Definiteness via partitive specificity? A view from Abaza

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Intro

- Two nominal affixes in Abaza
  - the prefix *a-* (glossed here as SP) **á**-sas ‘SP-guest’
  - the suffix *-ḳ* (glossed as INDF) sasə́-**ḳ** ‘guest-INDF’

- Traditional analysis Tabulova 1976, Arakelova 2019, Arkadiev submitted
  - *a-* marks **definiteness**
  - *-ḳ* marks **indefiniteness**

Intro

- Problems
  - nominals marked by both *a-* and *-ḳ* **á**-sas-**ḳ** ‘SP-guest-INDF’
  - *a-* attached to indefinite pronouns **á-zaǯ** ‘SP-someone’
- This talk
  - an attempt at a new monosemic account of *a-* and *-ḳ*
  - *a-* as a marker of **partitive specificity** rather than definiteness
  - formalization within compositional **dynamic semantics**

Data

- Preliminary data coming from the Ashkharywa dialect
  - **Apswa** (Karachay-Cherkess Republic, Russia), July 2023 + April 2024
- Elicited using the methodology of Matthewson 2004
- Additional data from Staro-Kuvinsk (elicitation + texts) forthcoming

Outline

Abaza

- $<$ West Caucasian family
  - closest relative: Abkhaz
- Two main dialects: Tapanta and Ashkharywa (might be closer to Abkhaz, Chirikba 2003)
- Spoken mainly in Karachay-Cherkess Republic (Russia) and in Turkey
- $\sim$ 38,000 native speakers in Russia and $\sim$ 10,000 in other countries Arkadiev submitted

Abaza


RUSSIA
Yuri B. Koryakov, 2023
Adygh e
Abaza
Kabardian
Adyghe
Kabardian
ABKHAZIA
Abkhaz
BLACK SEA
GEORGIA
SOUTH OSSETIA

Abaza: grammatical profile

- Polysynthesis
- Head-marking, all arguments are cross-indexed by prefixes on argument-taking expressions (verbs, possessed nouns, postpositions)
- Argument indexing follows an ergative pattern, case system is neutral
- Prevalent left branching

Grammatical descriptions: Tabulova 1976, Arkadiev submitted

Nominal phrases

- The noun and its 'adjectival' modifiers form a single phonological word: so-called **nominal complex**
- Inflectional affixes are attached to the nominal complex
  - SP/agreement with the possessor - stem - plural - INDF - case
- Demonstratives, nominals denoting possessors, and relative clauses occur outside the nominal complex

Types of nominal phrases

Four logically possible types of nominal phrases:

- **unmarked** sasə́ ‘guest’
- **marked by *a-*** á-sas ‘SP-guest’
- **marked by *-ḳ*** sasə́-ḳ ‘guest-INDF’
- **marked by *a-* and *-ḳ*** á-sas-ḳ ‘SP-guest-INDF’

All of them are attested.

Unmarked nominals

(1) **ŝə́** j-a-w-m-r-ṭə́-n.
door 3SG.N.ABS-3SG.N.IO-2SG.M.ERG-NEG-CAUS-open-NEG.IMP
'Don't open **any door**.'

- Resist modification
- Typically have narrow scope indefinite interpretations
- So far, an analysis in terms of pseudo-incorporation seems plausible (see Arkadiev & Testelets 2019 for the Tapanta dialect)

I won't consider unmarked NPs further due to the lack of data.

DPs marked by *a-*

Occur in contexts typical for anaphoric and unique definites:

- anaphora
- situational uniqueness
- presence of a demonstrative

DPs marked by *a-*

Anaphoric contexts:

(2) a. h-čə́ sasə́-ḳ d-á-j.
1PL.PO-near guest-INDF 3SG.H.ABS-CSL-go(PST)
'A guest came to us.'

b. aslán **á-sas** d-əj-dər-aj.
Aslan **SP-guest** 3SG.H.ABS-3SG.M.ERG-know-PRS
'Aslan knows the guest.'

DPs marked by *a-*

Situational uniqueness:

(3) [There is only one chess champion in the town.]
sará də-z-dár-aj **a-č'ampəjáwn šáχmat-la.**
1SG 3SG.H.ABS-1SG.ERG-know-PRS **SP-champion chess-INS**
'I know **the chess champion**.'

