

# French *de* nominals and Russian non-canonical genitives. Are they partitive-like nominal expressions?\*

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## Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to provide a unified analysis of *de* nominals in French and non-canonical genitive nominals in Russian. Unlike previous literature that relies on partitivity, quantification and case assignment, we argue that a unified formal account can be substantiated by guaranteeing a uniform syntactic analysis of weak indefinite expressions not based on quantification, a semantic dependency of *de* nominals and non-canonical genitives to non-veridicality, and different linearization operations at Spell-out that guarantee concatenation of words or subwords (French *de\*n*, Russian  $n\oplus\text{GEN}$ ).

**Keywords:** French *de*; indefiniteness; non-veridicality; Russian genitive; Spell-out

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**Resum.** *Els nominals francesos amb de i els genitius no canònics en rus. Són expressions nominals partitives?*

El principal objectiu d'aquest article és oferir una anàlisi unificada dels nominals amb *de* del francès i dels genitius no canònics del rus. A diferència de propostes anteriors, que es basen en la partitivitat, la quantificació i l'assignació de cas, defensem que es pot oferir una anàlisi formal unificada que garanteixi una explicació sintàctica uniforme de les expressions indefinides febles que no es basi en la quantificació, sinó en una dependència semàntica dels nominals amb *de* del francès i dels genitius no canònics del rus en la no veridicitat i en diferents operacions de linearització en la fase d'externalització que donin compte de la concatenació de mots i submots (francès *de\*n*, rus  $n\oplus\text{gen}$ ).

**Paraules clau:** francès *de*; indefinitud; no veridicitat; genitiu rus; Spell-out

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## 1. Introduction

It is well-known in the literature that some languages, such as Romance (e.g., French, Italian, Franco-Provençal, Genovese) and Balto-Slavic (e.g., Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Bosnian), among other languages, such as Basque and Finnish (Miestamo 2014; Luraghi & Huumo 2014; Etxeberria 2021), exhibit a special Vocabulary Item (like *de* in French, the nominal affix genitive case in Russian, partitive in Basque and Finnish) when an internal argument is under the scope of negation.<sup>1</sup> In a typological survey of 240 languages from different families, Miestamo (2014) investigated what he calls the “partitive of negation”, which is, in fact, the obligatory (or preferential) use of partitive/genitive marking on noun phrases under the scope of negation, denoting indefiniteness (‘indefinite quantity’, in his terms), as opposed to the use of other markings in the referential/specific use of noun phrases. He also reports that in Finnic, Baltic, Slavic languages and Basque noun phrases “in the scope of negation are marked, either obligatorily or as a matter of preference, *with a case that has a partitive-marking function (partitive or genitive)* [our emphasis, Authors]” (p. 63). In this paper, we are going to argue that what has been dubbed “partitive” or “genitive” syntactic Case is actually the overt morphophonological counterpart of a licensing operation of indefinite structures,

1. As it appears in the abstract we will use the term *non-canonical genitive* as a cover term for the so-called genitive of negation, genitive under the scope of intensional predicates and also partitive genitive.

We here assume the Distributed Morphology concept of Vocabulary Item, according to which it is a relation between a phonological string and information about where that piece may be inserted.

by means of which an operator DE contributes a property-type denotation to definite / specific nominal expressions and furthermore the whole nominal expression is subject to a semantic dependency to non-veridicality.

We here mainly focus on French and Russian as paradigmatic instances of the phenomenon we are addressing.<sup>2</sup> The former because *de* NPs contrast with other forms where the article (with its gender and number) is overtly expressed, such as indefinite *des/du/de la* NPs and definite *le/la/les* NPs in affirmative sentences. Russian has been chosen because, among Baltic and Slavic languages, is the language for which the phenomenon of *genitive of negation* (henceforth, GN) has been described more extensively (Borschev & Partee 1998; Partee & Borschev 2002, 2008; Harves 2002, 2013; Kagan 2010, 2013, 2020; among others).

A first illustration of the phenomenon we are going to deal with is presented in (1)-(2) where *de* NPs and GN appears in object of two transitive verbs *trouver* ‘to find’ and *kupil* ‘to buy’, respectively.

- (1) a. Jean n’a pas trouvé *de livres*. [French]  
 Jean NEG.has not found *de* books  
 ‘Jean hasn’t found (any) books.’
- b. Jean a trouvé {*\*de, des*} *livres*. (adapted from Kayne 1981: 95,  
 Jean has found *de* books exs. (3)-(4))
- (2) a. Anna ne kupila *knig*. [Russian]  
 Anna not bought.PERF book.GEN.PL  
 ‘Anna didn’t buy (any) books.’
- b. Anna ne kupila *knigi*.  
 Anna not bought.PERF book.ACC.PL  
 ‘Anna didn’t buy (the) books.’ (Kagan 2013: 13, exs. (23))

Notice that in French *de livres* is only allowed under the scope of negation, (1a), and that when this expression appears in an affirmative sentence, (1b), the sequence is ungrammatical.<sup>3</sup> In Russian, *knig*, which shows genitive case, is understood like *de livres* in French (1a), as an expression that mandatorily appears under the scope of the negative operator: Anna did not buy any books. By contrast, *knigi* in accusative case, is interpreted as being out of the scope of negation (Babyonyshev 1997; Kagan 2013): there are (specific) books that Anna did not buy.

These data open the debate as to what extent French and Russian are similar. On the one hand, it should be pointed out that French *de* NPs appear to be much more

2. From now on we leave aside partitive Case in Basque (Etxeberria 2021) and Finnish (Kiparsky 1998; de Hoop 2002; McFadden 2004) which in the latter language largely depends on aspect.
3. See Le Bruyn (2010) for a study on indefinites headed by French *des* in comparison to *unos* in Spanish; Dobrovie-Sorin and Beyssade (2012) for a study on indefinites headed by *des/du/de la* in French vs. indefinites in English; and Dobrovie-Sorin (2021) for a study on *des* in French in comparison to bare nominals in Romance languages.

restricted than Russian GN both syntactically and semantically: *de* NPs cannot occur in subject position and cannot be licensed by operators other than negation (Müller 1991; Tovená et al. 2004, a.o.). In fact, both these expressions (French *de* NPs and Russian GN) have been attributed the status of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) (Kayne 1975; Pesetsky 1982). However, Harves (2002) and Kagan (2013) provide arguments against this proposal for Russian, which is the view further supported in this paper on the basis that not only indefinite objects but also subjects inthetic sentences, singular demonstratives and proper names can occur in genitive under the scope of non-veridical operators (Giannakidou 1997, 1998 and Kagan 2010, 2013).

For concreteness, in this paper, we address the following research question: in spite of the observed differences, can French *de* NPs and Russian non-canonical genitives receive a common formal analysis? We consider it legitimate to offer a unified analysis of the two constructions that coincide as being expressions of indefiniteness (as opposed to real partitives that involve quantification) licensed in non-veridical contexts (a very restricted subset of them in French).

Our starting hypothesis is that our unification analysis can be supported by the syntactic structure for indefinite expressions in Romance postulated in Espinal and Cyrino (2022a, 2022b). According to this approach a common derivation for bare plurals, mass nouns and *de*-phrases is proposed that consists of an abstract operator DE adjoined to a definite determiner that shifts an entity into a property-type expression. Second, we take for granted that languages have polarity items (usually, a subset of indefinite expressions) sensitive to non-veridical operators (Zwarts 1995, 1996, 1998; Giannakidou 1997 and ff.; Hoeksema 2012). Third, we assume, along with McFadden (2004), Calabrese (2008), Caha (2009), Zdrojewski (2023), Schäfer and Anagnostopoulou (in press), that not all manifestations of case should be dealt with within narrow syntax.

With this in mind, we postulate the hypotheses: H1 that Russian non-canonical genitives (that is, GN, genitive under the scope of intensional predicates and partitive genitive) and *de* nominals in French have a common syntactic structure with a dedicated abstract operator DE; H2 that *de* NPs and non-canonical genitives further reveal a semantic dependency between a determiner-like functional nominal projection ( $D_{\text{def}}$  in French, F in Russian) and (a subset of) non-veridical operators (negation in French, negation and intensional predicates in Russian); and H3 that *de* and non-canonical genitives are different Spell-outs of the abstract operator DE.

This paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we review the previous literature on French and Russian and discuss the unsolved problems raised by these analyses. In section 3, we consider that the presence of *de* NPs in French and non-canonical genitives in Russian cannot be derived by lexical case assignment, cannot be the output of structural case and cannot be either an instantiation of dependent case. In section 4, we develop a new unified analysis that accounts for the so-called partitive indefinites, the GN, the genitive of intensional verbs in Russian, as well as *de*-phrases in French. We first present a structure for indefinite expressions. Then we relate indefiniteness to non-veridicality and, finally, we postulate different morphophonological Spell-outs of the abstract DE operator by means of two distinct operations: concatenation of terminal words in French and concatenation plus low-

ering of subwords in Russian. Finally, in section 5, we introduce additional support for our analysis of the syntax-semantics dependency relationship here proposed, by (i) examining a subset of long weak definites in Romance languages, (ii) considering the similarities between genitive case and Direct Object Marking (DOM) in terms of post-syntactic Spell-out, and (iii) grounding our analysis on a broader view of morphophonological case as a reflection of a grammatical process of licensing different kinds of dependencies (Hinzen & Sheehan 2013; Roberts 2023).

