



# The Assignment of Ablative Case To Albanian Nominal Constructions

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## ABSTRACT

The following paper aims at shedding some light on the Albanian language case system with special focus on the assignment of ablative case. Traditionally ablative in Albanian is highly described as a prepositional phrase headed by the common preposition "prej/ from". Semantically, a noun in ablative case establishes purpose, instrumental, place and time relations whereas syntactically it represents a complement adding information to the meaning of the sentence as a whole. Furthermore, apart from the constructions where the noun in ablative is preceded by a preposition where the latter assigns such a case there are also constructions where ablative NP(s) follows another noun or verbal head which are both presumed to assign ablative. Unfortunately the above nominal head lack the case assigning features [+preposition; +verbal], whereas the verbal head as a potential case assigner is limited to assigning case only to its internal (direct/indirect object) and external (subject) arguments. The above argumentation together with its historical evolution gave rise to an emerging theorized proposition treating all ablative NP(s) as complements base-generated within a prepositional phrase either headed by a phonetically expressed preposition or by an elliptical prepositional head which assigns overt or covert ablative case.

**KEY WORDS:** ablative, complement, elliptical preposition, case assigner, case features.

It is widely known that the Albanian case system it is made up of five distinctively inflected case forms known as: Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative and **Ablative**<sup>1</sup>. The last bolded case, namely

Ablative, is mostly associated with verbal, adjectival, prepositional and nominal categories within a sentence structure. In cases when it is used in the adjacency of a verbal element it denotes purpose, instrumental, place and time relations.

1.a Në fillim të Janarit **maleve** ra dëborë.

\*In the early January **the mountains** snowed.

In the early January it snowed in the mountains

Generally, the verb-adjoined ablative is preceded by a preposition.

2.a *buzë lumit, afër shtëpisë,*  
*anash rrugës,*  
*by the river, near the house, on the*  
*side of the road*

*pranë shkollës, prej druri.*  
*near the school (made) of wood*

On the other hand, the noun-adjoined ablative mostly does not use a preposition and syntactically it serves as a noun modifier comparatively similar to the genitive NP. In this case the ablative NP is used only in one of its indefinite forms modifying an indefinite noun as well.

3.b *këngë trimash, jehonë dasme,*  
*aromë lulësh, etc.*

*Warrior's songs wedding reverberation*  
*flower scent*

Subsequently, the NP in ablative in the above grammatical context, is closely linked to the syntactic functions of modifier and complement.

If, for an instance we are to compare the case system of English and Albanian language we have to highlight the undeniable fact that both languages have undergone the simplification processes of both verbal and nominal grammatical paradigm, easily

<sup>1</sup> I am tempted to use Ablative case (defined as denoting a noun that is the object of a prepositional phrase in Latin) as the best representative for the

Albanian language fifth case (rasa rrjedhore) because the noun in this case is preceded by the preposition "prej" meaning "from"



discernible in the simplification of their case forms. As, an inevitable consequence of the phonetic evolution some of the case forms have become identical. More concretely, the indefinite singular ablative shares the same grammatical and phonetic form with the dative (oak- both abl. and dat.-indef-singular), whereas the indefinite plural ablative is quite distinctive from dative, due to the presence of the *-sh* ablative inflection (malesh mountains-abl-indef-plural; oak-abl -idef-plural).

Agaliu (1989) stated that: “For us as researchers the existence of a noun case form involving only two distinctive inflective elements is unacceptable”

The Albanian language old linguistic data proves that the ablative inflective ending *-sh* made it distinguishable from dative. The ablative inflective ending *-sh* is analysed as an old representative remnant of the Indo-European locative *-su*.

Furthermore, difficulties are encountered in cases when different case forms share the same or synonymic syntactic functions as it happens with the Albanian language NP(s) “*dru lisi/ qumësht lopi*”(oak wood/ cow milk). The second NP “*lisi/ lopi*” (oak/ cow) phonetic form is similar with the dative one, whereas its syntactic function is synonymic with that of the Albanian genitive constructions “*druri i lisit/ qumështi i lopës*”(the wood of the oak/ the milk of the cow). Pursuant to the syntactic similarities some Albanian linguists concur that the ablative NP should be considered as indefinite genitives lacking a pre posed possessive determiner (libri *i* djalit/ the book of the boy). Demiraj (1989) driven by the syntactic function of the modifier the ablative NP plays in the sentence structure argues that: “The second indefinite NP is in the genitive case as it represents the modifier of the preceding NP which in cases when the former NP is used in its definite form it requires the phonetic presence of the possessive determiner, “*druri i lisit* – wood-definite-singular of oak-definite-genitive singular involving the possessive determiner”.

