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Copula agreement in NENA Urmi dialect: Towards agreement hierarchical rules

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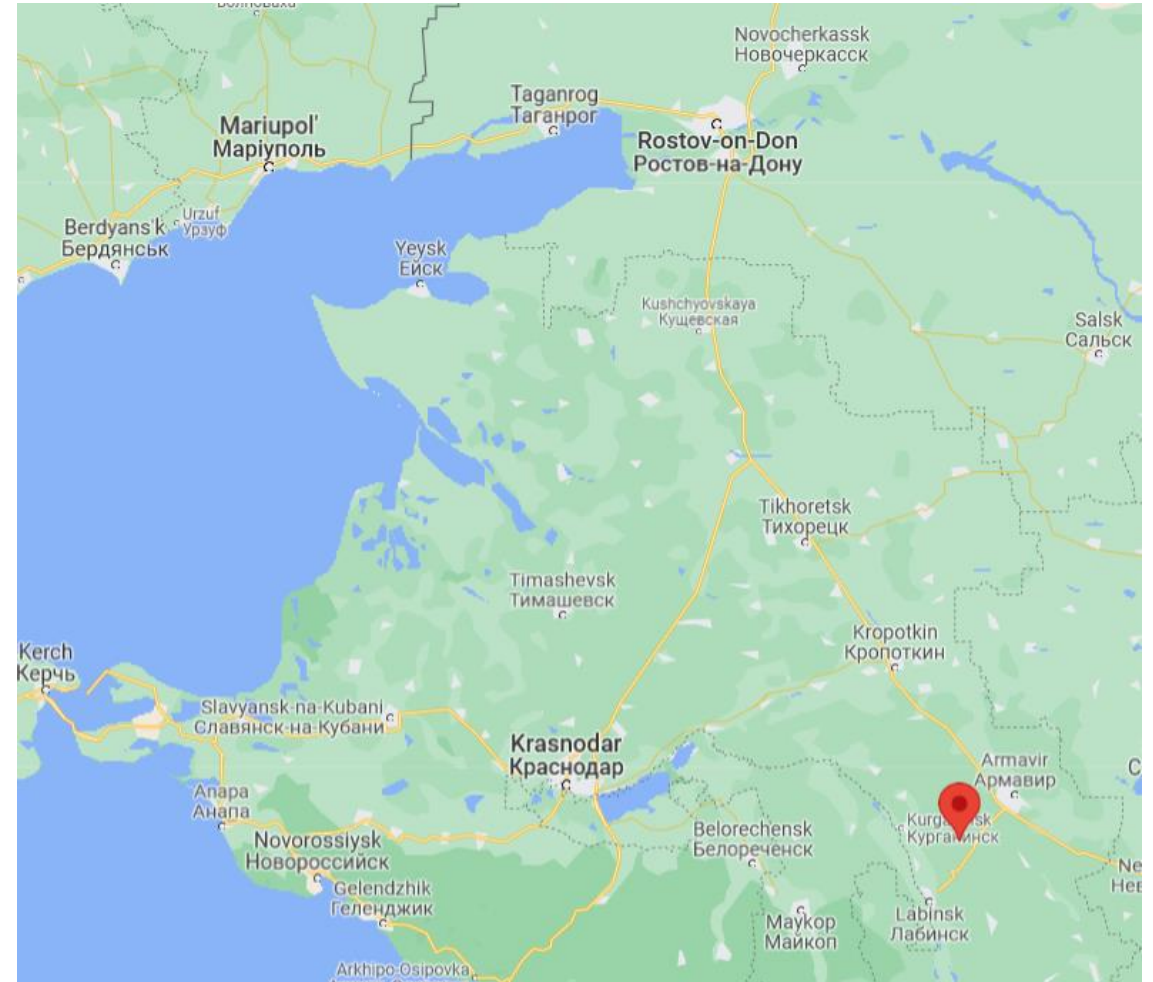
TPOLOGY LAB



ЛТЛЯ

Urmi NENA of Krasnodar krai

- Urmi Northeastern Neo-Aramaic dialect < Semitic < Afroasiatic.
- Two waves of emigration from North Caucasus and Turkey (1910th) and Armenia and Georgia (1990th)
- Urmia, Krasnodar krai (about 450 speakers).
- In a state of language loss.
- Elicitation with native speakers in July 2021.
- A questionnaire collected from 8 speakers of NENA.



