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Differential nominal marking:
The pervasive case alternation in Circassian

1. Introduction: Differential object marking

The regular alternation in form of direct objects (patients with transitive verbs), most often between a marked and an unmarked form, a phenomenon called **Differential Object Marking** (DOM), has been extensively studied in many languages and cross-linguistically, cf. Comrie 1979; Bossong 1985, 1998; Aissen 2003; de Hoop & Malchukov 2007; Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011; Iemmolo 2010, 2011 etc.).

Unlike other instances of object marking with cases or adpositions, DOM is determined by non-relational characteristics such as person, animacy, specificity, topicality, partitivity, aspect, negation etc. It was observed long ago that if an object nominal takes a marked case form, all nominals that outrank it on the person, definiteness or animacy hierarchies, take the marked form too. There is no generally accepted explanation of this asymmetry, factors such as "distinguishability" and "marking of prominence" having been invoked in the literature (Silverstein 1976; Comrie 1979; Kozinskij 1982; Næss 2004; Haspelmath 2008 etc.).

Similar kinds of alternation with subjects/agents are rarely attested and do not show a "mirror-image" behavior suggested by some explanations (e.g. Aissen 2003), see de Hoop & Malchukov 2008, Fauconnier & Verstraete 2014.

Some typical examples of DOM:

(1) Spanish: mostly animacy-based (Haspelmath 2008)

El	director	busca	el	carro/	el	perro/	**a**	su	hijo.
ART	director	seeks	ART	car	ART	dog	**PREP**	his	son

'The director is looking for the car/the dog/his son.'

(2) Russian: animacy based (with morphological conditions)

viž-u	dom / tigr-**a**
see-1SG.PR	house / tiger-ACC

'I see a house // a tiger.'

(3) Hebrew: definiteness-based (Danon 2001)

a.
Dan	kara	*(**et**)	ha-itonim.
Dan	read.PST	PREP	DEF-newspapers

'Dan read the newspapers.'

b.
Dan	kara	(*et)	itonim.
Dan	read.PST	PREP	newspapers

'Dan read newspapers.'

2. Pseudo Incorporation

A widespread instance of the unmarked member in the DOM alternation is **Pseudo Incorporation** (Massam 2001, 2009; Öztürk 2005; Kamali 2008; Dayal 2011; Baker 2011; Ljutikova 2012), a cluster of features that tend to occur together and sometimes may even occur in the subject NP as well:

(4) (i) involves a phrasal category (NP), not a word;
(ii) lack of case marking;
(iii) number neutrality;
(iv) semantic effects of incorporation like 'typical action';
(v) linear contact with the verb;
(vi) scope inertness of quantifiers;
(vii) non-specificity;
(viii) inability to antecede pronouns;
(ix) valency reduction (de-transitivation) of the verb;
(x) impossible with pronouns
(xi) no articles and other kinds of determiners.

Pseudo Incorporation in Niuean (Austronesian > Oceanic; Massam 2001: 157):

(5) a. Takafaga   tūmau nī   e   ia   **e**   **tau ika**.
         hunt   always EMPH   ERG   he   ABS   PL   fish

     b. Takafaga   **ika**   tūmau nī   a   ia.
         hunt   fish   always EMPH ABS he
         (a = b) 'He is always fishing.'

Pseudo Incorporation in Hindi (Dayal 2011: 137):

(6) a. anu   **bacca**   nahiiN   sambhaalegii
         Anu   child   not   look.after.FUT
         'Anu will not look after children.'

     b. anu   **bacce-ko**   nahiiN   sambhaalegii
         Anu   child-ACC   not   look.after.FUT
         'Anu will not look after the child.'

Pseudo Incorporation in the Mishar dialect of Tatar (Ljutikova 2012):

(7) a. Marat   **qɨzɨl alma** aša-dɨ
         Marat   red   apple eat-PST
         'Marat ate a red apple//red apples.'
     b. Marat   **qɨzɨl alma-nɨ**   aša-dɨ
         Marat   red   apple-ACC   eat-PST
         'Marat ate a red apple//*red apples.'

Massam 2001; Ljutikova 2012: of all the available nominal constructions in a given context, Pseudo Incorporation involves the more deficient one, – e.g. an NP which lacks case and number features, and not a DP.

