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ON THE STRUCTURE OF NOMINAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN WEST CAUCASIAN

1. The languages

Circassian and Abkhaz-Abaza are two branches of the West Caucasian (Abkhaz-Adyghe) family of the North-Caucasian phylum. In each branch, there are two extant languages (groups of dialects): **Adyghe** (West Circassian) and **Kabardian** (East Circassian); **Abkhaz** and **Abaza**. The third documented branch of the family comprises the now extinct Ubykh.

Our fieldwork data, mainly collected during field trips in 2004–2015, come from the Circassian varieties spoken in the Republic of Adygeya, and from the Tapanta dialect of Abaza spoken in the Republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessia (both in the Russian Federation)¹.

The main typological characteristics of the West Caucasian languages are rich consonant and poor vowel inventories, polysynthesis, ergativity and head-final (SOV) word order. For more information and references on Circassian cf. Arkadiev & Testele (2014).

2. Case and Differential Nominal Marking in Circassian

Absolutive (-*r*, marks S (1a) and P (1b)) and Oblique (-*m*, marks A (1b), all types of indirect objects (1b), and adnominal possessors (1c)). Personal pronouns, possessed nominals and proper names normally do not take overt case marking.

(1) Temirgoy Adyghe

- a. *č'ale-r me-čaje.*
boy-ABS DYN-sleep
'The boy is sleeping.'
- b. *č'ale-m pšaše-m txələ-r r-j-e-tə.*
boy-OBL girl-OBL book-ABS DAT-3SG.ERG-PRS-give
'The boy is giving the book to the girl.'
- c. *çəfə-m jə-wəne*
man-OBL POSS-house
'the man's house'

Nominal constituents in Circassian languages may lack overt case-marking:

- ☞ alternation of case-marked and unmarked forms occurs almost in all syntactic contexts;
- ☞ non-specific or indefinite NPs are unmarked, whereas specific or definite NP are case-marked.

2.1. The **Absolutive** contexts

2.1.1. Subjects (S) of monovalent intransitive verbs

(2) Temirgoy Adyghe:

- a. *pšaše-r ma-ķ^we*
girl-ABS DYN-go
'The girl is going.'
- b. *pšaše ma-ķ^we*
girl DYN-go
'A girl is going.'

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2.1.2. Subjects (S) of bivalent intransitive verbs

(3) Besleney Kabardian

λə = šəpqe(-r) *jeβaš-jə* *pšaše-m* *je-we-ne-qəm*
 man = true(-ABS) life-ADD girl-OBL DAT-hit-FUT-NEG
 ‘A real man will never hit a girl.’

2.1.3. Direct objects (P) of transitive verbs

(4) Besleney Kabardian:

- a. **ž'emə-r** *qe-s-š'ex^w-a*
 cow-ABS DIR-1SG.ERG-buy-PST
 ‘I bought the cow.’
- b. **ž'em** *qe-s-š'ex^wə-ne-w* *s-we-ḱ^we* *ž'.jə.ʔ-a*
 cow DIR-1SG.ERG-buy-FUT-ADV 1SG.ABS-PRS-go 3SG.ERG:say-PST
 ‘He said: I’m going in order to buy a cow.’ (textual example)

2.2. The **Oblique** contexts:

2.2.1. Indirect objects of intransitive (5) and ditransitive (6) verbs

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

- a. **šale-r** *txəλə-m* *j-we-že*
 boy-ABS book-OBL DAT-prs-read
 ‘The boy is reading the book.’
- b. **šale** *txəλ* *j-we-že*
 boy book DAT-prs-read
 ‘A boy reads a book.’

(6) Besleney Kabardian

- a. **pšəše = βesa-m** *qəβaβe* *jə-r-jə-tə-n-wə* *x^wje*
 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. **pšəše = βesa** *qəβaβe* *jə-r-jə-tə-n-wə* *x^wje*
 girl = well.mannered flower 3SG.IO-DAT-3SG.ERG-give-POT-ADV want
 ‘He wants to present flowers to (some) well-mannered girl.’

2.2.2. Indirect objects introduced by applicative prefixes

(7) Besleney Kabardian

- a. *s-jə-pšaše* **č'ele = daxe-m** *de-ḱ^we-n-wə* *x^waje*
 1SG.PR-POSS-girl boy = beautiful-OBL COM-go-POT-ADV want
 ‘My daughter wants to marry (lit. “go with”) a (particular) handsome guy.’
- b. *s-jə-pšaše* **č'ele = daxe** *de-ḱ^we-n-wə* *x^waje*
 1SG.PR-POSS-girl boy = beautiful COM-go-POT-ADV want
 ‘My daughter wants to marry a handsome guy (not an ugly one).’

