š<sup>w</sup>a      **-č'e**  
**2SG.POSS-**      **stupid-**      DIR-      dance      **-NML**

'your stupid manner of dancing...'

... səg<sup>w</sup> rjəhərep  
'... I don't like'

# (Apparently) no high absolutive syntax

## Strict order of arguments

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

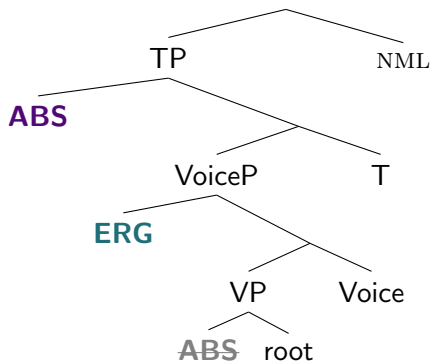
- ▶ 2-place intransitives: **ABS- IO-** root
- ▶ Transitives: **ERG- ABS-** root

## Contrary to prediction of high ABS:

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

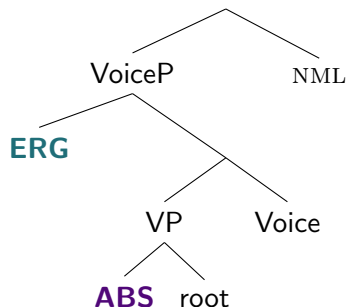
# Argument order: High ABS prediction visualized

Nominalization includes TP  
⇒ high ABS



⇒ \* **ABS-** **ERG-** root -NML

Does not include TP  
⇒ low ABS



⇒ ✓ **ERG-** **ABS-** root -NML

# Internal argument must be closer to the root

## ERG- ABS-

✓ **pșeșe-** **leɤe-** thač'ə -č'e -r  
**girl-** **dish-** wash -NML -ABS

## ABS- ERG-

# **leɤe-** **pșeșe-** thač'ə -č'e -r  
**dish-** **girl-** wash -NML ABS

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

# Nominal properties: summary

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

## Explains:

- ▶ no verbal cross-reference marking
- ▶ arguments must be incorporated or a possessor
- ▶ nominal, not verbal modifiers
- ▶ apparently no high ABS syntax

**Next:** this is challenged by

- ▶ possibility of **some** cross-reference marking
- ▶ high ABS with reciprocal binding
- ▶ possibility of **some** adverbial modifiers

# Cross-reference marking in nominalizations

- ▶ full verbal  $\phi$ -agreement is not available in nominalizations
- ▶ but other morphemes that are associated and interspersed with cross-reference marking are present
- ▶ and reciprocal and reflexive cross-reference marking is possible

## Evidence for:

- ▶ heads responsible for cross-reference marking are present, **including high ABS agreement**
- ▶ reciprocals: evidence for **binding by high ABS**



# Cross-reference-adjacent morphology is retained

“Directional” prefix *qe-*:

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

‘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:

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

'He was showing respect for them.'

FINITE

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

- reciprocal agreement **with applicative**

axer      Ø-      **ze-f-**      e-      g<sup>w</sup>əʔež'ə -x  
they.ABS   3ABS- **REC.IO-BEN-** DYN- endeavor -PL

'They work hard for each other.'

**FINITE**

ja-      **ze-fe-**      g<sup>w</sup>əʔež'ə -č'e  
3PL.POSS- **REC.IO-BEN-** endeavor -NML

'their manner of working hard for each other'

**NOMINALIZATION**

# Nominalizations allow anaphor agreement

- reciprocal agreement **with ergative**

⇒ DP<sub>ABS</sub> binds DP<sub>ERG</sub>  
⇒ **high absolutive!**

Ø-    **qe-**    **zer-**    e-    be-    š<sup>w</sup>e    -ž'ə -x  
3ABS- **DIR-** **REC.ERG-** DYN- CAUS- dance -RE -PL

'They are making each other dance.'

**FINITE**

ja-            **qe-**    **zere-**    be-    š<sup>w</sup>a    -č'e  
3PL.POSS- **DIR-** **REC.ERG-** CAUS- dance -NML

'their manner of making each other dance'

**NOMINALIZATION**

- ▶ reflexives are local subject oriented (Ershova 2019, 2023b)  
⇒ bound by highest DP in VoiceP
- ▶ reflexive agreement is possible in nominalizations

# Reflexive agreement with absolutive

mə pšašem **zə-** **q-** jə- ɸe- š<sup>w</sup>e -ž'ə -ɸ  
this girl(ERG) **REFL.ABS-** **DIR-** 3SG.ERG- CAUS- dance -RE -PST

'This girl made herself dance.'