DPs marked by *a-*

When the DP features a demonstrative, *a-* is also typically used:

(4) sará **awə́j** **a-təwk'án** s-c-ə́w-š.
1SG **DIST.SG** **SP-shop** 1SG.ABS-go-IPF-FUT
'I will go to **that shop**.'

DPs marked by *-ḳ*

- Occur in contexts typical for **indefinites**
- Don't require partitive specificity
- Can take narrow scope w.r.t. different operators

DPs marked by *-ḳ*

Introduce new drefs; don't require partitive specificity:

(5) [Out of the blue:]

h-čʼá	**sasə́-ḳ**	d-á-j.
1PL.PO-near	**guest-INDF**	3SG.H.ABS-CSL-go(PST)

'**A guest** came to us.'

DPs marked by *-ķ*

Infelicitous in anaphoric contexts:

(6) a. h-čə́ sasə́-ķ d-á-j.
1PL.PO-near guest-INDF 3SG.H.ABS-CSL-go(PST)
'A guest came to us.'

b. # aslán **sasə́-ķ** d-əj-dór-aj.
Aslan **guest-INDF** 3SG.H.ABS-3SG.M.ERG-know-PRS
intended: 'Aslan knows **the guest**.'

DPs marked by *-ḳ*

Infelicitous in contexts of situational uniqueness:

(7) [There is only one principal in the school under discussion]
sará **dəjrájktar-ḳ** də-z-dər-aj.
1SG **principal-INDF** 3SG.H.ABS-1SG.ERG-know-PRS
intended: 'I know **the principal**.'

DPs marked by *-ḳ*

Can take narrow scope:

(8) **vráč’-ḳ** w-j-á-ĉaẑa!
doctor-INDF 2SG.M.ABS-3SG.M.IO-DAT-talk(IMP)
‘Talk to **some doctor**!’ (any doctor will do)

DPs marked by *a-* and *-ḳ*

- Occur in contexts typical for **indefinites**
- **Do** require **partitive specificity**
- Can take narrow scope w.r.t. different operators

DPs marked by *a-* and *-ḳ*

Introduce new drefs, cannot be used anaphorically:

(9) a. á-sas-ḳ də-z-dár-aj.
SP-guest-INDF 3SG.H.ABS-1SG.ERG-know-PRS
'I know one of the guests.'

b. aslán-g'əj **á-sas-ḳ** də-j-dár-aj.
Aslan-ADD **SP-guest-INDF** 3SG.H.ABS-3SG.M.ERG-know-PRS
OK 'Aslan also knows **one of the guests**.'
'Aslan knows **that guest**.'

DPs marked by *a-* and *-ḳ*

Infelicitous out of the blue:

(10) [Out of the blue:]
h-čə́ **á-sas-ḳ** d-á-j.
1PL.PO-near **SP-guest-INDF** 3SG.H.ABS-CSL-go(PST)
‘**One of the guests** came to us.’

DPs marked by *a-* and *-ķ*

OK in contexts of **partitive specificity** (the nominal phrase refers to a subset of a familiar set of entities; Enç 1991, Farkas 2002, Farkas & Brasoveanu 2019):

(11) a. h-čə́ á-sas-ĉa j-á-j.
1PL.PO-near SP-guest-PL.H 3PL.ABS-CSL-go(PST)
'The guests came to us.'

b. OK **á-sas-ķ** də-z-dər-aj.
SP-guest-INDF 3SG.H.ABS-1SG.ERG-know-PRS
'I know **one of the guests**.'

DPs marked by *a-* and *-ḳ*

Don’t signal wide scope:

(12) [In a hospital:]
á-vrač’-ḳ w-j-á-ĉaẑa!
SP-врач-INDF 2SG.M.ABS-3SG.M.IO-DAT-говорить(IMP)
‘Talk to **one of the doctors**.’ (any doctor will do)

Summary

- DPs marked by *a-*: **definite**
- DPs marked by *-ḳ*: **indefinite**
- DPs marked by *a-* and *-ḳ*: **indefinite + partitive specific**

Additional evidence: indefinite pronouns

- Some indefinite pronouns can carry the prefix *a-*
  - *zaʒ́ə* ‘someone’ – *á-zaʒ́* ‘SP-someone’, *zž’aḳə́* ‘someone’ – *á-zž’ak* ‘SP-someone’
- The only semantic difference between ‘bare’ indefinite pronouns and their counterparts marked by *a-* seems to be partitive specificity.

