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# Ergative case in the Circassian languages<sup>1</sup>

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The Circassian languages (Northwest Caucasian) exhibit ergative patterns both in case marking and in the alignment of agreement markers in the verb. Ergative/absolutive case marking is restricted to certain types of nominals, which thus results in split-ergativity. The paper examines the marking of ergative/absolutive case in various types of nominals and relates the distribution to the Nominal Hierarchy.

The Circassian languages Adyghe (West Circassian) and Kabardian (East Circassian) belong to the West Caucasian languages. They are spoken by 568.000 in the Caucasus and also by great numbers in Turkey and other neighbouring countries<sup>2</sup>.

The problem of ergativity in the Circassian languages is treated in works such as Jakovlev & Ashkhamaf 1941, Rogava & Kerasheva 1966, Taov 1967, Zekokh 1967, Kumakhov 1971, 1989, Gishev 1985, Kumakhov & Vamling to appear.

## 1. Introduction

The intransitive subject (S) and the direct object (P) are marked by the absolutive case, whereas the transitive subject (A) appears in the ergative case (1-2).

- (1)      S'°əzə-r      ma-k'°e-ø  
         woman-ABS   S3SG-go-PRS  
         'The woman is going'

Adyghe

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<sup>2</sup>The majority of the Circassians were forced by tsarist Russia to leave their historical homelands in the Caucasus at the end of the Great Caucasian war (1817-1864) and settled in Turkey and other countries in the region.

- (2) L'ə-m s'°əzə-r ø-ə-ləy°ə-γ  
 man-ERG woman-ABS O3SG-S3SG-see-PF  
 'The man saw the woman' Adyghe

In the Circassian languages ergative patterns are found not only in nouns and pronouns but also in verbs, that include agreement markers of subject and objects. Two sets of agreement prefixes are distinguished. The (S/P) set appears in initial position in the verb complex (3), whereas the (A) prefixes (4-5) are found in non-initial position (second, third etc. depending on the valency of the verb).

- (3) sə-k°'e-š't S1SG-go-FUT 'I will go'  
 (4) wə-s-hə-š't O2SG-S1SG-carry-FUT 'I will carry you'  
 (5) W-je-s-tə-š't O2SG-IO3SG-S1SG-give-FUT 'I will give you to him' Adyghe

The related Northwest Caucasian languages Abaza and Abkhaz are similar to the Circassian languages in that they show ergative-absolutive alignment of subject-object agreement prefixes, but differ in that there is no ergative-absolutive case marking. In the Circassian languages ergative-absolutive case marking is developing, as will be illustrated with respect to different types of nominals in the two languages.

In this article, we will limit ourselves to ergative marking on nouns and pronouns.

## 2. The ergative case

### 2.1 *The ergative case: the noun*

Nouns in the ergative case are marked by the suffix *-m*, as shown in (6-7).

- (6) Ps'as'e-m pismo-r ø-ə-tχə-γ  
 girl-ERG letter-ABS O3SG-S3SG-write-PF  
 'The girl wrote the letter' Adyghe  
 (7) S'ak°'e-m dəy°əz'ə-r ø-jə-wəč'-a-s'  
 hunter-ERG wolf-ABS O3SG-S3SG-kill-PF-ASSRT  
 'The hunter killed the wolf'

Kabardian marks the plural by the suffix *-χe*, which precedes the case marker:

- (8) Fəz-χe-m bostej-χe-r ø-ja-də-r  
 woman-PL-ERG dress-PL-ABS O3-S3PL-sew-PRS  
 'The women are sewing the dresses' Kabardian

(9) Hač'e-m-e (-χe-m / -χe-m-e) lə-r ø-a-šχə-Ÿ  
 guest-ERG-PL (-PL-ERG / -PL-ERG-PL) meat-ABS O3SG-S3PL-eat-PF  
 'The guests ate the meat' Adyghe

## 2.2 The ergative case: demonstrative pronouns

(10) a. A-š' č'əg°ə-r ø-je-z'°e-ø  
he-ERG ground-ABS O3SG-S3SG-plough-PRS  
'He ploughs the ground' Adyghe

b. A-bə wəne-r ø-je-s''-ø  
he-ERG house-ABS O3SG-S3SG-do-PRS  
'He builds the house' Kabardian

(11) A-bə-m (mə-bə-m, mo-bə-m) bʒez'ej-r  
 he-ERG-ERG (this-ERG-ERG, that-ERG-ERG) fish-ABS  
 ø-q'-i-wbəd-a-s'  
 O3SG-OR-S3SG-catch-PF-ASSRT  
 'He (this one, that one) caught the fish' Kabardian

<sup>3</sup>When the demonstrative pronoun is used attributively, the case marker is not attached to it but is found in the final position of the NP, which is the usual position of case and number markers.

- (12) A-m,    ø-s-lay°ə-ø-wre,           Terk  
          he-ERG O3SG-S1SG-see-PRS-GER Terek  
          ø-q'ə-zə-ri-nek'-'a-s'  
          O3SG-OR-REFL-S3SG-leave-PF-ASSRT  
          'He, I saw it, left Terek behind him' Kabardian

The plural of the ergative case is formed in different ways in Kabardian: by adding *-χe-m* [-PL-ERG] directly to the stem or to the ergative case *-bə*.