3. The Circassian languages

Circassian < North-West Caucasian (Abkhaz-Adyghe) < North-Caucasian phylum
Two languages (groups of dialects): **Adyghe** (West Circassian) and **Kabardian** (East Circassian).
Our fieldwork data come from three Circassian varieties spoken in the Republic of Adygea (Russian Federation):

– Temirgoy dialect of Adyghe, very close to Standard Adyghe;
– Bzhedug dialect of Adyghe (village Wechepshije), substantially different from Standard Adyghe;
– Besleney dialect of Kabardian, village Ulyap (very different from Standard Kabardian).

Adyghe   Kabardian
                                Bzhedug dialect
                                Ulyap dialect
                                Temirgoy dialect
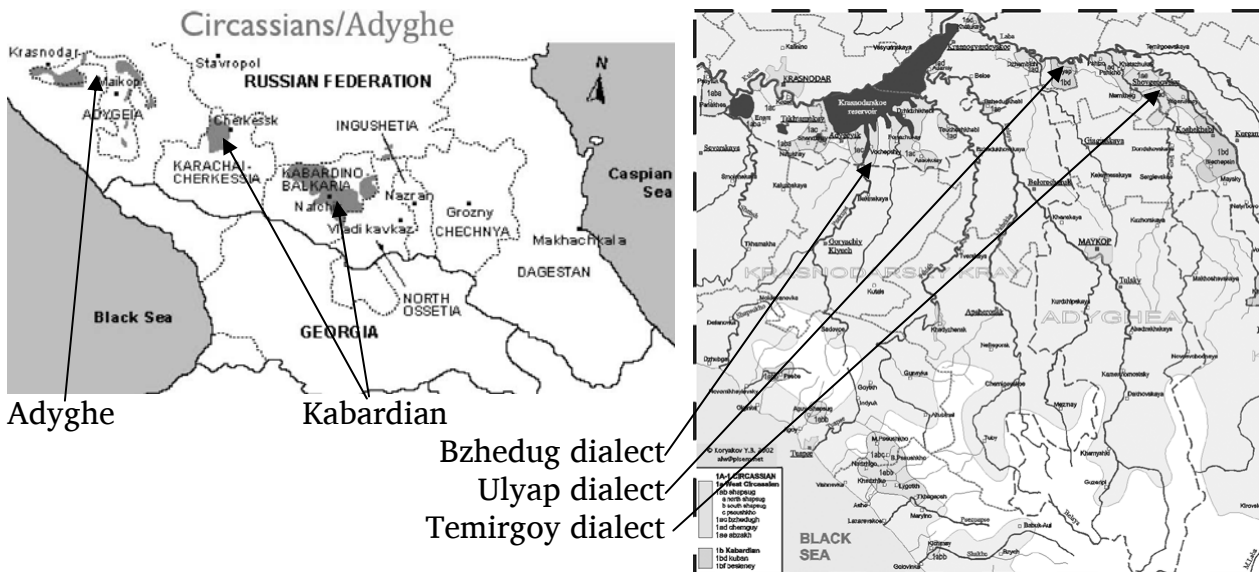
Important typological features:

– very little distinction between nouns, adjectives and verbs (Lander & Testelets 2006);
– polysynthesis: pronominal affixes expressing all arguments of the verb (S, A, P as well as various indirect objects such as recipient, benefactive, and even location, cf. e.g. Smeets 1992) and a rich system of affixes marking aspectual, temporal and modal meanings (Smeets 1984; Korotkova & Lander 2010; Lander & Letuchiy 2010)

(8) Besleney Kabardian

> sə-qə-zer-a-xʷə-č'erə-mə-ṭetə-č'ə-ž'-a-r
> 1SG.ABS-DIR-REL.FCT-3PL.IO-BEN-LOC-NEG-tie-ELAT-RE-PST-ABS
> 'that they could not untie me'

– ergativity in both head- and dependent-marking (Smeets 1992; Kumakhov & Vamling 2009; Letuchiy 2012), coupled with an impoverished case system comprising only Absolutive (-*r*, marks S (9a) and P (9b)) and Oblique (-*m*, marks A (9b), all types of indirect objects (9b), and adnominal possessors (9c). In turn, personal pronouns, possessed nominals and proper names normally don't admit case marking.