2.2.3. Locative (8) and temporal (9) adjuncts

(8) Standard Kabardian (Kumaxov 1971: 119):

- a. **mezə-m** *ma-ḱ^we* b. **mez** *ma-ḱ^we*
 forest-OBL DYN-go forest DYN-go
 ‘(S)he is going to the forest.’ ‘(S)he is going to a forest.’

(9) Bzhedug Adyghe:

nep^heməč' = mafe(-m) *tə-qe-ḱ^we-t*
 another = day(-OBL) 1PL.ABS-DIR-come-FUT
 ‘We’ll come on another day.’

2.2.4. NP-internal possessors

(10) Bzhedug Adyghe:

- a. *dawət^he* *çəf = bajə-m* *ə-pχ^w* *q-ə-š^he-n-ew* *feja-β*
 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. *dawət^he* *çəf = baj* *ə-pχ^w* *q-ə-š^he-n-ew* *feja-β*
 Daut man = rich 3SG.PR-daughter DIR-3SG.ERG-lead-POT-ADV want-PST
 ‘Daut would like to marry a rich man’s daughter.’

2.2.5. Complements of postpositions

(11) Besleney Kabardian

- pšeše = daxe* *šhač’e* *maskva-jə* *k^we-ne*
 girl = beautiful for MOSCOW-ADD go-FUT
 ‘For a pretty girl he will go even to Moscow.’

2.2.6. Ergative marking of the subject with transitive verbs

Oblique subjects of transitive verbs (as well as the Absolutive subjects of bivalent intransitive verbs, see 2.1.2) 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:

(12) Temirgoy Adyghe

- ʔaze = dex^wə* *w-jə-βe-χ^wəž’ə-š’t*
 doctor-good 2SG.ABS-3SG.ERG-CAUS-recover-FUT
 ‘A good doctor will [be able to] cure you.’

(13) Besleney Kabardian:

- č’ele = βesa* *apx^wede = pjəsmə* *jə-txə-ne-čəm*
 boy = well.behaved such = letter 3SG.ERG-write-FUT-NEG
 ‘No well-behaved boy will write such a letter.’

2.3. The Instrumental contexts

The Oblique case can combine with the polysemous Instrumental case marker *-č’e* resulting in the same contrast in (in)definiteness.

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

- a. *t-jate* *pχe-xe-r* *wetəč’ə-č’e* *j-e-q^wəte-x*
 1PL.PR-father wood-PL-ABS axe-INS 3SG.ERG-PRS-chop-PL
 ‘Father is chopping the wood with **an** axe.’
- b. *t-jate* *pχe-xe-r* *wetəč’ə-m-č’e* *j-e-q^wəte-x*
 1PL.PR-father wood-PL-ABS axe-OBL-INS 3SG.ERG-PRS-chop-PL
 ‘Father is chopping the wood with **the** axe.’

To sum up: **Differential Nominal Marking (DNM)** triggered by definiteness/specificity and occurring in all syntactic positions.

3. What is special about the Circassian DNM?

➔ The regular alternation between overt and zero case marking of nominals triggered by their referential properties (including specificity) is widely attested in the languages of the world, but only for a very restricted set of syntactic contexts, i. e. patients of transitive verbs (direct objects) – **Differential Object Marking (DOM)** (cf. Comrie 1979; Bossong 1985, 1998; Enç 1991; Aissen 2003; Leonetti 2004; Öztürk 2005; de Hoop & Malchukov 2007; de Swart 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 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:

(15) 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.’

(16) Thulung Rai (Tibeto-Burman, Nepal): animacy-based (Lahaussais 2002: 69)

- a. *go ama-mam*(-lai) hapa mim-pu*
 I my-mother-DAT much think-1SG > 3SG
 ‘I think of my mother a lot.’
- b. *gu-ka gari(*-lai) thur-y.*
 3SG-ERG car(*-DAT) drive-3SG > 3SG
 ‘He drives the car.’

By contrast, in the Circassian languages the alternation is not restricted to the syntactic role of the direct object — it is not restricted by syntactic position at all.

4. A futher issue: Pseudo Incorporation

A widespread instance of the unmarked member in the DOM alternation is the phenomenon called **Pseudo Incorporation (PI)** (Massam 2001, 2009; Öztürk 2005; Kamali 2008; Dayal 2011; Baker 2011; Ljutikova 2014; Borik & Gehrke (eds.) 2015), a cluster of features that tend to occur together and sometimes may even occur in the subject NP as well:

- (17) (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.