- (13) A-χe-m   (=a-bə-χe-m)           a-r       ø-ja-h-ø  
          he-PL-ERG (=he-ERG-PL-ERG) he-ABS O3SG-S3PL-carry-PRS  
          'They carry him' Kabardian

In Adyghe, the formation of the ergative case of demonstrative pronouns is even more complex. Among the four alternatives given in (14), *-χe-m* and *-χe-m-e* are found in standard Adyghe, whereas the others are local (dialectal) forms (Kerasheva 1957).

- (14) A-χe-m   (=a-χe-m-e,       a-r-χe-m-e,       a-š'-χe-m-e,  
          he-PL-ERG (=he-PL-ERG-PL he-ABS-PL-ERG-PL he-ERG-PL-ERG-PL,  
          a-š'-m-e)               čəg-χe-r       ø-a-ye-t'əsə-ye-χ  
          he-ERG-ERG-PL) tree-PL-ABS O3PL-S3PL-CAUS-plant-PF-PL  
          'They planted trees' Adyghe

### 2.3 No opposition in number in the ergative case

The ergative case *-m* may be neutral with respect to opposition in number. As shown in (15) the subject marker of third person singular *-jə* and third person plural *-ja* may both agree with a subject marked by the ergative suffix *-m*. Such undifferentiated use of the ergative case is characteristic of nouns and pronouns having a collective meaning.

- (15) Dəy°əz'ə-m a-r       ø-jə-šχ-a-s'  
          wolf-ERG       he-ABS O3SG-S3SG-eat-PF-ASSRT  
          ø-ja-šχ-a-s'  
          O3SG-S3PL-eat-PF-ASSRT  
          a. 'The wolf ate him'  
          b. 'The wolfs ate him' Kabardian

The subject *zeč'e-m* 'all, everybody' in the ergative case in (16) belongs to pluralia tantum, as it is represented by the third person plural subject agreement. It is not possible to use the ergative plural on the nominal in (16), as is found in (17).

- (16) Zeč'e-m a-r       f'əwe   ø-ja-lay°-ø  
          all-ERG   he-ABS well O3SG-S3PL-see-PRS  
          'Everybody loves him' Kabardian

- (17) Dəɣ°əz'-χe-m a-r      ø-ja-šχ-a-s'  
 wolf-PL-ERG    he-ABS    O3SG-S3PL-eat-PF-ASSRT  
 'The wolfs ate him' Kabardian

Adyghe differs from Kabardian (16) in marking the plural of the ergative *zeč'e-m-e* [all-ERG-PL] 'everybody', as shown in example (18).

- (18) Zeč'e-m-e    maš'əne-χe-r    ø-a-š'efə-ye-χ  
 all-ERG-PL    car-PL-ABS    O3PL-S3PL-buy-PF-PL  
 'Everybody bought a car' Adyghe

#### 2.4 Ergative and absolutive, definite and indefinite form

The ergative-absolutive is closely related to the opposition definite-indefinite. The suffixes used for marking the ergative and absolutive cases also have the definite function. The ergative and absolutive suffixes may alternate with zero marking when A (19), S (20) or P (21) is indefinite.

- (19) Ps'as'e-m (ø)      mə-r      ø-ə-š'e-ne-p  
 girl-ERG.DEF (INDEF)    it/that.one-ABS    O3SG-S3SG-do-FUT-NEG  
 'The/a girl will not do it' Adyghe
- (20) Ps'as'e-r (ø)      ma-k°'e-ø  
 girl-ABS.DEF (ABS.INDEF)    O3SG-go-PRS  
 'The/a girl is walking' Adyghe
- (21) We ps'as'e-r (ø)      ø-we-ley°ə-ø  
 you girl-ABS.DEF (ABS.INDEF)    O3SG-S2SG-DYN-see-PRS  
 'You see the/a girl' Adyghe

An important difference between Adyghe and Kabardian is that the alternation between definite-indefinite in A (19) is not characteristic of Kabardian. In this language the suffix *-m* marks ergative case and only very rarely alternates with zero (i.e. marking indefiniteness).

In oblique functions (cf. 2.5), the alternation between overt marking and zero is found in both languages.

The relation between the ergative-absolutive cases and the marking of definite-indefinite is asymmetrical. This is particularly clear in the plural, where no alternation with zero (i.e. marking indefiniteness) is allowed. Marking of definiteness-indefiniteness is thus only found in the singular.

