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Preface to the 35th volume

This 35th volume of the *Working Papers in Linguistics Circle* (WPLC) continues a decades-long tradition at the University of Victoria of providing budding scholars with an opportunity to publish their research. WPLC welcomes papers from recognized universities across Canada and beyond with the aim of sharing work in any area related to linguistics. This includes theoretical and applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, community-based research and language revitalization, as well as any interdisciplinary research that connects language with other fields of study. This year's volume brings together contributions in applied and theoretical linguistics, as well as in pragmatics and sociolinguistics by authors Tegan M. Clarke, Chloe Mee, and Sude Yöntemli from the University of Victoria, University of British Columbia, and Boğaziçi University, respectively.

We hope this collection allows readers to engage with work both within and beyond their areas of study and encourages them to share their own research and ideas with us in future volumes.

Editorial Committee
WPLC 35

Editorial Committee

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Teaching genitive plural allomorphy to second language learners of Russian

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This paper applies Tomasello and Herron's (1988) *Garden Path technique* to an introductory lesson plan designed to teach the genitive plural (GEN.PL) to second language (L2) Russian learners at the A1-A2 level. An adapted Engage-Study-Activate (ESA) instructional framework, supported by principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and game-based learning, is used to promote morphologically informed L2 instruction. Additional learning activities and materials are provided to consolidate learners' acquisition.
Keywords: Russian language teaching and learning; Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA); case acquisition; genitive case; ESA; TBLT; game-based learning; Garden Path technique; focus-on-form; focus-on-meaning

1 Introduction

Russian is a morphologically rich, fusional language whose inflectional case system is a reported source of difficulty for second language (L2) learners (Ceytlin & Kruglyakova, 2024; Cherepovskaia et al., 2022; Kisselev & Rubina, 2024). This six-case system encodes information such as grammatical gender, number, and animacy, as well as the syntactic role or semantic function of nominals within a sentence, often done overtly through suffixation (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010). Learners' acquisition of the case system can be further complicated by individual variables such as age of acquisition and whether one's first language has overt or covert case marking (DeKeyser, 2005; N. C. Ellis, 2022). As such, case errors, particularly in adult L2 learners' speech and writing, are common and can interfere with both intelligibility and comprehensibility (Tokareva, 2025). Since morphology often 'bottlenecks' L2 acquisition, it is crucial to support learners in developing both grammatical and communicative competencies in instructed L2 contexts (R. Ellis, 2005; Slabakova, 2019). One way to achieve this is by providing opportunities for hands-on learning that balance focus on grammatical form and meaning. This paper demonstrates how this can be accomplished through a modified version of Harmer's (1998) Engage-Study-Activate (ESA) framework, with Tomasello and Herron's (1988) Garden Path technique incorporated as an introductory activity.

1.1 The Russian case system

Russian has six cases: nominative, accusative, prepositional, genitive, dative, and instrumental.[1] In language classrooms, these cases are also often introduced in the above-listed sequence, with some variation in the order (Kisselev & Rubina, 2024; Jensen, 2007; Magnani & Artoni, 2015; Tokareva, 2025).[2] Of these cases, the genitive plural (GEN.PL) has been a common stumbling block for L2 learners due to its polysemantic usage contexts (multiple grammatical or semantic functions), allomorphic variation (various surface forms of the same morpheme), and suppletive forms (irregular forms that are not predictably derived from the base) (Cherepovskaia et al., 2022; Petukhova et al., 2020). Traditional instruction of GEN.PL is typically delivered through teacher-fronted, form-focused lessons that emphasize explicit explanation and controlled drills (Ceytlin & Kruglyakova, 2024; Kisselev & Rubina, 2024). However, there is ongoing debate in the field concerning whether instruction should prioritize form or meaning, especially in morphologically rich languages such as Russian. Researchers such as N. C. Ellis (2022) and Long (2014) assert that learners benefit more from a blend of explicit attention to form, exposure to meaningful input, and extensive opportunities for communicative output. Despite this, open-source materials that incorporate this design remain scarce.

The goal of this paper, therefore, is to first briefly discuss the theoretical aspects of GEN.PL allomorphy before presenting a unit plan consisting of an introductory lesson and accompanying language learning tools for teaching the GEN.PL to adult L2 learners of Russian. The central question guiding this work is: What instructional techniques can support the acquisition of the GEN.PL in a way that draws learners' attention to the target forms (focus-on-form, FoF) while also engaging them in meaningful communicative tasks (focus-on-meaning, FoM)?

2 Genitive plural allomorphy

The genitive case lacks a clear one-to-one correspondence with a single meaning or form. In fact, of the six cases, the GEN.PL has the largest number of functions and the greatest variation in its inflections (Cherepovskaia et al., 2022). The genitive case is used to express concepts such as possession, negation, absence, quantity (e.g., with words like много 'many/a lot', мало 'few', несколько 'several', нет 'none'), measure (e.g., with numerals), as well as to convey the meanings *from* and *of* (Asinari, 2019; Cherepovskaia et al., 2022; Jensen, 2007; Kisselev & Rubina, 2024; Magnani & Artoni, 2015). Moreover, unlike many other cases where the plural declension tends to have a unified form across genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter), the GEN.PL has several possible

[1] Abbreviations: ACC 'accusative'; DAT 'dative'; GEN 'genitive'; INSTR 'instrumental'; NOM 'nominative'; PL 'plural' PREP 'prepositional', SG 'singular'.

[2] Some beginner/intermediate textbooks vary the order between accusative-prepositional and dative-instrumental.

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allomorphs. This phenomenon is best analyzed as phonologically conditioned suppletive allomorphy (PCSA), in which the appropriate suffix can usually be determined by the phonological shape of the NOM.SG base from which the GEN.PL is derived. The three attested allomorphs are -ов (-ov), -∅, and -ей (-ej), shown in Examples 1–3. However, the GEN.PL can also be idiosyncratic (lexically conditioned), as shown in 4 and 5, with irregular forms persisting due to historical changes, homophony avoidance, and the frequency effect, whereby common forms resist regularization (Pertsova, 2015). All data provided comes from the author's L2 knowledge base, supported by Andrews (2001, pp. 34–36), Pertsova (2015, p. 230), and Rochtchina (2015, pp. 103–109).

The 'default' GEN.PL allomorph -ов (-ov) is shown in Example 1, bolded in red. Examples 1a–1d belong to what Blevins (2006) calls Inflection Class I, whose base form nouns all end in an unpalatalized ('hard') consonant. Forming the GEN.PL in these instances is rather straightforward: the suffix -ов (-ov) is simply added to the base. When the NOM.SG form ends with a palatalized ('soft') consonant, as in Example 1e, the corresponding soft ending -ев (-ev) is selected

(1) GEN.PL allomorphy -ов (-ov)

a.	ресторан	rectoran	ресторан**ов**	rectoran**ov**	'restaurant(s)'
b.	дом	dom	дом**ов**	dom**ov**	'house(s)'
c.	автобус	avtobus	автобус**ов**	avtobus**ov**	'bus(es)'
d.	театр	teatr	театр**ов**	teatr**ov**	'theatre(s)'
e.	музей	muzej	музе**ев**	muze**ev**	'museum(s)'

Another common pattern for forming the GEN.PL occurs in Example 2, aligning with Blevins' (2006) Inflection Classes II and IV. Here, nouns ending in -a or -o have this final vowel removed to form the GEN.PL, as shown in Examples 2a–2c. This is known as a 'zero' ending (-∅). If a disallowable ending cluster results after the removal of this vowel, the appropriate epenthetic ('filler') vowel will surface to break up the cluster.[3] If this cluster begins with a hard consonant as demonstrated in Examples 2d–2e, the filler vowel -o- surfaces. If the cluster begins with a sibilant (a 'hushing' consonant) such as ш, ж, ч, or щ seen in Example 2f, -e- will repair the cluster. Lastly, if the cluster begins with a soft sign (ь), which is a marker of palatalization for the preceding consonant, -e- will replace it, as seen in Example 2g.[4]

[3] See Bailyn and Nevins (2008) for further discussion on epenthetic 'filler' vowels and yers in Russian.

[4] This is also true of clusters who begin with the inherently soft consonant й (j), such as words like *майка (majka)*, with the GEN.PL being *маек (maek)*.

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(2) GEN.PL allomorphy -Ø / ‘filler’ vowel

a.	школа	shkola	школ-**Ø**	shkol-**Ø**	‘school(s)’
b.	книга	kniga	книг-**Ø**	knig-**Ø**	‘book(s)’
c.	слово	slova	слов-**Ø**	slov-**Ø**	‘word(s)’
d.	студентка	studentka	студент**о**к-**Ø**	student**o**k-**Ø**	‘student(s)’
e.	окно	okno	ок**о**н-**Ø**	ok**o**n-**Ø**	‘window(s)’
f.	девушка	devushka	девуш**е**к-**Ø**	devush**e**k-**Ø**	‘girl(s)’
g.	письмо	pis’mo	пис**е**м-**Ø**	pis**e**m-**Ø**	‘letter(s)’

The last predictable GEN.PL allomorph is -ей (-ej), corresponding to Blevins’ (2006) Inflection Class III. This allomorph surfaces in two instances: after bases that end in a hushing consonant (ш, ж, ч, щ) or those that end in soft sign (ь). In the latter case, ь is replaced by -ей (-ej), as shown in Examples 3c–3d.

(3) GEN.PL allomorphy -ей (-ej)

a.	врач	vrach	врач**ей**	vrach**ej**	‘doctor(s)’
b.	ключ	kljuch	ключ**ей**	kljuch**ej**	‘key(s)’
c.	преподаватель	prepodavatel’	преподавател**ей**	prepodavatel**ej**	‘professor(s)’
d.	церковь	tserkov’	церков**ей**	tserkov**ej**	church(es)’

As noted above, the GEN.PL has numerous irregular forms. The examples in 4, while somewhat predictable, do not employ any of the three aforementioned allomorphs and are therefore irregular. If a NOM.SG noun ends in the soft vowels -я (ja) or -е (je), this indicates that the preceding consonant or vowel is also soft. To preserve this softness in the GEN.PL, -ь or -й is used in place of this vowel. In Examples 4a–4b, a soft consonant-vowel sequence conditions the -ь ending. In Examples 4c–4e, a soft vowel-vowel sequence triggers the selection of -й.

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(4) GEN.PL allomorphy -ь / -й

a.	недел**я**	nedelja	недел**ь**	nedel**’**	‘week(s)’
b.	деревн**я**	derevnja	деревн**ь**	derevn**’**	‘village(s)’
c.	ид**ея**	ideja	ид**ей**	id**ej**	‘idea(s)’
d.	лекц**ия**	lektsija	лекц**ий**	lekts**ij**	‘lecture(s)’
e.	упрожнен**ие**	uprazhnenije	упрожнен**ий**	uprazhnen**ij**	‘exercise(s)’

This irregularity can also involve complete suppletion between the NOM.SG and GEN.PL forms, as in Examples 5a–5b, even in instances where a predictable allomorph, such as -ов (-ov), would otherwise be expected. The examples in 5c–5d are also irregular, though their forms are similar to the GEN.SG.

(5) GEN.PL allomorphy irregular

a.	человек	chelovek	**людей**	**ljudej**	‘person/people’
b.	ребёнок	renjonok	**детей**	**detej**	‘child(ren)’
c.	друг	drug	**друзей**	**druzej**	‘friend(s)’
d.	брат	brat	**братьев**	**brat’ev**	‘brother(s)’

Having presented the theoretical side of how to form the GEN.PL in Russian, this work now turns to the instructional framework and the lesson plan.

3 Pedagogical support: Instructional frameworks

Traditional L2 grammar instruction has often been explicit, teacher-fronted, and heavily form-focused (Ceytlin & Kruglyakova, 2024; Kisselev & Rubina, 2024). Research on L2 Russian acquisition suggests that learners benefit greatly from explicit instruction in morphology (Bazvanova et al., 2023; Comer & deBenedette, 2010, 2011; Gor & Chernigovskaya, 2005; Gor & Vdovina, 2010), while others, such as Wong and VanPatten (2003), question whether traditional drills are an effective vehicle for such FoF work. Long (1998, 2014) argues that viewing FoF (explicit) and FoM (implicit) as a dichotomy is flawed, as instruction should ideally integrate these elements into a unified approach, moving between them as needed. Similarly, R. Ellis (2005) emphasizes that L2 competence draws on both rule-based and formulaic knowledge, and that instruction should provide meaning-focused input and opportunities for output while still attending to form.

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3.1 ESA, TBLT, and Game-Based Learning

To best combine FoF and FoM instruction for a unit designed to teach GEN.PL, an adapted version of Harmer's (1998) Engage-Study-Activate (ESA) model was selected. The traditional ESA model begins with the Engage phase, wherein an activity is designed to capture learners' interest. This is followed by the Study phase, where learners examine language forms more closely, with the instructor facilitating and supporting learners rather than solely providing explicit instruction. Lastly, the Activate phase gives learners the "chance to try out real-world language with little to no restriction" through role-plays, dialogues, presentations, and other similar tasks (Harmer, 1998, p. 26).[5] Adjustments have been made to this ESA model to incorporate stages of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which Long (2014) and Willis and Willis (2007) describe as the pre-task (introduction/exploration), main task (application and use of the language), post-task (FoF/corrections), and follow-up task (consolidation of learning/further applications). Aspects of Game-Based Learning have also been integrated to promote the recycling and consolidation of material, collaboration, problem-solving, and to increase learner motivation in a non-drill-based way (Bush, 2015; Ismail, 2024; Maghsoud, 2018; Pavlenko & Pastushenkov, 2023; Plass et al., 2015; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). The sequencing may vary, provided that the tasks still allow for scaffolding, content recycling, and reflection, and progressively move learners toward the unit's goal: acquisition of the GEN.PL (Nunan, 2004).

3.2 The Garden Path technique

Tomasello and Herron's (1988) Garden Path technique is an instructional strategy designed to address learners' overgeneralization errors when acquiring irregular forms in a target language. The technique consists of three stages. First, learners are taught a grammatical rule and practice applying it to regular forms that conform to the rule. Second, once learners have become confident in applying the rule, they are presented with irregular forms without being informed that these are exceptions. As a result, learners are led to overgeneralize the rule and produce incorrect forms. Third, instructors provide immediate corrective feedback, drawing learners' attention to the mismatch between their response and the correct form. This discrepancy raises learners' awareness of the exception and encourages them to question why the rule does not apply in that case. In their study of L2 French classrooms, Tomasello and Herron (1988) found that learners in the Garden Path condition were more likely to remember and accurately produce irregular forms than learners who received traditional explicit instruction. The extensive allomorphy seen in Russian GEN.PL, both regular and

[5] The ESA model is also flexible in terms of the sequencing (e.g., ESA, EAS, ESESA, etc), so instructors may rearrange these phases as they see fit.