(18) PI in Niuean (Austronesian > Oceanic; Massam 2001: 157):

- a. *Takafaga tūmau nī e iā e tau ika.*
 hunt always EMPH ERG he ABS PL fish
- b. *Takafaga ika tūmau nī a iā.*
 hunt fish always EMPH ABS he
- (a = b) ‘He is always fishing.’

(19) PI in the Mishar dialect of Tatar (Ljutikova 2014: 57):

- a. *Marat qizil alma aša-di*
 Marat red apple eat-PST
 ‘Marat ate a red apple/red apples.’
- b. *Marat qizil alma-ni aša-di*
 Marat red apple-ACC eat-PST
 ‘Marat ate a red apple/*red apples.’

Massam (2001), Ljutikova (2014): PI involves a deficient nominal category (a “small nominal”, Pereltsvaig 2006), i.e. an NP lacking case and number features, and not a full nominal construction (DP) which is (and has to be) characterized by such features.

5. Is Circassian DNM Pseudo Incorporation?

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

➔ Pro-PI:

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

(20) Temirgoy Adyghe, Absolutive

- 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.’

(21) Kuban Kabardian, Oblique

- s-jə-g^w q-o-we nenaw-xe-r txəλ zer-je-mə-ž'e-r*
 1SG.PR-POSS-heart DIR-PRS-hit child-PL-ABS book SBD-DAT-NEG-read-ABS
 ‘It is a pity that children don’t read books.’

5.2. Scope inertness

(22) Temirgoy Adyghe, Absolutive:

- a. *tjetrad pepč wəs-jə-t^w de-tə-β*
 notebook every poem-LNK-two LOC-stand-PST
 ‘In every notebook, there were two poems.’ (different in every notebook)
- b. *tjetrad pepč wəs-jə-t^{wə-r} de-tə-β*
 notebook every poem-LNK-two-ABS LOC-stand-PST
 ‘In every notebook, there were **the** two poems.’ (same)

(23) Besleney Kabardian, Oblique:

- a. *txəλ = k^wedə-m s-ja-ž'-a-qəm*
 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 = k^wed* *s-ja-ž'-a-qəm*
 book = many 1SG.ABS-3PL.IO + DAT-read-PST-NEG
 'I read not many books.' / *'There are many books that I didn't read.'

(24) Bzhedug Adyghe, Instrumental:

- a. *zeč'e č'ale-me selat c^hec^h-jə-t^wə-ž'e q-a-šte-təB*
 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 c^hec^h-jə-t^wə-m-ž'e q-a-šte-təB*
 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 forks for all boys)

5.3. No pronouns

(25) Temirgoy Adyghe:

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

5.4. No determiners

- (26) a. *žane(-r)* b. *mə žane*(-r)*
 dress-ABS this dress-ABS
 'a dress/the dress' 'this dress'

⇒ Contra-PI:

5.5. The unmarked form in the Circassian languages lacks other characteristics of Pseudo Incorporation: it need not be adjacent to the verb, cf. the linear order in (27), may antecede pronouns (28), and is not accompanied by valency reduction.

Besleney Kabardian:

- (27) *txəλ mə twəč'anə-m š'-j-e-š'ex^w-zəpət*
 book this shop-OBL LOC-3SG.ERG-PRS-buy-FRQ
 'He often buys books in this shop.'
- (28) *dəB^wase twəč'anə-m sə-k^we-rjə, txəλ_i qe-s-š'ex^w-a.*
 yesterday shop-OBL 1SG.ABS-go-CNV book DIR-1SG.ERG-buy-PST
ž'ə a-bə_i s-o-ž'e.
 now DEM-OBL 1SG.ABS-PRS-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. (29):

(29) Besleney Kabardian:

- pšêše = vesa qekəve jə-r-jə-tə-n-wə x^wje*
 girl = well.mannered flower 3SG.IO-DAT-3SG.ERG-give-POT-ADV want
 'He wants to present flowers to (some) well-mannered girl.'

⇒ Following recent proposals on DOM-related PI (Massam 2001, 2009; Ljutikova 2014), we assume that the case and number features in Circassian characterize the full nominal construction (DP), but not the "small nominal" (NP), which can occur in the same syntactic positions. Being morphologically deficient, NPs are semantically inert (in generative terms, cannot undergo scope-changing movement), which explains their narrow scope with respect to quantifiers and negation. However, NPs in Circassian are subject to scope-unrelated scrambling.