- (22) Ps'as'e-χe-m ( \*-ø)    mə-r      ø-a-š'ə-ne-p  
 girl-PL-ERG      it/that-ABS    O3SG-S3PL-do-FUT-NEG  
 'The girls will not do it' Adyghe
- (23) We ps'as'e-χe-r ( \*-ø)    ø-we-ley°ə-ø-χ  
 you girl-PL-ABS      O3PL-S2SG-see-PRS-PL  
 'You see the girls' Adyghe

- (24) Ps'as'e-χe-r (\*-ø)                      ma-k°'e-ø-χ  
 girl-PL-DEF.ABS (-INDEF) S3PL-go-PRS-PL  
 'The girls are walking' Adyghe

Not all nouns and pronouns that may be marked for ergative-absolutive case differentiate definite and indefinite forms. Examples are Ad. *təye*, Kab. *dəye* 'sun', Ad., Kab. *maze* 'moon', *yatxe* 'spring', Ad. *č'əmaf*, Kab. *s'əmaχ°e* 'winter'. Abstract nouns like Ad., Kab. *nasəp* 'happiness', *l'əye* 'courage, bravery' can be used in S (25) or P (26) function with the marker *-r* or without it, with no difference in meaning.

- (25) S'əmaχ°e (-r)    ø-q'e-k°'-a-s'  
 winter (-ABS)        S3SG-OR-go-PF-ASSRT  
 'Winter has come' Kabardian
- (26) Dəye (-r)    ø-s-o-lay°-ø  
 sun (-ABS)    O3SG-S1SG-DYN-see-PRS  
 'I see the sun' Kabardian

However, these nouns may not be used in A function without the ergative marker *-m* (27).

- (27) Dəye-m (\* dəye-ø)    wəne-r                      ø-je-ye-neχ°-ø  
 sun-ERG                      house-ABS        O3SG-S3SG-CAUS-light-PRS  
 'The sun lights the house' Kabardian

When combining with the instrumental case, the suffix *-m* also marks definiteness.

- (28) Se mə-r                      se-m-č'e                      ø-s-o-s'°-ø  
 I    it/that-ABS    knife-DEF-INST    O3SG-S3SG-DYN-do-PRS  
 'I did it with the knife' Kabardian

When the suffix *-m* occurs together with the instrumental marker, it may freely alternate with zero (29), expressing indefiniteness (but only in the singular).

- (29) Se mə-r                      se- ø-č'e                      (se-χe-m-č'e,  
 I    it/that-ABS    knife-INDEF-INST    knife-PL-DEF-INST  
 \*se-χe-ø-č'e)                      ø-s-o-s'°-ø  
 \*knife-PL-INDEF-INST) O3SG-S1SG-DYN-do-PRS  
 'I do it with a knife / the knives' Kabardian

In the coordinative form the suffix *-m* occurs also on S and P. Here, *-m* marks definiteness (cf. 3.7 below, 'The coordinative form').



### 2.5 The oblique ergative

The ergative case in the Circassian languages, as in some other Caucasian languages (Topuria 1995), is also found in oblique functions. The suffix *-m* marks not only A but is also found in dative (30), locative (31), directional (32) and other functions.

- (30) L'ə-m tχəłə-r fəzə-m ø-jə-ri-t-a-s'  
man-ERG book-ABS woman-OERG O3SG-OO3SG-S3SG-give-PF-ASSRT  
'The man gave the book to the woman' Kabardian
- (31) We χame-χe-m w-a-χe-s-ø-s'  
you stranger-PL-OERG S2SG-O3PL-LOC-sit-PRS-ASSRT  
'You are living among strangers' Kabardian
- (32) Se wəne-m s-ø-i-ha-γ  
I house-OERG O1SG-OO3SG-LOC-enter-PF  
'I entered the house' Adyghe

This may also be shown for the personal/demonstrative pronouns with the markers *-š'* (Ad.), *-bə* (Kab.) (33a-b).

- (33) a. We a-r a-š' ø-je-p-tə-γ  
you he-ABS it/he-OERG O3SG-IO3SG-S2SG-give-PF  
'You gave it to him' Adyghe
- b. Fe a-bə fə-ø-te-s-ø-s'  
you he-OERG S2PL-OO3SG-LOC-sit-PRS-ASSRT  
'You are sitting on it' Kabardian

## 3. Split ergative marking

The ergative and absolutive cases are not realised on all nominals. Below we examine nominals that do not show the ergative-absolutive opposition: personal, interrogative and determinative pronouns and proper nouns.

### 3.1 Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns in the first and second persons (singular and plural) do not differentiate the ergative and absolutive cases. Both as A, P (34) and S (35) they appear in the same zero form.

- (34) Se we we-se-hə-ø  
I you O2SG-S1SG-DYN.carry-PRS  
'I carry you' Adyghe
- (35) Se se-če-ø  
I S1SG-DYN.run-PRS  
'I run' Adyghe

If the personal pronoun is used with the determinative pronoun *dəde* ‘self’ a marker shows up. However, there is no ergative-absolutive opposition as the suffix *-r* is used in all three functions: A (36), P (37) and S (38).

- (36) Fe-r      dəde-m    žane-r    ø-v-d-a-s'  
 you-(ABS) self-ERG shirt-ABS O3SG-S2PL-sew-PF-ASSRT  
 ‘You made the shirt yourself’ Kabardian
- (37) We-r      dəde-r    ø-s-ləγ°-a-s'  
 you-(ABS) self-ABS O3SG-S1SG-see-PF-ASSRT  
 ‘I saw you (yourselves)’ Kabardian
- (38) De-r      dəde-r    d-o-laz'e-ø  
 we-(ABS) self-ABS S1PL-DYN-work-PRS  
 ‘We (ourselves) are working’ Kabardian

### 3.2 Interrogative pronouns

The interrogative pronoun *χet* ‘who’ shows no case marking. It appears in the same form in A (39a), P (b) and S (c).