## 2. The previous literature

In this section we present the main syntactic proposals that precede our study and try to unify the two phenomena here under consideration: *de* NPs in French and GN (which is the most paradigmatic case of non-canonical genitive) in Russian. The literature we will review, starting already in the late seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have in common the proposal that a null quantifier category Q or a quantity formal feature [+q] is responsible for the presence of a partitive-like or a genitive-like nominal expression. In Section 2.1 we discuss French *de*, in Section 2.2 we move to Russian GN, and finally in Section 2.3 we point out the most relevant issues raised by these proposals.

### 2.1. French

French, a language with overt determiners, only allows *de* nominals for narrow scope under negation, no matter whether the indefinite is a mass noun (3a) or a (plural or singular) count noun (3b,c).

- (3) a. Jean n'a pas gagné *d'argent*.  
 Jean NEG.has not won de.money  
 'Jean has not won (any) money.'
- b. Jean n'a pas trouvé *de livres*.  
 Jean NEG.has not found de books  
 'Jean hasn't found (any) books.'
- c. Il n'y a pas *de cheval* sur le chemin de Damas. (Florence Delay)  
 It NEG.LOC has not de horse on the way of Damas  
 'There aren't (any) horses in the way to Damas.'

Given these examples and the parallel between (4a,b), Kayne (1975, 1981) analyzes *de* nominals in (4b) as [ $\emptyset$ -*de*-articleless NPs] and postulates that the zero element is a null quantifier-like expression.

- (4) a. J'ai mange [[beaucoup] *de carottes*].  
 I.have eaten many de carrots  
 'I have eaten many carrots.'

- b. Je n'ai pas mangé [[Ø] *de carottes*].  
 I NEG.have not eaten de carrots  
 'I have not eaten any carrots.'

Similarly, Ihsane (2008: 164) suggests that there is an 'empty quantity' head, which is bound by a negative operator or a quantifier, making the *de* NP construction syntactically similar to a *beaucoup / combine / (très) peu / trop de* structure and semantically similar to an NPI, as shown in (5).

- (5) a. *beaucoup de pain / livres*                      Quantity                      *de*    N  
       much/many de bread/books
- b. *peu de pain / livres*                              Quantity                      *de*    N  
       little/few de bread/books
- c. *pas de pain / livres*                              *pas<sub>i</sub>*                      *ec<sub>i</sub>*                      *de*    N  
       not de bread/books

Notice, however, that the presence of an overt or a covert quantity is independent of the existence of a negative operator. This is clearly illustrated by means of the following example, which shows that *de carottes* is an indefinite expression complement of the weak quantifier *beaucoup*, not linked to *pas*.

- (6) Je n'ai *pas* mangé [[*beaucoup*] *de carottes*].  
 I NEG.have not eaten much de carrots  
 'I have not eaten a lot of carrots.'

More recently, Taraldsen (2019: 40), following a suggestion by Kayne (2002), has proposed for *de* NPs, (7a), as well as for *des* NPs, (7b), a null NUMBER/AMOUNT that represents <quantity> in some specifier position within the nominal domain higher than *de*.<sup>4</sup>

- (7) a. [ NUMBER/AMOUNT [ *de* [ NP ] ] ]  
       b. [ NUMBER/AMOUNT [ *de* [ les/le/la NP ] ] ]

Notice that all these analyses consider that *de* NPs, no matter whether they occur as a complement of an overt Q or in negative contexts, are partitive expressions. However, *bona fide* canonical / full partitive constructions convey a relationship between a subset, which is introduced by an indefinite quantifier, and a larger set or superset of individuals introduced by a definite DP. According to Barker (1998: 680), standard partitivity is characterized by the fact that "partitive nominal

4. A similar line of analysis is followed by Garzonio and Poletto (2020: 645, (34)), who assume that partitive objects under negation are a special type of partitive expression where sentential negation is the modifier of a silent AMOUNT/NUMBER head.

(i) [<sub>NEGp</sub> *pas*... [<sub>QP</sub> [ *pas* ] ] [<sub>Q°</sub> AMOUNT [<sub>KP</sub> *de* [<sub>DP</sub> *vin* ] ] ] ] ]

expressions have in their extension only proper subparts of the entity denoted by the NP object of the partitive *of*'. Recently, Espinal and Cyrino (2022b) have argued that indefinite *de* and pseudopartitive *de* correspond to one kind of structure that gives rise to indefiniteness, whereas canonical partitives correspond to a different structure in which a part-whole relationship is headed by a bi-relational functional head responsible for partitivity.

In other words, to our understanding the problem behind these syntactic proposals is two-fold. First, empirically it has not yet been demonstrated that the expressions in (3) convey a quantity meaning, unlike real partitives such as *certaines de vos amis* 'some of your friends'. In French *de* NPs introduce indefinite objects, like in other contemporary Romance languages (e.g., Italian) *de* introduces indefinite objects, indefinite subjects, as well as left-dislocated subjects and objects.<sup>5</sup> Second, theoretically, there is not enough justification for postulating a null or empty category conveying quantity dependent on the negative marker *pas*. The alternative approach we consider below is that *d'argent*, *de livres*, *de cheval*, *de carottes* are indefinite expressions that occur in object position of transitive verbs or in object position of weak quantifiers.

## 2.2. Russian

In Russian, a language with no articles, genitive appears to alternate with accusative and nominative mass and count nouns, both in object and in subject positions.<sup>6</sup>

- (8) a. Ja ne pil                      vodu.  
 I not drank.IMPERF water.ACC  
 'I didn't drink (the) water. / I wasn't drinking water.'
- b. Ja ne pil                      vody.  
 I not drank.IMPERF water.GEN  
 'I didn't drink (any) water.'                      (Kagan 2013: 5, ex. (9))

- (9) a. Otvet                      ne prišol.  
 answer.NOM.M.SG not arrived.M.SG  
 'The answer did not arrive.'
- b. *Otveta*                      ne prišlo.  
 answer.GEN.M.SG not arrived.N.SG  
 'No answer arrived.'                      (Kagan 2013: 6, ex. (10))

Several syntactic and semantic analyses have been proposed to account for the presence of genitive case.

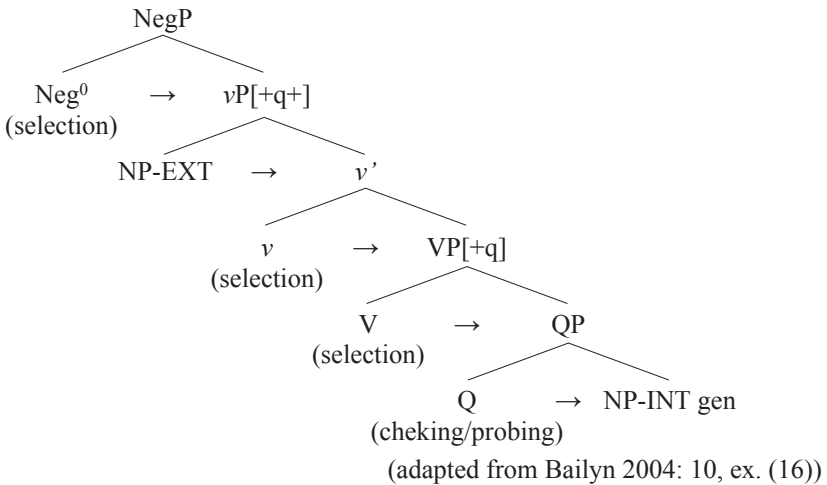
5. See also Espinal and Giusti (2024) for arguments that the determiner *de* and the clitic *ne* in languages such as Catalan and Italian are markers of indefiniteness, not markers of partitivity (i.e., quantification).
6. Although it is widely believed that, as a consequence of this alternation, GN is optional in Russian (e.g., Franks 1995), see Bailyn (1997), who argues that GN is obligatory on underlying direct objects.

Inspired by the literature on French, Pesetsky (1982) was the first to analyze the genitive marked NP in GN constructions as the complement of a phonologically null quantifier [ $_{QP_e}$ ] that is supposedly able to assign genitive case, just as phonologically overt quantifiers are assumed to do in Russian (Ionin & Matushansky 2006, and references therein). For him, negation does not license genitive but identifies the null quantifier which it c-commands. Notice that, as pointed out by Kagan (2013), this analysis basically addresses the genitive of quantity or partitive genitive phenomena and GN, but not the other subtypes of genitives that do not involve quantity and that appear under the scope of operators beyond the negative marker.

Building on Pesetsky’s work (see also Franks 1995), Pereltsvaig (1998) also proposes that a null quantifier is responsible for assigning genitive to internal arguments under sentential negation. For her, the null quantifier is a strict NPI, both syntactically and semantically, and it is only licensed by sentential negation.<sup>7</sup> To our understanding, this proposal, once again, lacks a justification for the need of a null quantifier to explain the presence of morphological genitive on nominals under the scope of negation; on the other hand, the fact that an item can be considered both a quantifier and a polarity item raises a serious puzzle for what has been generally argued for in the literature on negation (Déprez & Espinal 2020).