In a nutshell

- The suffix *-ḳ* is naturally analyzed as an indefiniteness marker
- The prefix *a-* is more problematic: it seems to mark partitive specificity when combined with *-ḳ* or indefinite pronouns and definiteness otherwise
- An idea for a monosemic account of *a-*:
  - under the **familiarity view of definiteness** (Heim 1982, Roberts 2010 a.o.), all definite NPs are partitive specific (Enç 1991)
  - thus, *a-* can be analyzed as a partitive specificity marker

Syntactic assumptions

I assume the following structure of DP in Abaza:

$[_{\text{DP}}\ \{\text{-}\dot{k}, \emptyset_{[-\text{INDF}]}, \ldots\}_{\text{D}}\ [_{\text{PossP}}\ \{a\text{-}, \emptyset_{[-\text{SP}]}, \ldots\}_{\text{Poss}}\ \text{NP}]]$

- *a-* is generated in Poss^0: recall that it cannot co-occur with prefixes cross-indexing the possessor
- *-ḳ* presupposes novelty, while *a-* presupposes partitive specificity of the dref introduced by the DP
- in the absence of *-ḳ* and *a-*, null presuppositionless elements $\emptyset_{[-\text{INDF}]}$ and $\emptyset_{[-\text{SP}]}$ are postulated

Dynamic semantics

- I adopt the framework of compositional **dynamic semantics**
- The system is similar to that of Dekker 1996 (which in turn is based on Heim 1982)
- Sentence meanings are **context change potentials**, i.e. functions from contexts to contexts

Dynamic semantics

Context:

a set of pairs $\langle w, f \rangle$, where w is a possible world and f is a partial assignment function

Every assignment in c has the same domain, written as $\mathrm{Dom}(c)$

Dynamic semantics

Dref introduction:

$[i] = \lambda c.\{\langle w, g\rangle \mid \text{there is } f \text{ s.t. } \langle w, f\rangle \in c \text{ and } f \subseteq_i g\}$

where:

$f \subseteq_i g$ iff $\text{Dom}(g) = \text{Dom}(f) \cup \{i\}$ and for each $j \in \text{Dom}(f) : f(j) = g(j)$

Dynamic semantics

Dynamic predication:

For a static n-place property r,

$$R(i_1)\ldots(i_n) = \lambda c.\{\langle w,f\rangle \in c \mid r_w(f(i_1))\ldots(f(i_n))\}$$

in particular,

$$i \leq j = \lambda c.\{\langle w,f\rangle \in c \mid f(i) \leq_w f(j)\}$$

Dynamic semantics

Novelty and familiarity cf. Heim 1982**:**

$\textsc{novel}(i) = \lambda c : i \notin \mathrm{Dom}(c).\, c$

$\textsc{familiar}(i) = \lambda c : i \in \mathrm{Dom}(c).\, c$

Dynamic semantics

Presupposing (cf. Beaver 2001)**:**

$\partial(A) = \lambda c : A(c) = c.\, c$

Conjunction:

$A; B = \lambda c.\, B(A(c))$

Dynamic semantics

- NPs and VPs denote dynamic predicates, e.g.

$$[\![sasə]\!] = \lambda i.\text{Guest}(i)$$

- I will ignore the contribution of number for simplicity

Semantics for the determiners

$[\![\text{-}\dot{k}]\!] = \lambda P.\lambda i.\lambda Q.\textsc{novel}(i); [i]; P(i); Q(i)$

$[\![\emptyset_{[-\textsc{indf}]}]\!] = \lambda P.\lambda i.\lambda Q.[i]; P(i); Q(i)$

$[\![a\text{-}]\!] = \lambda P.\lambda i.\lambda D.\lambda j.\lambda Q.\textsc{familiar}(i); \partial(P(i)); D(P)(j)(Q); j \leq i$

$[\![\emptyset_{[-\textsc{sp}]}]\!] = \lambda P.P$

Maximize presupposition (MP)

Given a context c and an LF S, if there is an LF S' s.t.

