

# The Mass/Count distinction: a lexically decomposed approach to mass neuter in Central Asturian

Matthew Burner  
mburner@wisc.edu



**Statement of the Problem:** In Central Asturian, CA, some nouns indicate a mass interpretation with the theme vowel *-o*. Elsewhere, final theme vowels make no explicit mass/count distinction. Examples (1)-(3) are masculine. The (a) examples are count nouns, indicated by *-u*, while the (b) examples are mass, indicated by *-o*.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) a. fierr-u<br>iron-MASC.COUNT<br>'an iron object' | b. fierr-o<br>iron-MASC.MASS<br>'iron material' |
| (2) a. pel-u<br>hair-MASC.COUNT<br>'a hair'           | b. pel-o<br>hair-MASC.MASS<br>'hair'            |
| (3) a. fil-u<br>thread-MASC.COUNT<br>'a thread'       | b. fil-o<br>thread-MASC.MASS<br>'linen'         |

Examples (4)-(5) are feminine mass and make no use of the *-o* theme vowel.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (4) rop-a<br>clothing-FEM.MASS<br>'clothing' | (5) sidr-a<br>cider-FEM.MASS<br>'cider' |
|--|---|

The literature does not treat nominal derivation, (d'Andrés 1993; Arias Cabal 1998; a.o.) so more should be said about the distribution of nouns.

In a novel approach to this data, I apply Kramer's (2015) analysis of nominal gender to CA. I argue that this system sheds light on how theme vowels, gender and mass/count interpretations interact in CA.

***n* Licensers:** Roots need to be categorized.

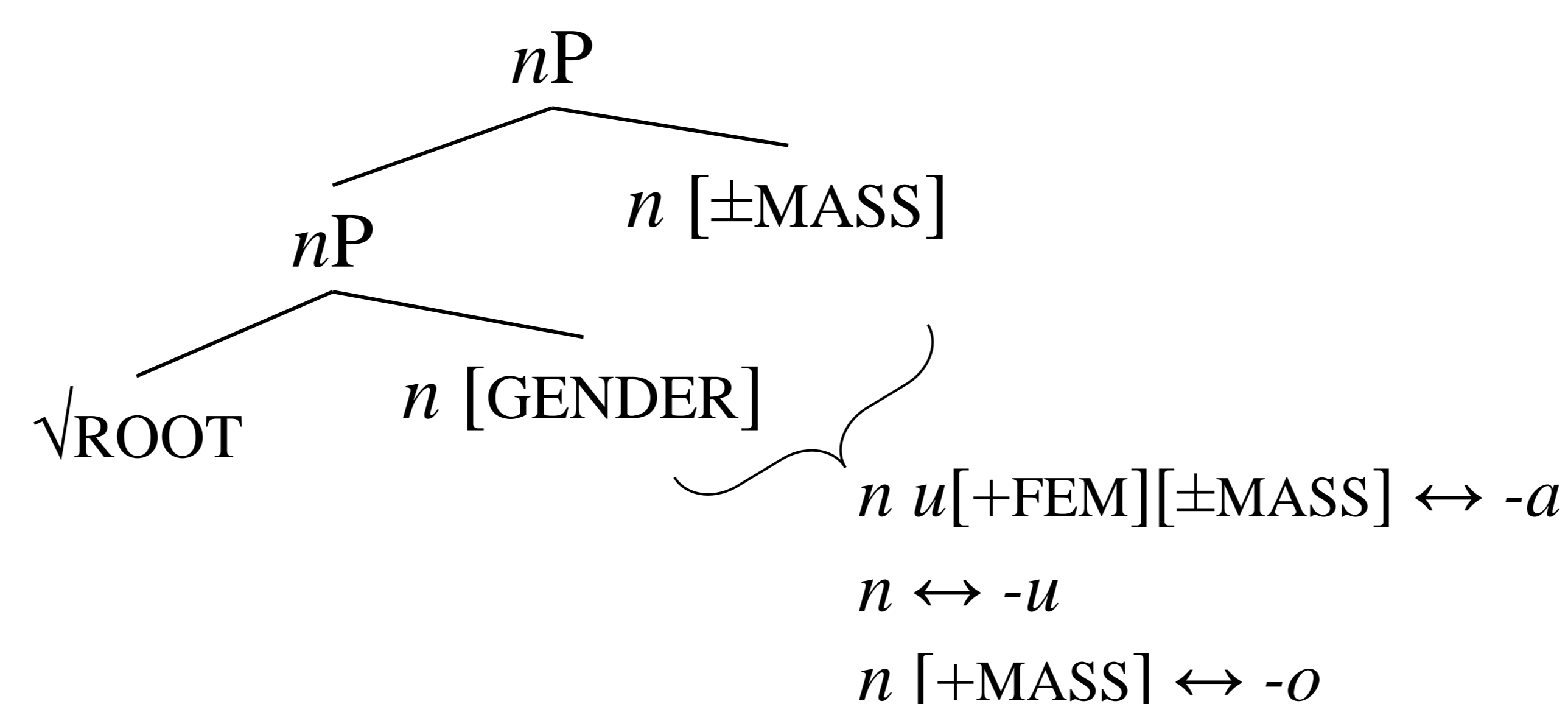
- (6) a. [n i[+FEM]][√NEÑ] = 'neña' [girl]  
 b. [n i[-FEM]][√NEÑ] = 'neñu' [boy]  
 c. [n [√FIERR]] = 'fierru' [an iron obj]  
 d. [n [+MASS]][√FIERR] = 'fierro' [iron mat]  
 e. [n u[+FEM]][√PER] = 'pera' [pear]