Also building on Pesetsky (1982)’s proposal, Bailyn (2004) postulates that  $Neg^0$  selects a verbal complex (v and V) with a [+q] feature, which in turn selects a QP object (rather than an NP object). It is the null head of that QP that checks for genitive case on its internal NP complement, as seen in the structure in (10). For Bailyn, instances of genitive involve a Q.

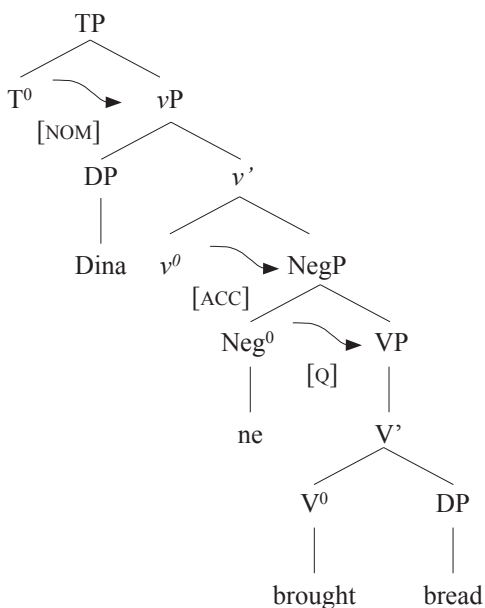
(10)



7. See Harves (2002) for a criticism of Pereltsvaig’s (1999) null quantifier q as being treated as an NPI.

Subsequent literature has also assumed (without questioning) the syntactic analyses that propose that some sort of quantification is involved in genitive assignment. In this perspective, for example, Matushansky (2010) assumes that genitive corresponds to the formal feature [Q] in Neg, which then assigns Genitive to a VP that has a semantically non-specific underlying object, as *bread* in (11).

(11)

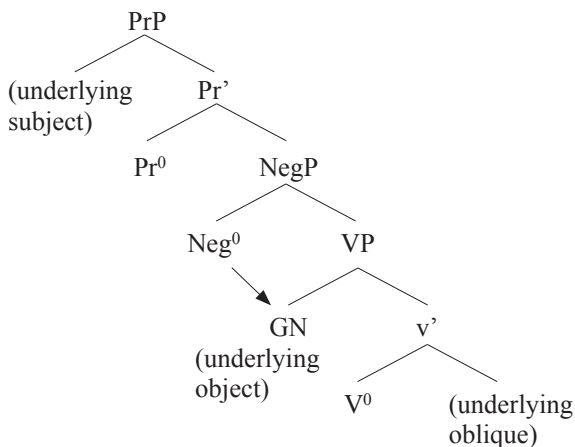


(adapted from Matushansky 2010: 27, ex. (17))

According to this author “[T]he presence of sentential negation introduces the feature [Q], which is realized as the genitive case marking [...]. In the absence of [Q] both objects and subjects receive their normal case-marking” (p. 27). Therefore, the special case-marking under negation needs additional morphological rules to derive the right output.

It is also worth to mention here Bailyn’s (1997) type of syntactic analysis, which takes GN as an obligatory configurational case in the context of a structure such as (12), where PrP stands for Predicational Phrase.

(12)



According to this analysis GN is assigned under government by Neg, which accounts for the most common distribution of GN, underlying objects, while it excludes transitive subjects, oblique objects, and deeply embedded elements. Baylin's analysis is also interesting because the GN particular kind of interpretation (i.e., existential or indefinite interpretation), is opposed to the nominative or accusative counterparts (which are individuated) by assuming that GN arguments are always part of the VP domain (Diesing 1992), i.e. the domain of existential closure.

As far as we know, no other alternative syntactic approach has been advanced in the literature on GN in Russian, and no questions have been raised with respect to the status of quantifiers in the analyses above.

### 2.3. *Unsolved puzzles raised by these analyses*

The analyses presented above raise some questions that remain to be answered: (i) why should the negative marker select (in a strong sense) or license (in a weak sense) a quantifier-like constituent? And (ii) why should a quantifier assign genitive (or any other) case to a nominal?

In relation to question (i), first, we have to consider that negation reverses the polarity of the sentence where it applies, and, in this sense, it is a semantic propositional operator (Horn 1989). As such, it should be considered to be included in the sentential projection, but under minimalist syntactic assumptions, it appears to be awkward to postulate that this negative operator should select an empty quantity/quantifier expression.

Second, although a negative marker, as the head of NegP (Pollock 1989; Ouhalla 1990), cannot be claimed to select the verbal complex it precedes or a QP object it may occur with, it may still compose with different types of nominal expressions to yield different sources of negative dependencies (which might

include polarity items and negative concord items). However, from both a syntactic and a semantic perspective, there is no evidence that negation contributes to quantification.

Therefore, in none in the above-mentioned studies, have we found any sort of explanatory basis for the assumption that the presence of sentential negation selects/licenses a quantificational constituent which is realized as *de* in French and as genitive case in Russian.

Concerning our second question, namely, why should a quantifier assign genitive case to a nominal expression, one must be reminded about the role of quantifiers in natural languages. From a semantic perspective, quantifiers are functions from sets (the denotation of the N it combines with) to generalized quantifiers (sets of sets) (Montague 1973). Quantifiers have been assumed to bind variables that have certain properties (the properties of the N and the V in the sentential domain). From a syntactic perspective, quantifiers are determiner-like expressions that specify nouns. However, in standard generative terms the relationship between negation and a nominal expression that might semantically depend on it and the relationship between Q and N is not one of case-assignment. As well-known in Case Theory (Chomsky 1981, 1986), case assigners are P, V, T, but neither D nor Q. Therefore, we conclude that, in spite of the empirical fact that in Russian many quantifiers are followed by genitive NPs and in French by *de* NPs, there is no theoretical and empirical justification for the assumption that a (null) quantifier or case assignment is involved in the structure of indefinite *de* phrases in French and GN nominals in Russian.

In the next section, we argue that Russian GN, the alleged genitive of indefinite quantity or the partitive genitive, as well as the so-called partitive *de* in French are not the output of case assignment operations in accordance with the standard operations that govern structural, non-structural or dependent case.

### 3. On Case

We have seen up to now that in French and Russian a special Vocabulary Item (*de* and *genitive*, respectively) marks an internal argument under the scope of negation. In this section, we discuss whether this Vocabulary Item is related to Case assignment, as classically understood in standard generative grammar.<sup>8</sup> We argue that *genitive* in the GN construction in Russian and the so-called partitive in *de*-phrases in French cannot be considered expressions of structural case, non-structural case, or dependent case.

Within the generative tradition, different types of cases, namely structural and non-structural, have been ascribed to different types of nominals, depending

8. Chomsky and Lasnik (1977), following an original idea by Vergnaud, considered that Case is present in nominals in the syntax, even if not morphologically realized in some languages, the so-called abstract Case, a syntactic feature whose value depends on the syntactic relation/position of the nominal in a sentence. See Schäfer and Anagnostopoulou (in press) for a thorough presentation on the development of the theory of Case and its implications for grammatical theory.

on their position in the structure (Chomsky 1981, 1986). The former is related to certain syntactic configurations in the vicinity of a *functional* category (TP, vP) responsible for the checking of the corresponding Case (nominative, accusative). Structural Case identifies the core grammatical relations (subject and object) configurationally. NPs marked with structural Case are assumed to follow A-movement in order to guarantee its Case-checking. Non-structural Case, on the other hand, has been related to the absence of specific functional projections responsible for checking. It has been argued that the non-structural Case is assigned/checked by lexical categories (V or P), and that it can be either inherent or lexical (Woolford 2006). Inherent Case has been related to thematic roles: ergative (agent) and dative (recipient/goal). In this respect genitive has been considered an inherent Case only when assigned by certain prepositions indicating source, goal, and possession. Lexical Case, on the other hand, is idiosyncratic, depending on lexical heads. In the minimalist framework (Chomsky 2000, 2001), both structural Case features and Agreement features interact: both undergo AGREE, an operation between probes (that is, the functional categories T/C, v) and goals. The probes bear uninterpretable and unvalued phi-features, but not Case features, and search for goals to check those features. NPs enter the derivation with valued phi-features but uninterpretable/unvalued Case features. Through the checking and valuation of the uninterpretable features of the probe, the unvalued Case feature of the goal receives a value, NOM or ACC, depending on whether the probe is T or v. In other words, the valuation and checking of the Case is mediated by a phi-AGREE operation with the probe.

Another more recent syntactic approach to Case, the so-called Dependency Case Theory (Marantz 1991; Baker 2015), considers the dependency of DPs in the clause as relating to different abstract or morphological Cases. In this sense, there is no ‘structural/non-structural’ distinction, but a dependency relation between DPs in different positions in the clause. ‘Dependent Case’ is the case assigned to one NP if there is a second NP in the same local domain. Marantz (1991) considers that accusative and ergative are dependent Cases because they both depend on a higher NP that has certain properties. Baker (2015), on the other hand, assumes that the relevant syntactic environment for dependent Case assignment/checking is not the position itself, but the existence of a locality domain determined by the notion of *phase* (Chomsky 2001).<sup>9</sup>

In what follows we argue that GN (and, by extension, the rest of non-canonical genitives) in Russian and the so-called partitive *de* nominals in French cannot be the expression of structural, non-structural or dependent Case.