- (39) a. χet ø-q'-i-s'eχ°-a      mə tχələ-r?  
 who O3SG-OR-S3SG-buy-PF this book-ABS  
 ‘Who bought this book?’ Kabardian
- b. hes'e-m χet ø-jə-ləγ°-a?  
 guest-ERG who O3SG-S3SG-see-PF  
 ‘Whom did the guest see?’ Kabardian
- c. χet ø-q'a-k°'e-ø-r?  
 who S3SG-OR-go-PRS-ABS  
 ‘Who is coming (this way)?’ Kabardian

The interrogative pronoun Ad. *səd*, Kab. *sət* ‘what’ differs from *χet* ‘who’ in that marking may (40) or may not appear (41a-c).

- (40) Sədə-m wə-qə-ø-hə-γ?  
 what-ERG O2SG-OR-S3SG-bring-PF  
 ‘What has brought you here?’ Adyghe
- (41) a. Səd wə-zə-γa-γ-re-r?  
 what O2SG-REFL-CAUS-weep-PART.PRS-ABS  
 ‘What is making you weep?’ Adyghe
- b. Səd ø-qə-we-x°əl'a-γe-r?  
 what S3SG-OR-OO2SG-happen-PART.PF-ABS  
 ‘What has happened to you?’ Adyghe
- c. Səd ø-p'-s'e-š't  
 what O3SG-S2SG-do-FUT2  
 ‘What will you do?’ Adyghe

The ergative marker *-m* on Ad. *səd*, Kab. *sət* ‘what’ appears with an inanimate A and the causative form of the verb, as in (42).

- (42) Sətə-m    ø-q’-i-ye-nəχ°-ø-re  
 what-ERG O3SG-OR-S3SG-CAUS-light-PRS-Q  
 (ø-q’-i-ye-χ°abe-ø-re,                      ø-q’-i-ye-s’əɽ’-ø-re)  
 (O3SG-OR-S3SG-CAUS-warm-PRS-Q O3SG-OR-S3SG-CAUS-cold-PRS-Q)  
 Q)  
 mə wəne-r?  
 this room-ABS  
 ‘What lights (warms) this room up (makes cold)?’ Kabardian

The interrogative pronoun *χet* ‘who’ in the same position and with the same causative verbs may not be marked for the ergative case (43).

- (43) χet (\*-m)    ø-q’-i-ye-nəχ°-ø-re (ø-q’-i-ye-χ°abe-ø-re,  
 who (\*-ERG)  
 ø-q’-i-ye-s’ə-?’-re) mə wəne-r  
 ‘Who lights (warms) this room up (makes cold)?’ Kabardian

### 3.3 Determinative pronouns

The determinative pronoun *χeti* ‘any, everybody’ (for humans) does not differentiate ergative-absolutive (44a-c).

- (44) a. χeti            a-r    ø-je-s’-e-ø  
 every (any) he-ABS O3SG-S3SG-know-PRS  
 ‘Everybody knows him’ Adyghe  
 b. χeti            me-g°əpšəse-ø  
 everybody S3SG-think-PRS  
 ‘Everybody is thinking’ Adyghe  
 c. A-š’    χeti            ø-je-ɬey°ə-ø  
 he-ERG everybody O3SG-S3SG-see-PRS  
 ‘He sees everybody’ Adyghe

Being a nominal modifier *q’es* ‘every, any’ follows its head noun, but despite its final position it is not marked by the case suffixes in S (45a), A (b) or P (c).

- (45) a. C’əχ° q’es    tχəɬ-χe-r    ø-q’-i-s’əχ°-a-s’  
 person every book-PL-ABS O3PL-OR-S3SG-buy-PF-ASSRT  
 ‘Every person bought books’ Kabardian  
 b. C’əχ° q’es    ma-k°’e-ø  
 person every S3SG-go-PRS  
 ‘Every person is walking’ Kabardian  
 c. C’əχ° q’es    ø-w-o-ɬəte-ø  
 person every O3SG-S2SG-DYN-count-PRS

‘You are counting every person’

Kabardian

There is no case marking on the pronoun *jəs'heč'e* 'he himself' in any of the functions A (46a), S (b) or P (c).

- (46) a. *Jəs'heč'e a-r ø-jə-š-a-s'*  
 himself he-ABS O3SG-S3SG-bring-PF-ASSRT  
 'He himself brought him' Kabardian
- b. *Jəs'heč'e ma-že-ø*  
 himself S3SG-run-PRS  
 'He himself runs' Kabardian
- c. *Jəs'heč'e ø-s-łey°-a-s'*  
 himself O3SG-S1SG-see-PRF-ASSRT  
 'I saw *him*' Kabardian

The ergative and absolutive are not differentiated in the singular of Ad. *jež'* 'self' (47a-c) but in the plural they are (48a-c).

