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Armenian

Noun phrase structure and determination

Katherine Hodgson

University of Cambridge

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# General properties

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The noun phrase in modern Armenian is head-final, generally showing the order **Dem Num A N** (cf. Greenberg's Universal 20):

- (1) **ays** **yerku** **geṭec'ik** **nkar-ner-ə**  
DEM1 two beautiful picture-PL-DEF  
'these two beautiful pictures'

The **definite article** is enclitic, always on the head noun. It is obligatory with demonstratives and/or possessives, and may agree with the latter in person (and with the former in some dialects):

- (2) **im** **nkar-s**                      **k'o** **nkar-d**                      **nra** **nkar-ə**  
my picture-DEF1      your picture-DEF2      his/her picture-DEF(3)
- (3) **as** **oiv-əs** 'this shepherd-DEF1' (Hamshen, Vaux 2007: 266)

# Parallels between noun phrase and clause

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The 'agree' relationship between the possessor and the definite article suggests parallels with that between the subject and the inflected verb/auxiliary in the clause (Donabédian-Demopoulos 2010, Hodgson 2019). Similar syntactic and semantic parallels have been drawn at least since Chomsky (1972):

John destroyed the city.

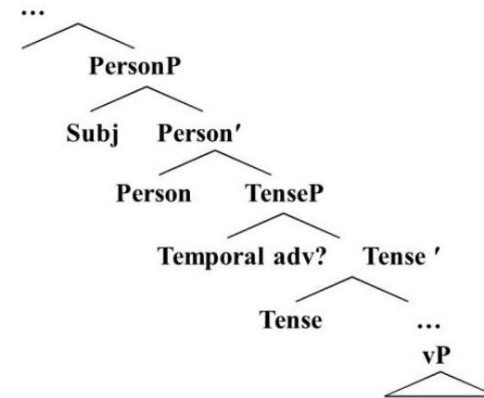
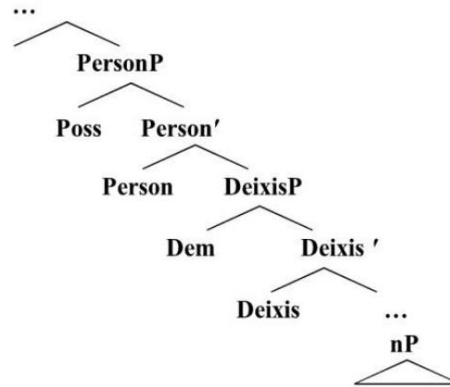
John's destruction of the city.

The role of demonstratives could be compared to that of Tense in the clause (as expressed by temporal adverbs and verb morphology): both have deictic properties, the former locating the referent in space, the latter anchoring the event in time. In generative terms, D would be parallel to T.

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# Inflectional domain of DP and clause

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# Noun phrase structure and clause structure

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Clause:	[CP...[CP	[FPadv1...[FPadv2	[vP...[VP]]]]]]
Noun phrase:	[DP...[DP	[FPadj1...[FPadj2	[nP...[NP]]]]]]
	Discourse domain	Inflectional domain	Thematic domain

Ihsane (2008: 17) (cf. also Cinque 2002, Belletti 2004, Rizzi 2004, etc.)

Armenian also provides some evidence for movement of modifiers to a peripheral ‘discourse domain’ in the noun phrase (see Hodgson 2019 for more details):

- (4) Or **haykakan** kusakc‘ut‘yun-ner-n en gorcum Avstralia-yum?  
which Armenian party-PL-DEF be.3PL.PRS operate.IPT Australia-LOC  
‘Which Armenian parties operate in Australia?’ (unmarked)
- (5) **Haykakan** OR kusakc‘utyunnern en gorcum Avstraliayum?  
‘Armenian’ is unstressed: topic of discourse = Armenian things or parties.
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# Definite article and specificity

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The definite article in Armenian occurs in certain contexts that cannot be defined as ‘definite’ in the usual sense of ‘identifiable by the addressee’. Sigler (1996: 113ff) describes it as a marker of specificity, as it is said to be obligatory with genitives (6) and partitives (7):