First, as seen above, within generative grammar, structural Case is related to certain syntactic configurations in the vicinity of a functional category responsible for the checking of the corresponding Case. For example, the internal argument has an uninterpretable and unvalued Case feature that is checked by v, since this functional projection v bears [ucase:acc]. However, GN and the so-called par-

9. For Marantz (1991), the notion of dependent case is relevant in the PF component, whereas for Baker (2015) it is a syntactic notion based on c-command.

titive *de*-phrases, although applying to an internal argument, cannot qualify as structural Case, since neither genitive nor partitive are a proper Case feature of *v*. Additionally, structural Case is purely syntactic (or morphosyntactic) in nature with no link to semantic interpretation. But crucially, as we have advanced in Section 2.2 and will argue below, GN and *de*-phrases are not purely syntactic phenomena, since they are morphophonological markings associated with indefiniteness (so-called partitive genitive) and with semantic dependencies to various non-veridical operators (*de* NPs, GN, and irrealis genitive, more generally).<sup>10</sup>

Second, non-structural Case (inherent Case and lexical Case) has been considered in general terms not to be related to specific functional projections. First, inherent case is related to thematic relations (e.g. recipient, goal). It may be morphological or be assigned by an adposition, usually indicating source, location, instrument, goal, recipient, agent, etc. However, note that GN and *de*-phrases cannot be instances of inherent Case, since these expressions do not relate to any specific thematic role, or to any specific adposition.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, lexical Case is idiosyncratic, irregular, lexically selected by heads. In the literature on Russian cardinals have been claimed to be transparent to an operation such as Case-Assignment: the lower (adjectival) cardinals are said paucal, and the higher ones genitive (Ionin & Matushansky 2006, 2018). Similarly, overt and null quantifiers have been extensively claimed to assign genitive Case (genitive of quantification, Babby 1987; genitive for partitives, Franks 1995).

Lastly, as seen above, dependent Case approaches consider Case as the effect of a dependency relation between two DPs in different positions in the clause. However, GN and *de*-phrases, in our view, cannot be considered instantiations of dependent Case, since neither GN NPs nor *de* NPs depend on another DP in the clause; that is, there is no sensitivity to argument structure.<sup>12</sup>

10. Belletti (1988) analyzes existential constructions and unaccusative sentences with postverbal subjects, and she proposes that these postverbal nominals are assigned “Partitive Case”, which she considers as a type of inherent Case assigned by a *lexical* head in conjunction with a theta-role. In other words, what she proposes to be “Partitive Case” is not structural Case, but it is associated both with a structural position, namely, the internal argument position and with the fact that these postverbal subjects are indefinites, affected by the Definiteness Effect (see also Belletti & Bianchi 2016, for an overview of the proposal and an updated account in minimalist terms). However, notice that standard partitives select a definite DP complement and are disallowed in existential constructions, as shown in (i) for Spanish (see also Espinal & Cyrino 2022b: 185-186). This shows that, in fact, partitivity is not linked to the Definiteness Effect:

(i) \*Tras el atentado, hubo *algunas de las secuelas* (entre las víctimas).  
after the attack had some of the sequels among the victims

Given these considerations, we cannot subscribe to Belletti’s view of a ‘partitive/inherent’ Case for *de*-phrases, since, as we show in this paper, these expressions are dependent on the presence of negation and other non-veridicality operators, and they are not related to either unaccusativity or the Definiteness Effect.

11. As pointed out by Kagan (2013: 2) “the fact that with numerous verbs, its appearance <i.e. the appearance of non-canonical genitive [Authors]> is possible under negation but not in affirmative clauses suggests that it is not dependent on thematic role assignment”. In the end, Kagan also reaches the conclusion that non-canonical genitive is neither structural nor inherent.

12. However, see Sigurðsson and Šereikaitė (2023) for GN as dependent case in Lithuanian.

Given these issues in relation to the analysis of GN and *de*-phrases in terms of a syntactic Theory of Case, in the next section we approach a different view grounded both at the syntax-semantics and at the syntax-phonology interfaces. In this sense, we are inspired by semantic approaches to Case and also by recent proposals for treating morphological case as post-syntactic (applying at the PF-branch of the grammar, such as McFadden 2004, Calabrese 2008, Caha 2009 and Zdrojewski 2023, among others; see also the discussion in Schäfer & Anagnostopoulou, in press).

In our proposal, non-canonical genitives and *de*-phrases are the Spell-out at PF of indefinite DPs bound to a non-veridical operator at LF. This view relies on semantic approaches to Case (Butt & King 2005; Butt 2006; Kagan 2013, 2020), which point out the fact that morphological marking correlates with semantic properties (see also McFadden 2004). Under this view Case marking on a nominal reflects the semantic relation of a nominal to other constituents in the sentence. One example of semantic Case widely discussed in the literature is the Russian GN (Borschev & Partee 2002; Partee & Borschev 2002, among others; Kagan 2013), which most characteristically mark internal arguments of verbs, but their licensing crucially depends on a specific syntactic configuration, rather than on the presence of a particular lexical/functional head.<sup>13</sup> That is, Russian GN is a semantically conditioned Case. Kagan (2020) also observes that the assignment of semantic Case interrelates with certain ‘semantic characteristics’ that determine their use: in the case of GN, “indefiniteness, non-specificity, narrow scope and absence of existential entailment/presupposition” (Kagan 2020: 28).

The view the authors of this paper hold aligns with this kind of approach, since we defend that *de* in French and non-canonical genitive in Russian are two distinct morphological Spell-outs of a syntactic functional category that is responsible for indefiniteness in the nominal domain. Furthermore, we postulate for both languages an independent semantic dependency between a higher functional nominal projection and a non-veridical operator higher in the syntactic configuration.

#### 4. A new unified analysis

Our proposal circumvents the issues raised above by neither relying on concealed quantification, since this seems a stipulation with no empirical evidence, nor on case assignment, since it is also a stipulation that French partitive and Russian GN are assigned by either a functional or a lexical category.

13. Butt and King (2005) discuss other examples of semantically conditioned Case: (i) the alternation of overtly marked accusative objects with unmarked nominative objects in Turkish, which correlates with specific vs. non-specific interpretations (Enç 1991); (ii) the Finnish partitive, which is associated with aspectual notions such as (non)telicity and (un)boundedness (Kiparsky 1998; Huomo 2021); (iii) the alternation between Scottish Gaelic genitive and unmarked objects (Ramchand 1997), which correlates with aspectual affectedness; and (iv) the association of accusative case and affectedness in Hindi-Urdu (Butt 1998, and references therein). See also Etxeberria (2021: 338) for the claim that the Basque partitive determiner [-*(r)ik*] is a polarity element that only appears in polarity contexts.

The crucial point we want to draw attention to in this paper is that most of the nominal expressions involved in the constructions in (1)-(2) involve ‘indefiniteness’, a term broadly used in the literature in association with a number of not identical semantic properties, such as *lack of individuation*, *lack of specificity*, *property denotation*, *unbounded quantity*, *lack of presupposition of existence*, *lack of commitment to the existence of the referent within the field of perception of the observer*, etc. (for French, see Godard 2004, Carlier et al. 2013; for Russian, see Babby 1980, Borschev et al. 2008, Partee & Borschev 2008, Kagan 2013, a.o.).

The analysis that follows consists of postulating, on the one hand, a syntactically-driven approach to indefiniteness and a semantic dependency of indefinite nominal structures to non-veridicality. On the other hand, it consists of postulating a morphological case exponence of indefiniteness, negotiated post-syntactically.

#### 4.1. Indefiniteness

The first ingredient of our proposal consists in postulating a unified analysis for both French *de*-phrases and Russian non-canonical genitives (i.e., so-called partitive genitive, GN and intensional genitive) by extending Espinal and Cyrino’s (2022a) (from now on E&C) syntactic approach of indefinite expressions in Romance to include the phenomena under consideration in this paper.

In accordance with E&C, French *des/de la/du* nominals, like Romance bare plurals and bare mass nouns have a common source, whereby an abstract operator DE – semantically parallel to IDENT (Partee 1987)<sup>14</sup> – is adjoined to a definite determiner and shifts an entity into a property-type expression. In this sense, E&C follow Delfitto (1993), Storto (2003), Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016), among many others, who argue that French *des* NPs, like bare nominals, are interpreted as indefinite expressions with a common derivation. The present analysis further builds up on the proposal developed in Cyrino and Espinal (2020) (following previous work by Bouchard 2002, Dobrovie-Sorin 2012, a.o.), whereby the pluralizer in Romance is a modifier of a definite D only in the case of count nouns. See the data in (13a) and (14a) and the corresponding structures of the nominals in these examples.