Starting point

- As a basic rule, the copula agrees with a subject NP (Khan 2016):

- (1) a. xór-i catáv=əl
friend(M)-P.1SG writer(M)=COP.3M
‘My friend is a writer’
- b. +xavórta catáv=əla
female_friend(F)-P.1SG writer(M)=COP.F
‘My female friend is a writer’

- (2) ána +xóra díyy-ux=əvan
I friend(M) OBL.PRON-P.2M=COP.1F
‘I’m your friend’

- In the absence of an (overt) subject, the agreement is female singular:

- (3) gu +tárta xóšc=əla
in yard(M) dark-COP.3F
‘It is dark outside’.

- Usually the copula can not be omitted.

Defective controllers

- The list of non-substantive constituent types able to take the subject position:
 - Prepositional phrase
 - Finite clause
 - Adjectives and numerals

} Deprived of agreement features
- Possible scenarios:
 - Default 3F copula agreement.
 - Agreement on a nominal in the predicate position.
 - Agreement on an embedded nominal of an NP in the subject position.

Defective controllers. Prepositional Phrases

- Constructions with subject and predicate constituents featuring nouns of different grammatical gender:

SU	PRED- <i>COP</i>
PP(NP _F)	NP _M

or

SU	PRED- <i>COP</i>
PP(NP _M)	NP _F

- (4) a. *dəpn=ət* *madrása* *duccán=əla*
side(F)=REL school(F) shop(M)=**3F**
{What is next to the school?}
Next to the school it is the shop’.
- b. *bi* *+búsra* *aha* *xaris=əla*
with meat(M) DEM1 harissa(F)=COP.3F
{Is it harissa or bushala that is cooked of meat?}
Of meat it is harissa’.

Defective controllers. Prepositional Phrases

Table 1. Agreement in the “PP—NP” type

Gender of the NP within subject PP	Gender of the predicate NP	Agreement	
		M	F
F	M	7	6
M	F	3	9

The distribution is **not** statistically significant, Exact Fisher’s test, $P > 0.05$

- Obviously, no statistical significance for any deviation.
- **Conclusion:** either no rules or a possible preference for 3F agreement in constructions with predicate female NP.

Defective controllers. Clauses

- Constructions with clausal subjects and predicate NPs of different grammatical gender in present and future tense:

SU	PRED- <i>COP</i>
Clause	NP _M /NP _F

or

SU	<i>be.FUT</i>	PRED
Clause		NP _M /NP _F

- (5) a. mán áha víd=ələ áha yácca ⁺bukár=əl
 who DEM1.SG do.RES=3M DEM1.SG enormous.M question(M)=3M
 ‘Who has done it is a big question’
- b. kat átən tíyy=ət rába xadúyt=əla
 COMP you come.RES=COP.2M much joy(F)=COP.3F
 ‘That you came is a great joy’
- (6) átən p̣t-át-ət p̣t-óy-a ⁺róba xadúyta
 you FUT-come-SS.2M FUT-be.PRS-SS.3F much joy(F)
 ‘That you will come will be a great joy’.

Defective controllers. Clauses

Table 2. Agreement in “CLAUSE—NP” type

Tense	Gender of the NP in P	Agreement	
		M	F
present	M	7	2
	F	1	8
future	M	7	1
	F	2	6

The distribution in the upper cells is statistically significant, Exact Fisher’s test, $P = 0.01$.

The distribution in the lower cells is statistically significant, Exact Fisher’s test, $P = 0.04$.

- The result is statistically significant in both matrices.
- **Conclusion:** Preference for agreement with predicate NP.

Clauses in predicate position

- (7) mən cúllə yáccə xadúyt=əla kat at tíyy=ət
 from all enormous.F pleasure(F)=3F CMPL you come.RES.M=2M
 ‘The greatest joy is that you came’.

Table 3. Agreement in “NP—CLAUSE” type

Tense	Gender of the noun in S	Agreement		
		M	F	0
present	F	0	7	3
	M	3	0	3
future	F	0	8	0
	M	4	3	0

Clauses in predicate position

- (7) mən cúllə yáccə xadúyt=əla kat at tíyy=ət
 from all enormous.F pleasure(F)=3F CMPL you come.RES.M=2M
 ‘The greatest joy is that you came’.

Table 3. Agreement in “NP—CLAUSE” type

Tense	Gender of the noun in S	Agreement	
		Matching agreement	Non-matching agreement or zero copula
present	F	7	3
	M	3	3
future	F	8	0
	M	4	3

- Copula use and agreement are more consistent with female subject NPs.
- A bias towards the default 3F agreement?