**FINITE**

jə- **zə-** **qə-** ɸe- š<sup>w</sup>a -č'e  
3SG.POSS- **REFL.ABS-** **DIR-** CAUS- dance -NML

'her manner of making herself dance'

**NOMINALIZATION**

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

# Some adverbial modifiers are possible

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

# Nominalizations include temporal adverbs

[ **mafe-qes**    wjə-            t<sup>w</sup>əčan- ḳ<sup>w</sup>e -n ]    sjezeš'əɸ  
day-each        2SG.POSS- store-    go    -NML    I am tired

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

Compare with non-derived nouns:

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

Intended: 'everyday program'



# Concessive clausal adjunct in nominalization

səg<sup>w</sup> rjehə                    [ jə-                    leɸe- 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<sup>w</sup> rjəhərep    [ jə-                    aχš'e-    ɸe-    k<sup>w</sup>a -č'e  
I don't like                    3SG.POSS- money- CAUS- go    -NML  
[ **njewəš'remafem**    **jeməg<sup>w</sup>əpšəsew** ] ]  
tomorrow                    not thinking

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

# Hidden syntax in nominalizations: summary

## Ershova (2020):

Nominalizations are incompatible with verbal cross-reference marking

(+ clausal argument case/licensing and some verbal modifiers)

**because the heads responsible for verbal cross-reference marking are absent.**

⇒ **Nominalizations are small.**

## My claim today:

This is challenged by:

- ▶ possibility of some cross-reference marking
- ▶ possibility of some adverbials
- ▶ high ABS syntax with reciprocal binding

⇒ **Nominalizations are larger than they appear.**

# Why do nominalizations seem small?

If nominalizations include the heads responsible for cross-reference marking and case/licensing,

- ▶ why is most cross-reference marking disallowed?
- ▶ why are arguments ordered as if there is no high ABS syntax?

## In brief:\*

\*Details in Ershova (2023a).

- ▶ The heads responsible for cross-reference marking are **deficient** in nominalizations  
⇒ cannot agree with / assign case to fully  $\phi$ -specified DPs and cannot license arguments
- ▶ lexical NPs are **licensed by adjacency** to the head that selects them  
⇒ illusion of low ABS syntax

# Roadmap

Background on West Circassian

Case study 1: Absence of cross-reference morphology

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

Conclusion

# Case marking as a diagnostic for structure

- ▶ Joint work with Nikita Bezrukov.
- ▶ This is a brief teaser. Hear more about this at CauCLing!

**Basic premise:** Nominal arguments may be unmarked for case in any syntactic position.

**Arkadiev and Testelefs (2019):** Absence of case marking correlates with the absence of a DP layer

≈ pseudo-noun incorporation (Massam 2001; Öztürk 2005, 2009, a.o.)

## Our claim:

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

**Arkadiev and Testelefs (2019):** Caseless nominals share several 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)
- ▶ do not affect valency/transitivity and trigger regular cross-reference marking
- ▶ may antecede pronouns

# Pseudo-incorporation properties of caseless nominals

## ► 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)

## ► Low scope:

tjetrad-pepč     **wəs-jə-t<sup>w</sup>**     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)



# Caseless nominals don't behave like pseudo-incorporation

- ▶ no adjacency requirement
- ▶ no valency reduction
- ▶ trigger regular cross-reference marking

ʔaze-deɁ<sup>w</sup>ə-m      w-jə-be-χ<sup>w</sup>əž'ə-š't  
doctor-good-OBL 2SG.ABS-3SG.ERG-CAUS-recover-FUT

'The good doctor will cure you.' (Arkadiiev and Testelels 2019:729)

ʔaze-deɁ<sup>w</sup>ə    jəbaʃe-m      Ø-j-e-be-χ<sup>w</sup>əž'ə  
doctor-good always-OBL 3ABS-3SG.ERG-DYN-CAUS-recover

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

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

**Our response:**

- ▶ Absence of overt case **does not entail** absence of D.
- ▶ Pseudo-incorporation properties of caseless nominals **are compatible** with a DP analysis.