(13) a. J’ai mangé *des* carottes.  
I.have eaten de.DEF.PL carrots  
‘I have eaten carrots.’

b. [<sub>D</sub> DE [<sub>D</sub> [iPLURALIZER: PL] [<sub>D</sub> D<sub>def</sub> *carotte* ]]]

(14) a. J’ai *de* l’argent.  
I.have de the.money  
‘I have money.’

b. [<sub>D</sub> DE [<sub>D</sub> D<sub>def</sub> *argent* ]]

14. DE is semantically parallel to IDENT in the sense that in an intensional system IDENT maps an entity onto the property of being that entity: IDENT(IOTA(P)) (Partee 1987).

This approach allows a unified syntactic analysis of weak quantifiers that select for indefinite DE structures, no matter whether *de* is overt at Spell-out (*beaucoup de carottes*) or not (*trois carottes*).<sup>15</sup>

(15) a. *beaucoup de carottes*  
 many de carrots  
 ‘many carrots’

b. [<sub>Q</sub> *beaucoup* [<sub>D</sub> DE [<sub>D</sub> [iPLURALIZER: PL] [<sub>D</sub> D<sub>def</sub> *carotte* ]]]]

(16) a. *trois carottes*  
 three carrots  
 ‘three carrots’

b. [<sub>Q</sub> *three* [<sub>D</sub> DE [<sub>D</sub> [iPLURALIZER: PL] [<sub>D</sub> D<sub>def</sub> *carotte* ]]]]

With the aim to provide a unified analysis of *de* nominals in French and non-canonical genitive nominals in Russian, for this language we make several hypotheses. First, we hypothesize (following Heim 2011, Šimik & Demian 2020, Seres & Borik 2021), that nominal expressions are indefinites by default which we understand as denoting properties.

Second, following Borik and Espinal’s (2020) study on numberless kinds in Russian on the one hand, and Pereltsvaig’s (2007) analysis of demonstratives and Kagan and Pereltsvaig’s (2014) study on (high, intermediate and low) adjectives in the nominal projection of Russian on the other, we hypothesize that just like in French (where articles and other determiners are overt), there is a functional layer in the structure of Russian nominals responsible for composing entity-type denoting expressions. We call this category F and abstain from defining the nature of this functional category. Semantically, F is a projection whose function is to convert a nominal expression into an argument type (cf. Longobardi 1994; Ramchand & Svenonius 2008). This function is similar to D in languages with articles, but it is unclear whether it should be associated with a determiner-like role in languages without articles. What is less controversial is that F turns properties of objects (the denotation of a Noun specified for Number) into object-denoting nominals, as postulated by the referenced papers above.

Third, we hypothesize that genitive in so-called partitive genitive, GN and intensional genitive is the morphological Spell-out of a functional projection in the F domain that turns entities back to properties.

15. Kayne (1975: 110 footnote 55, and 120) already postulates a structure that contains a covert marker *de* for the structures in (i). He also reports the existence of overt *de* NPs after numerals in colloquial varieties of French (Bauche 1951), as in (ii). See also Gerards and Stark (2021: 11).

(i) a. [<sub>NP</sub> une [ de fleur ]]  
 b. [<sub>NP</sub> des [ de fleurs ] rouges]

(ii) J’ai deux [ de bonnets ].  
 I have two de caps  
 ‘I have two caps.’

Consider the examples in (17a) and (18a) and the corresponding structures of the genitive nominal objects in these examples.<sup>16</sup>

(17) a. Ja kupil            tebe        *jablok*.  
 I bought.PERF you.DAT apples.GEN.PL  
 ‘I bought you (some) apples.’        (adapted from Kagan 2013: 3, ex. 2b))

b. [<sub>F</sub> DE [<sub>F</sub> F [ Num [*jabl-*] ]]]

(18) a. Ja vypil            *vody*.  
 I drank.PERF water.GEN  
 ‘I drank (some) water.’        (adapted from Kagan 2013: 3, ex. (1b))

b. [<sub>F</sub> DE [<sub>F</sub> F [ *vod-*] ]]

It follows from these structures that the so-called quantificational meaning that has been associated in the literature with the so-called partitive genitive (Franks 1995), licensed on objects of certain perfective verbs (Kagan 2013), is not an entailment but an implication, since the structures here postulated basically encode indefiniteness (not quantification), and the (small) quantity meaning has a context-dependent component.

With this in mind, let us now move to the second piece of our analysis, which accounts for the fact that French *de*-phrases cannot occur in external subject position: as NPIs can only occur under the scope of negation. By contrast, Russian non-canonical genitive objects and genitive derived subjects can occur under the scope of non-veridical operators in various syntactic positions.

#### 4.2. Non-veridicality

The second ingredient of our analysis consists in postulating that indefinite nominal structures may further occur under the scope of some non-veridical operators (Zwarts 1995; Giannakidou 1997, 1998, 1999).<sup>17</sup> In this section, we consider French *de* nominals and Russian canonical genitives, and we bring additional evidence for polar sensitivity of a functional D/F projection to a negative (or some other non-veridical) operator.

16. It follows from this proposal that nominative and accusative nominals will not have DE in their structure. We do not have any evidence for considering Number a modifying feature in Russian, therefore we assume from previous studies on Russian a morphosyntactic functional projection Num above N (see Kagan & Pereltsvaig 2014, Borik & Espinal 2020, among others).

17. Consider the definitions in (i), which relate veridicality to truth entailment.

- (i) Let F be a unary sentential operator. The following statements hold:
- a. F is veridical iff  $Fp \rightarrow p$  is logically valid;
  - b. F is nonveridical iff  $Fp \not\rightarrow p$ ; and
  - c. F is antiveridical iff  $Fp \rightarrow \neg p$

(adapted from Giannakidou & Mari 2018: 94, (25))

#### 4.2.1. French *de* nominals

Our analysis for French *de* nominals of the sort illustrated in (1a), *Jean n'a pas trouvé de livres* 'Jean hasn't found (any) books', beyond postulating a syntactic structure for indefinite expressions that unifies *de livres* with *des livres*, further builds on Kayne's (1975) proposal that *de* NPs are NPIs semantically dependent on an antiveridical operator. Two main phenomena support this claim. First, *de* NPs can occur neither in subject position nor in fragment answers, (19a) and (20Ba) (exactly like polarity sensitive items *qui/quoi que ce soit* 'anyone, anything', Tovená et al. 2004), whereas negative quantifiers and negative concord items are legitimate out of the scope of negation, (19b) and (20Bb).<sup>18</sup>

- (19) a. \**De trains* n'arrivent.  
 de trains NEG.arrive
- b. *Aucun train* n'arrive.  
 no train NEG.arrive  
 'No trains arrive.'
- (20) A. *Qui* a envoyé la lettre?  
 who has sent the letter  
 'Who sent the letter?'
- B. a. \*{*De personne, Qui que ce soit*}  
 de person anybody
- b. *Personne*.  
 person  
 'Nobody.'

The second argument is that *de* NPs, in contrast to *des / de la / du* indefinites, cannot take local narrow scope with respect to non-veridical operators other than negation. Thus, *de* NPs are ungrammatical in the context of a conditional or a modal operator.

18. This is similar to what is observed in English with *any* polarity items and negative quantifiers.
- (i) a. \*Any trains didn't arrive.  
 b. No trains arrived.
- (ii) A. Who sent the letter?  
 B. a. \*Anybody.  
 b. Nobody.

French *de* NPs, like English *any* NPs are excluded from surfacing higher than their negative licenser. This is the case because in both languages negative quantifiers (and, to a lesser extent, constituent negated polarity items such as *not anybody / not anything* in English) are grammaticalized in subject position. See Etxeberria et al. (2024) for a detailed description of the limits between polarity sensitivity, negative polarity and negative concord in a significant number of natural languages.

- (21) a. Si quoi que ce soit vous dérange, faites-le nous savoir.  
 if anything you bothers make.it us know  
 ‘If anything bothers you, let us know it.’ (Tovena et al. 2004: 348, ex. 27c)
- b. \*Si *de bruit* vous dérange, faites-le nous savoir.  
 if de noise you bothers make.it us know
- (22) a. Jean doit lire des romans.  
 Jean must read des novels  
 ‘Jean must read some novels.’ (Dobrovie-Sorin 2021: 190, ex. (4))
- b. \*Jean doit lire *de romans*.  
 Jean must read de novels

We take NPIs as a subtype of polarity sensitive items (Zwarts 1995, 1996, 1998; Giannakidou 1997, ff; Hoeksema 2012; among others), analyzed as variables carrying a polarity sensitive formal feature  $[+\sigma]$  according to Espinal & Tubau (2016) that is semantically dependent on a  $\sigma$ -operator (cf. Chierchia 2006) adjoined to a c-commanding negative operator.<sup>19</sup> Thus, our analysis of French *de*-phrases relies on the assumption that the definite article under the scope of the DE operator may be not only covert, as postulated also for indefinite bare plurals in Romance (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016; E&C 2022a), but it may also be bound to negation. Consider for (23a) the relevant structure in (23b), where  $D_{\text{def}[+\sigma]}$  is c-commanded by *pas*  $^{\sigma}$ .