Defective controllers. Other cases

- (8) *smúka mən cúllə šapíra ráng=əl*
red.M from all beautiful.M colour(M)=3M
'Red is the most beautiful colour'

Table 4. Agreement in other cases

Type of the S	Gender of the predicate NP	Agreement		
		F	M	0
Adjective	M	2	5	1
Numeral	M	1	5	2
Adverb	F	4	0	3
	M	2	0	4

Defective controllers. Other cases

(8) *smúka mən cúllə šapíra ráng=əl*
 red.M from all beautiful.M colour(M)=3M
 ‘Red is the most beautiful colour’

Table 4. Agreement in other cases

Type of the S	Gender of the predicate NP	Agreement	
		Matching agreement	Non-matching agreement or zero copula
Adjective	M	5	3
Numeral	M	5	3
Adverb	F	4	3
	M	0	6

- No possibility to detect any rules.

Number incongruence

- Constructions with subject and predicate NPs of different grammatical number:

SU	PRED- <i>COP</i>	or	SU	PRED- <i>COP</i>
NP _{SG}	NP _{PL} /NP&NP		NP&NP/ NP _{PL}	NP _{SG}

(9) mən cúllə yáccə davélt-i áyya ⁺xorovát=**əna**
 from all enormous.F wealth(F)-P.1SG DEM2.F friend(M).PL=**3PL**
 ‘My greatest treasure are my friends’.

(10) Ašúr i Ninévia ġíl nápər=**əla**
 Ashur and Ninevia young family(F)=**COP.3F**
 ‘Ashur and Ninevia are a young family’.

Number incongruence

Table 5. Agreement by number incongruence

Number of the NP in S position	Number of the NP in P position	Agreement	
		SG	PL
Conj	SG	9	3
PL	SG	4	4
Gen. PL	SG	13	7
SG	Conj	2	9
SG	PL	2	6
SG	Gen. PL	4	15

The distribution in the gray cells is statistically significant, Exact Fisher's test, $P < 0.01$.

- **Conclusion:** Preference for agreement on predicate NP in constructions with plural NP in predicate position.

Discussion

Table 6. Summary

Context		Result
Defective controllers	PP + PP	<i>uncertain</i> : predicate agreement preference for female predicate NPs
	Clause + NP	proven preference for predicate NP agreement
	Other cases	no obvious rules at this point
Number incongruence		proven preference for predicate NP agreement
NP + Clause		a possible bias to default 3F agreement

- *A predicate NP agreement or a (more) specified NP agreement?*

Discussion

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Context		Result
Defective controllers	PP + PP	<i>uncertain</i> : predicate agreement preference for female predicate NPs
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	Other cases	no obvious rules at this point
Number incongruence		proven preference for plural predicate NP agreement
NP + Clause		a possible bias to default 3F agreement

- *A predicate NP agreement or a “(more) important” NP agreement?*
- Predicate NP agreement is a rule in constructions with personal pronouns in predicate position (Logvinova 2020):

(2) ána ⁺xóra díyy-ux=əvan
 I friend(M) OBL.PRON-P.2M=COP.1F
 ‘I’m your friend’.

(11) ģéns ⁺xóra díyy-ux án=ivən
 good friend(M) OBL.PRON-P.2M me=COP.1M
 ‘Your best friend is me’.

Discussion

- Can NENA system then be described by means of a single hierarchy without any reference to syntactic roles?
- $1/2SG > 3PL > 3F > 3M > 0$
- If any of the features to the left is present, the copula has a greater probability to agree with it than with any of the features to the left.

Discussion

- Can NENA system then be described by means of a single hierarchy without any reference to syntactic roles?
- $1/2SG > 3PL > 3F > 3M > 0$
- If any of the features to the left is present, the copula has a greater probability to agree with it than with any of the features to the left.

- **Alternative explanation:**
- *Hierarchical* rules or *attraction* rules? Can it be that copula agrees on the features of the predicate NP because it is closer?

References

Corbett 2006 — G. Corbett. 2006. Agreement. Cambridge University Press.

Khan 2016 — G. Khan. 2016. The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of the Assyrian Christians of Urmi. Vols. 1–4. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016.

Abbreviations

CMPL — complementizer; DEM1 — demonstrative of the first type; F — feminine; M — masculine; P — possession; PL — plural; REL — relator; RES — resultative; SG — singular.