- (30) a. ${}_{NP}$ [*žane*]
dress
'dress(es)'
- b. ${}_{DP}$ [*mə* ${}_{NP}$ [*žane*]-*r*]
this dress-ABS
'this dress'; *'these dresses'
- c. * ${}_{NP}$ [*mə* *žane*]
this dress

☞ Note that NP vs. DP is an independently established distinction in the Circassian languages, which have two kinds of nominal constituents:

- full nominal projections forming several phonological words and able to recursively attach possessive modifiers and full relative clauses (31a);
- “nominal complex” consisting of the noun and its non-referential modifiers forming together one phonological word (32b).

(31) Temirgoy Adyghe

- a. [${}_{DP}$ [*s-jə*- ${}_{NP}$ [*č'ale*]-*xe-m*] *ja*- ${}_{NP}$ [*wəne*]-*xe-r*]
1SG.PR-POSS-boy-PL-OBL 3PL.PR + POSS-house-PL-ABS
'my sons' houses.'
- b. [${}_{NP}$ *šolk = ž'ene = daxe*]
silk = dress = beautiful
'a beautiful silk dress / beautiful silk dresses'

With overt number marking, overt case marking becomes obligatory (32). This can be accounted for if we assume that both number and case features occur only at the DP level:

- (32) a. ${}_{DP}$ [*mə* ${}_{NP}$ [*žane*]-*xe-r*]
this dress-PL-ABS
'these dresses'
- b. * ${}_{DP}$ [*mə* ${}_{NP}$ [*žane*]-*xe*]
this dress-PL

6. The unmarked nominals in Abaza: NP vs. DP contrast without case marking

The Circassian two-layered structure of nominal constructions can be extended to the languages of the Abkhaz-Abaza branch, which morphologically encode definiteness and number, but lack morphological cases distinguishing core grammatical relations.

Definiteness and number correlate: with an overt marker of (in)definiteness, the plural may also be marked (34b), (35b), whereas nominals that lack the (in)definiteness markers are neutral with respect to number (33a), (35c) and cannot express it overtly (34a), (35d).

Abaza:

- (33) a. *čə* *s-ɣ^war-nəs* *s-taqə-ḗ*
horse 1SG.ERG-buy-INF 1SG.ABS-want-PRS
'I want to buy horse/horses.'
- b. *čə-k / a-čə* *s-ɣ^war-nəs* *s-taqə-ḗ*
horse-INDEF/ DEF-horse 1SG.ERG-buy-INF 1SG.ABS-want-PRS
'I want to buy a/the horse.'
- (34) a. **č-k^wa* *s-ɣ^war-nəs* *s-taqə-ḗ*
horse-PL 1SG.ERG-buy-INF 1SG.ABS-want-PRS
intended: 'I want to buy horses.'
- b. *č-k^wa-k / a-č-k^wa* *s-ɣ^war-nəs* *s-taqə-ḗ*
horse-PL-INDEF/ DEF-horse-PL 1SG.ERG-buy-INF 1SG.ABS-want-PRS
'I want to buy some/the horses.'

- (35) a. *a-stol* *a-tamšak'* *jə-k^w-p̄*
 DEF-table DEF-plate 3SG.NH.ABS-be-PRS
 'The plate is on the table.'
- b. *a-stol* *a-tamšak'-k^wa* *jə-k^w-p̄*
 DEF-table DEF-plate-PL 3SG.NH.ABS-be-PRS
 'The plates are on the table.'
- c. *a-stol* *tamšak'* *jə-k^w-p̄*
 DEF-table plate 3SG.NH.ABS-be-PRS
 'There is a plate/are plates on the table.'
- d. **a-stol* *tamšak'-k^wa* *jə-k^w-p̄*
 DEF-table plate-PL 3SG.NH.ABS-be-PRS
 intended: 'There are plates on the table.'

This strongly suggests that for Abkhaz-Abaza the same two-layered model of NP vs. DP is to be employed:

- (36) _{DP}[_{a-NP}[č]-*k^wa*]
 DEF-horse-PL
 'the horses'

In Abkhaz, the distribution of bare NPs is restricted to e.g. non-specific arguments under sentential negation (Hewitt 1979: 154), cf. (37):

- (37) Abkhaz:
 ž^wə *sə-m-ba-jt̄*
 cow 1SG.ERG-NEG-see-FIN
 'I didn't see a cow (any cows).'

In Abaza, however, the distribution of bare NPs is wider and similar to that in Circassian, cf. the locative NP/DP:

- (38) (*a*-)bazar *wax'č^wa* *sə-g'-c-wəšə-m*
 (DEF-)market today 1SG.ABS-NEG-go-FUT-NEG
 'I won't go to the market today.'