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irregular, makes it an interesting test case for the Garden Path technique, which is discussed in more detail below in Section 4.1.1.

By integrating principles of these frameworks, this unit plan establishes a foundation for morphologically informed L2 instruction. The following section provides an overview of the unit's first lesson plan and the required language learning tools and materials.

4 Unit design and procedures (Introductory lesson)

Learner profile/level: These lessons are designed for university-aged L2 Russian learners at the A1–A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). All learners are assumed to have prior knowledge of NOM, ACC, PREP, and GEN.SG cases.

Unit goals and objectives: Following Bloom's Taxonomy, learners should be able to do the following by the end of this unit:[6]

- Identify and produce (ir)regular GEN.PL forms in spoken and written output.
- Formulate and apply generalizations about GEN.PL patterns to new words.
- Self-correct over-generalizations in controlled and communicative tasks.
- Demonstrate metalinguistic awareness of GEN.PL forms by describing usage contexts, justifying allomorph choices, and evaluating peers' output.

Suggested unit timeframe: three 60-minute lessons (face-to-face)

4.1 Task cycle and implementation

Refer to the Appendices for the introductory one-page lesson plan as well as for the required language learning materials. The one-page lesson plan in Appendix A summarizes the Engage, Study, and Activate tasks as well as the reflection and follow-up activities. The materials for each specific activity in this unit plan are included in Appendices B to J.

4.1.1 Engage phase: Down the genitive plural garden path (25 minutes)

Building on their prior knowledge of the GEN.SG, this lesson introduces learners to the GEN.PL. These tasks aim to establish the range of GEN.PL allomorphs and their functions. This first lesson begins with what may, at first, seem like a counterintuitive approach: learners are intentionally induced to make overgeneralization errors for GEN.PL forms, inspired by Tomasello and Herron's (1988) Garden Path technique. This technique requires learners to analyze patterns, generate hypotheses, and be guided into making an error before receiving corrective feedback.

[6] Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001): remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

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Task I: Discovering a 'rule'
Pair learners up and provide them with a data set to review and analyze (e.g., Example 1 listed above). This set is introduced first because -ов (-ov) is often treated as the 'default' allomorph, and many learners tend to overgeneralize it (Ceytlin & Kruglyakova, 2024).

Ask learners what patterns they notice and if they can formulate a 'rule' for forming the GEN.PL based on the data.[7] After some discussion, have them write down their ideas before they respond aloud. Without prior knowledge or the presence of contradictory data, learners will likely conclude that the GEN.PL is always formed by adding -ов (-ov). Repeat their responses and display these forms on the board using chalk or the slides in Appendix B before moving on to the next task.

Task II: Applying the 'rule' to a new data set
Provide learners with a new data set (e.g., Examples 5a–5d above). Working in pairs, have them review the data and apply their 'rule' even though, unbeknownst to them, this set includes nouns with irregular GEN.PL forms. For example, if given the NOM.SG form человек (chelovek, 'person'), learners will likely produce *человеков (*chelovekov, *'people'), rather than the correct suppletive form людей (ljudej, 'people'). As in the first task, ask them to write down their guesses and then share them aloud. Repeat their responses and write these forms on the board. After which, project the actual GEN.PL forms alongside these incorrect forms using the slides in Appendix B. When met with conflicting forms, learners may be slightly confused or surprised, prompting them to question their initial analysis.

Task III: Making it explicit
Before any explicit explanations are given, ask learners to think about what the nouns in the second data set have in common with one another, then elicit whole-class responses. All data in this set are thematically related (i.e., words for people/family) and have irregular forms in GEN.PL. Briefly discuss this, ensuring they understand that there are multiple allomorphic variants for forming the GEN.PL, some of which are predictable, others irregular. The goal is to provide learners with the opportunity to reflect on this 'garden path' moment, making the errors explicit in order to raise their metalinguistic awareness and trigger re-analysis.

Task IV: More data and exceptions
Though learners may be hesitant at this stage, provide them with the remaining data sets and get them to analyze and discuss in pairs. Be sure to note that GEN.PL is not reliably predicted based on gender (Blevins, 2006). Provide learners with a worksheet to fill out collaboratively during this exercise, encouraging them to

[7] This task is similar but distinct from the one described in Beers et al. (2014) with reduplication in Tohono O'odham.

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take notice of the phonological environment, such as the shape of NOM.SG base in relation to the allomorph selection. A sample handout has been provided in Figure 1. Anticipated responses are those similar to the ones provided in Section 2.

Figure 1. *Student handout #1*

'Ending' (Allomorphs)	NOM.SG Nouns	GEN.PL Nouns	Description of Environment	Class Inflection
Set 1: **-ов**	Дом	Домов	Hard Consonant	Class I
Set 2: **-∅ / Filler Vowel**				Classes II, IV
Set 3: **-ей**				Class III
Set 4: **Exceptions**				_____
Set 5: **Exceptions**				_____

These initial tasks support acquisition by providing learners with their first exposure to the GEN.PL through what Haight, Herron, and Cole (2007) refer to as guided inductive instruction. Learners engage in pattern discovery via hands-on form-meaning mapping prior to receiving explicit instruction. This approach also shifts learners' role from passive receivers of knowledge to active participants, tasked with the co-construction of their understanding (Rezai et al., 2025). Moreover, Tomasello and Herron's (1988) Garden Path technique presents learners with an immediate contrast between forms (expectation vs. reality), which provides an opportunity for *noticing*, in which learners' awareness of the target forms is raised (Schmidt, 1990, 1993). Identifying and correcting mistakes further builds metalinguistic awareness of the GEN.PL and its multiple realizations (i.e., allomorphs) of the same morpheme.

4.1.2 Study phase: Genitive plural walkabout (15 minutes)

The study phase gives learners the chance to apply what they've learned to new words, while also ensuring the repetition or 'recycling' of familiar content. Stanton (2002) created a flowchart to aid learners in determining the appropriate allomorph given the phonological environment and shape of the base. In this adapted version, following Martin and Schwartz's (2014) recommendations for visualization and kinesthetic actions in learning environments, the instructor will use the material in Appendix C to recreate the flowchart on the classroom floor. Have learners draw a card from the noun card deck (see Appendix D) and guess what they think the GEN.PL form would be. To test their hypothesis, have them walk the path, consulting each question before moving forward. The design of this game-based FoF task is an additional opportunity for noticing (Schmidt, 1990, 1993) and ensures learners have the chance to get it 'right in the end' (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). See Appendix C for a more in-depth description.

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5 *Activate phase: Много или Мало? A lot or a little? (10–15 minutes)*

To balance FoF and FoM, as is recommended by R. Ellis (2005), N. C Ellis (2022) and Nation (2007), incorporating communicative tasks where learners can practice using the language in real-world scenarios is essential. To accomplish this in the first lesson, low-stakes activities such as dialogues or mini role-plays work well. For example, provide learners with an image and ask them to describe what they see. Ask guiding questions, such as *"What are there a lot of, few of, none of?"* These questions require learners to use quantity words like: много 'many/a lot', мало 'few', несколько 'several', нет 'none' in their output, which licenses GEN.PL. See Appendix E for sample images, but any images will suffice. Provide a copy of the flowchart for learners to refer to, if needed.

5.1.1 Review and reflect (5 minutes)

Give learners time to review and reflect on what they've learned so far, either in pairs or as a whole-class discussion. Guiding questions may be used to get things started. For example:

- Q1) In what contexts does one use the GEN.PL?
- Q2) What aspects of the GEN.PL were easy for you? Which were more challenging?

This first question invites learners to compare usage contexts metalinguistically, which can support acquisition (Arnett & Lysinger, 2013; Kisselev & Rubina, 2024). The second question allows learners to pinpoint specific areas where they struggled, helping them identify which aspects need more focused attention. By discussing these points as a group, they can learn from one another's experiences and reinforce the key takeaways.

5.1.2 Follow-up task/homework (outside of class):

Depending on what surfaced during the reflection task, the instructor can assign targeted follow-up questions to further consolidate the GEN.PL. Alternatively, learners can be prompted to review other materials and write a discussion post on their institution's learning management system (e.g., Brightspace) about which approach they (dis)like. Recommended resources and tasks include:

- Ford's (2013) video series on YouTube.
- Rochtchina's (2015) lesson on GEN.PL (pp. 103–109)
- Sanaeva's (2025) lesson on GEN.PL (pp. 21–26)

6 Lessons two and three

The remaining lessons in the unit on GEN.PL could begin with review before working towards more authentic and communicative language use, or vice versa, depending on the instructors' assessment of learners' abilities after the first lesson. Game-based learning, as discussed in Section 3.1, is just one way to

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approach review and consolidation activities, as it can work as either an Engage or Study phase within the ESA model. Several games were adapted or created by the author to facilitate acquisition of the GEN.PL, including Иди лови рыбу! (Go Fish!), Case Race, and Bingo. A listening gap-fill activity with song lyrics has also been prepared to provide learners with additional aural exposure to these forms. Descriptions of these tasks and all required materials are provided in the Appendices. Instructors are encouraged to use these games as they see fit.

For communicative tasks in the Activate phase, role-plays, oral presentations, or written compositions are recommended for output opportunities. Potential themes include: Я ваш гид по _____ (I'm your tour guide for _____), Мой город (My city), and/or Моя семья (My family), as they frequently require the use of both regular and irregular GEN.PL forms, in addition to other case constructions. See Appendix J for a more detailed description of Я ваш гид по _____ (I'm your tour guide for _____). For oral presentations, it's recommended to hold peer Q&A sessions after each presentation, as it encourages active listening and allows instructors to gauge learners' comprehension. If a written composition is chosen, instructors can review learners' work themselves or have paired peer corrections.

Depending on class size, the final lesson time may need to be reserved for presentations, leaving only one class period after the initial introductory lesson open for review, opportunities for input and output in other modalities (e.g., reading and writing texts), presentation planning, and so on. With this in mind, the author has provided all activities and resources in the Appendices for instructors to mix and match in the quantity and sequencing that they feel best suits the needs of their learners.

7 Conclusion

This paper has presented the theoretical background on forming the GEN.PL in Russian in addition to one unit's worth of materials to teach these forms to L2 learners. These activities and materials were designed to address the gap between FoF and FoM tasks in L2 grammar instruction and open-source materials. Together, they complete learners' understanding of the GEN case (SG and PL) and help them gain confidence with its variety of uses and forms. By adding another case to their L2 toolkit, learners continue to expand their linguistic repertoire and become better equipped to participate in a wider range of communicative tasks both in the classroom and in real-world contexts. The collaborative, hands-on design of the unit enables learners to engage meaningfully with the material by exerting their agency, in which they are responsible for reinforcing the mapping between form and meaning. Sequenced tasks that vary in modality, the use of guided inductive instruction, and the use of games provide scaffolding for learners' production and support the achievement of the unit's learning outcomes.

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8 About the author

Tegan M. Clarke is an MA student in applied linguistics with a focus on Russian language teaching and learning. They plan to pursue a PhD, furthering their knowledge in how L2 learners of Russian acquire the case system.

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Appendix A: One-page lesson plan exploring the GEN.PL Garden Path

Phase	Steps	Materials
Engage Tasks 1 - 4 **25 Minutes**	**Down the Garden Path**	
	1. Pair up learners and present them with a set of words that have the GEN. PL -ов (-ov) pattern forms. 2. Ask learners to review and discuss the data. Ask them what patterns they see (if any). 3. Ask learners if they can form a 'rule' based on what they see in the data set for forming the GEN.PL in Russian. Learners will likely say: "Just add -ов." 4. After they've had a chance to discuss, have learners write their responses down before answering aloud. 5. Repeat their responses before moving on to the next phase. 6. Provide the pairs with data set 5 and have them review it before they write down their guesses for forming GEN.PL. 7. Given the environment and the previous dataset, it's also likely that learners will apply the -ов ending in this context. 8. As with the previous exercise, have learners state their responses aloud (whole class) and write them on the board. 9. Display the actual genitive plural forms on the board. 10. When this mismatch occurs, learners may be confused, as they have been induced to make an error. 11. Think-Pair-Share: What the nouns in the data set have in common (their meanings) and elicit whole class responses. 12. Have a brief, explicit discussion about the irregular genitive plurals and how these differ from the regular -ов endings. 13. Before moving on, it should be made clear to learners that there are multiple allomorphic variants for forming the genitive plural, some of which are predictable and some irregular. 14. Continue with data sets and analysis.	Data Set 1 - 5 White Board + Markers
Study Task 1 **15 Minutes**	**Genitive Plural Walkabout**	
	1. The instructor will set up the GEN.PL flow chart on the floor. 2. Have learners pick a noun card from the deck and write down their guess for the GEN.PL form before walking the path. 3. Were learners correct? Place their sticky note on the board in either the correct/incorrect section.	Flow Chart Noun Cards Sticky Notes
Activate Task 1 **10 - 15 Minutes**	**Много или Мало? A Lot or A Little?**	
	1. In pairs, have learners describe an image using terms like много, мало, нет, etc. 2. Prompt learners to make self or peer corrections, if needed.	Images
Review & Reflect **5 Minutes**	**Guiding Questions**	
	1. In what contexts does one use the GEN.PL? 2. What aspects of the GEN.PL were easy for you? Which were more challenging?	N/A
Follow-up Activity	1. Take-home FoF exercises to prepare for the following lesson.	N/A