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

# Some definite/specific DPs are also caseless

- ▶ personal pronouns and proper names

te məjeq<sup>w</sup>ape mə bzəlfəʋe-m jə-mašjəne-č'e  
we(ABS) Maykop(OBL) this woman-OBL 3SG.POSS-car-INS  
tə-qe-k<sup>w</sup>a-ɛ  
1PL.ABS-DIR-go-PST

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

- ▶ possessed nouns

a š<sup>w</sup>əzə-m jə-č'ale dax-ew Ø-qe-š<sup>w</sup>e  
this woman-OBL 3SG.POSS-son beautiful-ADV 3ABS-DIR-dance

'This woman's son dances beautifully.'

# Some definite DPs are number neutral

[mə bzəʎfəʋe-m **jə-ha**]                      zʋešxənew  
this woman-OBL **3SG.POSS-dog** 1SG.ERG.feed.MOD.ADV  
jezʋež'aʋ  
1SG.ERG.begin.PST  
'I began feeding this woman's dog / dogs.'

(See also: Bagirokova et al. 2022)

# 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

**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;  $\exists > 3$ )

# Summary: case exponence as a syntactic diagnostic

## Our claim:

“Caseless” nominals are not caseless or structurally diminished.

Absence of overt case = result of case allomorphy:

$[ABS/OBL] \longrightarrow \emptyset / [INDEF \mid PARTICIPANT \mid PRNAME \mid \dots]$

## There's much more to say!

At CaucLing we'll also cover:

- ▶ conditions on case allomorphy
- ▶ why number neutrality correlates with absence of overt case
- ▶ a scenario where non-overtness = absence in the syntax!

# Roadmap

Background on West Circassian

Case study 1: Absence of cross-reference morphology

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

Conclusion

# Morphological exponence and the syntax

- ▶ The absence of morphological exponence is standardly used as evidence for the absence of the corresponding syntactic structure.
- ▶ 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



# Cross-reference markers in nominalizations

- ▶ Nominalizations in West Circassian are incompatible with verbal cross-reference markers.
- ▶ However, the heads responsible for cross-reference marking are present in the syntax, albeit deficient.
- ▶ Evidence:
  1. Reflexive and reciprocal cross-reference marking still possible.
  2. Reciprocals are bound by high absolutive.
  3. Some adverbial modifiers are possible.

# Apparently caseless nominals

- ▶ Caseless nominals display some properties associated with a diminished (NP/nP-sized) syntax.
- ▶ But they also display properties typical of full DPs.
- ▶ Our claim: apparent caselessness is a consequence of case allomorphy.
- ▶ Evidence:
  1. Some definite DPs are also caseless.
  2. Some definite DPs are also number neutral.
  3. Narrow/wide scope may not be a good syntactic diagnostic.

# Nuances of unpronounced structure

“Anytime a syntactician claims there’s a silent category, you should of course check your pockets for your wallet...”

(Carnie 2013:372)

...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,

positing an unpronounced category is warranted.

# Thank you!

- ▶ West Circassian consultants: Svetlana K. Alishaeva, Saida Gisheva, Susana K. Khatkova, and Zarema Meretukova
- ▶ Karlos Arregi, Vera Gribanova, Boris Harizanov, David Pesetsky
- ▶ Audiences at: SMircle at Stanford, LingLunch at MIT, Syntax Reading Group at UMass, LSA 95, the Speaker Series at UPenn, GLOW 46, the Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics, and the LASER Workshop at Göttingen
- ▶ Funding sources:
  - ▶ Dissertation Research Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation (BCS-1749299)
  - ▶ Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship of Scholars in the Humanities at Stanford University

- Aldridge, Edith. 2008. Generative approaches to syntactic ergativity. *Language and Linguistics Compass: Syntax and Morphology* 2.5: 966–995.
- Arkadiev, Peter M., and Yakov G. Testelests. 2019. Differential nominal marking in Circassian. *Studies in Language* 43 (3): 715–751.
- Bagirokova, Irina, Yury Lander, and Paul Phelan. 2022. Number in West Circassian. In *Number in the world's languages: A comparative handbook*, eds. Paolo Acquaviva and Michael Daniel, 261–304. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Baker, Mark C. 1997. Thematic roles and syntactic structure. In *Elements of grammar: Handbook in generative syntax*, ed. Liliane Haegeman, 73–137. Springer.
- Bittner, Maria, and Kenneth Hale. 1996. The structural determination of case and agreement. *Linguistic Inquiry* 27: 1–68.
- Bošković, Željko. 2005. On the locality of left branch extraction and the structure of NP. *Studia Linguistica* 59 (1): 1–45.
- Bošković, Željko. 2008. What will you have, DP or NP? *Proceedings of NELS* 37: 101–114.
- Bošković, Željko. 2012. On NPs and clauses. In *Discourse and grammar: From sentence types to lexical categories*, eds. G. Grewendorf and T. E. Zimmermann, 179–242. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Carnie, Andrew. 2013. *Syntax: A generative introduction*, 3rd edn. Wiley-Blackwell.