(i) $[\![S]\!](c) = [\![S']\!](c)$ and

(ii) $\{c \mid [\![S']\!](c) \text{ is defined } \} \subset \{c \mid [\![S]\!](c) \text{ is defined}\}$,

then S is infelicitous in the context c.

Heim 1991, Bade 2021

Presuppose the NP restriction

I will employ the following additional principle (supposed to follow from more general pragmatic considerations):

- If a nominal phrase interpreted in the context c introduces a familiar dref i, then the NP restriction P predicated to i should be presupposed in c formally: $P(i)(c) = c$

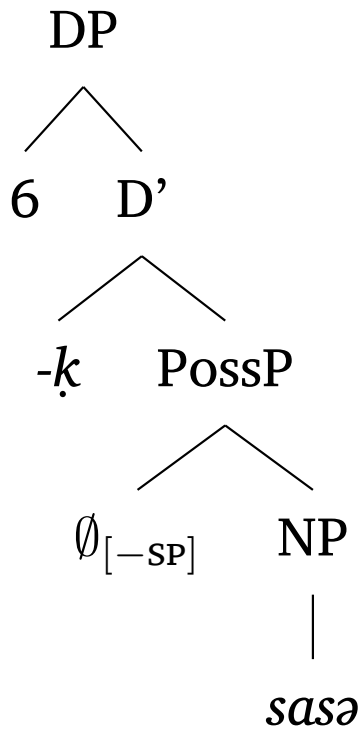
cf. Roberts 2010

Predictions

- The combination $\emptyset_{[-\text{INDF}]}$ + $\emptyset_{[-\text{SP}]}$ is ruled out: it violates either MP or *Presuppose the NP restriction*
- DPs marked only by *a-*: definite (definiteness understood as weak familiarity; Roberts 2003)
- DPs marked only by *-ḳ*: indefinite
- DPs marked by both *a-* and *-ḳ*: indefinite + partitive specific

Examples

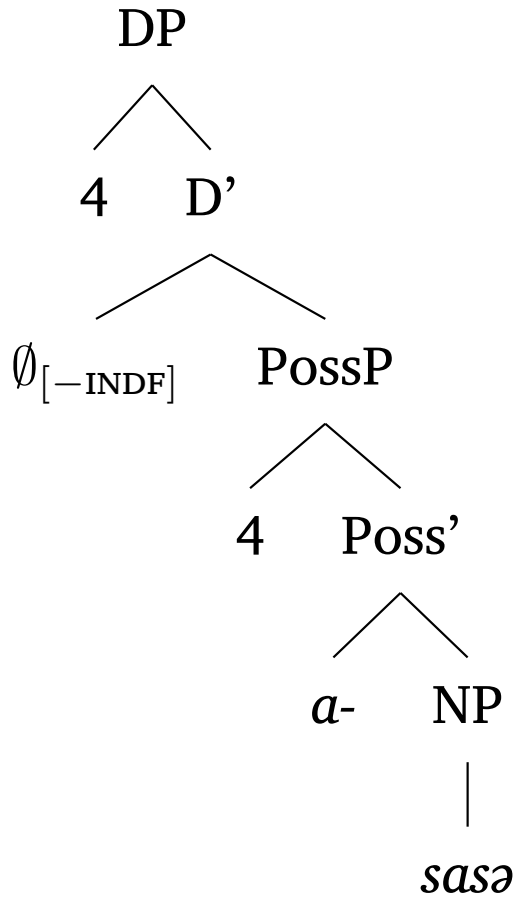
sasə-ḳ ‘guest-INDF’