In addition, Gosturanit (1989) further argues that the above examples represent a sort of morphological homonymy, but there exist no semantic homonymy. He points out that in the above nominal constructions “*dru lisi* (oak wood); *lule mali* (flowers mountain/mountainous flowers)” the second NP “*lisi/mali* (oak/mountain)” is in the ablative for the following reasons:

Firstly, if we are turning the above NP into its indefinite plural form it will end in *-sh*, an ablative-preserved inflectional ending.

4.a *dru lisi* – *dru lisash* (wood-indefinite-singular-nominative oaks-indefinite-plural-ablative)

4.b *ujë mali* – *ujë melesh*.(water-indefinite-singular-nominative mountains-indefinite-plural ablative)

Secondly, if we are to exercise the elimination or deletion the second NP can not be in genitive case, as the genitive definite or indefinite NP is always preceded by a possessive determiner.

Thirdly, if we compare both genitive and prepositionless ablative nominal construction they do not bear the slightest semantic similarities. The ablative Albanian NP bear a general meaning, whereas the genitive ones bear an individualized meaning due to the individualizing effect of the pre posed possessive determiner.

Forthly, if we go back in time in the literary legacy of the early Albanian writers we will find certain definite/indefinite ablative preposition-lacking nominal construction where the second NP is preceded by an old one-letter prepositional element “*-n*” denoting ablative.

5.a *bukë n’elbi* (Buzuku) (rye bread)

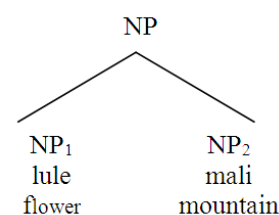
5.b *furka n’hekuri* (Bardhi) (iron distaff)

5.c *rrasa n’guri* (Bogdani) (stone tablets)

Apart from the semantic distribution the ablative NP fulfils a number of syntactic functions within the sentence boundaries as the time, place, purpose or instrumental complement.

For the ablative nominal constructions which syntactically represent the modifier NP in the structural generative configuration [NP;NP], the ablative NP should licence the  $\Theta$ -features of the source and origin and afterwards the case features should be checked under the government condition. To this point we stress that the distinctive  $\Theta$ -features together with its morphological ones distinguish ablative from genitive, the latter semantically realizing the possessor.

The X-bar scheme of the Albanian language preposition-lacking ablative constructions is best illustrated below.



From the above X-bar scheme it would sound acceptable to assume that the first NP “*lule/ flower*” case marks the second NP “*mali/ mountain*” and there is no violation of the Government

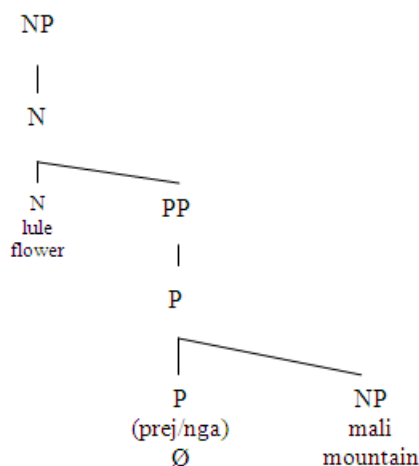


Condition. Furthermore, such assignment of ablative case requires that both the case marker and case receiver to be structurally portrayed under the [head : complement] configuration.

The first controversially question that arises at this point of our analysis is the faulty acceptance of the nominal heads as case assigner when generally nouns are deprived of the case assigning features [+verbal; +prepositional]. Moreover, if the preceding noun is to be accepted as a potential ablative case assigner than it would also be accepted that the same noun takes as its internal argument an NP (in ablative case)  $\Theta$ -marking it. So, the ablative NP internal argument is very sensitive to the  $\Theta$  role of the source and origin.

The dependent ablative NP “*mali/ mountain*” generated in the nominal head position is not only semantically limited but it undergoes grammatical constraints as it is always used in its indefinite singular or plural.

In addition the semantic characterizing features of the ablative NP are quite distinct from the genitive one as the former is represented by an NP thematically indicating the source and origin whereas the latter is an NP thematically indicating the possessor. From the structural and syntactic perspective the ablative NP in its deep structure might be base-generated within the PP (prepositional phrase) maximal projection, as the complement of the prepositional head which in the surface structure might be a null head or an empty category (not expressed phonetically). In other words, between both NP(s) there is generated the PP headed by a lexical category (preposition) which in cases of preposition-lacking nominal construction with the second NP in ablative the prepositional head is represented by an elliptical prepositional element or an empty prepositional category.