- (23) a. Je n’ai pas mangé *de carottes*.  
 I NEG.have not eaten de carrots  
 ‘I have not eaten any carrots.’
- b. [*pas*  $^{\sigma}$ ... [ $D_{\text{DE}}$  [ $D_{\text{IPLURALIZER: PL}}$ ] [ $D_{\text{def}[+\sigma]}$  *carotte* ]]]

Note that if DE is postulated to be an operator that cancels definiteness, as argued in section 4.1, DE itself cannot be bound to Neg, since both DE and Neg are operators. Alternatively, one could imagine that the pluralizer should be the feature sensitive to negation. However, this cannot be the case either, since mass nouns, which do not have morphosyntactic number, show exactly the same contrast illustrated by bare plurals, as illustrated in (24) and (25).

19. Chierchia (2006) deserves the original idea that an expression may be inherently characterized with a semantically strong feature  $[+\sigma]$  (under the idea that scalar items that carry this feature activate alternatives within smaller domains). We use here the term in a much weaker sense, by aligning with Espinal and Cyrino’s (2017) hypothesis that the definite article that occurs in so-called expletive definites and long weak definites in Romance is a polar syntactic item that encodes a weak bound reading: “Being polar means that its meaning is dependent on and is sensitive to another constituent present in a c-commanding position in the clause” (p. 16-17).

- (24) a. \*Elle a mangé *de carottes* cette année.  
 she has eaten de carrots this year (Kayne 1975: 29, ex. (58a))
- b. Elle n'a pas mangé *de carottes*.  
 she NEG.has not eaten de carrots  
 'She did not eat (any) carrots.' (Kayne 1975: 30, ex. (63a))
- (25) a. \*Il a gagné *d'argent*.  
 he has won de.money (Kayne 1975: 29, ex. (58b))
- b. Il n'a pas pu gagné *d'argent*.  
 he NEG.has not be able won de.money  
 'He was not able to win (any) money.' (Kayne 1975: 30, ex. (63b))

Therefore, we are left with the proposal that in French *de*-NPIs, it is the covert  $D_{\text{def}}$  that has a formal feature sensitive to the negative head, as represented in (23b). As a result of this dependency,  $D_{\text{def}}$  is predicted to be non-referential and to lack presupposition of existence and uniqueness.

#### 4.2.2. Russian non-canonical genitives

Pursuing a unified analysis of *de* nominals and non-canonical genitive nominals in Russian, we account for the meaning of (26a) by postulating the structure in (26b) where F is a c-commanded (definite) functional projection that bears a  $[+\sigma]$  feature and is bound by negation. In this structure the feature  $[+\sigma]$  on F is responsible for the NPI status of GN, whereas DE is responsible for the indefinite property-type interpretation of the nominal expression in morphological genitive form.

- (26) a. Ja ne pisala *pisem*.  
 I not wrote.IMPERF letter.GEN.PL  
 'I did not write (any) letters.'
- b. [ $ne^{\sigma} \dots$  [ $_F$  DE [ $_F$  F $_{[+\sigma]}$  [Num [*pis'm-*] ]]]]

Moreover, we would now like to further extend this analysis to the so-called irrealis genitive in Russian (an idea initially put forward by Kagan 2013), which puts together the GN illustrated in (27a) with the genitive of intensionality in (27b). What these examples have in common is that the internal argument that appears to be sensitive either to the negative marker or to the intensional predicate is finally Spelled-out in a genitive morphological form.<sup>20</sup>

20. Kagan (2013: 92, table 5.1) lists the following intensional verbs that license genitive case: *xotet'* 'want', *želat'* 'wish', *žaždat'* 'thirst for', *trebovat'* 'demand', *prosit'* 'ask for', *ždat'* 'wait', *oždat'* 'wait, expect', *iskat'* 'look for, seek', *izbegat'* 'avoid', *zasluživat'* 'deserve', *stoit'* 'cost, be worth', *bojat'sja* 'be afraid of'.



- (31) Ja ne pisala *pis'ma*.  
 I not wrote.IMPERF letter.GEN.SG  
 'I did not write any letter.' (Peteghem & Paykin 2013: 91, ex. (78a))

Even proper names may appear in a highly restricted set of environments in the genitive form, especially in the case of derived subjects, as in existential sentences and passives of a perception predicate. See the two examples in (32).

- (32) a. *Maši* ne bylo doma.  
 Maša.GEN not was home  
 'Maša was not at home.' (Harves 2002: 46, ex. (43a))
- b. *Maši* ne vidno.  
 Maša.GEN not seen  
 'Maša can't be seen.' (Kagan 2013: 127, ex. (14b))

We would like to account for the meaning of these sentences, in which the genitive subject is an internal argument of an unaccusative construction, by following an analysis similar to the one provided for previous examples. Therefore, first we account for genitive *Maši* in (32) by postulating that the nominal structure of the proper name is under the scope of an operator DE, which is ultimately responsible for its morphophonological Spell-out.

Second, since this nominal expression is under the scope of negation the meaning of sentence (32a) conveys lack of commitment to existence of the individual called Maša in a particular spatio-temporal location.<sup>21</sup> In other words, our analysis of non-canonical genitive arguments predicts that *Maši* is a property-denoting expression (Partee 1987, Zimmermann 1993, Matushansky 2008 and Kagan 2013) because it has undergone a semantic shift to a property, as triggered by DE. Furthermore, our analysis also predicts that – although the referent of the proper name might be ultimately presupposed to exist – the interpretation of a sentence such as (32b) be that Maša is not present within the field of perception of the speaker (Partee & Borschev 2008; Kagan 2013), and this is due to the semantic dependency of the proper name with respect to negation. Accordingly, we postulate for (32) a partial structure of the sort represented in (33).<sup>22</sup>

- (33) [ $ne^{\sigma} \dots [_{F} DE [_{F} F_{[+\sigma]} [Maš- ]]]]$

21. Interestingly, a sentence such as (32a) has been argued to contrast with a sentence with constituent negation such as (i), in which *Maša* in nominative case is interpreted as the topic of the sentence and contrastive focus applies on *doma* 'home'. This sentence commits the speaker to Maša's presence in the relevant location.

(i) *Maša* ne byla doma a u menja.  
 Maša.NOM not was home but at me.GEN  
 'Maša wasn't at home but at my place.' (Harves 2002: 46, ex. (43b) and fn. 16)

22. The functional projection F over proper names follows those analyses that postulate D in the structure of proper names in Romance (Longobardi 1994, among others).

### 4.2.3. Long distance licensing

Our analysis of French *de*-phrases and Russian irrealis genitive in terms of polar sensitivity of a functional D/F projection to a negative (or some other non-veridical) operator finds an additional support when we consider the fact that these expressions are licensed long-distance within a transparent syntactic context (that is, infinitives and subjunctives) as expected for NPIs, although this possibility appears to be rare in Russian and exceptional in French. In this respect, even though Arkadiev (2016: 71) acknowledges that “non-local GN in Russian is largely obsolete” (in comparison to other Baltic, Slavic, and Baltic-Finnic languages), Brown and Franks (1995: 254-258) provide examples that show that GN “must be able to occur at some syntactic distance but still be reducible to a purely local relationship” (p. 255), such as in control contexts.<sup>23</sup>

- (34) a. Vovka ne ljubil čitat' *knig*.  
 Vovka not liked read books.GEN  
 ‘Vovka didn’t like to read books.’ (Brown & Franks 1995: 254, ex. (27a))
- b. Ljudi ne xotjat videt' *neprikladnoj real'nosti faktov*...  
 people not want see unattractive.GEN.SG reality.GEN.SG fact.GEN.PL  
 ‘People do not want to see the unattractive reality of the facts...’  
 (Arkadiev 2016: 71, ex. 107; *apud* <<https://ruscorpora.ru/en>>)

Interestingly, French, a language that requires *des*-phrases (a so-called positive polarity item, Dobrovie-Sorin 2021) and not *de*-phrases in the context of intentional verbs, still licenses *de* nominals under the scope of a negative marker in long-distance contexts on very few occasions. See Kayne’s (1975) example (35) and the contrast between the pair of examples in (36).<sup>24</sup>

- (35) Elle n’a pas réussi à trouver *de cheval*.  
 she NEG.has not managed to find de horse  
 ‘She didn’t manage to find any horse.’ (Kayne 1975: 30, ex. (63c))
- (36) a. Jean a échoué à planter (*des / \*d’*) *arbres* dans son jardin  
 Jean has failed to plant de trees in his garden
- b. Jean n’a pas réussi à planter (*des / d’*) *arbres* dans son  
 Jean NEG.has not succeeded to plant de trees in his  
 jardin.  
 garden  
 ‘Jean has not manage to plant trees in his garden.’

Examples (35) and (36b), which contains *ne pas réussir* followed by an infinitive clause, allows *de*-phrases in internal argument position, whereas (36a), which

23. See Picallo (1984, 1985), Tsoulas (1994, 1995), Roussou (2010), among many others, on the transparent nature of subjunctive and infinitive complements.

24. We thank C. Beyssade (p.c.) for this contrast and pair of examples.

contains the synonymous verb *échouer*, does not, thus illustrating the exceptionality of *de*-phrases in long-distance licensing in this language.

Likewise, as expected, *de*-phrases may be licensed under the scope of negation within a subordinate clause in the subjunctive mood.