(9) Temirgoy Adyghe

  a. č'ale-**r**   ∅¹-me-čəje.
      boy-ABS   3.ABS-DYN-sleep
      'The boy is sleeping.'

  b. č'ale-**m**   pŝaŝe-**m**   txəλə-**r**   ∅-∅-r-j-e-tə.
      boy-OBL   girl-OBL   book-ABS   3.ABS-3SG.IO-DAT-3SG.ERG-DYN-give
      'The boy is giving the book to the girl.'

  c. çəfə-**m**   ∅-jə-wəne
      man-OBL   3SG.PR-POSS-house
      'the man's house'

Existing sources on Circassian morphosyntax:

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¹ Below we will not mark and gloss zero morphemes.

– in general on Circassian: Kumaxov 1971 (in Russian); Kumakhov & Vamling 2009 (in English);
– on Adyghe: Paris 1989 (in French); Smeets 1984 (in English); Rogava & Keraševa 1962; Testelec (ed.) 2009 (in Russian);
– on Kabardian: Colarusso 1989, 1992, 2006; Matasovič 2008 (in English); Kumaxov (ed.) 2006 (in Russian).

4. Differential nominal marking in Circassian

NPs may lack the case endings **-r** (Absolutive) and **-m** (Oblique). Regular alternation of case-marked and unmarked forms occurs almost in all syntactic contexts. The condition that makes the alternation possible is generally that non-specific or indefinite NPs are unmarked, whereas specific or definite NP are case-marked.

4.1. The **Absolutive** contexts

4.1.2. Subjects of intransitive verbs

(10) Temirgoy Adyghe:

    a.   **pŝaŝe-r**   ma-ḳʷe
            girl-ABS   DYN-go
            'The girl is going.'

    b.   **pŝaŝe**   ma-ḳʷe
            girl   DYN-go
            'A girl is going.'

4.1.2. Direct objects of transitive verbs

(11) Besleney Kabardian:

    a.   **ž'emə-r**   qe-s-š'eχʷ-a
            cow-ABS   DIR-1SG.ERG-buy-PST
            'I bought the cow.'

    b.   **ž'em** qe-s-š'exʷə-ne-w   s-we-ḳʷe   ž'.jə.ʔ-a
            cow   DIR-1SG.ERG-buy-FUT-ADV   1SG.ABS-DYN-go   3SG.ERG:say-PST
            'I'm going in order to buy a cow.' (DX_Anekdot: 3)

4.2. The **Oblique** contexts:

4.2.1. Indirect objects of intransitive (12) and ditransitive (13) verbs

(12) Standard Kabardian (Kumaxov 1971: 37):

    a.   **ŝale-r**   **txəλ̣ə-m**   j-we-ʒe
            boy-ABS   book-OBL   DAT-DYN-read
            'The boy is reading the book.'

    b.   **ŝale   txəλ**   j-we-ǯe
        boy   book   DAT-DYN-read
        'A boy reads a book.'

(13) Besleney Kabardian:

    a.   **p̂eŝe-ʁesa-m**   q̇eʁaʁe   jə-r-jə-tə-n-wə   xʷje
        girl-well.mannered-OBL   flower   3SG.IO-DAT-3SG.ERG-give-POT-ADV   want
        'He wants to present flowers to the well-mannered girl.'

    b.   **p̂eŝe-ʁesa**   q̇eʁaʁe   jə-r-jə-tə-n-wə   xʷje
        girl-well.mannered   flower   3SG.IO-DAT-3SG.ERG-give-POT-ADV   want
        'He wants to present flowers to (some) well-mannered girl.'

4.2.2. Experiencers introduced by applicative prefixes:

(14) Besleney Kabardian:

    [ʔedeb   zə-xe-λ   **p̂aŝe**]   mwe   ǯ'ane-r   č'egʷa-š'-wə
    manners   REL.IO-LOC-lie   **girl**   that   dress-ABS   short-NIM-ADV

    q̇ə-fe-ŝə-ne
    DIR-MAL-make-FUT

    'To a well-mannered girl, that dress will seem somewhat short.'

