Tolerance of Underspecification
Evidence from Karachay-Balkar

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Abstract
In this paper we discuss differences between two variants — old (G_1) and young (G_2) — of the Cherek dialect of the Karachay-Balkar language (Turkic, Altaic). We show that a few morphological and syntactic differences (possessive constructions and number agreement) within noun phrase are due to a tiny structural change on the interface between syntax and PF.

1 Setting the scene

In the Cherek dialect of Karachay-Balkar language[1] we found a number of differences between the older variant (G_1) and the younger one (G_2). Due to the space limit in this talk we will discuss just two of them:

1. Use of the overt marker of possession implies presence of a referential possessor in G_2 (1).

2. Number agreement mismatch between an anaphoric element and its antecedent is disallowed in G_2 (2).

(1) tišir·iu zijri·ʁ-i
     woman dress-3SG

a women's dress $^{ok}G_1$ *G_2

the women's dress owned by someone $^{ok}G_1$ $^{ok}G_2$

(2) [Alim$_i$ bla Kerim$_j$]$_k$ an-ni$_{i/j/k}$ egeč-i-ni süj-e.
     Alim   and Kerim   he-GEN   sister-3-ACC love-PRS

Alim and Kerim loves his/their sister. G_1: an-ni$_{i/j/k}$ G_2: an-ni$_{i/j/*k}$

2 Synopsis of the analysis

We argue that G_2 preserves the syntactic structure and agreement rules of G_1. What lies in the core of the differences is a structural change of the rule of the Spell-Out that can be formulated as follows:

Old rule Tolerate nominal structures with underspecified[2] φ-features for Spell-Out.

New rule Never tolerate nominal structures with any underspecified φ-features and leave them unpronounced.

3 Data

3.1 Possessive constructions

The Cherek Balkar (as most Turkic) distinguishes two types of possessive constructions — with the non-referential possessor (PC I) and with the referential one (PC II). The referential possessor is always marked with the genitive. In G_1 both PC I and PC II are marked with the possessive marker -si on the head noun. In PC II possessive marker agrees with the possessor in person (5). G_2 restricts use of -si to PC II only.

(3) sabij ojunčaʁ-i
     child toy-3

child's toy

(4) sabij-ni ojunčaʁ-i
     child-GEN toy-3

the toy of the child

(5) meni kitab-im
     I.GEN book-1

my book

In both G_1 and G_2 PC II affix should be specified in person (6).

(6) men-ni qiz ginži-ler-im
     I-GEN girl doll-PL-1

my girlish dolls

The plural marker always precedes the possessive marker (7).

(7) a. qiz-ni ginži-ler-i
         girl-GEN doll-PL-3

         the girl's dolls

     b. *qiz-ni ginži-si-le
   girl-GEN doll-3-PL

3.2 Number agreement mismatch

G_1 licenses use of a morphologically singular pronominal with the semantically plural antecedent, while G_2 requires full feature match between an anaphor and an antecedent (8). Both variants ban the match of morphologically plural anaphor and singular antecedent (9).

(8) a. [eki džaščik]$_i$ an-ni$_{i/j}$ mešina-ni satar-di
         two man   he-GEN   car-ACC   sell-PST

         Two men sold their car. G_1:^{ok}i/^{ok}j G_2:*i/^{ok}j

     b. [eki džaščik]$_i$ an-nar-ni$_{i/j}$ mešina-ni satar-di
         two man   he-PL-GEN   car-ACC   sell-PST

         Two men sold their car. G_1:^{ok}i/^{ok}j G_2:^{ok}i/^{ok}j

(9) *džaščik an-nar-ni mešina-ni satar-di
     man   he-PL-GEN car-ACC   sell-PST

4 Solution

We adopt Grashchenkov (2007)'s view on the possessive constructions in Turkic. Within the noun phrase two projections take care of possessors — Spec nP licenses the non-referential possessor and Spec DP assigns genitive to the referential possessor (cf. Split-NP analysis in Radford (2000) *i.a.*). Number projection NumP according to Split-NP analysis mediates nP and DP. Heads n, Num and D bear [POSS], [NUM], and [PERS] features respectively. This can be illustrated with the following ascetic tree:
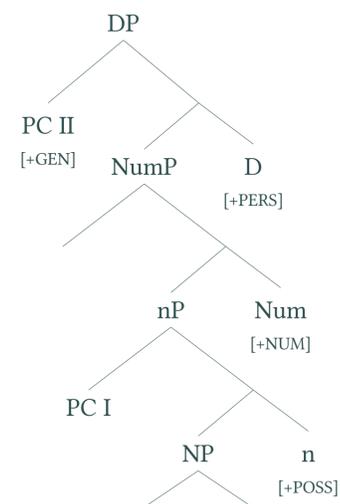
We argue that in G_1 possessive marker can be sent to the Spell-Out with underspecified [PERS] feature, i.e. at the level of Num (or n if we change linearization rules appropriately), while in G_2 this is not an option. The similar can be said about number agreement between an anaphor and an antecedent: pronominal in G_1 can be underspecified for number (in line with van Gelderen 1992, Burzio 1989 *i.a.*).

References

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[1] The data is collected during the linguistic expedition in aul Ullu Malqar (Cherek district, Kabardino-Balkar Republic, North Caucasus, Russia).
[2] What we understand here by underspecification is α-specification (Rooryck 1994)