

Looking for a D-layer in Moksha

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The universality of the D-layer is a subject of a long-standing debate. Some authors argue that the presence of a D-layer is necessary for a nominal projection to qualify as an argument. Hence, when it comes to articleless languages, these too must project a D-layer (e.g. Longobardi 1994, Progovac 1998). Others (e.g. Chierchia 1998, Bošković' 2005, 2008) argue for the presence of a global parameter: some languages lack a D-projection, but nevertheless their nominal projections qualify as arguments; hence in these languages D is not necessary for argument-hood. Yet other authors argue against the existence of such a global parameter. For instance, Pereltsvaig (2007, 2013), Gillon & Armoskaite (2015) argue that in Russian and Lithuanian respectively bare nouns can project either NP or DP structures, but may qualify as arguments under either option. A drawback in their analysis is that in Russian and Lithuanian the evidence for DP-vs.NP-hood is rather indirect. In this paper we explore the structure of the nominal complex in another articleless language, namely Moksha (Uralic), which provides more direct evidence. Moksha expresses definiteness by means of a definite declension, which has morphological marking only in three cases (out of fourteen possible) –Nominative, Genitive and Dative. Moksha also employs two other types of declension –the default and the possessive one. Moksha displays a mixed behaviour wrt Bošković's generalizations (Bošković' 2005, 2008). It behaves as an NP language wrt adjunct extraction (1) and exhaustivity of possessives (2).

- (1) *Kodama oš-stə Pet'a vas'-ft-s' st'ər'?*
which city-el Peter meet-caus-pst.3 girl
lit. 'From which city Peter met the girl?'"
- (2) *Pet'a-n' kolma it'-ənzə kud'-sə-t, a n'il'əcəs' ul'ca-sə*
Peter-GEN three children-3SG.POSS.PL house-INESS-2SG.POSS a fourth.one street-IN
lit. 'Peter's three children are at home, and the fourth (one is) outside.'

At the same time, just like DP languages, Moksha disallows left branch extraction, LBE (3) and allows two nominal genitive arguments (4).

- (4) **Tε Ivan rama-z'e mašina-t'.*
this Ivan buy-PST.3SG.S.3SG.O car-DEF.SG.GEN
Int.: 'Ivan bought this car.'
- (5) *Ivan kulxtsond-si al'az'e-n' kniga-n' luv-əma-nc.*
Ivan listen-NPST.3SG.S.3SG.O father-GEN book-GEN read-NZR-3SG.POSS.SG.GEN
'Ivan listens to his father's reading of the book.'

It should be noted, however, in connection with (4), that Moksha is a language with differential object marking. If the DO is a topic of the sentence, it gets genitive marking of the definite (4) or possessive (3) declension; if not, it can stay unmarked. Overt marking on the DO triggers subject-object agreement on the verb, while in case of unmarked DO the verb agrees only with the subject. Only in the latter case, is LBE possible (5).

(5) *Pitn'i Ivan rama-s' mashina.*

beautiful Ivan buy-PST.3-SG car

'Ivan bought a beautiful car.'

The correlation between definiteness of interpretation, the presence of a specific encoding on the verbal inflection and the impossibility of LBE indicates the presence of a D-layer in these cases. Conversely, however, also in the absence of DOM, nominal projections in Moksha fully qualify as arguments. I conclude that Moksha presents further evidence in favour of the view that in addition to DP, also smaller nominal projections can qualify as arguments.