4.2.3. Locative (15) and temporal (16), (17) adverbials

(15) Standard Kabardian (Kumaxov 1971):

    a.   **mezə-m**   ma-k̇ʷe
        forest-**OBL**   DYN-go
        '(S)he is going to the forest.'

    b.   **mez**   ma-k̇ʷe
        forest   DYN-go
        '(S)he is going to a forest.'

(16) Bzhedug Adyghe:

    nepʰeməč'   **mafe(-m)**   tə-qe-k̇ʷe-t
    another   day(-**OBL**)   1PL.ABS-DIR-come-FUT
    'We'll come on another day.'

(17) Besleney Kabardian:

    a.   **nah-mexʷe-xʷabe-m**   psə-m   də-k̇ʷe-ne
        more-day-warm-**OBL**   water-OBL   1SG.ABS-go-FUT
        'We'll go to the river on the warmer day (we know the forecast).'

    b.   **nah-mexʷe-xʷabe**   psə-m   də-k̇ʷe-ne
        more-day-warm   water-OBL   1SG.ABS-go-FUT
        'We'll go to the river on a warmer day (if there will be any).'

4.2.4. NP-internal possessors

(18) Bzhedug Adyghe:

    a.   dawətʰe   **çəf-bajə-m**   ə-pχʷ   q-ə-š'ʰe-n-ew   feja-ʁ
        Daut   man-rich-OBL   3SG.PR-daughter   DIR-3SG.ERG-lead-POT-ADV   want-PST
        'Daut would like to marry the daughter of a (particular) rich man.'

    b.   dawətʰe   **çəf-baj**   ə-pχʷ   q-ə-š'ʰe-n-ew   feja-ʁ
        Daut   man-rich   3SG.PR-daughter   DIR-3SG.ERG-lead-POT-ADV   want-PST
        'Daut would like to marry a rich man's daughter.'

4.2.5. Complements of postpositions

(19) Besleney Kabardian

pŝeŝe-daxe	ŝhač'e	maskva-jə	ḳʷe-ne
girl-pretty	for	Moscow-ADD	go-FUT

'For a pretty girl he will go even to Moscow.'

(20) Bzhedug Adyghe:

nəbǯ'eʁʷ(-**əm**)	pʰaj	tʰjəmwər	zeč'e-r-jə	ə-ŝ̂ə-t
friend(-OBL)	for	Timur	all-ABS-ADD	3SG.ERG-do-FUT

'Timur will do everything for his friend / for anyone who is his friend.'

4.2.6. Ergative marking of the subject with transitive verbs

Subjects of transitive verbs are the least available context for the unmarked form. The latter is only possible in this position when the subject is non-specific, and the verb phrase serves as an individual-level predicate with the lasting effect, e.g. of (in)ability, cf. (21) and (22–23):

Temirgoy Adyghe:

(21) a.

pŝaŝe-m	ǯane(-r)	ə-də-ʁ
girl-**OBL**	dress(-ABS)	3SG.ERG-sew-PST

b.

*****pŝaŝe**	ǯane(-r)	ə-də-ʁ
girl	dress(-ABS)	3SG.ERG-sew-PST

'The/a girl made a (/the) dress.'

(22)

ʔaze-deʁʷə	w-jə-ʁe-χʷəž'ə-š't
doctor-good	2SG.ABS-3SG.ERG-CAUS-recover-FUT

'A good doctor will be able to cure you.'

(23) Besleney Kabardian:

č'ele-ʁesa	apxʷede	pjəsme	jə-txə-ne- q̇əm
boy-well.behaved	such	letter	3SG.ERG-write-FUT-NEG

'A well-behaved boy won't write such a letter.' (i.e. this letter is such that no decent boy would write it)

4.3. The **Instrumental** contexts

The Oblique case can combine with the instrumental case marker -č'e/-ǯ'e, resulting in the same contrast in (in)definiteness.