- (6) (a) egełeci-i-**n** tanik<sup>ˈ</sup>-\*(ə)                      (b) egełeci-i-**mə** tanik<sup>ˈ</sup>-\*(ə)  
church-GEN-**DEF** roof-**DEF**                      church-GEN-**IND** roof-**DEF**  
‘the church’s roof’ (def)                      ‘a church’s roof’ (indef)
- (7) Ôto-ner-e-n      yerek<sup>ˈ</sup> hat-\*(ə)      gołc<sup>ˈ</sup>vec<sup>ˈ</sup>an.  
Car-PL-ABL-DEF three piece-**DEF** steal.PASS.3PL.AOR  
‘Three of the cars were stolen’
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# Definite article and specificity

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However, this is best interpreted as a syntactic operation where the article is used when the noun is modified by certain categories of elements usually associated with definiteness or specificity, rather than being associated with the semantic property of specificity itself:

(8) (a) Ostikan em p'ntrum, bayc' č'em karot gtnel.  
policeman be.1SG.PRS search.IPF, but NEG.be.3SG.PRS able find.INF  
'I'm looking for a policeman, but I can't find one.' (non-specific)

(b) Mi ostikan-i(-\*n) em p'ntrum, or-i anun-ə  
IND policeman-DAT(-\*DEF) be.1SG.PRS search.IPF, which-GEN name-DEF  
Połos ê.  
Poghos be.3SG.PRS  
'I'm looking for a policeman, whose name is Poghos.' (specific)

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# Definite article and nominalization

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Asatryan (2004: 96) states that the definite article may be used simply as a marker of nominalization, converting non-nominal parts of speech to nominal use. In this role it is not necessarily associated with definiteness, or even specificity, as seen in the following example:

- (9) Et'e mtadrvel es mek'ena gnel, aveli lav k-lini  
If decide.PPT be.2SG.PRS car buy.INF, more good FUT-be.3SG  
nor-ə gnel.  
new-DEF buy.INF  
'If you have decided to buy a car, it will be better to buy a new one.'
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# Definite article and argument status

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There is some evidence that the definite article in cases such as (9) is better understood as a marker of (core) argument status. One possible piece of evidence is that in standard Eastern Armenian, it may not be used with cases associated with non-core arguments (genitive, ablative, instrumental, locative), even if the referent is definite:

- (10) (a) kʻaʎakʻ-i(\*-n) kentron-ə  
town-GEN(\*-DEF) centre-DEF  
'the centre of the town'
- (b) kʻaʎakʻ-icʻ(\*-ə) 'the town (ABL)'
- (c) kʻaʎakʻ-ov(\*-ə) 'the town (INS)'
- (d) kʻaʎakʻ-um(\*-ə) 'the town (LOC)'
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# Definite article and argument status

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Another piece of evidence comes from certain other essentially adverbial elements that take nominative (zero) case, but do not receive the definite article even if semantically definite, notably elements denoting location (11) and destination (12):

(11) Vardan-ə Erevan(\*-ə) / xanut'(\*-n) ê.

Vardan-DEF Yerevan(\*-DEF) / shop(\*-DEF) be.3SG.PRS

'Vardan is in Yerevan / at the shop.'

(12) Vardan-ə gnum ê Erevan(\*-ə) / xanut'(\*-ə).

Vardan-DEF go.IPT be.3SG.PRS Yerevan(\*-DEF) / shop(\*-DEF)

'Vardan is going to Yerevan / the shop.'

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# Typological parallels

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- Donabédian-Demopoulos (2010) states that when bare nouns appear to be arguments (object or subject), their main function is actually to modify or complete the meaning of the verb (see also Kalomoiros 2021 for semantics of bare nouns), as an adjective modifies a noun. Both immediately precede the modified element. She draws typological parallels with other languages of the area.
  - The distribution of the definite article in Armenian has parallels with that of the ‘articulated’ case forms in Kartvelian (Harris 1985), suggesting similar developments in the history of these languages.
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# ideas

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- Look for parallels between noun phrase structure and clause structure in other languages you know. How far do these parallels go? What are the differences between the structure of the noun phrase and that of the clause?
- Investigate the functions of the definite article in other languages you know. Are there any instances where it functions as something other than a marker of semantic definiteness? Are there any restrictions on its use with semantically definite referents?

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# this lecture

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