

Uniqueness definites as bare NPs in German

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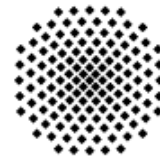
University of Stuttgart

Berlin, June 2022

Network Definiteness Workshop



Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft



Universität Stuttgart
Germany

Introduction

In German, definiteness may be indicated by the **definite article**.

(1) **Der Präsident** ist beleidigt. .
the president is insulted

(2) **Der Vater** des Jungen ist an der Arbeit.
the father of-the boy is at the work

(3) **Der Auslöser** des Feuers war unklar.
the trigger of-the fire was unclear

Introduction

Bare NPs alone cannot indicate definiteness

(1) * **Präsident** ist beleidigt.
president is insulted

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father of-the boy is at the work

(3) * **Auslöser** des Feuers war unklar.
trigger of-the fire was unclear

Introduction

However, in some constructions, **bare** NPs can have a definite interpretation **without definite article**:

- (4) **Präsident** ist ein Däne. [RHZ08]
president is a Dane
- (5) **Vater** des Babys ist der Schauspieler Pete Dwojak. [NUZ09]
father of-the baby is the actor Pete Dwojak
- (6) **Auslöser** der Protestaktionen war die Krise. [RHZ 011]
trigger of-the protests was the crisis

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However, in some constructions, **bare** NPs can have a definite interpretation **without definite article**:

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trigger of-the protests was the crisis

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the father of-the baby is the actor Pete Dwojak

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the trigger of-the protests was the crisis

Question:

What are the syntactic and semantic conditions for the omission of the definite article in these constructions?

Main Claims

Bare NP1 is a **predicative** type of **uniqueness** based definites.
Anaphoric NP1 cannot occur bare.

Road map


- Sentence type and the status of NP1
- Uniqueness and relationality of bare NP1
- Analysis

Sentence type: specificational copula clause

■ Types of copula clauses (Higgins 1979)

(7) John is a teacher / young. predicational

(8) Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens. equative

(9) a. The president of the club is John. specificational 
b. The biggest problem is the recent budget cuts.
c. A doctor who might be able to help you, is Harry Barcan.
(Mikkelsen 2004: 173)

(9a):

the x that is the president of the club at the given time = *John*

The non-referentiality of NP1

NP1 in specificational clauses is a predicate, a non-referential phrase (Partee 1986, Mikkelsen 2004, and Geist 2007)

- Pronominalization: gender-matching pronouns are disallowed, only pro-predicative pronouns are possible

(10) **Sieger**, *d(ies)er / *er /es / das war Arthur Techtow.
Winner that.M / he / it / this was Arthur Techtow
'The winner, it was Arthur Techtow.'

Difference to equative clauses: gender-matching demonstratives are allowed

(11) **Mary_i ist Georg Preuße.**
Mary is Georg Preuße
'Mary is Georg Preuße.'
D(ies)e_i / sie_i / *es / *das ist berühmt.
this.F / she / it this is famous
She is famous.'

Inverse structure


- Inverse agreement in specificational clauses in German (experimental evidence s. Hartmann & Heycock 2014)

(12) [Die / ∅ Ursache der Flut]_{NP1} *war/waren [heftige Regenfälle]_{NP2}.
The / ∅ cause of-the flood was/were heavy rain-falls
'The flood was caused by heavy rainfalls.'

→ specificational clauses have an “inverse” structure, NP₂ is the subject

- Syntactic analysis (Mikkelsen 2003): discourse driven inversion
The topic feature allows the predicative NP to move

[NP_{PREDICATE} [+topic] [be [NP_{SUBJECT} t_{PREDICATE}] SMALL CLAUSE]]



The diagram illustrates the movement of the predicative NP to the subject position. A horizontal line with an upward-pointing arrow at its left end connects the 't_{PREDICATE}' in the subject position to the 'NP_{PREDICATE} [+topic]' in the predicate position, indicating that the NP has moved from the predicate to the subject position.