(24) Temirgoy Adyghe (Serdobol'skaja & Kuznecova 2009: 189; cf. Xalbad 1975 a.o.):

a.

t-jate	pχe-xe-r	**wetəč'ə-č'e**	j-e-qʷəte-x
1PL.PR-father	wood-PL-ABS	axe-INS	3SG.ERG-DYN-chop-PL

'Father is chopping the wood with **an** axe.'

b.

t-jate	pχe-xe-r	**wetəč'ə-m-č'e**	j-e-qʷəte-x
1PL.PR-father	wood-PL-ABS	axe-OBL-INS	3SG.ERG-DYN-chop-PL

'Father is chopping the wood with **the** axe.'

(25) Bzhedug Adyghe:

a.

a-r	mač'e	**nebγər-jə-ṭʷə-m-ǯ'e**
that-ABS	little	person-LNK-two-**OBL**-INS

'This is too little for the two persons.'

b.

a-r	mač'e	**nebγər-jə-ṭʷə-ǯ'e**
that-ABS	little	person-LNK-two-INS

'This is too little for (any) two persons.'

To sum up: In Circassian we see a phenomenon, unattested to our knowledge in other languages, for which we suggest the term **Differential Nominal Marking (DNM)** – an alternation of the case-marked and the unmarked forms of nominals which covers not only object and subject, but most other uses of nominal constructions as well.

5. Is Circassian DNM Pseudo Incorporation?
The unmarked form in Circassian displays some but not all characteristics of Pseudo Incorporation listed above.

5.1. Number neutrality of the unmarked form (Jakovlev, Ašxamaf 1941: 47; Kumaxov 1971: 13)

(26) Standard Kabardian:

txəλ qe-s-ŝexʷa-ŝ
book DIR-1SG.ERG-purchase-DCL
'I bought a book/books.'

(27) Temirgoy Adyghe:

    a.   stolə-m   **txəλə-r**   tje-λ
            table-OBL   book-**ABS**   LOC-lie
            'There is a (one) book on the table.'

    b.   stolə-m   **txəλ**   tje-λ
            table-OBL   **book**   LOC-lie
            'There is a book on the table / There are books on the table.'

Bzhedug Adyghe (number neutrality accompanied by the usual *de re* vs. *de dicto* contrast):

(28)   a.   **ǯene-šχʷanṭe**   sə-faj
            dress-blue   1SG.ABS-want
            'I want a blue dress / blue dresses.'

    b.   **ǯene-šχʷanṭe-m**   sə-faj
            dress-blue-**OBL**   1SG.ABS-want
            'I want the blue dress (one).'

5.2. Scope Inertness

    Temirgoy Adyghe, Absolutive:

(29)   a.   tjetrad   pepč   **wəs-jə-ṭʷ**   de-tə-ʁ
            notebook   every   poem-LNK-two   LOC-stand-PST
            'In every notebook, there were two poems.' (different in every notebook)

    b.   tjetrad   pepč   **wəs-jə-ṭʷə-r**   de-tə-ʁ
            notebook   every   poem-LNK-two-**ABS**   LOC-stand-PST
            'In every notebook, there were **the** two poems.' (same)

(30)   a.   stwədent   pepč   **wəs-jə-ṭʷ**   ə-txə-ʁ
            student   every   poem-LNK-two   3SG.ERG-write-PST
            'Every student wrote down two poems.' (different)'

    b.   stwədent   pepč   **wəs-jə-ṭʷə-r**   ə-txə-ʁ
            student   every   poem-LNK-two-**ABS**   3SG.ERG-write-PST
            'Every student wrote down **the** two poems.' (same)'

(31) Besleney Kabardian, Oblique:

    a. **txəλ-kʷedə-m**   s-ja-ǯ'-a-**q̇əm**
        book-many-**OBL**   1SG.ABS-3PL.IO + DAT-read-PST-**NEG**
        'There are many books that I didn't read.' / 'I read not many books.'

    b. **txəλ-kʷed**   s-ja-ǯ'-a-**q̇əm**
        book-many   1SG.ABS-3PL.IO + DAT-read-PST-**NEG**
        'I read not many books.' / *'There are many books that I didn't read.'