- (37) Je ne veux pas que tu lises *de romans policiers*.  
 I NEG want not that you read.SUBJ de novels detective  
 'I don't want that you read detective novels.'

(adapted from Taraldsen 2019: footnote 22)

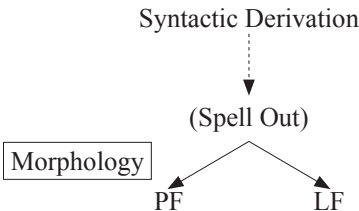
To sum up, the formal analysis presented in this section for non-veridical dependencies together with the formal analysis of indefiniteness in section 4.1 provides support for Kagan's proposal that partitive genitive, for which we postulate an indefinite structure, is different from irrealis genitive. We have formalized this idea by proposing that only in those sentences for which Kagan postulates an irrealis genitive a semantic dependency additionally takes place between a functional nominal projection (F in Russian, D in French) and a non-veridical sentential operator. The indefinite DE operator is responsible for notions that have been associated with indefiniteness in the literature: lack of individuation, lack of specificity, property denotation and unbounded quantity. By contrast, the semantic dependency to a non-veridical operator is responsible for meaning components such as lack of commitment to the existence of the referent.

In the next section we deal with DE at Spell-out.

#### 4.3. On post-syntactic Spell-out

The third ingredient of our proposal for *de* nominals in French and (irrealis) genitive in Russian is the hypothesis that both *de* and genitive are morphophonological realizations of DE. Following the Distributed Morphology (DM) idea that the case algorithm applies after Spell-out, at the PF-branch (see the model of grammar in (38) and Schäfer & Anagnostopoulou in press: 16), we account for the different linearization of syntactic terminals within a Spell-out domain by means of either one of these two operations: the concatenation of words (in French) or the concatenation plus lowering of subwords (in Russian).

#### (38) The Grammar



(Embick & Noyer 2007: 292, ex. (1))

In this model, the structures generated by narrow syntax additionally undergo further operations which will determine their pronunciation and interpretation. Syntax generates structures and dependencies, and morphology provides the corresponding exponents.

Assuming such a framework, we propose that genitive in Russian and *de* nominals in French are the PF morphophonological expressions of syntactic terminals involving an indefinite structure. More precisely, genitive in Russian and *de* in French are the Spell-out of the abstract operator *DE*.

We follow Embick and Noyer (2001) and Embick (2007)'s DM approach, according to which, by hypothesis "syntactic terminals that are not sisters are unordered with respect to each other, and require an algorithm of linearization in order to establish a total order among all terminals within a linearization domain (henceforth, a Spell-out domain, often identified as coincident with the minimalist syntax concept of a phase)" (Nevins 2012: 4). An operation of *concatenation* combines syntactic terminals to form words, while the operation of *lowering* is a specific morphological operation that is often related to the incorporation of features or elements from a head into its complement. In other words, *concatenation* is a core grammatical process in languages, while *lowering* is a *post-syntactic operation of movement* where a syntactic terminal, typically a head, is "lowered" to become a part of the internal structure of the word or phrase. In order to explain the different ordering of exponents of *DE* (*de* in French and genitive in Russian) in relation to the N, we assume the proposal of different operations for the formation of morpho-syntactic M-words and subwords advanced by Embick (2007).<sup>25</sup>

Concatenation of terminal nodes is part of the linearization procedure that produces statements like *de\*n*, thus creating an adjacency relation between two M-words in the grammar of French, since linearization concatenates M-words in this case. In (39b) we have the concatenation of two M-words in French, [<sub>X</sub> *de*], which is the vocabulary item corresponding to *DE*, and [<sub>X</sub> *livres*], which corresponds to [<sub>D</sub> [IPLURALIZER: PL] [<sub>D</sub> D<sub>def</sub> *livre* ]]. In (39c) we have the PF simplified representation.

(39) a. Jean n'a pas trouvé *de livres*.  
 Jean NEG.has not found *de* books  
 'Jean hasn't found (any) books.'

b. concatenation: NEG... [<sub>XP</sub> [<sub>X</sub> *DE* [<sub>X</sub> *livres*]]]

c. PF: *de livres*

25. According to Embick (2007: 11), M-words and subwords are defined as:

- (i) A node *X* is a *Morphosyntactic Word* (M-Word) iff *X* is the highest zero-level projection of *X* (cf. Chomsky (1995: 245) " $H^{0max}$ ")
- (ii) *X* is a *Subword* iff *X* is a terminal node in an M-Word (i.e., a bundle of features).

According to Embick and Noyer (2001), M-words and subwords are the basic atoms of postsyntactic movement operations.

On the other hand, an operation of lowering – by means of which a head lowers to the head of a complement – yields a concatenation of subwords like  $n \oplus_{\text{GEN}}$  in the grammar of Russian, thus creating an adjacency relation within complex heads.<sup>26</sup> An example is provided for a sentence as (40a) in Russian. In (40b), we have two subwords, since the feature bundle for DE (spelled out as the bound morpheme GEN) and the feature bundle for ‘water’ are merged in a complex M-word; (40c) represents the lowering operation yielding the PF representation for *vody* in (40d).

- (40) a. Ja ne pil *vody*.  
 I not drank.IMPERF water.GEN  
 ‘I didn’t drink (any) water.’
- b. concatenation: NEG... [<sub>X</sub> DE [<sub>X</sub> vod ]]
- c. lowering: NEG... [<sub>X</sub> [<sub>X</sub> vod  $\oplus_{\text{DE}}$  ]]
- d. PF: *ne...vod-y*

In accordance with this framework, it is only at the last stage of the mapping from syntax to phonology (Nevins 2012; i.e. at the stage of exponence, called “allomorph selection” or “Vocabulary Insertion”), that the right vocabulary items (*de* in French or *genitive* in Russian) will be inserted for each language. Since LF is blind to the different exponents in each language, both French and Russian have similar LF interpretations for the expression of indefinites, but they have different morphophonological exponents at the time of Vocabulary Insertion.

To sum up, in this section, we have proposed a new analysis for French *de* nominals and Russian non-canonical genitive that relies on a specific syntactic structure for indefiniteness, on a semantic dependency to non-veridicality and on different postsyntactic operations.

## 5. Further discussion

In this final section we aim to introduce additional and independent support for our analysis.

### 5.1. On long weak definites with a definite article bound to negation

First, we support the NPI status of *de* nominals in French, according to which a polarity dependency takes place between a determiner-like functional nominal projection and a negative operator, by considering the case of a subset of long weak definites that occur under the scope of negation.<sup>27</sup>

26. We are aware of the fact that the head noun can be modified by prenominal adjectives in French as well as of the fact that prenominal adjectives and demonstratives may acquire genitive morphology in Russian. In this case, we assume that genitive on the adjective or on the demonstrative is the output of a morphophonological operation of agreement that also takes place in the Spell-out domain.
27. Long weak definites such as those exemplified in (i) (Poesio 1994; Barker 2005) denote non-uniqueness, have a restricted distribution to postverbal position, usually occur with relational

To support this approach, consider the Catalan negative sentences in (41), which show that the overt definite article in object position co-occurs with an additional postverbal polarity item.<sup>28</sup> What is interesting about these examples is that the overt definite DPs *la cama* ‘the leg’ and *la pel·lícula* ‘the movie’ not only do not prevent *cap* ‘any’ in the possessor PP from being bound to the negative marker, but they may themselves become bound to negation (unless they have a unique reference, as one of the English glosses illustrates).

- (41) a. *No enguixaré la cama de cap jugador.*  
 not plaster.FUT the leg of any player  
 ‘I won’t plaster the/any leg of any player.’
- b. *No van veure la pel·lícula de cap director argentí.*  
 not PAST watch the movie of any director Argentinian  
 ‘They did not watch the/any movie of any Argentinian director.’
- (Espinal & Cyrino 2017: 7, exs. (13))

These examples show that overt definite NPs may have a narrow scope interpretation in a subset of non-veridical contexts (such as in conditional, interrogative and negative environments) and, therefore, that the definite article may have a polarity status. This is made explicit by means of the following glosses: ‘I won’t plaster *any* leg of *any* player’ and ‘They did not watch *any* movie of *any* Argentinian director’.

More relevant for our purposes is the hypothesis that an appropriate syntactic analysis for explaining the bound reading of the definite article in *la cama* ‘the leg’ and *la pel·lícula* ‘the movie’ requires postulating that the definite article in Romance comes in two variants: a referentially unique variant (to be semantically translated by means of the iota operator, Partee 1987) and a polarity variant (to be formally characterized by what Espinal & Cyrino 2017 call an inherent [+ $\sigma$ ] feature, which is semantically translated by an existential operator. Following this approach the definite article of long weak definites shares a syntactic analysis of indefinite polarity items, inherently characterized as [+ $\sigma$ ]. This abstract feature is conceived of as an uninterpretable feature that needs to be syntactically checked by an interpretable abstract freezing operator  $\sigma$  attached to a clausal node. The

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nouns and with a PP expressing the possessor, and manifest narrow scope with respect to other operators.