- (47) a. *Jež' lə-r ø-ə-šχə-γ*  
 self meat-ABS O3SG-S3SG-eat-PF  
 'He (himself) ate the meat' Adyghe
- b. *Jež' me-laž'e-ø*  
 self S3SG-work-PRS  
 'He (himself) is working' Adyghe
- c. *Jež' ø-w-e-s''e-ø*  
 self O3SG-S2SG-DYN-know-PRS  
 'You know *him*' Adyghe
- (48) a. *Jež'-χe-m təγ°əz'ə-r ø-a-wəč''ə-γ*  
 self-PL-ERG wolf-ABS O3SG-S3PL-kill-PF  
 'They (themselves) killed the wolf' Adyghe
- b. *Jež'-χe-r me-žeg°ə-ø-χ*  
 self-PL-ABS S3PL-play-PRS-PL  
 'They (themselves) are playing' Adyghe
- c. *Jež'-χe-r ø-s-e-s''e-ø*  
 self-PL-ABS O3PL-S1SG-DYN-know-PRS  
 'I know *them*' Adyghe

The differentiation of the ergative and absolutive cases in the pronoun *jež'* 'self' is in a process of development. In certain dialects of Adyghe the ergative-absolutive opposition is found also in the singular. Cf. the following examples from the Temirgoj dialect:

- (49) *Jež'ə-m pismo-r ø-ə-tχə-γ*  
 he/(himself)-ERG letter-ABS O3SG-S3SG-write-PRF  
 'He (himself) wrote the letter' Adyghe (Temirgoj dialect)

- (50) Jež'-ø                      me-k°'e-ž'ə  
 he/(himself)-ABS S3SG-go.PRS-REV  
 'He (himself) returns'                      Adyghe (Temirgoj dialect)

Turning to Kabardian we note that the process has gone further. Case differentiation is found in both the singular and plural of the corresponding pronoun *jezə* 'self' (51a-d).

- (51) a. Jezə-m (\*ø) s'ə-r      ø-jə-v-a-s'  
 self-ERG              field-ABS O3SG-S3SG-plough-PF-ASSRT  
 'He (himself) ploughed the field'                      Kabardian
- b. Jezə-χe-m      g°e3ə-r      ø-χ-a-s-a-s'  
 self-PL-ERG      wheat-ABS O3SG-LOC-S3PL-sow-PF-ASSRT  
 'They (themselves) sowed wheat'                      Kabardian
- c. Jezə-r (\*ø) ma-γ-ø  
 self-ERG              S3SG-cry-PRS  
 'He (himself) is crying'                      Kabardian
- d. Fəzə-m      jezə-r (\*ø) ø-q'-i-šə-n-s'  
 woman-ERG self-ABS      O3SG-OR-S3SG-lead-FUT-ASSRT  
 'The woman will bring *him*'                      Kabardian

As shown by these examples, the presence of the suffixes *-m* (51a) and *-r* (51c) is obligatory. In this respect the pronoun *jezə* 'self' differs from the declension of nouns, where alternation with zero is allowed. The ergative case of the pronoun *jezə* 'self' may also be formed by double ergative suffixes (52), whereby the ergative marker of demonstrative pronouns *-bə* followed by the second ergative suffix *-m* are added to the root (the reverse order of the suffixes is not possible).

- (52) Jez-bə-m (\*jezə-m-bə) tχələ-r      ø-q'-i-h-a-s'  
 self-ERG-ERG                      book-ABS O3SG-OR-S3SG-carry-PF-ASSRT  
 'He (himself) brought the book'                      Kabardian

### 3.4 Proper nouns

3.4.1 *Personal names.* It is common for proper nouns in the Circassian language not to distinguish the ergative and absolutive cases. This is particularly characteristic of personal names.

- (53) a. Murat Aslan ø-ə-š'e-š't  
 Murat Aslan O3SG-S3SG-bring-FUT2  
 'Murat will bring Aslan'                      Adyghe
- b. Murat me-čəje-ø  
 Murat S3SG-sleep-PRS  
 'Murat is sleeping'                      Adyghe

- c. Murat  $\emptyset$ -w-e-s''e- $\emptyset$   
 Murat O3SG-S2SG-DYN-know-PRS  
 'You know Murat' Adyghe

In (53a) subject-object word order determines the grammatical status of *Murat* and *Aslan*. Moving *Aslan* to initial position *Aslan Murat*  $\emptyset$ - $\emptyset$ -š'e-š't 'Aslan will bring Murat' changes the grammatical status of the NPs.

It is possible to mark proper nouns by *-m/-r*. However, in contrast to common nouns (19-21), the suffixes *-r/-m* on proper nouns are not related to the marking of definiteness. The suffixes *-r/-m* alternate freely with zero and have no impact on the meaning, as illustrated for proper nouns as A, S and P in (54a-c).