Apart from the above cases a NP in ablative cases in Albanian language is also encountered in structural configuration [NP; VP], an NP governed by an intransitive verb head, as a transitive one assigns only the accusative case its internal argument in the structural configuration [NP;VP].

- 6.a Ai ecte rrugës.  
He was walking along the road
- 6.b Pushuesit shëtisnin mbrëmjeve.  
Holidaymakers were walking during the night.

The above assignment of ablative it is believed to be a depiction of an inherent case assignment model to an NP portrayed as the intransitive verb argument as the latter requires an NP argument to complete the sentence semantic meaning.

In the above examples and the like the ablative NP represents a necessary but not a semantically vital nominal category as it carries the additional information of place, time, purpose, instrument etc. Such a blurring semantic representation characterized by a weak verbal head government (as structurally the ablative NP is not the verbal internal argument), lead to a possible but not necessary subordinate verbal head-ablative NP relations. In this context, pursuant to the government and binding theory the assignment of ablative case from the transitive and intransitive verbs is doubtful as verbal heads assign case to their internal arguments (direct or indirect objects). The ablative NP due to the additional semantic information they imply within the sentence they do not represent a vital verbal argument and as a result the relations established between the verbal head and the ablative NP are complementary ones.

Based on the unyielding fact focusing on the close bond between the case marker and argument structure, we argue that one NP is case marked only if it is realised under an [+argument] position. So, we have to reason whether the ablative NP is realized under such [+verbal argument] position.

- 7.a Ai ecte rrugës.  
[InflP[NP Ai[Infl[VP[V ecte[NP rrugës]  
He was walking along the road  
[InflP[NP He[Infl[VP[V was walking[NP road]road]

Within the verbal structure of the VP headed by the verb “*eci/ walk*” is realized the NP “*rrugës/ road*”. The latter is pretended to be case marked by the intransitive verb “*eci/ walk*”. Such a pretension is unacceptable as intransitive verbs take only one external argument “*Ai; He*” functioning as the sentence subject which structurally is base-generated in the [NP;VP] position to be  $\Theta$ -marked and afterwards moves toward [SpecInflP] position



to be assigned nominative case. At this point we have to concur that the intransitive verb can not assign ablative case to the NP “*rrugës/ road*” as the latter does not structurally represent either the internal or external verbal argument nor is it realized in a [+verbal argument] position. As so the structural bond between the verb “*eci/walk*” and the NP “*rruges/road*” is weak allowing the ablative NP to be omitted without having any influence on the sentence grammaticality.

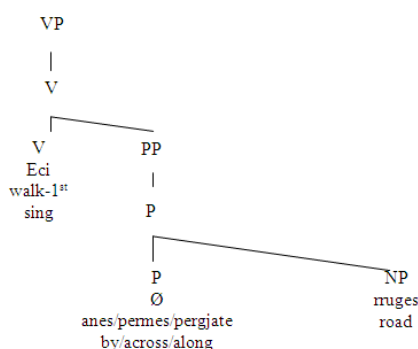
The implausibility and impossibility of the verbal head to assign ablative case to the NP “*rrugës/ road*” once more convince us of the recently emerging proposal that the surface structure NP in ablative case is realized within a prepositional projection headed by a phonetically expressed preposition or an elliptical element or an empty category. Even though the PP should be headed by an empty prepositional category it might be easily inserted causing no grammatical or semantic ambiguity. Demiraj (1989) case related argument was: “*the noun “rruges/ road” in the definite, singular syntactic structure “eci rruges/ \*walk road” should be preceded by an inserted preposition without changing the sentence grammaticality or semantic properties*”

8.a Eci **anës** rrugës.

Walk-1<sup>st</sup> sing **by** road-the  
ablative/singular/definite

8.b Eci **permes/pergjate** rrugës

Walk-1<sup>st</sup> sing. **across/along** road- the  
ablative/sing/definite



In conclusion the prepositional head, phonetically expressed or not assigns ablative case in its deep structure to the NP complement of the P<sup>0</sup>. The assignment of ablative case is not a representative of structural or inherent case assignment model. The ablative case assignment in Albanian language nominal constructions is realized in the complement position of the PP maximal projection by the P<sup>0</sup> which case marks the NP.

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