$\lambda Q.\textsc{novel}(6); [6]; \textsc{Guest}(6); Q(6)$

Examples

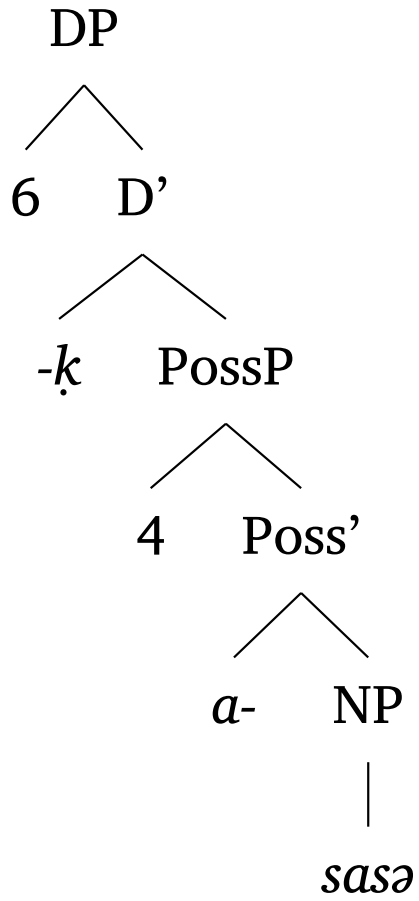
a-sas ‘SP-guest’



$\lambda Q.\textsc{familiar}(4); \partial(\text{Guest}(4)); Q(4)$

Examples

a-sas-ḳ ‘SP-guest-INDF’



$\lambda Q.\textsc{familiar}(4); \partial(\textsc{Guest}(4)); [6]; \textsc{Guest}(6); Q(6); 6 \leq 4$

Extension to indefinite pronouns

- We can account for indefinite pronouns with and without *a-* by decomposing them into an indefinite article and an NP restriction
- E.g., the structure for *á-zaʒ̂* 'SP-someone' could look like

  $[_{\text{DP}}\ \text{INDF}\ [_{\text{PossP}}\ a\text{-}\ \text{HUMAN}]]$

- *zaʒ̂ə* spells out INDF + HUMAN

Recap

- In Abaza, the prefix *a-* (traditionally considered an definiteness marker) can co-occur with the indefiniteness marker *-ḳ* and indefinite pronouns
- I proposed a solution to this problem by re-analyzing *a-* as a marker of partitive specificity

Against analyzing *a*-NP-*ḳ* as a partitive construction

- Could NPs featuring both *a*- and -*ḳ* be analyzed as genuine partitive constructions?
- The partitive analysis is unlikely to be correct: there is a dedicated analytic partitive construction

Against analyzing *a*-NP-*ḳ* as a partitive construction

- Note the prefix *a-* on the indefinite pronoun, which is hard to account for if the pronoun itself is a partitive construction in disguise

(13) [[**awát** **rə́-wa**] **á-zaʒ̂**] aslán
DIST.PL **3PL.PO-among** **SP-someone** Aslan

də-j-də́r-aj.
3SG.H.ABS-3SG.M.ERG-know-PRS

'Aslan knows **one of them**.'

Loose ends

- Usual problems of the familiarity theory of definiteness (see Coppock 2022 for a recent discussion)
- I ignored number and discussed only singular DPs (singular is unmarked) for simplicity and because the semantics of plurality markers in Abaza is ill-understood
  - importantly, *a-* and *-ḳ* do co-occur with plurality markers
- There are functions of *a-* and *-ḳ* not covered by the account (e.g., *a-* can mark kind reference)

Parallels from other languages

- A very similar construction in Akan Duah et al. 2023

(14) AKAN (Duah et al. 2023)
[[ǹkùrɔ́ffóɔ́ nó] bí]
people DEF INDEF
'Some of the people'

Parallels from other languages

- Definite articles in Greek, Basque, and Hungarian can be used as quantifier domain restriction markers Etxeberria & Giannakidou 2009
  - NB: they do not co-occur with indefinite articles
- Some Uralic determiners used in definite and partitive specific contexts Simonenko 2017

Thank you!

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Presuppose the NP restriction

Motivations for the additional principle:

- No clear examples of determiners violating it
- Evidence from an articleless language: a bare NP can be understood anaphorically only if its predicate can be construed as presupposed
  - if Heim 2011 and others are correct and such bare NPs are always indefinite, there should be a special constraint responsible for this effect

Presuppose the NP restriction

(15) RUSSIAN

Petja sidel v kafe rjadom s neznakomcem$_i$.
Petja was.sitting in cafe near with stranger

Vdrug on dostal pistolet i vystrelil v neznakomca$_{OK_i/??_j}$
suddenly he took gun and shot in stranger

/ špiona$_{?_i/OK_j}$.
spy

'Petja was sitting in a cafe next to a stranger. Suddenly he took his gun and shot **the** stranger / **a** spy.'

NB: 'the spy' reading is actually possible but seems to involve accomodation