The only phenomenon resembling Pseudo-incorporation in Abkhaz-Abaza is that the non-human "absolute" argument (subject with intransitives and direct object with transitives) does not agree overtly with the verb if it is directly adjacent to it, (39a) vs. (39b):

Abaza

- (39) a. *a-awtobus* *aʃa-jt̄*
 DEF-bus come-PST
 'The bus came.'
- b. *a-awtobus* *wax'č^wa* *(j-)aʃa-jt̄
 DEF-bus today *(3SG.NH.ABS-)come-PST
 'The bus came today.'

However, NPs and DPs display no difference with respect to this effect, cf.:

- (40) a. *awtobus* *aʃa-jt̄*
 bus come-PST
 'A bus came.'
- b. *awtobus* *wax'č^wa* *(j-)aʃa-jt̄
 bus today *(3SG.NH.ABS-)come-PST
 'A bus came today.'

7. Discussion and conclusions

We hypothesize that differential nominal marking in West Caucasian can be accounted for in the framework of the two-layer structure of nominals, i.e. the NP vs. DP distinction:

- ❶ the unmarked form represents a bare NP which is grammatically deficient and lacks the features of number, (in)definiteness (Abkhaz-Abaza) and case (Circassian), which is in some respects similar, though not identical, to Pseudo-Incorporation;
- ❷ both case-marked forms in the Circassian languages (the Absolutive and the 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 West Caucasian is that **the syntactic distributions of NP and DP are close to identical**.

This fact is a challenge to all theoretical approaches to differential case marking 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, as in Turkish (Kamali 2008), but we are aware of no other language where PI or similar phenomena would be as pervasive and systematic as is DNM in West Caucasian.

The data from Abkhaz and Abaza (section 6) that lack cases suggest that the distribution of bare and marked forms has nothing to do with the subject-object asymmetry; rather, the bare forms represent a structurally deficient nominal construction which however may occur in almost every syntactic context.

➡ In the generative approaches to DOM, it is often assumed that the NP object that lacks case characteristics remains in the VP whereas the case-marked DP object raises to get its case feature checked (Massam 2001 a.o.). However, such an analysis can hardly apply to the West Caucasian data:

- 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;
- the VP-internal analysis cannot be simply extended to DMN with adjuncts and in non-clausal domains such as adnominal possessors and postpositional complements, which in Circassian languages show the same behavior as verbal arguments;
- bare NPs in West Caucasian can overtly move out of the VP; besides that, there is virtually no independent empirical evidence for the obligatory case-driven movement of DPs.

➡ Likewise, all accounts of DOM in the functionalist perspective have been based on the subject vs. object asymmetry. The functional strategy responsible for DOM has been characterized 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 2009: 13–14; Iemmolo 2010), given that direct objects tend to be new, or focal, or of low accessibility (Du Bois 2003).

However, the Circassian-style DNM does not seem to synchronically fulfil any obvious functional role:

- if the transitive A is already marked, distinguishability comes “for free” regardless of the presence vs. absence of overt case marking on the P;

- if agentive participants of polyvalent predicates tend to be topical and definite, then functional or frequency considerations predict that they would get extra marking when focal or indefinite/non-specific – just the opposite to what we find in Circassian;
- in general, unmarked non-specific NPs impressionistically are the **less frequent** type of overt nominal in Circassian discourse, especially in positions other than the transitive P – probably like bare common nouns in English.

☛ The typologically non-trivial situation in Circassian can be the result of an unusual combination of cross-linguistically recurrent features:

- overt definiteness/specificity (DP) marking vs. zero coding of indefiniteness/non-specificity (NP) (Dryer 2013);
- affixation of definite determiners (ibid.);
- reduced case distinctions with indefinite/non-specific nominals – or, conversely, presence of overt case marking only with determiners (cf. the Pamir group of the Iranian languages, see Payne 1989).

Abbreviations

ABS — absolutive; ACC — accusative; ADD — additive; ADV — adverbial; BEN — benefactive; CAUS — causative; CNV — converb; DAT — dative; DCL — declarative; DEF — definite; DEM — demonstrative; DIR — directional preverb; EMPH — emphatic; ERG — ergative; FRQ — frequentative; FUT — future; INS — instrumental; IO — indirect object; IPF — imperfect; LNK — linking morpheme; LOC — locative; NEG — negation; NH — non-human; OBL — oblique; PL — plural; POSS — possessive; POT — potential; PR — possessor; PRS — present; PST — past; RE — reffective; SBD — subordinator; SG — singular.

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