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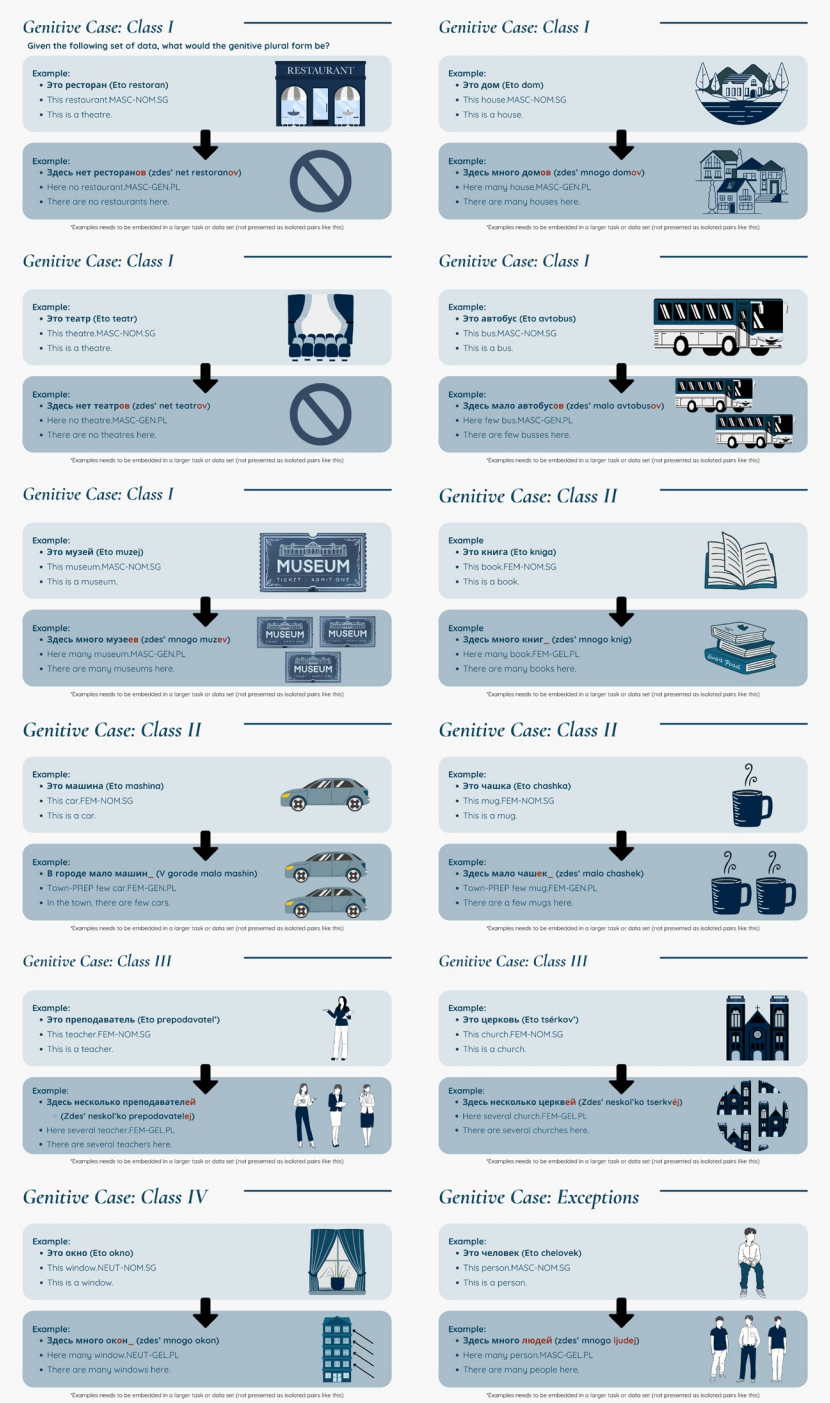
Appendix B: Sample slide deck / data sets for learners



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Appendix C: Genitive plural walkabout / flowchart (detailed)

Description: Based on Stanton's (2002) flowchart and building off of Tomasello and Herron's (1988) garden path technique, this activity requires learners to engage in hypothesis testing and physical movement to reach a conclusion.

Timeframe: 15 Minutes

Materials:

- Flowchart segment printouts / ink-saver printouts
- Tape
- Flashcards of nouns in NOM.SG form
- Sticky Notes
- Whiteboard/chart paper
- Markers

Preparation:

1. Before the class starts, the instructor will need to print out each segment of the adapted version of Staton's (2002) flowchart using the printouts provided in the materials section.
2. Tape these pieces of paper around the classroom to recreate the logic of the flowchart. Ensure that there is a clear starting/ending point.
3. Print and cut out the noun flashcards (NOM.SG).
4. Use the whiteboard or chart paper to create labelled columns for the allomorphs.

The rules: How it works:

1. Pair learners up, and each will receive one noun card (e.g., стол, книга, окно, врач, нож) to start. Have them write down their guess on a sticky note before they begin.
2. Each pair will walk through the flowchart. At each step, they will need to choose which way to go based on their card. For example: *стол* would follow this pattern: Start → Exception? → NO → Ending -a/-o? → NO → Soft sign or husher? → NO → ADD -OB* → END
3. Based on the outcome, learners will place their sticky notes in the corresponding column on the whiteboard or chart paper, located at the end point of the flowchart.
4. After all learners have had a chance to walk 'down the garden path,' review errors as a class, correcting and grouping them based on their ending (e.g., ов/-ев, -ей, zero ending/filler vowel).

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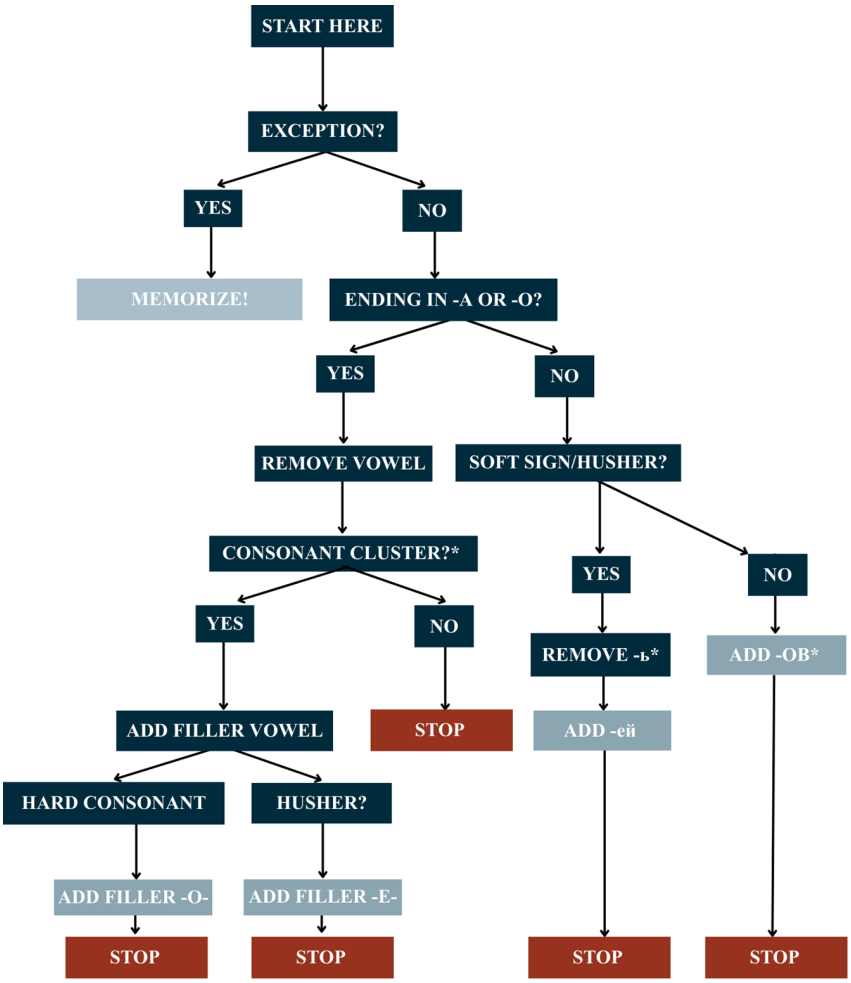
Figure 2. *GEN.PL flowchart*



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Appendix D: Cards (Dual purpose for GEN.PL Go Fish/Case Race)

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Appendix E: Sample images

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Appendix F: Genitive plural Go Fish! (Иди лови рыбу!)

Description: Game-based consolidation provides learners with additional exposure and opportunities to form the genitive plural of nouns in Russian. This activity can be used as a warm-up to refresh learners' memories at the beginning of class or at the end.

Timeframe: 10–20 minutes
Materials:

- Flashcards of nouns in NOM.SG form (groups of -ов, -ей, zero ending/filler vowel)
- Flowchart handouts (if needed)

Preparation:

1. Before the class starts, the instructor will need to print and cut out the noun flashcards (NOM.SG).
2. Ensure all groups of GEN.PL allomorphs are represented (e.g., **-ов/-ев** - стол, дом, музей, **-ей** - ночь, врач, нож, словарь, **zero ending/filler vowels** - книга, слово, окно, яблоко), plus exceptions before shuffling the cards to distribute them randomly.

The rules: How it works:

1. Like with regular Go Fish, where the goal is to collect pairs, the learner's goal in this game is to collect noun cards that have the same GEN.PL allomorph (e.g., -ов + -ов, -ей + -ей, exceptions with exceptions, etc). Example of learner interaction:
    a. Learner 1: Do you have a word that takes a -ей ending in the genitive case?
    b. Learner 2: "Yes" *gives card to Learner 1* or "No, go fish!" and Learner 1 picks up a card.
2. For learners to keep this pair, they must show their understanding by justifying why this is the correct allomorph. If no explanation is given, they do not get to keep the cards.
    a. Example: "My card *ночь* ends in a soft sign, so it takes **-ей** in the GEN.PL: *ночей.* Your card *нож* ends in a hushing consonant, and also takes **-ей**: *ножей.*"
3. The game is played until the cards are paired up or time is up, whichever comes first. The player with the most matches wins.

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Appendix G: Genitive Case Race

Description: By design, the time crunch of this game further facilitates the building of associations between allomorphs. Learners must first be able to recognize and predict the correct GEN.PL allomorphs based on the base form of the noun. By actively participating in this interactive and competitive game, learners benefit from repeated retrieval practice, which strengthens the long-term retention (and acquisition) of genitive plural forms. As well, oral production of the full form is required to win.

Timeframe: 10–20 Minutes

Materials:

- Flashcards of nouns in NOM.SG form
- Flashcards with 'endings' (-ов, -ей, ∅ ending/filler vowel, irregular)
- Wild cards (e.g., use the noun in a sentence, explain it)

Preparation:

1. Before the class starts, the instructor will need to print and cut out the noun flashcards (NOM.SG), as well as the ending flashcards and wildcards.

The rules: How it works:

1. Pair up or group learners into teams and provide them with the cards.
2. Learners will pick up all the possible ending cards to have in their hand (-ов, -ей, ∅ ending, -o-, -e-, irregular).
3. One learner will turn over the first card of the main deck onto the table, and all players will race to select the correct ending from their hand and slap it down onto the noun card, forming the genitive plural.
4. In order to win the round, a learner must be the first one to have their card placed down *and* be able to orally produce the form aloud.
5. If correct, this learner keeps the card (1 point per card). If incorrect, the learner will lose 1 point. The next fastest person to correctly say the GEN.PL form will get to take the card and the point for the round.
6. After each round, learners ensure that they have all their 'ending' cards back in their hands.
7. The player with the most cards (i.e., points) at the end of the game wins.

In instances where a noun requires the -∅ allomorph *and* a filler vowel (-o-, -e-) to form the GEN.PL, learners are required to place two cards down. For example:

- Noun card: *окно* (okno). Place down the ∅ ending + filler vowel -o- cards. Say *окон* (okon) aloud.

For completely suppletive/irregular forms, learners will place the 'irregular' card down and produce the correct form orally (more difficult). For example:

- Noun card: *мать* (mat'). Place down the irregular card. Say *матерей* (materej) aloud.

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Appendix H: Genitive allomorph bingo

Description: This game is designed differently from traditional bingo, where one normally marks off what they hear. In this version, learners' bingo cards have the NOM.SG form, and the instructor will be calling out the GEN.PL form. Doing this in the opposite format ensures that learners are able to connect what they've heard and associate it with the appropriate forms, which supports form mapping (both NOM.SG to GEN.PL and GEN.PL to NOM.SG). This task is particularly good for working on irregular forms or those that have filler vowels.

Timeframe: 10 Minutes

Materials:

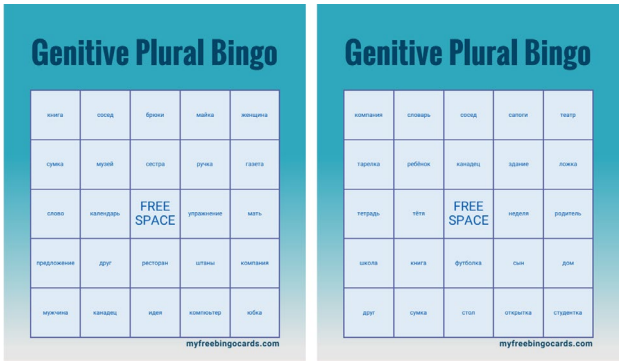
- Class set of bingo cards (with NOM.SG nouns randomized across cards)
- Master list of nouns for instructor use
- Pencils, pens, markers, etc

Preparation:

1. Before the class starts, the instructor will need to print and cut out the bingo cards.

The rules: How it works:

1. Distribute bingo cards to learners (individual or paired exercise).
2. The instructor will call out the genitive plural forms from the master list. For example: Машин (Mashin).
3. Learners will need to find the corresponding form in the NOM.SG: Машина (Mashina) and cross it out.
4. The game will continue until someone is able to complete a line or a full card and yell BINGO!
5. To ensure that learners understand what they've just done, the instructor can do a quick check. The winning learner will go through their card, first saying the NOM.SG form and then the GEN.PL form aloud.
    a. Машина - Машин (Mashina - Mashin)
    b. Человек - Людей (Chelovek - Ljudej)



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Appendix I: Gap-fill listening activity (GEN.SG and GEN.PL)

Description: In this aural activity, learners will listen to a song and write down what they hear, paying attention to which ending is used and why (i.e., GEN.SG/GEN.PL). A worksheet for the song Место для шага вперед (Mesto dlya shaga vperyod), a popular song by the Russian band Кино (Kino), is provided below.
If time permits, have learners try to create a new line for the song using the frame: У меня́ есть ___, но нет ___. (I have ___, but not ___).

Timeframe: 15 Minutes

У меня́ есть дом, то́лько нет _____	*keys
У меня́ есть со́лнце, но оно́ среди́ _____	*rainclouds
Есть голова́, то́лько нет _____	*shoulders
Но я ви́жу, как ту́чи ре́жут со́лнечный _____	*letters
У меня́ есть сло́во, но в нём нет _____	*axes
У меня́ есть лес, но нет _____	*strength
У меня́ есть вре́мя, но нет _____ ждать	*dreams
И есть ещё ночь, но в ней нет _____	
И есть ещё бе́лые, бе́лые дни Бе́лые го́ры и бе́лый лёд Но всё, что мне ну́жно Э́то не́сколько _____ И ме́сто для ша́га вперёд	*words
У меня́ река́, то́лько нет _____	*bridge
У меня́ есть мы́ши, но нет _____	*cat
У меня́ есть па́рус, но _____ нет	*wind
И есть ещё кра́ски, но нет _____	*canvas
У меня́ на ку́хне из _____ вода́	*tap
У меня́ есть ра́на, но нет _____	*bandage
У меня́ есть бра́тья, но нет _____	*relatives
И есть рука́, и она́ пуста́	
[chorus repeats]	

GEN.PL Answers: ключе́й, туч, плечей, луч, букв, топоро́в, сил, снов, слов, родны́х
GEN.SG Answers: моста́, кота́, ве́тра, холста́, кра́на, бинта́

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Appendix J: Я ваш гид по _____ / I am your guide for _____

Description: To finish off the unit on the uses and forms of the GEN.PL in Russian, learners will create a short oral presentation. One theme to explore is getting learners to act as a 'tour guide' for a city or town. To assist them in their presentation, it's recommended that they create slides with images and keywords that may be new for the class (not full sentences). In this presentation, learners will need to describe the city/town, what it has, what it does not have, etc, which will allow for extensive use of the GEN.PL. Sample: В Санкт-Петербурге много музе**ев** и парк**ов**. In Saint Petersburg, there are many museums and parks.