(32) Bzhedug Adyghe, Instrumental:

    a. zeč'e   č'ale-me   selat **cʰecʰ-jə-ṭʷə-ǯ'e** q-a-šte-təʁ
        all   boy-OBL.PL salad fork-LNK-two-**INS** DIR-3PL.ERG-take-IPF
        'All the boys were taking the salad with two forks.' (each boy had his own pair of forks)

    b. zeč'e   č'ale-me   selat **cʰecʰ-jə-ṭʷə-m-ǯ'e** q-a-šte-təʁ
        all   boy-OBL.PL salad fork-LNK-two-**OBL-INS** DIR-3PL.ERG-take-IPF
        'All the boys were taking the salad with the two forks.' (the same two)

5.3. No pronouns

(33) Temirgoy Adyghe:

    a*(-**r**)   ma-ḳʷe
    that-**ABS**   DYN-go
    'S/he is going.'

5.4. No determiners

(34) a. ǯane(-**r**)
        dress(-**ABS**)
        'a dress/the dress'

    b. mə   ǯane*(-**r**)
        this   dress*(-**ABS**)
        'this dress'

5.5. Other

The unmarked form in the Circassian languages lacks other characteristics of Pseudo Incorporation (4): it may be not adjacent to the verb, cf. the linear order in (35), may antecede pronouns (36), and is not accompanied by valency reduction.

Besleney Kabardian:

(35) **txəλ**   mə twəč'anə-m   š'-j-e-š'exʷ-zepət
     book   this shop-OBL   LOC-3SG.ERG-DYN-buy-FRQ
     'He often buys books in this shop.'

(36) dəʁʷase twəč'anə-m sə-ḳʷe-rjə,   **txəλ**ᵢ q̇e-s-š'exʷ-a.
     yesterday shop-OBL   1SG.ABS-go-CNV book DIR-1SG.ERG-buy-PST

     ǯ'ə   **a-bə**ᵢ   s-we-ǯ'e.
     now   DEM-OBL 1SG.ABS-DYN-read
     'Yesterday I went to the shop and bought a book. Now I am reading it.'

Notably, there may be several (as many as necessary) unmarked nominals in a single clause, cf. (12b) or (13b), repeated here as (37):

(37) Besleney Kabardian:

    pŝeŝe-ʁesa   **q̇eʁaʁe** jə-r-jə-tə-n-wə   xʷje
    girl-well.mannered   flower 3SG.IO-DAT-3SG.ERG-give-POT-ADV want
    'He wants to present flowers to (some) well-mannered girl.'

Following (Massam 2001, 2009; Ljutikova 2012), we assume that the case and number features in Circassian characterize the full nominal construction – Determiner Phrase (DP), but not the "small nominal" (Pereltsvaig 2006), i. e. a Noun Phrase (NP) which can sometimes occur in the same syntactic positions.

Being morphologically deficient, NPs are semantically inert (in generative terms, cannot undergo movement), which explains their narrow scope with respect to quantifiers and negation.

(38) a.   _{NP}[ӡane]
        dress
        'dress(es)'

   b.   _{DP}[mə   _{NP}[ӡane]-r]
        this   dress-ABS
        'this dress'; *'these dresses'

   c.   *_{NP}[mə   ӡane]
        this   dress

With overt number marking, overt case marking becomes obligatory (39). This can be accounted for if we assume that both number and case features occur only at the DP level:

(39) a.   _{DP}[mə   _{NP}[ӡane]-xe-r]
        this   dress-PL-ABS
        'these dresses'

   b.   *_{DP}[mə   _{NP}[ӡane]-xe]
        this   dress-PL-ABS

Of all the Circassian varieties we have studied so far, only in the Bzhedug dialect of Adyghe overt plural nominals can be unmarked for case when they are indefinite and in the Absolutive case position (40).

(40) Bzhedug Adyghe:

čhe   **gʷəpšʰəse-xe**   q-j-e-he-x
1SG.PR + head   thought-PL   DIR-LOC-DYN-come-PL
'Into my head, thoughts come.'

However, in Bzhedug the unmarked form in the Absolutive positions is specified for number: it is singular, cf. (28b) and (41):

(41) Bzhedug Adyghe:

laʁe   stwelə-m   tje-tʰ
plate   table-OBL   LOC-stand
'There is a plate on the table'; *'There are plates on the table'

Data like (40–41) suggest that in Bzhedug, unlike other Circassian dialects, number is not associated with DP, but characterizes a smaller category like NP or NumP.