- (54) a. Fatime-(m) žane-r  $\emptyset$ -jə-d-a-s'  
 Fatima-(ERG) shirt-ABS O3SG-S3SG-sew-PF-ASSRT  
 'Fatima sewed the shirt' Kabardian
- b. Fatime-(r) me-laz'e- $\emptyset$   
 Fatima-(ABS) S3SG-work-PRS  
 'Fatima is working' Kabardian
- c. Fatime-(r)  $\emptyset$ -s-o-c'əχ°- $\emptyset$   
 Fatima-(ABS) O3SG-S1SG-DYN-know-PRS  
 'I know Fatima' Kabardian

The free alternation between zero and *-r/-m* may be interpreted as a first step towards establishing the opposition of absolutive-ergative marking on personal names. In some Circassian dialects one may observe a more consistent ergative-absolutive opposition in personal names. In the Bzhedug and Shapsug dialects of Adyghe personal names ending in a consonant are marked by the suffix *-ə* in the ergative (Zekokh 1969). In this way there is an opposition between the ergative and absolutive of personal names:

- (55) a. Ahmed-ə γ°əč'ə-r  $\emptyset$ -jə-fəte- $\emptyset$   
 Axmed-ERG iron-ABS O3SG-S3SG-forge-PRS  
 'Axmed is forging the iron' Adyghe
- b. Ahmed- $\emptyset$  me-pxas''- $\emptyset$   
 Axmed-ABS S3SG-do.carpentry-PRS  
 'Axmed is doing carpentry' Adyghe

3.4.2 *Circassian family names*. In contrast to personal names, Circassian family names consistently distinguish the ergative and absolutive cases:

- (56) a. Q'ardenə-m As'ənə-r  $\emptyset$ -jə-h- $\emptyset$   
 Kardan-ERG Ashin-ABS O3SG-S3SG-carry-PRS  
 'Kardan is carrying Ashin' Kabardian

- b. Q'ardenə-r ma-že-ø  
 Kardan-ABS S3SG-run-PRS  
 'Kardan is running' Kabardian

In a combination of a personal name and family name, the family name always precedes the personal name. They are declined as a unit and follow the rules of the final element (57a-b). The first member (the family name) is not marked for case and the following personal name is declined in the same way as it is without the family name. The ergative and absolutive markers in (57a-b) are not obligatory.

- (57) a. Q'arden Zaurə-(m) As'ən Anzorə-(r) ø-jə-h-ø  
 Kardan Zaur-(ERG) Ashin Anzor-(ABS) O3SG-S3SG-carry-PRS  
 'Zaur Kardan is carrying Anzor Ashin' Kabardian
- b. Q'arden Zaurə-(r) ma-že-ø  
 Kardan Zaur-(ABS) S3SG-run-PRS  
 'Zaur Kardan is running' Kabardian

As noted above (56a-b), family names (without following personal names) consistently distinguish the ergative-absolutive cases. However, in the plural the opposition is not obligatory anymore (58a-b). Word order determines the grammatical relations in absence of case marking in (58a).

- (58) a. Q'arden-χe-(m) As'ən-χe-(r) ø-ja-še-ø  
 Kardan-PL-(ERG) Ashin-PL-(ABS) O3PL-S3PL-lead-PRS  
 'The Kardans are leading the Ashins' Kabardian
- b. Q'arden-χe-(r) ma-že-ø  
 Kardan-PL-(ABS) S3PL-run-PRS  
 'The Kardans are running' Kabardian

3.4.3 *Borrowed (foreign) family names.* Borrowed family names, for instance Russian, are declined in the same way as Circassian personal names. In contrast to proper Circassian family names the ergative (59a) and absolutive cases (59b-c) are not obligatorily distinguished.

- (59) a. Ivanov tχəłə-r ø-je-tχ-ø  
 Ivanov book-ABS O3SG-S3SG-write-PRS  
 'Ivanov is writing the book' Kabardian
- b. Ivanov me-laz'e-ø  
 Ivanov S3SG-work-PRS  
 'Ivanov is working' Kabardian
- c. Ivanov ø-s-ley°-a-s'  
 Ivanov O3SG-S1SG-see-PF-ASSRT  
 'I saw Ivanov' Kabardian



Phonetic and prosodic features of the borrowed family names have a great impact on the marking or non-differentiation of the ergative and absolutive cases (as in (59a-c)). Cf., for instance, the consistent marking of the ergative-absolutive on the family name *Ljenske* (60a-c).

- (60) a. *Ljenske-m tχələ-r ø-je-tχ-ø*  
 Lensky-ERG book-ABS O3SG-S3SG-write-ABS  
 ‘Lensky is writing the book’ Kabardian
- b. *Ljenske-r me-laz'e-ø*  
 Lensky-ABS S3SG-work-PRS  
 ‘Lensky is working’ Kabardian
- c. *Ljenske-r ø-s-łey°-a-s'*  
 Lensky-ABS O3SG-S1SG-see-PF-ASSRT  
 ‘I saw Lensky’ Kabardian

### 3.5 Representative plural

The use of the so-called representative plural ‘X... and the others’ is characteristic of the Circassian languages. In Kabardian, there is no differentiation of ergative-absolutive (61a-c).