(i) a. I usually had breakfast at *the corner of a major intersection*. (Poesio 1994: 283, ex. (4c))

b. The baby’s full-developed hand wrapped itself around *the finger of the surgeon*. (Barker 2005: 96, ex. (15))

28. For our current purposes we keep that Catalan *cap* in (43) is a polarity item. See Espinal and Llop (2022) for discussion that items such as *ningú* ‘anybody, n-body’, *cap* ‘any, no’, *res* ‘anything, n-thing’, *gens* ‘anything, n-thing’, etc., come in two series, as polarity items and as negative concord items. The difference between the two series in Catalan is not related to prosody (as it is the case in Greek; Giannakidou 1997, 1998, 2006, a.o.) but to a different syntactic distribution.

output of this binding relationship is that both *la* and *cap* are bound to the negative operator thus licensing the weak reading of the definite article.<sup>29</sup>

- (42) a.  $No^\sigma \text{ van veure } [[_{DP} [_{D [+σ]} \text{ cap } ] \text{ director argentí}] [_{DP} [_{D [+σ]} \text{ la } ] \text{ pel·lícula } ]]$   
 b.  $\neg\exists\langle x,y,e \rangle [ \text{watched}(e) \wedge \text{Agent}(e)=\text{they} \wedge \text{Theme}(e)=y \wedge \text{movie}(y) \wedge \text{Argentinian\_director}(x) \wedge R_{\text{HAVE}}(x,y) ]$

Modern French data such as the examples in (43) also illustrate that the negative expression *aucun* ‘no’ may license a bound reading for the definite article at the time of the derivation when the possessor c-commands the possessee. Therefore, parallel to the structure and meaning we have presented in (42), the relevant structure for (43b) is given in (44), the only difference here being that - in the absence of the negative marker *pas* - the  $\sigma$  operator is attached to the negative quantificational determiner *aucun*.<sup>30</sup>

- (43) a. Je ne plâtrerais la jambe d’aucun joueur.  
 I NEG plaster.FUT the leg of.no player  
 ‘I wan’t plater the/any leg of any player.’  
 b. Ils n’ont vu le film d’aucun réalisateur argentin.  
 they NEG.have watched the movie of.no director Argentinian  
 ‘They did not watch the/any movie of any Argentinian director.’

- (44) a.  $Ils \text{ n’ont vu } [[_{DP} [_{D} \text{ aucun}]^\sigma \text{ réalisateur argentin}] [_{DP} [_{D [+σ]} \text{ le } ] \text{ film } ]]$

This analysis of long weak definites in Catalan and French negative sentences gives further evidence for our proposal in section 4.2, where we argued that French *de* NPs and Russian irrealis genitive are analyzed by means of a polarity sensitive [+σ] feature on D or F, with the proviso that this formal feature must be frozen by a  $\sigma$  operator adjoined to a non-veridical operator.

Overall, the data in this section provides independent evidence for our analysis that postulates that a functional category  $D_{\text{def}}$  is bound to a non-veridical operator, namely the antimorphic negative operator.

29. A syntactic analysis of this bound reading consists in postulating (following Kayne 1993, 2000) that at the point where the derivation of a long weak definite starts the possessor c-commands the possessee, but the possessee is moved to Spec,PP after the merger of a possessive preposition *de*. Consider the derivation in (i).

- (i) a.  $no \dots [[\text{cap director argentí}] [\text{la pel·lícula}]] \rightarrow \text{merger of } de$   
 b.  $no \dots [de [[\text{cap director argentí}] [\text{la pel·lícula}]]] \rightarrow \text{movement of the possessee}$   
 c.  $no \dots [[\text{la pel·lícula}] de [[\text{cap director argentí}]]]$

30. Recall that *ne* has just been considered a scope marker in the literature on French (Corblin et al. 2004; Godard 2004).

### 5.2. *On DOM and GN*

The second piece of support for our analysis comes from the phenomenon of DOM, whereby the direct object of certain languages (e.g., Spanish, Romanian, Turkish, Hebrew, among others) has a special mark depending on a number of factors: definiteness, specificity, animacy, higher degree of individuation.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, Kagan (2020) already compares the existence of DOM in several languages to Balto-Slavic GN, since in the latter, genitive marking on objects – as we have seen in this paper – is sensitive to properties related to (in)definiteness. She observes that both the genitive in these languages and unmarked objects in DOM languages are less individuated than their accusative counterparts.

The analysis in section 4.3, whereby we have argued that different morphophonological expressions of indefiniteness are the result of post-syntactic operations, also finds support in recent syntactic proposals for DOM in the literature (Zdrojewski 2023). Analyzing DOM in RioPlatense Spanish in a DM framework, Zdrojewski proposes that the conditions for Vocabulary Insertion make reference to two properties: (i) certain inherent characteristics of the nominal (animacy); and (ii) the syntactic configuration in which the nominal is merged. Thus, he proposes that in Morphology, an insertion rule introduces a node if the direct object is human. This node gets the [+INTERPRETATION] feature (associated with definiteness/specificity). Once inserted in the derivation, the node receives the exponent *a*. In this sense, his formal analysis for DOM is close to the one we offer both for French *de* and Russian non-canonical genitive and brings out the similarities between these phenomena.

### 5.3. *On morphophonological case as a way of marking dependencies*

The third piece of support for our analysis is theoretically grounded. Recall that in this paper we align with the view that morphophonological case is just one way of marking certain kinds of dependencies, a view that has also been proposed by Hinzen and Sheehan (2013) and Roberts (2023), among others. In their work, the status of case in linguistic theory is reconsidered and shifted to the view that it might not have a role in narrow syntax.<sup>32</sup>

31. An example of DOM is seen in the contrast in (i), from Spanish, where an animate (specific) nominal in object position is introduced by a marker *a* (Leonetti 2004; Fábregas 2013, a.o.).

(i) a. Juan vio *\*(a)* {la niña, María}.

Juan saw DOM the girl María

‘Juan saw {the girl, María}.’

b. Juan vio *\*(a)* el coche.

Juan saw DOM the car.

32. In fact, Roberts (2023) discusses the fact that although the majority of Indo-European languages have morphological case to some extent, as is the case of some French pronouns and Russian nominals, there are other languages that lack the realization of case. He reports the findings of Sheehan and van der Wal (2018), who investigated a range of typologically unrelated languages which lack morphological case. These authors found out that these languages do not have a free distribution of NPs, but that some restrictions do occur. For example, in Zulu, argumentless nominals

From this perspective, Hinzen and Sheehan (2013: 204, 206) develop a concept of what a grammatical organization entails in full. They consider ‘case’ as a term used to indicate “a morphological phenomenon that translates syntactic patterns into morphophonological terms”. Case occurs in different domains, as an inherently aspect of ‘grammatical semantics’, that is, of how words or parts of words implement grammatical functions. Under this view (see also Section 3, above), these authors entertain the idea that syntactic parameters might be reformulated in terms of ‘PF-parameters’, which would affect the externalization of language, by means of post-syntactic operations (which include linearization and allomorph selection, among others), but also – we would say – in terms of LF operations that guarantee the right sort of semantic dependencies among syntactic constituents (Kagan 2013; Espinal & Cyrino 2017).

Similarly, we have argued that the NPs here under investigation (French *de* nominals and Russian non-canonical genitives) show a morphophonological marking that is the Spell-out of an abstract syntactic category responsible for indefiniteness. Furthermore, the structure postulated for indefinite expressions shows semantic dependencies that have LF effects and specific realizations at PF.

## 6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have shown that the parallel between *de*-nominals in French and non-canonical genitive in Russian does not rely on quantification but on indefiniteness, for which we postulated a uniform syntactic analysis. The syntactic structure here postulated, which relies on an abstract  $D_E$  operator that encodes a type-shifting from  $\langle e \rangle$  to  $\langle e, t \rangle$  on top of a functional  $D_{def}/F$  projection, accounts for the so-called indefinite genitive or partitive genitive as well as for semantic meanings associated with indefinite expressions, including lack of individuation, lack of specificity, property-denotation and unbounded quantity.

We have further argued that, when these indefinite structures are dependent on a non-veridical operator, the  $D_{def}/F$  projection is semantically dependent on the highest sentential operator by means of a formal relationship we have analyzed in terms of  $Op^\sigma \dots \{D_{def}^\sigma/F\}_{[+\sigma]}$ . We have accounted for the NPI status of *de* nominals in French and for the need to keep apart the partitive genitive (our indefinite nominals) from the irrealis genitive (Kagan 2013) by arguing that French *de* and Russian irrealis genitive introduce a formal semantic dependency at the syntax-semantics interface between  $D_{def}/F$  and some non-veridical operator. The semantic implications of this relationship are lack of commitment to the existence of the referent and lack of commitment to the truth of the proposition.

Finally, we have proposed an analysis to account for the morphophonological expression of *de* in French and non-canonical genitive in Russian, according to which they are different Spell-outs of  $D_E$ : the output of either a concatenation of

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are restricted to appearing under the scope of negation and inside the vP (see also Taraldsen 2019 on augmentless nominals in Xhosa). From this, Roberts concludes that case is not universal, but that some form of nominal licensing is indeed required by UG.

M-words in French, or a concatenation of two subwords followed by a lowering postsyntactic operation in Russian.

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