# References (cont.)

- Coon, Jessica, Nico Baier, and Theodore Levin. 2021. Mayan agent focus and the ergative extraction constraint: Facts and fictions revisited. *Language* 97 (2): 269–332.
- Deal, Amy Rose, Line Mikkelsen, and Ellen Thrane. 2024. Syntactic ergativity without inversion in Kalaallisut. Presentation at NELS 54. <https://nels54.mit.edu/sites/default/files/documents/deal-mikkelsen-thrane-handout.pdf>.
- Ershova, Ksenia. 2019. Syntactic ergativity in West Circassian. PhD diss, University of Chicago.
- Ershova, Ksenia. 2020. Two paths to polysynthesis: Evidence from West Circassian nominalizations. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 38: 425–475. doi:10.1007/s11049-019-09455-w.
- Ershova, Ksenia. 2021. Diagnosing clause structure in a polysynthetic language: Wh-agreement and parasitic gaps in West Circassian. *Linguistic Inquiry* 52 (1): 1–38. doi:10.1162/ling\_a00371.
- Ershova, Ksenia. 2023a. Licensed to license: Deficient probes in West Circassian nominalizations. Presentation at GLOW 46.
- Ershova, Ksenia. 2023b. Syntactic ergativity and the theory of subjecthood: Evidence from anaphor binding in West Circassian. *Language* 99 (2): 193–241. doi:10.1353/lan.2023.a900086.

# References (cont.)

- Ershova, Ksenia. 2024. Phasehood as defective intervention: Possessor extraction and selective DP islandhood in West Circassian. *Syntax*. doi:10.1111/synt.12275.
- Korotkova, Natalia, and Yury Lander. 2010. Deriving affix ordering in polysynthesis: Evidence from Adyghe. *Morphology* 20: 299–319.
- Lander, Yury. 2009. Subject properties of the Adyghe absolute: Evidence from relatives. Unpublished ms.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354052419\\_Subject\\_properties\\_of\\_the\\_Adyghe\\_absolute\\_Evidence\\_from\\_relatives](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354052419_Subject_properties_of_the_Adyghe_absolute_Evidence_from_relatives).
- Lander, Yury. 2012. Reljativizacija v polisintetičeskom jazyke: adygejskie otnositel'nye konstrukcii v tipologičeskoj perspektive [Relativization in a polysynthetic language: Adyghe relative clauses in a typological perspective]. PhD diss, Russian State University for the Humanities.
- Lander, Yury. 2017. Nominal complex in West Circassian: Between morphology and syntax. *Studies in Language* 41 (1): 76–98.
- Letuchiy, Alexander. 2010. Ergativity in the Adyghe system of valency-changing derivations. In *Ergativity, Valency and Voice*, eds. Gilles Authier and Katharina Haude, 323–353. De Gruyter.
- Manning, Christopher D. 1996. *Ergativity: Argument structure and grammatical relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Massam, Diane. 2001. Pseudo noun incorporation in niuean. *NLLT* 19 (1): 153–197.

- Öztürk, Balkız. 2005. Pseudo-incorporation of agents. 11: 213–226.
- Öztürk, Balkız. 2009. Incorporating agents. *Lingua* 119: 334–358.
- Öztürk, Balkız, and Ömer Eren. 2020. The nominal domain in languages of the Caucasus. In *The Oxford handbook of languages of the Caucasus*, 811–843. Oxford University Press.
- Royer, Justin. 2023. Binding and antcataphora in Mayan. *Linguistic Inquiry* Early Access. doi:10.1162/linga00498.
- Yuan, Michelle. 2018. Dimensions of ergativity in Inuit: Theory and microvariation. PhD diss, MIT.
- Yuan, Michelle. 2022. Ergativity and object movement across Inuit. *Language* 98 (3): 510–551.