- (61) a. *Marjan-səme χade-r ø-ja-t'-ø*  
 Marjan-and.others kitchen.garden-ABS O3SG-S3PL-dig-PRS  
 ‘Marjan and the others are digging in the kitchen garden’ Kabardian
- b. *Marjan-səme ma-k°'e-ø*  
 Marjan-and.others S3PL-go-PRS  
 ‘Marjan and the others are walking’ Kabardian
- c. *Marjan-səme ø-s-o-łay°-ø*  
 Marjan-and.others O3PL-S1SG-DYN-see-PRS  
 ‘I see Marjan and the others’ Kabardian

In Adyghe the particle *dəχe* ‘and others’ expresses the representative plural and distinguishes ergative-absolutive.

- (62) a. *Jəshaq dəχe-m wəne-r ø-a-s'ʔə-γ*  
 Isxak and.others-ERG house-ABS O3SG-S3PL-do-PF  
 ‘Isxak and the others built the house’ Adyghe
- b. *Jəshaq dəχe-r ø-qe-k°'a-ye-χ*  
 Isxak and.others-ABS S3PL-OR-go-PF-PL  
 ‘Isxak and the others came here’ Adyghe
- c. *Jəshaq dəχe-r ø-s-e-š'e-ø-χ*  
 Isxak and.others-ABS O3PL-S1SG-DYN-lead-PRS-PL  
 ‘I lead Isxak and the others’ Adyghe

### 3.6 Possessive forms

There is no differentiation between the ergative and absolutive cases of possessive forms in Adyghe.

- (63) a. Ti-s'awe      a-r      ø-je-s''e-ø  
 POS2PL-son   he-ABS   O3SG-S3SG-know-PRS  
 'Our son knows him' Adyghe
- b. Si-s'awe      ø-qe-k''-ž'ə-γ  
 POS1SG-son   S3SG-OR-go-REV-PF  
 'My son returned' Adyghe
- c. Wi-s'awe      ø-s-e-s''e-ø  
 POS2PL-son   O3SG-S1SG-DYN-know-PRS  
 'I know your son' Adyghe

Possessive forms in Kabardian are not consistent in marking the opposition ergative-absolutive (64a-b). In Standard Kabardian possessive forms of nouns usually take overt marking of the ergative and absolutive cases.

- (64) a. Fi-ade-(m)                      sə-q'-i-ye-k''-a-s'  
 POS2PL-father-(ERG)   O1SG-OR-S3SG-CAUS-go-PF-ASSRT  
 'Your father sent me here' Kabardian
- b. Wi-ade-(r)                      me-žej-ø  
 POS2PL-father-(ABS)   S3SG-sleep-PRS  
 'Your father is sleeping' Kabardian

### 3.7 The coordinative form

Demonstrative pronouns in the coordinative form (with repeated coordinative suffixes *-re*) coincide in the ergative and absolutive. Both in the function of A (65a) and S/P (65b-c) the demonstrative pronouns in the coordinative form are marked by the suffix *-bə* (formally ergative).

- (65) a. Mə-bə-re                      mo-bə-re                      mas'e-r      ø-ja-t'-ø  
 he/this-ERG-COORD   he/that-ERG-COORD   hole-ABS   O3SG-S3PL-dig-PRS  
 'This one and that one are digging the hole' Kabardian
- b. Mə-bə-re                      mo-bə-re                      ma-γ-ø  
 he/this-ERG-COORD   he/that-ERG-COORD   S3PL-cry-PRS  
 'This one and that one are crying' Kabardian
- c. Mə-bə-re                      mo-bə-re                      ø-s-o-h-ø  
 he/this-ERG-COORD   he/that-ERG-COORD   O3PL-S1SG-carry-PRS  
 'I am carrying this one and that one' Kabardian

Nouns in this coordinative form (repeated coordinative suffixes *-re*) are marked by *-m*, even in the S/P positions instead of the expected absolutive *-r*. As a result of this, the marking of A (66a), S (b) and P (c) coincide.

- (66) a. L'ə-m-re      fəzə-m-re      a-r      ø-ja-še-ø  
 man-ERG-COORD woman-ERG-COORD he-ABS O3SG-S3PL-lead-PRS  
 'The man and the woman are leading him' Kabardian
- b. L'ə-m-re      fəzə-m-re      ma-k'°e-ø  
 man-ERG-COORD woman-ERG-COORD S3PL-go-PRS  
 'The man and the woman are walking' Kabardian
- c. L'ə-m-re      fəzə-m-re      ø-s-o-še-ø  
 man-ERG-COORD woman-ERG-COORD O3PL-S1SG-DYN-lead-PRS  
 'I am leading the man and the woman' Kabardian

In (66b-c) the suffix *-m* may alternate with zero, expressing indefiniteness of S (67a) and P (67b) – in contrast to the (formally) ergative suffix *-bə* in demonstrative pronouns (65b-c).