Timeframe: Depends on class size. **Presentation Length:** 3–5 minutes each

Materials:

- A list of common nouns in NOM.SG and quantifiers, if needed.

Expectations of Learners:

1. Use appropriate nouns (e.g., restaurants, theatres, schools, parks, etc.)
3. Use a variety of nouns that require different forms in the GEN.PL.
4. Use the correct GEN.PL forms where appropriate.
5. Use a variety of quantifiers or numerals.
6. Fluency, flow, and style (cohesive presentation with logical order, delivered in a fluent or semi-fluent manner).
7. Design of presentation and use of images facilitate peers' understanding.

Steps:

Learners can choose a city or town they'd like to learn more about, and they will take on the role of a tour guide. Google Maps, Yandex, or other sites can be used to find information and images. Key elements to include are: The name of the city, where it's located, what there is a lot of, few of, none of, what you recommend doing there, and so on. To ensure other learners understood the presentation, the instructor can follow up with comprehension-checking questions for the class. Learners are also encouraged to ask the presenter questions. This allows for natural and spontaneous use of the GEN.PL, which complements the structured practice.

To Scale Down/Further Scaffold the Activity:

1. Provide a sample text, audio, or video of a similar task as a model.
2. Provide sentence frames: В town name-PREP много noun-GEN.PL.
3. Provide example cities to choose from.

To Scale up the Activity:

1. Have advanced learners compare their chosen city to their hometown or where they live now, discussing the similarities and differences

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Horizontal and vertical scaffolding of Discourse Viewpoint Spaces in memes

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How do Instagram commenters demonstrate their understanding of the memetic discourse and viewpoint network in the Original Meme (OM)? Sometimes, a comment section can be more entertaining than the post itself. In this paper, I analyze comments under six Instagram Reels memes to assess how they interact with the OM's memetic structure and viewpoint network. Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2016) argue that a viewpoint network is "supervised" from a higher-level viewpoint, the Discourse Viewpoint" (p. 37), creating the Discourse Viewpoint Space (DVS). I further their DVS theory by positing additional dimensions of horizontal and vertical scaffolding. Following their assertion that the DVS is both a network and a hierarchy (p. 15), I suggest that we can scaffold the DVS. Users can scaffold horizontally as they contribute different stances to express similar experiential viewpoints, and scaffold vertically as they contribute varisous experiential viewpoints that become embedded within the same stance. Thus, a DVS does not remain fixed because its trajectory can be scaffolded. Users contribute to the meme's relatability by adding their own experiential viewpoints and adopting new stances. In doing so, they create an in-group of knowledge by establishing a complex network of stances that contribute to the OM's DVS.
Keywords: memes; comments; social media; Instagram Reels; Discourse Viewpoint Space; cognitive linguistics; horizontal scaffolding; vertical scaffolding

1 Introduction

When we engage with content online, we can become drawn to the comment section. Comments on Instagram Reels memes can garner tens of thousands of likes because they can be more entertaining than the original content itself. As I studied memes, I observed that social media users appear to consider memetic structure before posting comments and expressing a variety of viewpoints. Each Instagram Reels meme that serves as source material will henceforth be referred to as the Original Meme (OM). My previous research analyzed the complexity of comments on digital social reading platforms—primarily Wattpad, which

[11] I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Barbara Dancygier, for her invaluable guidance and feedback throughout this project.

features comments anchored to each paragraph of text. Other popular digital social reading platforms include Goodreads, Archive of Our Own (AO3), and Perusall. This work inspired me to study comments posted on Instagram Reel memes, examining how users interact with the source material. I chose to study Instagram Reels because, according to *SQ Magazine*, Instagram has more monthly users than TikTok, and its Reels across the platform attain more views on average compared to TikToks (Lee, 2025).

Throughout this paper, I adapt key terms from Dancygier and Vandelanotte's *The Language of Memes* (2025) to describe elements of Instagram Reels memes. Within the context of this study, Meme Viewers refer to Instagram users who watch Instagram Reels. More specifically, I study the Meme Viewers who have posted comments. Dancygier and Vandelanotte use Meme Maker to refer to people who create memes with images and text; however, in this study, I use Meme Maker to describe an Instagram creator who posts Reels in a meme format. Rather than using a still Image Macro—an "entrenched image" (p. 26)—these reels consist of a video with overlaid text. This overlaid text will henceforth be referred to as Top Text (TT), as in Dancygier and Vandelanotte. Throughout this paper, I will also consider how the TT and post descriptions work together to impact memetic meaning. I employ these terms to describe these multimodal artifacts as I consider how users interact with the memetic structure of Instagram Reels.

I analyze comments posted under six Instagram Reels memes to assess how they interact with the memetic discourse and viewpoint network of the OM. The memes selected for this study featured comments that best exemplified the trends that I observed in the comment sections of other Instagram Reels memes. Some comments offer new stances, while others contribute new experiential viewpoints. I define "stance" as an individual's position or perspective in relation to the topic of the meme, whereas I define "experiential viewpoint" as an expression of a lived experience. Because users may share the same position or perspective, they are described as sharing a stance. I begin this essay by reviewing the existing literature on memes and comments. Using Dancygier and Vandelanotte's concept of the "Discourse Viewpoint Space" (2016) as an initial framework, I further their theory by positing additional dimensions of horizontal and vertical scaffolding.

I argue that Instagram commenters demonstrate an implicit understanding of memetic discourse through their engagement with memes in the comment section of Instagram Reels by considering the Discourse Viewpoint Space (DVS) established by the OM. Each commenter's interaction with a meme's memetic structure and DVS depends on the type of meme. In "the lion does not concern himself" memes, commenters scaffold the DVS vertically by following the trajectory of the lion's stance and embedding new viewpoints. "When" meme comments scaffold the DVS horizontally by expressing the user's own stances and adding similar experiential viewpoints to the discourse. Lastly, the POV meme comments combine both types of scaffolding by adding both new stances and new viewpoints.

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2 Literature review

Most of the existing literature about comments posted under memes examines how they reflect real-life societal trends or dynamics within online communities. However, Kovacheva et al.'s (2022) study about comments posted under climate change memes helpfully demonstrates that social media users do read comments before they like or share them.

Several articles about meme comments examined their perpetuation of positive and negative values, reflecting real-life trends. A recent study examined how comments under memes about the well-loved celebrity Keanu Reeves reflect how fans maintain an idolized image of him (Nielsen & Nititham, 2022). These memes create a participatory culture which encourages fans to engage with a celebrity in a way that aligns with their fandom (p. 161) and imbues positive values by celebrating them (p. 168). Ultimately, Nielsen and Nititham recommend that other celebrities encourage their fans to create their own meme culture.

Comments in meme cultures also reflect negative societal trends. In *Exploring Online Masculinity in the Indian Meme Culture: A Case of Video Doge Memes* (2025), Adiga and Padmakumar. studied how the subculture of Doge memes in India perpetuates toxic masculinity. When viewing memes that perpetuate misogynistic stereotypes, male commenters often engage in these problematic narratives without critiquing them, even emphasizing the narrative that only "real men" understand the content (p. 7). These comments create an in-group of users who make light of these jokes and encourage emotionally distant behaviour towards women with their very crude and derogatory memes (p. 10). Memes may seem like harmless, funny content, but this study demonstrates that they can perpetuate offensive beliefs, as illustrated by user comments.

However, some online communities feature interactions that demonstrate how its users police an OM's content and comments. In an article about Reddit forum r/DankLeft memes, Merrill et al. (2025) discuss how several users create taboo-breaking content to challenge the stereotype that people who identify with the political beliefs of "Marxism, Anarchism, and Democratic Socialism" typically refuse to break taboos (p. 3964). This Reddit forum provides insight into how this in-group community discusses their political beliefs through memes**.** Using a technology called Perspective API to measure affective response in comments throughout the forum, the scholars found that comments under these taboo-pushing posts had the strongest emotional response because other users were critiquing the memes for going too far (p. 3966). As a result, commenters express their disapproval of meme content or suggest improvements for its reception within their community.

Similarly, a 2018 study examined how commenters in the Polandball comics Facebook community act as "vigilantes" to regulate its sociocultural norms (Procházka, p. 80). These Polandball comics feature spherical characters whose designs and personalities are differentiated by their respective flags. The Polandball memes posted in this community are culturally specific because they

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depict various geopolitical attitudes. Some community members from the referenced country would correct others' assumptions. This behaviour highlights the community's efforts to maintain "social cohesion and identity" to avoid incorrect interpretations of meme content (Procházka, p. 86). Lastly, Liang et al. (2023) studied a Spanish YouTuber living in Taiwan to examine how comments under his meme-filled videos demonstrate that memes can encourage "translingual and translational perspectives" (p. 445). This YouTuber shares his political opinions, encouraging his followers to reflect on their beliefs and comment when considering the memes he shares (p. 459). These comments raise awareness about sociopolitical issues while maintaining a humorous outlook.

Finally, in addition to the literature that explores how comments under memes reflect real-life trends and illustrate the inner workings of online communities, Kovacheva et al. (2022) studied how the stance of comments under a meme impacted other users' interactions with it. Their case study examined how comments on climate change memes influence their reception. They found that if even one user had posted a comment denying climate change, other users were less likely to interact with the meme by liking or sharing it—regardless of their own beliefs about climate change. Therefore, this study demonstrates that a Meme Viewer's interaction with a meme posted on social media is not limited to simply viewing the meme itself. Users also engage with its comments. Given that memes on social media no longer exist in isolation as multimodal artifacts, scholars should continue the conversation about how comments under memes impact a user's interpretation of them. Consequently, following Kovacheva et al.'s conclusion that comments posted under memes influence social media users' online behaviours, I examine how comments contribute to the viewpoint network of the OM.

3 Methodology and theoretical framework

In this paper, I study six memes from Instagram Reels to analyze the DVSs constructed in their comment sections. Throughout November 2025, I selected memes from my Instagram Reels feed. These memes featured comments that best exemplified the interaction trends found across other memes on my feed, hosted several unique comments with thousands of likes that related to the OM's topic, and included a relevant post description. I divided these memes into three categories: "the lion does not concern himself" memes, "when" memes, and POV memes. These categories are now reflected in the three case studies that I use to explore this topic. I have omitted the commenters' usernames from this paper to protect their identities. The number of likes for each comment is based on totals as of December 2nd, 2025.

I employ several theoretical frameworks established by Dancygier and Vandelanotte in their book, *The Language of Memes: Patterns of Meaning Across Image and Text* (2025), and their article, "Discourse viewpoint as network" (2016). As discussed above, I use several key terms from Dancygier and Vandelanotte's book, including Meme Viewer, Meme Maker, Image Macro,

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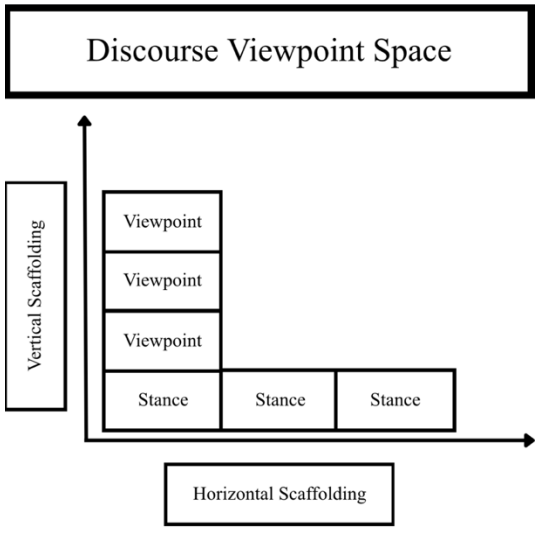
and Top Text (TT) (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2025). I also build on the key theoretical framework of DVS proposed in "Discourse viewpoint as network" (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2016). In this article, they define viewpoint as "a discourse participant's alignment with an aspect of a frame or situation" (p. 14). I refer to Instagram's discourse participants as users or commenters. Furthermore, Dancygier and Vandelanotte propose that viewpoints form a network and a hierarchy (p. 15). This complex network of viewpoints "contribute[s] to and is 'supervised' from a higher-level viewpoint, the Discourse Viewpoint," which is where comprehension takes place (p. 37). In other words, we can understand a network of viewpoints collectively through the DVS. The DVS considers the lower-level viewpoints that contribute to an overall network.

In this paper, I expand the definition of DVS posited by Dancygier and Vandelanotte to suggest how DVS can be scaffolded, following their assertion that a DVS is both a network and a hierarchy. In their 2016 article, Dancygier and Vandelanotte suggest that a DVS can take the following forms: "Possible configurations may include embedded spaces, parallel spaces, alternative spaces, or even two independent networks of spaces, depending on the nature of the text" (p. 16). Under the umbrella of the DVS, I suggest that users scaffold horizontally as they contribute different stances to express similar experiential viewpoints, and scaffold vertically as they adopt the same stance to embed various experiential viewpoints (see Figure 1). Using Dancygier and Vandelanotte's terminology, horizontal scaffolding moves the trajectory of the DVS into parallel space, and vertical scaffolding into embedded space. In other words, a DVS does not remain fixed; rather, participants in the discourse—in this case, Instagram users—can scaffold the trajectory of its network.

Figure 1. *Author's own diagram with proposed schema for horizontal and vertical scaffolding of the Discourse Viewpoint Space*



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4 Case study 1: "The lion does not concern himself" memes

A recent Instagram Reels meme trend features an Image Macro in video form, and the overlaid text starts with the phrase, "The lion does not concern himself." Meme Makers complete this phrase with a situation that is likely concerning to "the lion," but they do not want to admit to their worries. In Instagram Reels with this memetic form, the comments mimic the structure of its TT. This close adherence to the syntactic structure of TT demonstrates that comments expand the DVS of the meme through vertical scaffolding. The users all adopt the stance of "the lion," which refers to the Meme Maker and to the commenters themselves, but each user embeds their own viewpoints.