**Declension Classes:** There are three classes that help us link noun roots to their theme vowels.

III	-e/Ø	xent-e 'people', carbón-Ø 'coal'
II	-a	dí-a 'day', rop-a 'clothing', sidr-a 'cider'
I	-u/-o	man-u 'hand', fierr-u 'an iron object', fierr-o 'iron material', pel-u/pel-o...

**Theme Nodes:** Rules for theme vowel insertion.

- A. i. Insert [TH, III] in context √XENT, √CARBÓN ...  
 ii. Insert [TH, II] in context √DÍ ...  
 iii. Insert [TH, I] in context √MAN ...  
 B. Insert [TH, II] in context [+FEM]  
 C. Insert [TH, I, -o] in context [+MASS]√FIERR, √PEL, √FIL ...  
 D. Insert [TH, I] elsewhere



**Predictions/Implications:**

Mass nouns (cf. (1b), (2b), (3b)) spelled out as *-o* forms licensed under *n* [+MASS] via specific vowel insertion rule

Count nouns (cf. (1a), (2a), (3a)) spelled out as *-u* forms licensed under *n* via elsewhere vowel insertion rule

Count/mass feminine nouns (cf. (4)-(5)) spelled out as *-a* forms licensed under [+FEM] via specific vowel insertion rule

All other theme vowels derivable by the same system; may be dependent on specific rules

**Selected References:** Academia de la Llingua Asturiana (ALIA). (2001). Gramática de la Llingua Asturiana. Uviéu: ALIA.; d'Andrés, R. (1993). Emplegu del neutru n'asturianu. LIA, 49, 49-85.; Arias Cabal, Á. (1998). Diacronía del incontable o 'neutro de materia' en asturiano. In Atti del Xxi CILFR (Vol. 1, pp. 35-49). Berlin/NYC: Mouton de Gruyter.; Camblor Portilla, M. et al. (2005). The Mass Neuter Phenomenon in Asturian: Adjectives and Agreement. RFA, 5, 19-40.; Kramer, R. (2015). The Morphosyntax of Gender. Oxford: OUP.

Funded in part by Spanish and Portuguese and the Graduate School at UW-Madison. Thank you to Language Sciences for the practice venue and DesignLab for their design input.