6. Conclusions

We hypothesize therefore that

1) DNM in Circassian is an instance of Pseudo Incorporation whereby the unmarked form represents a bare NP which is grammatically deficient and lacks the grammatical features of case and number;

2) both marked forms (Absolutive and Oblique) represent full nominal constructions (DPs).

Assuming that the two-layer NP vs. DP model is adequate for many languages, the main typological peculiarity of Circassian is that **the syntactic distributions of NP and DP are close to identical**.

This fact is a challenge to all theoretical approaches to DOM proposed so far, within the formal or the functional perspective alike. All of them have been focused on the grammatical asymmetry of subjects and objects: DOM is a phenomenon that involves objects only. Pseudo Incorporation can have a wider take and involve subjects too (Kamali 2008), but we are aware of no other language where it is as pervasive as it is in Circassian.

In the generative approaches proposed for DOM, it is often assumed that the object that lacks case characteristics remains in the VP whereas the case-marked object raises to get its case feature checked (Massam 2001 a.o.). However, it is hard to postulate as many VP-internal positions for the unmarked NPs as there are VP-external positions for their case-marked DP counterparts. Within the generative framework, the subject vs. object structural asymmetry is a VP(vP)-internal characteristic based on the verb's subcategorization properties, and as such it cannot be merely replicated at the higher structural levels.

Likewise, all accounts of DOM in the functionalist perspective have been based on the subject vs. object asymmetry: to solve the DOM puzzle is to account for the fact why it occurs with some arguments and not with others. To abide by the functional principles, viz. to provide the effectiveness and the economy of communication, languages tend to mark an element whenever it is necessary. The functional strategy responsible for DOM has been characterised as marking a participant that is less "natural", or less expected to occur in a given role, e.g. animate or definite nominals as objects (Silvestein 1976; Comrie 1979; Dixon 1979 a.o.), or shows a less frequent pattern, i.e. an unexpected association between grammatical role and information-structure properties (Haspelmath 2008; Iemmolo 2010), given that direct objects tend to be new, or focal, or of low accessibility (Du Bois 2003). Cf. also attempts to incorporate functional-typological concepts like iconicity, economy etc. within the formal framework via Optimality Theory in Aissen 2003 and de Hoop & Malchukov 2008.

The hypothesis that both DPs and NPs can be subjects, objects or less prominent nominals seems to directly account for the DOM asymmetry, but only in one case. In languages with nominative-accusative alignment and unmarked nominative, it may be that NPs are available only in the structural case positions, i.e. nominative and accusative, and the difference between a DP and an NP is morphologically visible only in the direct object position (accusative-marked DP vs. caseless NP).

Our approach cannot explain, however, why the case-marked DP vs. caseless NP difference is not as widely attested for subjects in languages with overtly marked subjects, be they of the nominative-accusative or ergative-absolutive alignment, and is still rarer in oblique syntactic positions. To our knowledge, Circassian is the only subject-marking language which consistently employs this pattern for all syntactic positions. A similar phenomenon is recorded in Coptic, where only postverbal arguments take overt case marking – nominative or accusative (Grossman 2014).[2]

Abbreviations

ABS — absolutive; ACC — accusative; ADD — additive; ADV — adverbial; ART — article; BEN — benefactive; CAUS — causative; CNV — converb; DAT — dative; DCL — declarative; DEF — definite; DEM — demonstrative; DIR — directional preverb; DYN — dynamic; ELAT — elative; EMPH — emphatic; ERG — ergative; FCT — factive; FRQ — frequentative; FUT — future; INS — instrumental; IO — indirect object; IPF — imperfect; LNK — linking morpheme; LOC — locative; MAL — malefac-

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[2] In Semelai, an Aslian (Mon-Khmer) language (Kruspe 2004), core NPs which are case-marked in postverbal position do not retain clitic or preposition marking when fronted to preverbal position. Only one bare topical NP can be fronted per clause, which makes the phenomenon similar to left dislocation, widely attested elsewhere; cf. the "no case before the verb" constraint observed for African languages (König 2008).

tive; NEG — negation; NIM — nimifactive; OBL — oblique; PL — plural; POSS — possessive; POT — potential; PR — possessor; PST — past; RE — refactive; REL — relativizer; SG – singular.

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