In the first example of "the lion does not concern himself" (henceforth TLDN) meme, a user posts a video compilation of himself enjoying his life, travelling and spending time with friends (see Figure 2). Yet the TT on this meme reads, "The lion does not concern himself with his noticeable memory loss, brain fog and slight cognitive decline" (@mackenziemcintyre, 2025). The Image Macro video portrays "the lion" enjoying his life without concerns; however, the meme's text reveals the contrary when considering his mental functioning. Its comments echo the syntactic structure and stance established in the OM, scaffolding the trajectory of the DVS vertically through embedded experiential viewpoints. One top comment with almost 60,000 likes reads: "The lion does not concern himself with the seemingly instant passing of weeks." This comment adopts the same uncaring "lion" stance—which users familiar with memetic discourse can deduce refers to both the Meme Maker and Viewer—and adds another viewpoint about the rapid passage of time. In other words, the user adds another item to the DVS to express how, alongside the mental fog that "the lion" is experiencing, time seems to be passing quickly for them.

In addition to contributing to the discourse by discussing how time escapes them, users also further its trajectory by lamenting their social media use and its impact on their mental functioning. In a comment with almost 40,000 likes, another user writes, "The lion doesn't remember what he saw 3 scrolls ago." This comment diverges from the typical TLDN syntactic structure to contribute a viewpoint about doomscrolling, alluding to how the lion does actually concern himself with these issues. The top comment with over 123,000 likes on this meme follows this trajectory of "the lion" being simultaneously concerned and unconcerned. It reads, "Lion is getting a little worried tho." This shift demonstrates that as the comments scaffold vertically towards the DVS, they start to dismantle the faux blasé attitude presented by the Meme Maker through the lion's viewpoint while still adopting the same stance. That this comment is the most liked demonstrates how discussing uncomfortably true topics in the TLDN meme reduces their stigma.

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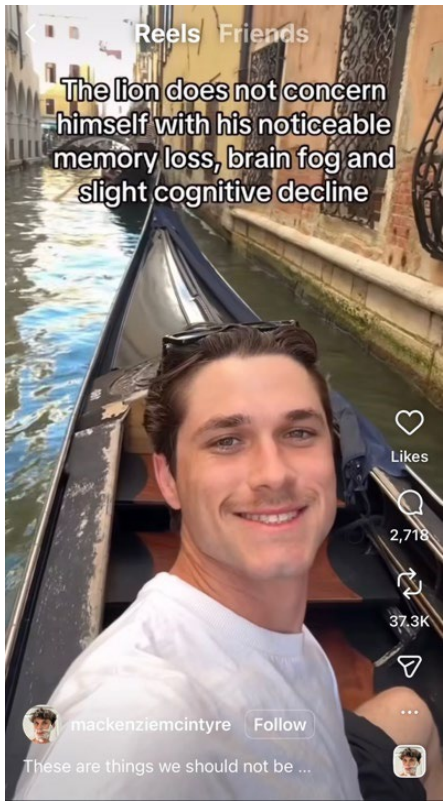
Figure 2. *@mackenziemcintyre's TLDN meme about memory loss, brain fog, and slight cognitive decline*



In the next example, the Meme Maker @hannahblackmedley does not include the TLDN phrase in the TT. The phrase is in the post's description. In a video compilation of their grandfather avoiding the crowds at their cousin's wedding by watching the proceedings from a distance with a cigarette in hand, the user writes the following TT: "POV your cousin is getting married and your granddad absolutely hates crowds" (@hannahblackmedley, 2025). Her description reads, "The lion does not concern himself with participating [sic] family events" (see Figure 3). While the TT adopts the stance of an onlooker observing this granddad avoiding the crowds, the description takes on the stance of the grandfather himself through TLDN memetic structure. Interestingly, many of the OM's top comments follow the TLDN format, indicating that Meme Viewers noticed the description. The description's shift in stance creates the DVS of a grandfather who avoids crowds in social situations. The second-most liked comment, at over 80,000 likes, reads, "The lion does not concern himself with social obligations." This comment adopts the awkward grandfather's stance while adding the experiential viewpoint that suggests he may not care about social expectations in general. Not only does this comment demonstrate how a commenter integrates the memetic structure established in the description, but it also follows the

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vertical scaffolding of a DVS by embedding another viewpoint through the stance of the grandfather.

Another comment with over 1,000 likes reads, “the lion does not concern himself with wedding activities,” to which the original poster, @hannahblackmedley, responds, “the lion does not concern himself with us peasants.” This comment chain between Meme Maker and Viewer illustrates how a comment thread can also contribute to the OM’s scaffolded DVS. Both comments adopt the stance of the grandfather; however, they add separate embedded experiential viewpoints about his nonchalance toward weddings and their participants. Although the Meme Maker introduces TLDN memetic structure in the OM’s description, commenters notice this detail. They use it to expand its DVS by scaffolding it vertically with new viewpoints from the awkward granddad rather than the onlooker stance established in the TT. Apart from these TLDN comments, other comments under this meme reflect the trends on POV memes (see case study 3). For example, the top comment on this post, with a staggering 234,000 likes, reads: “We didn’t have autism back in the day.” This user suggests that the grandfather’s avoidance of crowds aligns with the behaviour of someone who is neurodivergent. Younger generations are typically more cognizant of neurodivergence, explaining why commenters may create this simulated dialogue. This comment also adopts the stance of the grandfather without using the TLDN memetic format.

Figure 3. *@hannahblackmedley’s POV meme about her granddad hating crowds at a wedding with TLDN in the post description*

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The comments on both TLDN memes indicate that users follow the memetic structure established in the OM and generate comments that vertically scaffold its DVS. In other words, users who comment under TLDN memes adopt the same stance of "the lion" (which represents the person in the meme or the commenter themselves) but embed different experiential viewpoints about the situation that they are supposedly unconcerned about.

5 Case study 2: "When" memes

This case study explores the trajectory of comments on "when" memes. Previous work by Lou (2017) discusses the "when" meme as a multimodal simile. Lou proposes that because "when" memes are multimodal similes, they prompt "mappings without relying on the presence of a final blended space where all inputs are integrated" (p. 115). In other words, Meme Viewers must map the connections between the text and the Image Macro. Lou acknowledges the difficulty of analyzing "when" memes where videos take the place of Image Macros in his conclusion (p. 128). In this case study, I suggest that "when" memes on Instagram typically feature videos that act out the "when" clause rather than creating a simile. This video format also invites a more vivid experiential depiction of the meme character. Additionally, their comments demonstrate the horizontal scaffolding of a DVS, where commenters adopt their own distinct stances while sharing similar experiential viewpoints in parallel spaces.

In the first "when" Instagram Reels example meme, the video depicts a young man folding his paper plate in half to discard food (see Figure 4). The TT reads, "When the food at the family function is trash so you're forced to hit this move" (@wake.taylor, 2025). With the context of the TT, the Meme Viewer understands that the video depicts a young man discreetly disposing of food that he is not enjoying at a family event. The video shows him going to great lengths to ensure that he throws the food away subtly, crawling behind a kitchen counter towards the garbage bin while holding the folded plate. The Meme Maker posted this "when" meme just before American Thanksgiving, making light of a common experience during this holiday. One top comment with 105,000 likes reads, "Gotta put the plate in there upside down so they can't see too." While the user adopts their own stance as someone who has experienced the same dilemma, they add a similar experiential viewpoint of discarding the plate upside down so that their family cannot see it. This comment could read as a continuation of the TT's when clause: "When the food at the family function is trash so you're forced to hit this move where you put a plate of food in the garbage upside down so your family doesn't notice." The commenter elaborates on the meme by adding a similar viewpoint from their stance that could contribute to the TT.

Similarly, the top comment with almost 150,000 likes reads, "One time it got so bad I flushed an enchilada down the toilet." This hilarious comment adds a new stance with a similar viewpoint to the DVS, introducing a different premise where the commenter disposed of the food in the toilet instead of the garbage. In

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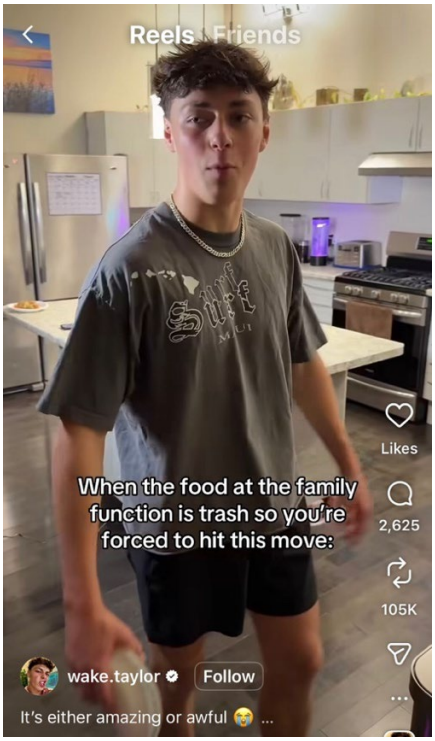
this case, the TT could read, “When the food at the family function is trash, so you’re forced to hit this move of flushing your enchilada down the toilet.” While this second comment might require the Meme Maker to adapt the video to fit the new TT, the comment still expresses the experiential viewpoint of the person who does not enjoy their family’s cooking but still wants to be polite. They also add their experience of throwing the food away in the toilet. In this example, @wake.taylor embodies the action described in the when clause (“this move” refers to throwing the food away). Furthermore, the comments follow horizontal scaffolding by adding to the DVS from their own stance with similar experiential viewpoints in a parallel space, politely discarding not-so-great family-cooked food.

Figure 4. *@wake.taylor’s “when” meme about politely throwing away bad food during a family function*



In the second “when” meme example, a woman falls dramatically over a large pair of shoes, looking frustrated as she turns around and throws them off-screen (see Figure 5). The TT reads, “When you’re already overstimulated and you step on your man’s ugly shoes” (@rastagee_, 2025). Much like in the comment section of the previous meme, the commenters continue the trajectory of the OM by adopting their own stances and sharing similar experiential viewpoints. For example, the top comment with almost 60,000 likes reads, “I get so mad I’m like why tf are these clown shoes always in my way and kick them across the room

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😭.” This comment adds specificity to the OM by describing the user’s irritated actions in this scenario. Thus, the user expresses their own stance of anger and adds a similar experiential viewpoint. A more precise TT that incorporates this experience could read: “When you’re already overstimulated, and you step on your man’s ugly shoes, so you get really mad and kick them across the room.” Synthesizing this content into a longer TT by incorporating another user’s similar experiential viewpoint demonstrates how the commenter scaffolds the DVS horizontally. However, this exercise illustrates how the new TT renders the meme unfunny with its lengthy specificity. The OM’s formatting with concise TT and comments that add relatability works better for a Meme Viewer’s cognitive load than a meme with a lengthy TT.

Another top comment reads, “Size of a fkin boat,” with almost 50,000 likes. Integrating this comment into the TT could yield the following: “When you’re already overstimulated, and you step on your man’s ugly shoes that are the size of a boat.” This user also adopts their own stance to add their experiential viewpoint about the shoe size. This comment furthers the OM’s relatability because many people may relate to their partner’s shoes being annoyingly large. Lastly, another comment follows the same schema, where the comment reads, “So this is a universal experience 😭😭😭😂😂,” garnering thousands of likes. This comment elucidates the relatability of OM’s scenario and could similarly add to the TT. Therefore, this “when” meme also features horizontal scaffolding of the DVS in parallel spaces with individualized stances that share similar viewpoints. These comments illustrate a participatory culture of commenters who bond over a shared experience. This in-group of people can relate to the meme due to their similar lived experiences; in this case, people who have a partner with large shoes that they always leave out for them to trip over.

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Figure 5. *@rastagee_'s "when" meme about tripping over her man's shoes when she's already overstimulated*

This case study of "when" memes demonstrates that the video content paired with the when clause on Instagram typically features Meme Makers acting out the scenario rather than creating a multimodal simile. Furthermore, the comments scaffold the meme's DVS horizontally in parallel spaces. Commenters adopt their own distinct stances while sharing similar experiential viewpoints, adding to the specificity and relatability of the meme. This horizontal scaffolding of the OM's DVS contributes to a sense of community amongst Meme Viewers who share similar lived experiences.

6 Case study 3: POV memes

While TLDN meme comments scaffold their DVS vertically, and "when" meme comments scaffold their DVS horizontally, POV meme comments scaffold their DVS in both directions (see Figure 6). POV memes invite different stances of various actors to participate in their discourse. Each new stance expands the DVS horizontally, and when others adopt that same stance, they add new embedded viewpoints that extend the DVS vertically. As a result, POV memes generate a viewpoint network that expands in both directions.

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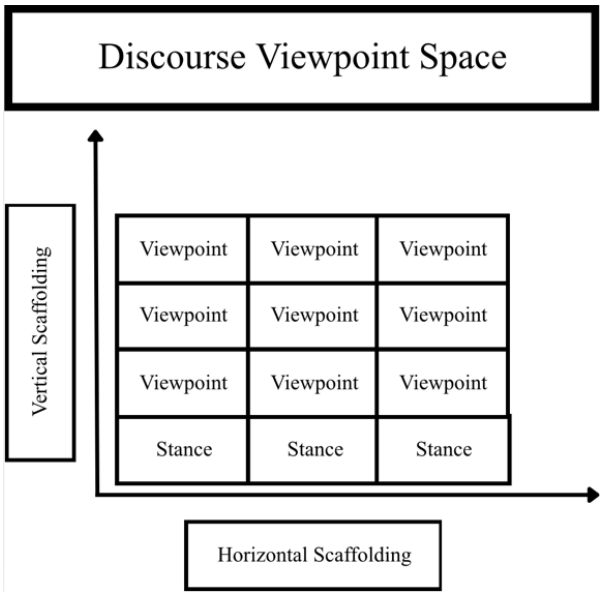
Figure 6. *Author's own diagram depicting a Discourse Viewpoint Space with simultaneous horizontal and vertical scaffolding*



In the first example of a POV meme (see Figure 8), @saifisntsafe portrays an unsuspecting poisonous snake being picked up by another Instagram creator, @fishinggarrett. The latter's account features videos of Garrett, a wildlife conservationist who shares content about the creatures he handles in his work, often picking them up so viewers can observe them (see Figure 7). As he picks up some snakes, he admits that they are highly venomous, advising his viewers against handling them in the wild. The meme's TT reads, "POV: ur a highly venomous snake getting 'yoinked' and 'booped' by some white dude" (@saifisntsafe, 2025). Its Image Macro video depicts the creator bopping and weaving like a snake. He then grabs his shirt and acts as though he has been picked up and "booped" on the nose. Viewers familiar with @fishinggarrett's videos may immediately recognize the reference to the "white dude" in the TT. To assist any confused viewers, @saifisntsafe tags him in the description, rendering his reference explicit. The comments under this POV meme adopt three different stances: that of the snake, @fishinggarrett, and a viewer of @fishinggarrett.