- (67) a. L'ə-ø-re      fəz-ø-re      ma-k'°e-r  
 man-ABS.INDEF-COORD woman-ABS.INDEF-COORD S3PL-go-PRS  
 'A man and a woman are walking' Kabardian
- b. L'ə-ø-re      fəz-ø-re  
 man-ABS.INDEF-COORD woman-ABS.INDEF-COORD  
 ø-s-o-ø-še-ø  
 O3PL-S1SG-DYN-lead-PRS  
 'I am leading a man and a woman' Kabardian

The appearance of the (formally) ergative markers *-bə* and *-m* in S and P functions instead of the expected absolutive *-r* may be explained as an avoidance of combining two sonorant consonants in the absolutive *-r* and coordinative *-re*. An indication that this is the case comes from a comparison with another coordinative form with the repeated suffixes *-i*, where the expected absolutive *-r* shows up on S (68a) and P (b).

- (68) a. L'ə-r-i      fəz-r-i      ma-k'°e-ø  
 man-ABS.DEF-COORD woman-ABS.INDEF-COORD S3PL-go-PRS  
 'The man and the woman are walking' Kabardian
- b. L'ə-r-i      fəz-r-i  
 man-ABS.DEF-COORD woman-ABS.INDEF-COORD  
 ø-s-o-še-ø  
 O3PL-S1SG-DYN-lead-PRS  
 'I am leading the man and the woman' Kabardian

4. Split-ergativity and the nominal hierarchy

Split-ergativity conditioned by the semantics of nominal types has been viewed in relation to proposed nominal hierarchies. The prediction is that if there is a split in the case marking of nominals, it will be accounted for by noting a breaking point along the hierarchy. Nominals in the rightmost positions – first and second person pronouns – are more likely to occur in A function and are therefore less in need of being marked as agents. Inanimate nouns are the least likely to occur in A function, marking them as agents is thus an important signal. The Nominal Hierarchy is shown in Figure 1 (based on Dixon 1994).

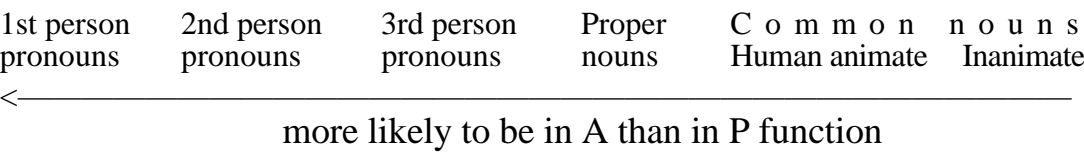


Figure 1. The Nominal Hierarchy

Data from the Circassian languages is interesting in relation to the Nominal hierarchy, as ergative case marking in these language departs in some respects from the expected distribution. Figure 2 summarises the main patterns of ergative marking in the Circassian languages.

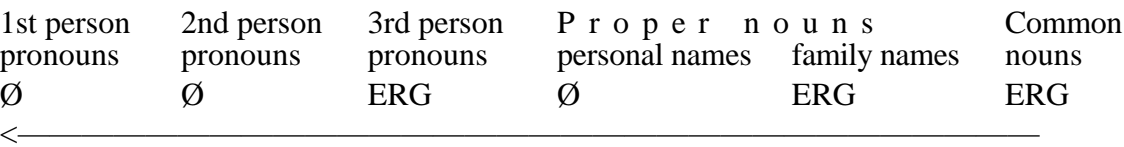


Figure 2. Marking of the ergative case in the Circassian languages

First and second person pronouns in the Circassian languages do not differentiate the ergative and absolutive cases, as predicted by the Nominal Hierarchy.

The Nominal Hierarchy predicts that ergative case will be marked in the following positions to the right. Third person (by origin demonstrative) pronouns are marked for the ergative case, as discussed in section 2.2.

In the next position personal names are generally not marked for the ergative case (cf. 3.4.1), whereas family names are (3.4.2). It is interesting to note that there is a tendency for an increased use of the ergative case also on personal names.

Common nouns in the leftmost position are marked for the ergative case, as expected. The distinction Human-Animate vs. Inanimate does not play a role in the marking on common nouns, but it seems to be of some importance

for the ergative marking of the interrogative pronouns. As pointed out in section 3.2 (42-43), Ad. *səd*, Kab. *sət* ‘what’ referring to an inanimate agent/force is marked by the ergative case whereas *χet* ‘who’ in the same position is not.

The key problem in accounting for case marking in the Circassian languages seems to be the relation between the marking of case and definiteness. The major difference between the distribution of ergative and absolutive case is that ergative case has established itself as a case that primarily marks A, ignoring definiteness (section 2.4). In the S and P positions the opposition indefiniteness-definiteness is still available as well as in oblique functions (section 2.5). This applies in particular to common nouns: the suffix *-m* marks A obligatorily, whereas the suffix *-r* is found on definite NPs in S and P functions and is lacking on indefinite NPs in S and P functions. The opposition indefiniteness – definiteness is found in the singular; in the plural *-m/-r* mark only case (cf. examples (22-24) and (48a-c)).

New information is most often introduced in S and P functions, the availability of indefinite marking is therefore important here. Old information is most often given in the A function (cf. Du Bois 1987). The motivation for the grammaticalisation of definite marking in A into the ergative case in the Circassian languages may therefore be sought in discourse structure.

The behaviour of the *-m/-r* suffixes on proper nouns should also be seen in relation to the marking of definiteness. As proper nouns are definite on semantic grounds, there is no need for marking of definiteness.

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