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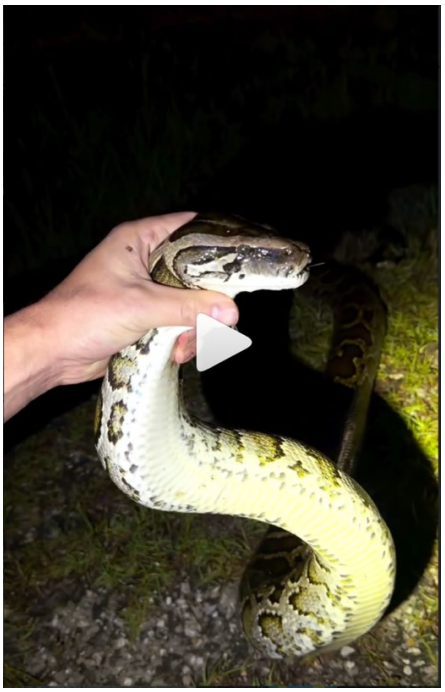
Figure 7. *Screenshot from an Instagram Reel by @fishinggarrett, in which Garrett handles a Burmese python*



Many comments elaborate on the snake's stance expressed in the TT by sharing different experiential viewpoints. One well-liked comment with over 15,000 likes reads, "Viper goes home: You would not BELIEVE who I ran into today, did he boop me? Ofc he did!" This comment uses simulated discourse to express the snake's experiential viewpoint after it goes "home" to tell other snakes that Garrett has picked it up. Similarly, another commenter adopts the same stance but expresses the snake's complaints as Garrett picks it up. The comment echoes the new viewpoint with the snake addressing Garrett by saying, "have some respect for me, I am highly lethal." Another comment is by Garrett himself, who responds with a laughing emoji and garners over 45,000 likes. His comment moves the trajectory of the DVS away from the OM and towards the stance of the referenced creator, who finds humour in this meme. Once these users re-establish the connection between the meme and @fishinggarrett's account, several comments move the DVS's trajectory horizontally by adopting the stance of his viewers in a new parallel space. A top comment reads: "He always hits the 'and you really don't want to handle these guys' BROTHER SO WHY ARE YOU HANDLING IT." The all-caps text illustrates the stance of a concerned viewer who shares their experiential viewpoint. Several other commenters elucidate the dissonance of enjoying Garrett's content while also feeling concerned for his safety, adding vertical scaffolding to this stance within the OM's DVS. Consequently, not only do the comments feature horizontal scaffolding as

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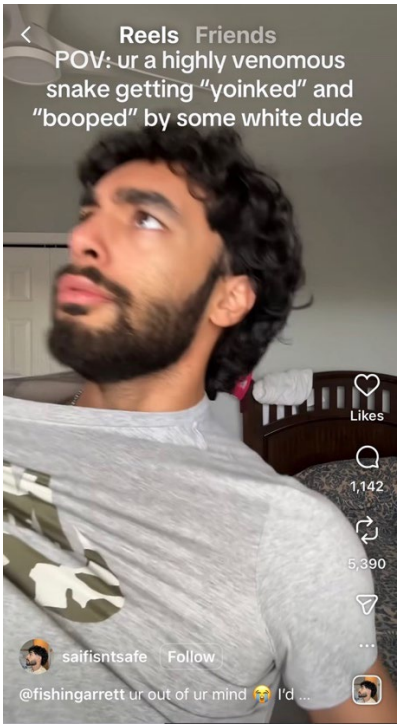
commenters expand the trajectory of the OM with distinct stances, but each stance becomes vertically scaffolded with embedded experiential viewpoints.

Figure 8. *@saifisntsafe's POV meme about being a poisonous snake who @fishinggarrett has picked up*



The second POV meme makes fun of how different generations use texting conventions to express humour (see Figure 9). This meme depicts someone initially responding to a funny text with "hahahaha," then correcting themselves by deleting that text and then typing "😂😂." Its TT, "POV: you're texting someone older than 21 so you have to pull this move" (@artur_sorn1on, 2025), suggests that texters who are "older than 21" use the laughing emoji, whereas younger texters use "hahahaha"; however, this assertion sparks disagreements within the comments, leading to users taking on different stances in the debate. Some comments do not challenge the argument in the POV meme, expanding the trajectory of the DVS vertically. One commenter laments the labelling of 21 as "old," writing: "bro im gonna turn 22 in a few days and I feel old now." This comment maintains OM's stance but adds the viewpoint of someone who is reaching the threshold of being "old." Another commenter moves the trajectory of the DVS horizontally into a parallel space, discussing how people debate over the use of other emojis in humorous situations:

> "I once sent: 😭

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They asked[:] “why are you crying 💀”

This top-liked comment with over 120,000 likes (see Figure 10) demonstrates how some texters use the sobbing emoji to react to humorous situations, whereas others use the skull emoji. This comment continues the discussion about the best emoji to use for humorous texting situations. Yet the user adopts a new stance to highlight the debate about other emojis to depict laughter. The fast-paced nature of social media does create divisions as users may prefer different schemas to express laughter in online discourse. Lastly, some commenters challenge the TT’s assertion directly, such as the top-liked comment with almost 90,000 likes that states, “This isn’t old, using ‘hahahaha’ is old,” where “this” refers to using the laughing emoji. This stance is the inverse of the OM’s, moving its DVS horizontally in a new parallel space that opposes its original stance. Other comments also adopt this stance and add their own viewpoints in response. This comment chain disagrees with the stance of the Meme Maker, contributing to both the horizontal and vertical scaffolding of the OM’s DVS as users agree and disagree with each other. Thus, this POV meme generates horizontal scaffolding through its controversial positioning, which adds the second trajectory of vertical scaffolding where commenters agree with each other’s new interpretations.

Figure 9. *@artur_sorn1on’s POV meme about different texting conventions for expressing humour depending on the texter’s age*

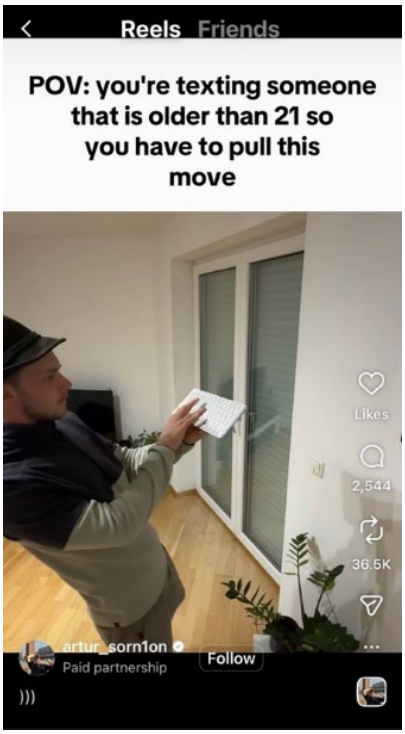

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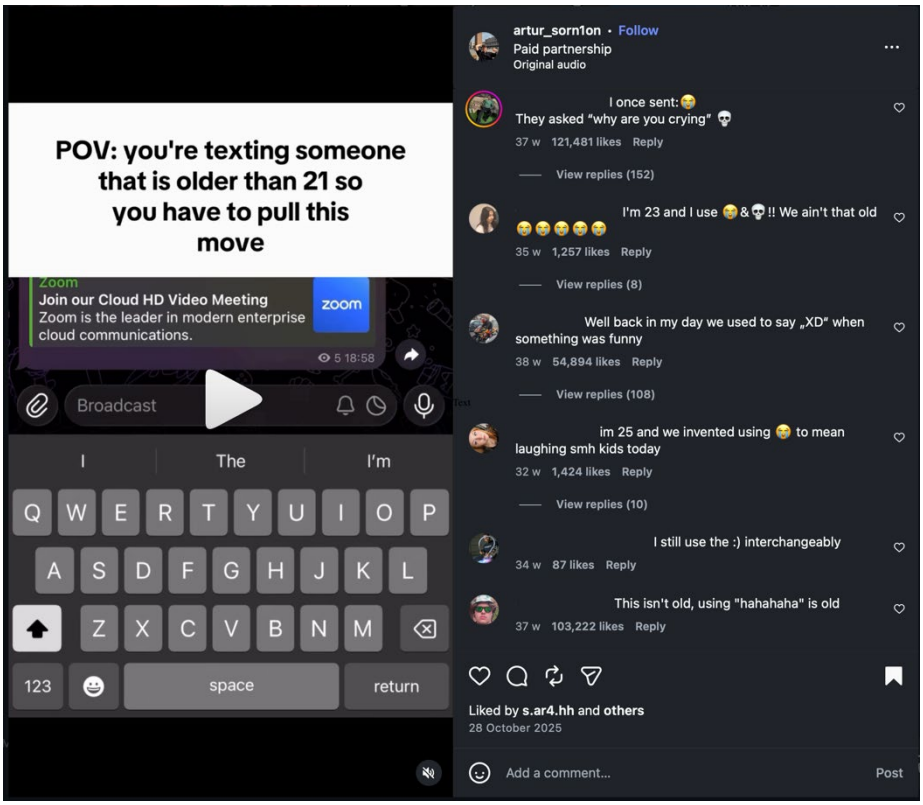
Figure 10. *Comments (usernames redacted) under @artur_sorn1on's Instagram Reels post in desktop view, including the top-liked comment*



This final case study demonstrates that POV memes feature both vertical and horizontal scaffolding of their DVS. With the premise that the OM introduces one "POV," commenters present new stances (or POVs) in parallel spaces that either play with or disagree with the discourse set up within the OM. Additionally, other commenters respond to these various stances with their own viewpoints, which creates vertical scaffolding as they embed their experiential viewpoints with the same stance as another commenter. As this analysis reveals, POV memes encourage comments that expand the DVS through both horizontal and vertical scaffolding, adding new stances and viewpoints that shape the trajectory of the OM.

7 Limitations

A significant limitation of this paper is the impact of Instagram's algorithm. All the memes in the case studies were from my Instagram feed. Naturally, my algorithm impacted the memes I gathered for the case studies and the comments at the top of my feed. For example, my established viewing history of @fishinggarrett's content explains why I encountered the meme about him by

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@saifisntsafe. Further studies could replicate my methods of selecting memes based on one scholar's Instagram Reels feed and sorting them by meme type, repeating this process on several Instagram accounts. Including a larger pool of data from different sources would help determine whether the trends observed in this paper are consistent with more rigorous testing. However, I posit that a benefit of employing my method with one Instagram feed is that a researcher replicating this method would have an in-depth understanding of the content on their feed, which they can employ to better interpret user trends. This valuable prior knowledge contextualizes the Instagram Reels memes they encounter in their feed.

Another limitation to my analysis is how the discourse in comment sections on Instagram Reels can become very messy, sometimes resisting a simple classification into either horizontal or vertical scaffolding. Many comments can be off-topic or contribute stances in a way that is difficult to label with this binary. Meme Viewers are not consciously adhering to a particular type of scaffolding—rather, they are contributing playfully to a broader meme and Internet culture through their comments. However, this framework of scaffolding with the DVS is valuable in illustrating how the collective output of commenters produces a shift in the DVS of the meme by interacting with memetic structure and meaning.

8 Conclusion

In this essay, I complete a case study of six Instagram Reels memes that fall under three categories: "The lion does not concern himself" memes, "when" memes, and POV memes. These case studies demonstrate that commenters interact with the DVS of each meme differently depending on its memetic structure and initial stance, illustrating that commenters' posts are not completely random.

I further Dancygier and Vandelanotte's (2016) argument about DVS in memes by illustrating how comments add a further component of scaffolding to the DVS. I posit two types of scaffolding (see Figure 1). In the first, vertical scaffolding describes an expansion of the DVS where commenters adopt the same stance, but all post different embedded experiential viewpoints within that stance. An OM with vertical scaffolding features comments that follow the trajectory of adding nuance to a stance. In the second, horizontal scaffolding describes an expansion of the DVS into parallel spaces where comments adopt different stances, but all post about similar experiential viewpoints. They contribute to a linear trajectory that elucidates the meme's specificity. Meme comments can demonstrate horizontal or vertical scaffolding of the DVS, or both. Comment sections may follow the trajectory of introducing and exploring new stances. In this essay, I find that commenters scaffolded TLDN memes vertically by adopting the same stance and expressing different experiential viewpoints, scaffolded "when" memes horizontally by adopting different stances with similar experiential viewpoints, and scaffolded POV memes both horizontally and

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vertically as they both introduced various stances and elaborated with unique experiential viewpoints.

I argue that comments under Instagram Reels memes demonstrate an implicit understanding of memetic structure and its stance content as users adhere to the same scaffolding trajectory in comments responding to the OM. They contribute to the relatability of the OM by adding their own experiential viewpoints and create an in-group of knowledge by establishing a complex network of stances that all contribute to the OM's DVS. This study highlights the complexity of interactions in meme comment sections, where users consider memetic structure and DVS. These findings also suggest that memes themselves are a stance generator through their memetic structure, inviting various responses. By analyzing the cultural zeitgeist of comments under memes, scholars can study how Meme Viewers interact with memes through their memetic structure and DVS scaffolding, contributing to a sense of community on Instagram Reels. Users do not always react with a simple, brief comment, like the expression "hahaha" or a laughing emoji, before scrolling away. Instead, many Meme Viewers push the trajectory of the OM's DVS by exploring new stances and viewpoints. These comment interactions demonstrate users' complex and ingenious interactions with memes, simultaneously encouraging laughs and creating community.

9 About the author

Chloe Mee is a master's student in the Department of English Language and Literatures at the University of British Columbia. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English (Honours with Distinction) from the University of Victoria, alongside a minor in Professional Communications and a certificate in French Language and Culture Proficiency. She is fascinated by participatory culture and its intersection with texts, particularly across platforms like Instagram and Wattpad. Working primarily from a literary studies background, Chloe is interested in how cognitive linguistics frameworks can help explain the interactions between comments and digital content.

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Number expression variability in Kurmanji

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This paper investigates variability in number agreement expression between two varieties of Kurmanji, an Indo-Iranian language, as well as an outlier pattern that diverges from the generalizations that have been made for both varieties, based on original fieldwork data elicited from multiple consultants. Kurmanji exhibits a split alignment system conditioned by tense, displaying ergative alignment in the past tense and accusative alignment in the present tense, with agreement tracking the nominative-marked argument in both. The paper documents two main varieties, focusing on how number information is encoded across pronouns, verbal agreement, and case marking in both present and past tense. I compare a variety consistent with Standard Kurmanji (spoken by an informant from Mardin) with a variety spoken in Batman that diverges from the standard grammar by employing an OBL-OBL alignment system in the past tense. This divergence disrupts the nominative tracking agreement, creating optionalities in number expression with oblique marked subject and object. These findings have been analyzed as language change towards a simpler lexicon and a simpler alignment system, with the optionalities in the lexicon being caused by syncretism.
Keywords: Kurmanji; number agreement; syncretism; split ergativity; case alignment.

1 Introduction

This paper will present a survey of the variability in number expression in Kurmanji, an Indo-Iranian language, based on original fieldwork data elicited from a couple of informants. Öpengin and Haig (2024) have identified five dialectal regions for Kurmanji. They are the southeastern dialectical region, southern dialectical region, northern dialectal region, southwestern dialectal region, northwestern dialectal region. Both of my main informants are from the southern dialectal region of Turkey. They are from the cities Mardin and Batman. I observed and documented interdialectal variation. In Section 2 and Section 3, I document the expression of number in two Kurmanji varieties, discussing the effects of case alignment and syncretism on where number can be expressed in argument-agreement configurations. In Section 4, I demonstrate the extent of variability in number expression by discussing further data that instantiate outlier patterns, diverging from the robust generalizations that hold for the two reported

varieties. Section 5 discusses the implications emerging from the survey reported in this study.

2 Informant 1: "Standard Kurmanji"

The informant is from Mardin, a city in southeastern Turkey. They are an L1 speaker of Kurmanji. The informant's language aligns with what was described as Standard Kurmanji (Thackston, 2006). Therefore, this informant's language will be referred to as Standard Kurmanji (SK). SK has a split alignment system based on tense. It shows an ergative alignment in the past tense, marking the external argument of the transitive verb as oblique (OBL), while marking the internal argument of the transitive verb and the sole argument of intransitives as nominative (NOM). Whereas in the present tense, it shows an accusative alignment, marking the internal argument of the transitive verb with OBL, while marking the external argument of transitives and the sole argument of intransitives with NOM. It is necessary to mention—as no other informant's Kurmanji fully aligns with the described standard form—that the speaker also teaches Kurmanji at a university in Turkey, and they are interested in the standardization of the language.

2.1 Alignment and agreement in 1st and 2nd person pronouns

Let us start with the pronouns in the language, which have distinct NOM and OBL forms, as shown in Table 1. In this section, I limit my attention to 1st and 2nd person pronouns.

Table 1. *Pronouns in Standard Kurmanji*

	Nominative	Oblique
1SG[1]	*Ez*	*Min*
2SG	*Tu*	*Te*
3SG	*Ew*	*Wî/Wê*
1PL	*Em*	*Me*
2PL	*Hûn*	*We*
3PL	*Ew*	*Wan*

[1] 1 'first person'; 2 'second person'; 3 'third person'; NOM 'nominative'; OBL 'oblique'; PL 'plural'; PRS 'present'; PST 'past'; SG 'singular'.

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Table 2. *Case alignment in Standard Kurmanji*

Present tense			Past tense		
Valence	Argument count	Pattern	Valence	Argument count	Pattern
Unaccusative	1	NOM	Unaccusative	1	NOM
Unergative	1	NOM	Unergative	1	NOM
Transitive	2	NOM-OBL	Transitive	2	OBL-NOM

When both the subject and the object are 1st and 2nd person pronouns in the accusative alignment (i.e., under present tense), the verb agrees in number and person with the NOM marked subject *tu* in Examples 2a–b and the NOM marked subject *em* '1PL.NOM' in Examples 4a–b. In the ergative alignment (i.e., under past tense), the verb agrees in number and person with the NOM marked objects *ez* and *em* in Examples 1a–b and NOM marked objects *tu* and *hûn* in Examples 3a–b respectively.

All 1st and 2nd person pronouns encode number information on themselves regardless of case; however, only the NOM marked ones agree with the verb in number and person, which is a fact observed regardless of the tense.

(1) a. Te ez dîtim
Te ez dît -im
2SG.OBL *1SG.NOM* *see.PST* *-1SG*
'You saw me'

b. Te em dîtin
Te em dît -in
2SG.OBL *1PL.NOM* *see.PST* *-PL*
'You saw us'

(2) a. Tu min dibînî
Tu min dibîn -î
2SG.NOM *1SG.OBL* *see.PRS* *-2SG*
'You are seeing me'

b. Tu me dibînî
Tu me dibîn -î
2SG.NOM *1PL.OBL* *see.PRS* *-2SG*
'You are seeing us'

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(3) a. Me tu dîtî
Me tu dît -î
1PL.OBL *2SG.NOM* *see.PST* *-2SG*
'We saw you'

b. Me hûn dîtin
Me hûn dît -in
1PL.OBL *2PL.NOM* *see.PST* *-PL*
'We saw you(PL)'

(4) a. Em te dibînin
Em te dibîn -in
1PL.NOM *2SG.OBL* *see.PRS* *-PL*
'We are seeing you'

b. Em we dibînin
Em we dibîn -in
1PL.NOM *2PL.OBL* *see.PRS* *-PL*
'We are seeing you(PL)

2.2 Alignment and agreement elsewhere

2.2.1 Subjects of nominal predicates

The subjects of nominal predicates are all marked NOM both in the past and the present tense. The existential copula agrees with the NOM marked subject in number and person. No overt plural (PL) marking can be seen on the subject NP. Example 5 illustrates that in the past tense, the plurality of the NOM marked subject *zarok* is only expressed on the verb and never on the NP itself. Example 6 illustrates that in the present tense the plurality of the NOM subject is again only expressed through the marking on the verb and never through a marker on the NP.

(5) a. Zarok li malê bû
Zarok li mal -ê bû
child.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PST.3SG*
'The child was in the house'

b. Zarok li malê bûn
Zarok li mal -ê bûn
child.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PST.PL*
'The children were in the house'

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(6) a. Zarok li malê ye
Zarok li mal -ê ye
child.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PRS.3SG*
'The child is in the house'

b. Zarok li malê ne
Zarok li mal -ê ne
child.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PRS.3PL*
'The children are in the house'

The abovementioned pattern does not change when the subject of the nominal predicate is inanimate, as in Examples 7–8.

(7) a. Pirtûk li malê bû
Pirtûk li mal -ê bû
book.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PST.3SG*
'The book was in the house'

b. Pirtûk li male bûn
Pirtûk li mal -ê bûn
book.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PST.3PL*
'Books were in the house'

(8) a. Pirtûk li malê ye
Pirtûk li mal -ê ye
book.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PRS.3SG*
'The book is in the house'

b. Pirtûk li malê ne
Pirtûk li mal -ê ne
book.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PRS.3PL*
'The books are in the house'

2.2.2 Agreement in sentences with transitive verbs

The PL agreement tracks the NOM marked subject in the present tense, which is where SK has accusative alignment, as can be seen from Examples 9–11. The plurality of the object does not make a difference, as shown in comparisons in Examples 9a–c and 10a–b; the verb always agrees in number with the NOM marked subject. In fact, agreement with the OBL PL object results in ungrammaticality, as can be seen in Example 9c.

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(9) a. Tu pirtûkan dibî
Tu pirtuk -an dib -î
2SG.NOM book -OBL.PL take.PRS -2SG
'You are taking the books'

b. Tu pirtûkê dibî
Tu pirtuk -ê dib -î
2SG.NOM book -OBL.SG take.PRS -2SG
'You are taking the book'

c. *Tu pirtûkan dibin
Tu pirtuk -an dib -in
2SG.NOM book -OBL.PL take.PRS -PL
'You are taking the books'

(10) a. Eyşe pirtûkê dibe
Eyşe pirtuk -ê dib -e
Eyşe.NOM book -OBL.SG take.PRS -3SG
'Eyşe is taking the book'

b. Eyşe pirtûkan dibe
Eyşe pirtuk -an dib -e
Eyşe.NOM book -OBL.PL take.PRS -3SG
'Eyşe is taking the books'

In the past tense, where SK has ergative alignment, the verb does not agree with the OBL marked subject. In Examples 11a–b, the subject is 2SG, but the agreement marker on the verb changes from *in*[2] 'PL' to the 3SG null morpheme. Thus, the verb must be agreeing in number with the NOM marked object.

(11) a. Te pirtûk birin
Te pirtuk bir -in
2SG.OBL book.NOM take.PST -PL
'You took the books'

b. Te pirtûk bir
Te pirtuk bir
2SG.OBL book.NOM take.PST.3SG
'You took the book'

A notable fact is that the plurality of the object in past tense can only be understood from the marking on the verb because objects are marked with NOM case, which has no overt marking. This fact is evident from the Examples 12–13

[2] Plural marker *-in* is syncretic for 1st, 2nd, 3rd persons. Therefore, it is indicated as PL and the person is not specified.

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where, no matter how the plurality of the subject and object is manipulated the object, does not show overt number marking and number is shown only on the verb.

(12) a. Eyşeyê pirtûk bir
Eyşe -ye pirtûk bir
Eyşe -*OBL.SG* *book.NOM* *take.PST.3SG*
'Eyşe took the book'

b. Eyşeyê pirtûk birin
Eyşe -ye pirtûk bir -in
Eyşe -*OBL.SG* *book.NOM* *take.PST.3SG* -*PL*
'Eyşe took the books'

(13) a. Wan pirtûk bir
Wan pirtûk bir
3PL.OBL *book.NOM* *take.PST.3SG*
'They took the book'

b. Wan pirtûk birin
Wan pirtûk bir -in
3PL.OBL *book.NOM* *take.PST.3SG* -*PL*
'They took the books'

The OBL argument marks plurality on the NP whether it is a subject or an object, which can be seen in Example 14a, where *zarok* is marked with the portmanteau morpheme *-ê* for OBL and SG and again in Example 14b when *zarok* is marked with the portmanteau morpheme *-an* for OBL and PL.

(14) a. Zarokê ez dîtim
Zarok -ê ez dît -im
child -*OBL.SG* *1SG.NOM* *see.PST* -*1SG*
'The child saw me'

b. Tu zarokan dibînî
Tu zarok -an dibin -î
2SG.NOM *child* -*OBL.PL* *see.PRS* -*2SG*
'You are seeing the children'

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2.2.3 Nominative 3rd person pronoun

While the other pronouns encode the number information on themselves, the only way to understand the number of the 3rd person pronoun *ew* is through the marker on the verb.

Comparing Examples 15a–b with Examples 16a–b respectively, where the independent variable is the plurality of the 3rd person pronoun, it is observed that the agreement marker on the verb is the PL morpheme *-in* in Example 15 but the 3SG morpheme *-e* in Example 16.

It is evident from the test that the 3rd person pronoun *ew* is syncretic between PL and SG. Thus, it does not encode the number information on itself.

(15) a. Ew pirtûkê dibin

Ew	pirtuk	-ê	dib	-in
3PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'They are taking the book'

b. Ew pirtûkan dibin

Ew	pirtuk	-an	dib	-in
3PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'They are taking the books'

(16) a. Ew pirtûkê dibe

Ew	pirtuk	-ê	dib	-e
3SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'S/he is taking the book'

b. Ew pirtûkan dibe

Ew	pirtuk	-an	dib	-e
3SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'S/he is taking the book'

3 Informant 2: "Batman Kurmanji"

The second informant is from Batman, a city in the southeast of Turkey. They are an L1 speaker of Kurmanji. They actively use the language in their daily life, and they are engaged with the language through the Kurmanji Literary Club in Boğaziçi University. Their Kurmanji dialect does not fully align with the "standard" dialect (Thackston, 2006). Therefore, it will be referred to as Batman Kurmanji (BK)[3]. BK will be described in the present tense and the past tense separately.

[3] It must be acknowledged that a single speaker's dialect does not represent the whole area of Batman.

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Table 3. *Pronouns in Batman Kurmanji*

	Nominative	Oblique
1SG	*ez*	*min*
2SG	*tu*	*te*
3SG	*ew*	*wî/wê/ew*
1PL	*em*	*me*
2PL	*hûn*	*we*
3PL	*ew*	*wan*

3.1 Present tense

3.1.1 Alignment and agreement with 1st and 2nd person pronouns

When both the subject and the object are 1st and 2nd person pronouns, agreement tracks the NOM marked pronoun as in Example 17a–b. As was the case in SK, the number information is encoded inside both the NOM marked and the OBL marked 1st and 2nd person pronouns. However, only the NOM marked pronouns agree with the verb.

(17) a. Tu me dibînî

Tu	me	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*1PL.OBL*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing us'

b. Tu te dibînin

Em	te	dibîn	-in
1PL.NOM	*2SG.OBL*	*see.PRS*	*-PL*

'You are seeing us'

In Examples 17c–d the object is the 1st person SG OBL pronoun *min*, the subject is the 2nd person NOM SG pronoun in Example 17c, while in Example 17d it is PL. For Example 17c, the verb has the 2SG and for Example 17d the verb has the PL morpheme. The verb is observed to have agreed with the NOM subject in both person and number.

c. Tu min dibînî

Tu	min	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*1SG.OBL*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing me'

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d. Hûn min dibînin
Hûn min dibîn -in
2PL.NOM *1SG.OBL* *see.PRS* *-PL*
'You(PL) are seeing me'

3.1.2 Alignment and agreement elsewhere

3.1.2.1 Subjects of nominal predicates

In the subjects of nominal predicates, the number information is never observed on the NP. In Example 18a, the plurality of the sentence can only be understood from the verb. The NP *zarok* does not take any marker in either Example 18a or 18b. However, the verb changes from PL *in* Example 18a to 3SG *e* in Example 18b.

(18) a. Zarok li mal in
Zarok li mal in
child.NOM *in* *house.NOM* *exist.PRS.PL*
'Children are in the house'

b. Zarok li mal e
Zarok li mal e
child.NOM *in* *house.NOM* *exist.PRS.3SG*
'The child is in the house'

3.1.2.2 Agreement in sentences with transitive verbs

While BK marks the subject of the transitive verb as nominative, it marks the object of the transitive verb as OBL. This is evident in Example 19, where the subject *Eyse* is marked NOM in both instances, while the object 'book' is marked with OBL.

(19) a. Eyşe pirtûkê dibe
Eyşe.NOM pirtûk -ê dib -e
Eyşe.NOM *book* *-OBL.SG* *take.PRS* *-3SG*
'Eyşe is taking the book'

b. Eyşe pirtûkan dibe
Eyşe.NOM pirtûk -an dib -e
Eyşe.NOM *book* *-OBL.PL* *take.PRS* *-3SG*
'Eyşe is taking the books'

The agreement in the present tense in BK tracks the NOM case, similar to how agreement tracks the NOM case in SK. As can be seen in Example 20, the verb agrees with the 2SG.NOM subject *tu* in both instances. Even though the object is

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PL in Example 20a and SG in Example 20b, agreement with the object is not observed on the verb.

(20) a. Tu pirtûkan tênî

Tu	pirtûk	-an	tên	-î
2SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*bring.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are bringing the books'

b. Tu pirtûkê tênî

Tu	pirtûk	-ê	tên	-î
2SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*bring.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are bringing the book'

The OBL marked object encodes the number information on itself. This is attested in Example 21a when the object 'book' is PL, it is marked with *-an*, the portmanteau morpheme for OBL.PL. In Example 21b, the SG object 'book' is marked with *-ê*, the portmanteau morpheme for OBL.SG.

(21) a. Em pirtûkan tênin

Em	pirtûk	-an	tên	-in
1PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*bring.PRS*	*-PL*

'We are bringing the books'

b. Em pirtûkê tênin

Em	pirtûk	-an	tên	-in
1PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*bring.PRS*	*-PL*

'We are bringing the book'

3.1.2.3 Nominative 3rd person pronoun

The agreement between the verb and the subject in number is more evident in Example 22, because the NOM marked pronoun *ew* is syncretic in 3PL and 3SG. Unlike the 1st and 2nd person pronouns, the 3rd person pronoun does not encode the number information on itself. The only way that the plurality of *ew* is understood is through its agreement with the verb. The evidence is shown when comparing Example 22a with Example 23a, where the independent variable is the plurality of the pronoun *ew*, the dependent variable is the agreement marker on the verb, which is *-in* '-PL' in Example 22a; and *-e*, the 3SG marker, in Example 23a. The same pattern appears in Example 22b and Example 23a.

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(22) a. Ew pirtûkê dibin

Ew	pirtûk	-ê	dib	-in
3PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'They are taking the book'

b. Ew pirtûkan dibin

Ew	pirtûk	-an	dib	-in
3PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'They are taking the books'

(23) a. Ew pirtûkê dibe

Ew	pirtûk	-ê	dib	-e
3SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'S/he is taking the book'

b. Ew pirtûkan dibe

Ew	pirtûk	-an	dib	-e
3SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'S/he is taking the books'

3.2 Past tense

3.2.1 Alignment and agreement with 1st and 2nd person pronouns

SK shows ergative alignment in the past tense. BK diverges from the standard in that when both the subject and the object of the transitive verb are 1st and 2nd person pronouns, they are marked with OBL. In instances like Examples 24–26, where both the subject and the object are marked overtly with OBL, the number information is encoded on themselves, and there is no agreement on the verb observed.

(24) a. We me dît

We	me	dît
2PL.OBL	*1PL.OBL*	*see.PST*

'You(PL) saw us'

b. We min dît

We	min	dît
2PL.OBL	*1SG.OBL*	*see.PST*

'You(PL) saw me'

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(25) a. Te min dît
Te min dît
2SG.OBL *1SG.OBL* *see.PST*
'You saw me'

b. Te me dît
Te me dît
2SG.OBL *1PL.OBL* *see.PST*
'You saw us'

(26) a. Me te dît
Me te dît
1PL.OBL *2SG.OBL* *see.PST*
'We saw you'

b. Me we dît
Me we dît
1PL.OBL *2PL.OBL* *see.PST*
'We saw you(PL)'

c. Min we dît
Min we dît
1SG.OBL *2PL.OBL* *see.PST*
'I saw you(PL)'

3.2.2 Alignment and agreement elsewhere

3.2.2.1 Subjects of nominal predicates

In the subjects of the nominal predicates, NPs do not contain the number information on themselves. In Example 27a, the sentence's plurality can only be understood from the change in the verb. The NP *zarok* does not take any marker that would show plurality in either Example 27a or Example 27b. However, the verb takes the PL marker *-n* in Example 27a while it does not take any markers when the NP is understood as SG in Example 27b.

(27) a. Zarok li mal bûn
Zarok li mal bûn
child.NOM *in* *house.NOM* *exist.PST.PL*
'Children were in the house'

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b. Zarok li mal bû
Zarok li mal bû
child.NOM *in* *house.NOM* *exist.PST*
'The child was in the house'

3.2.2.2 Agreement in sentences with transitive verbs

In instances like Examples 28–29 where both the subject and the object are marked overtly with OBL, an instance where BK diverges from SK, the number information is encoded on the NPs themselves, and there is no number agreement on the verb observed. The PL NPs are marked with the OBL.PL portmanteau morpheme *-an*, the SG NPs are marked with the OBL.PL portmanteau morpheme *-e*.

(28) a. Te pirtûkan anî
Te pirtûk -an anî
2SG.OBL *book* *-OBL.PL* *bring.PST*
'You brought the books'

b. Te pirtûkê anî
Te pirtûk -ê anî
2SG.OBL *book* *-OBL.SG* *bring.PST*
'You brought the book'

(29) a. Me pirtûkan anî
Me pirtûk -an anî
1PL.OBL *book* *-OBL.PL* *bring.PST*
'We brought the books'

b. Me pirtûkê anî
Me pirtûk -an anî
1PL.OBL *book* *-OBL.SG* *bring.PST*
'We brought the book'

In instances such as Example 30, where the NP is SG, overt realization of the OBL marking on the NP is optional. Example 31a is the first account the informant gave, which has overt OBL marking in the subject and no overt marking on the object. When asked to judge if Example 31b, where the OBL.SG portmanteau morpheme *-ê* is overtly realized on the object, is attested or not, the informant stated that "attaching *-ê* is optional," it is used interchangeably with the cases of no attachment.

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(30) a. Eyşe pirtukê bir
Eyşe pirtûk -ê bir
Eyşe.OBL book -OBL.SG take.PST
'Eyşe took the book'

b. Eyşe pirtukan bir
Eyşe pirtûk -an bir
Eyşe.OBL book -OBL.PL take.PST
'Eyşe took the books'

(31) a. Me zarok-Ø dît
Me zarok -Ø dît
1PL.OBL child -OBL.SG see.PST
'We saw the child'

b. Me zarok-ê dît
Me zarok -ê dît
1PL.OBL child -OBL.SG see.PST
'We saw the child'

c. Me zarok-a dît
Me zarok -a dît
1PL.OBL child -OBL.PL see.PST
'We saw the children'

Another instance where this optionality is observed are Examples 32b–c. Whereas in Example 32a the OBL.PL marking on the object is overt, in Example 32b, where the object is stated as singular by the informant, there is no overt marking on the object observed. When asked, the informant judged Example 32c, where there is an overt OBL.SG marker on the object, as grammatical.

(32) a. Te zarok-a dît
Te zarok -a dît
2SG.OBL child -OBL.PL see.PST
'You saw the children'

b. Te zarok-Ø dît
Te zarok -Ø dît
2SG.OBL child -OBL.SG see.PST
'You saw the child'

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c. Te zarok-ê dît
Te zarok -ê dît
2SG.OBL *child* *-OBL.SG* *see.PST*
'You saw the child'

However, Examples 30, 31 and 32 all behave the same according to where the number agreement is observed. It is never observed on the verb and always observed on the NP or pronoun.

In Example 33a, BK makes a similar construction to SK where the object is marked NOM and there is no number information on it, and the object's number is marked on the verb with the PL morpheme *-in*. Example 33b, however, is BK's OBL-OBL construction where both the object and the subject are marked overtly with the OBL marker, thus the number information is encoded with the morpheme *-an* on the object and there is no agreement with the verb.

(33) a. Te zarok dîtin
Te zarok dît -in
2SG.OBL *child.NOM* *see.PST* *-PL*
'You saw the children'

b. Te zarokan dît
Te zarok -an dît
2SG.OBL *child* *-OBL.PL* *see.PST*
'You saw the children'

Example 33 shows that unmarked *zarok* can only be understood as SG if there is no agreement observed on the verb.

3.2.2.3 Analysis of the oblique third person pronoun

In SK, *ew* has been analyzed in Section 2 as being syncretic between 3SG.NOM and 3PL.NOM. In BK, *ew* has been analyzed in Section 3.1 as syncretic between 3SG.NOM and 3PL.NOM, the same as SK.
In BK, when both the subject and the object are 1st or 2nd person pronouns, they always occur as OBL and contain the number information on themselves. Considering these facts, the data below will be analyzed as *ew* being an 3SG.OBL pronoun.

In Examples 34a–b, where the independent variable is the case marking of the pronoun, the speaker judged both instances as grammatical and as having the same meaning. Therefore, *ew* can be used as a 3SG.OBL pronoun in BK.

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(34) a. Ew pirtûkan bir
Ew pirtûk -an bir
3SG.NOM book -OBL.PL take.PST
'S/he took the books'

b. Wî pirtûkan bir
Wî pirtûk -an bir
3SG.OBL.M book -OBL.PL take.PST
'He took the books'

In Example 35b, the 3PL.NOM pronoun *ew* is judged ungrammatical. Instead, Example 35a, where the 3PL.OBL pronoun *wan* is used, is judged to be grammatical by the informant.

(35) a. *Ew pirtûkê bir
Ew pirtûk -ê bir
3PL.NOM book -OBL.SG take.PST
'They took the book'

b. Wan pirtûkê bir
Wan pirtûk -ê bir
3PL.OBL book -OBL.SG take.PST
'They took the book'

It is understood from Example 35 that *ew* cannot be used as a 3PL.OBL pronoun.

In Example 36 the speaker judged the use of *ew* as an 3SG.OBL pronoun in the object position as grammatical.

(36) a. Te ew dit
Te ew dit
2SG.OBL 3SG.OBL see.PST
'You saw him/her'

In Examples 34, 35 and 36, the pronoun *ew* does not agree with the verb. It contains the number information on itself, and it can be used interchangeably with the 3SG.OBL pronouns *wî/wê*. It cannot be used interchangeably with the 3PL.OBL pronoun *wan*. Therefore, *ew* in the BK past tense can be analyzed as an 3SG.OBL pronoun.

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Table 4. *Case alignment in Batman Kurmanji*

Present tense	Past tense
transitive verb	transitive verb
argument count: 2	argument count: 2
NOM-OBL	OBL-OBL

4 Outlier data from Batman Kurmanji

Regarding the PL agreement in the past tense, the data is mostly consistent in BK, the OBL subject and object never agree in number with the verb; they encode the number information on themselves. However, there is only one exception to this observation.

(37) a. Wan pirtukan birin

Wan	pirtuk	-an	bir	-in
3PL.OBL	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PST*	*-PL*

'They took the books'

b. Wan pirtukê bir

Wan	pirtuk	-ê	bir
3PL.OBL	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PST*

'They took the book'

The outlier pattern is evident in Example 37a, the 3PL.OBL pronoun and the OBL.PL marked object encode the number information on themselves as usual. However, there is PL agreement on the verb. This is not expected, as the PL agreement never targets OBL arguments elsewhere. The absence of PL agreement in Example 37b, however, is consistent with the data presented so far.

Atlamaz (2019) observed this outlier pattern in Adıyaman Kurmanji, which is mostly aligned with Standard Kurmanji. He gives a morphosyntactic explanation for the existence of this pattern. His explanation does not take the pattern as an outlier. Instead, it is a result of the fusion of the OBL case feature and number feature into a single morpheme.

5 Discussion

In Standard Kurmanji, the past tense has ergative alignment and NOM is unmarked; hence, we do not observe any marking on the object. However, in Batman Kurmanji, we observe OBL-OBL alignment, which is assumed to be the merger of accusative and ergative alignment systems. In other words, OBL-OBL alignment can be analyzed as an ergative-accusative tripartite system, which has been argued to emerge as a result of a lack of contextual specification for the assignment of the accusative case (Atlamaz, Demirok, Bağrıaçık, 2021, p. 6). BK in some cases behaves like an intermediary form between SK and an OBL-OBL

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system. We observe that our consultant fluctuates between the split-ergative system of SK and a variant where OBL-OBL (tripartite) is the norm in the past tense, suggesting a language change in progress.

BK additionally exhibits optionality in the morphological expression of number. I hypothesize that the language currently draws from two separate lexicons for case and number marking, compatible with the view where emergent patterns or language change in progress is modelled through competing grammars/competing lexicons.

Table 5. *Lexicons*

BK Lexicon I	BK Lexicon II
-a(n) = [OBL, PL]	*-a(n)* = [OBL, PL]
	-ê = [OBL]
elsewhere = ∅	

In BK Example 38b we see the singular object did not take any marking as would be the case in SK. BK draws from Lexicon I and forms the sentence according to the SK grammar in this instance, while in Example 38a and Example 38b it draws from Lexicon II and forms the sentence according to the OBL-OBL system.

(38) a. Te zarok-a dit

Te	zarok	-a	dit
2SG.OBL	*child*	*-OBL.PL*	*see.PST*

'You saw the children'

b. Te zarok-∅ dit

Te	zarok	-∅	dit
2SG.OBL	*child*	*-OBL.SG*	*see.PST*

'You saw the child'

c. Te zarok-ê dit

Te	zarok	-ê	dit
2SG.OBL	*child*	*-OBL.SG*	*see.PST*

'You saw the child'

(39) a. Tu zaroka dibînî

Tu	zarok	-a	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*child*	*-OBL.PL*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing the children'

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b. Tu zarok-Ø dibînî

Tu	zarok	-Ø	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*child*	*-OBL.SG*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing the child'

The same phenomenon is observed in the present tense in Example 39 and when the NP is a subject in Example 40. However, in Example 40 BK employs Lexicon I and the OBL-OBL system.

(40) a. Eyşe pirtûkê bir

Eyşe	pirtûk	-ê	bir
Eyşe.OBL	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PST*

'Eyşe took the book'

b. Eyşe pirtûkan bir

Eyşe	pirtûk	-an	bir
eyşe.OBL	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PST*

'Eyşe took the books'

This optionality puts BK in a transitional position between a baseline grammar and an emerging grammar. The language seems to be evolving towards a simpler lexicon as syncretism leads to fewer forms, as well as a simpler OBL-OBL alignment pattern in the past tense (where accusative case assignment is no longer restricted to non-past environments and is fully generalized/ underspecified). Dialects like BK, as well as the data in the Outlier section, show us that grammars are not static and constantly evolve, exhibiting intermediate forms along the way.

6 Future directions

There are a few questions that cannot be answered without a bigger sample size. Currently I am unable to clearly state whether the variation I observed stems from my informant's prescriptivist inclinations or whether the Kurmanji that people from Mardin speak is aligned with SK. Likewise, I am unable to state whether the whole region of Batman has undergone a change towards OBL-OBL patterning. I am also unable to state if the variation observed could stem from the informant's age, social status, gender, etc. The effects of these factors need to be further looked at with a bigger sample size.

7 About the author

I am a senior linguistics student at Boğaziçi University. Kurmanji in Turkey is currently undergoing a change; I wanted to see the morphological reflections of this process.

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