Discourse linking of NP1

- The specificational topic is always related to some antecedent or “trigger” in the previous discourse. (Mikkelsen 2004: IX.)

discourse old

trigger

discourse new

NP1

is NP2



Discourse linking of NP1

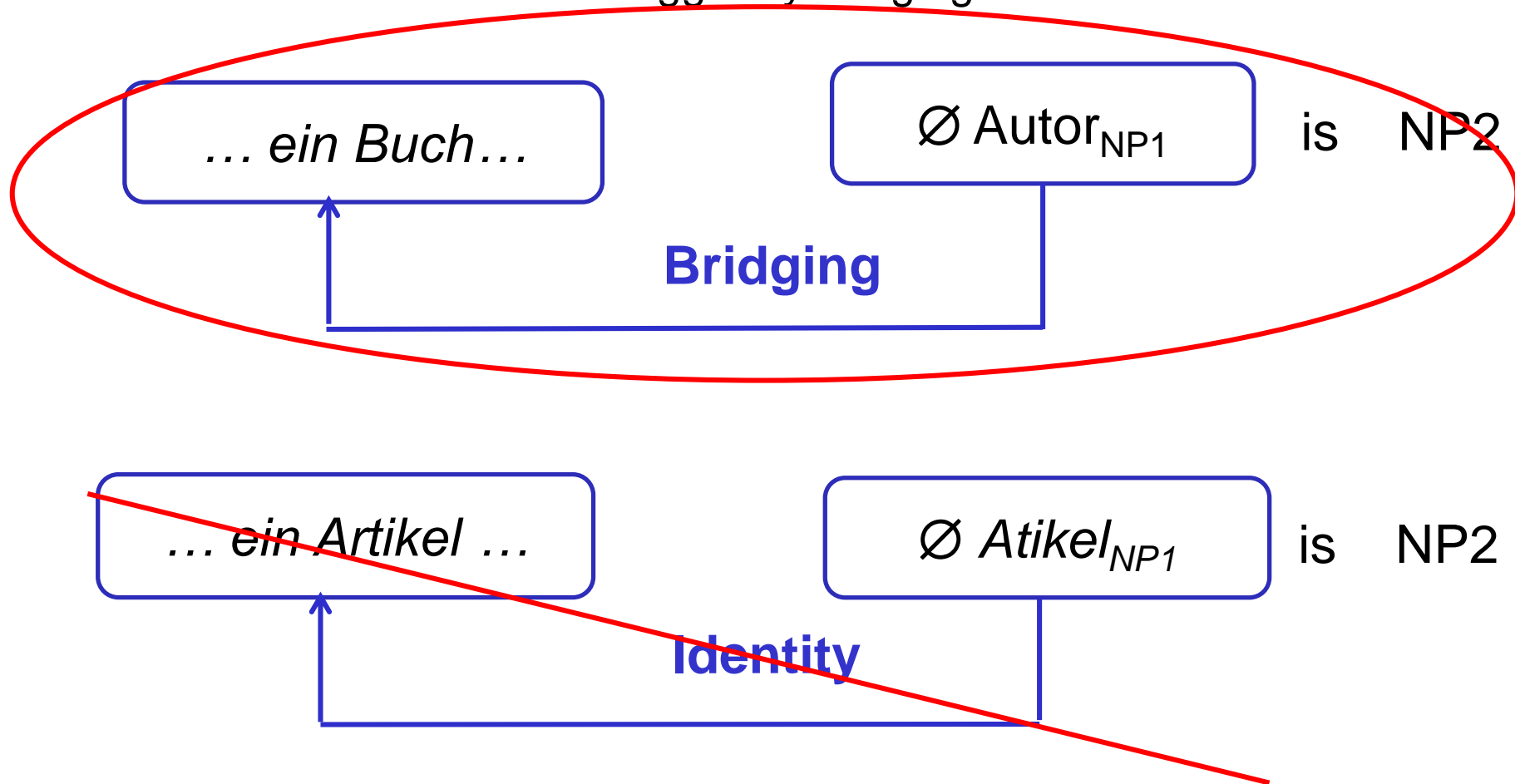
- Corpus studies in COSMAS (newspapers 2010-2014)
- specificational clauses with NP1+**def. Article** (87)
- specificational clauses with **bare** NP1 (158)
- Analysis of the relation between bare NP1 and the discourse old „trigger“

Discourse linking of NP1 with definite article



Discourse linking of bare NP1

- Bare NP1 is related to the trigger by bridging.



→ Bare NPs are not used as direct anaphors. The definite article is needed in this case.

Bare NP1 cannot be anaphoric

- Bare NPs as specificational topics cannot serve as anaphors:

(24) In die Sendung wurde ein Universitätsrektor und ein Schulrektor eingeladen. # **Universitätsrektor** ist Professor Schmidt.

‘A university rector and a school rector were invited to the show.
The university rector was Professor Schmidt.’

Anaphoric NP1 cannot be bare

Familiarity definiteness in predicative position: obligatory article

(30)

Die Financial Times hatte am Morgen [...] einen neuen Artikel über das Konzern Wirecard veröffentlicht. **Der Artikel** war eine Ansammlung von falschen Anschuldigungen.

‘The Financial Times had published a new article about the Wirecard group that morning [...] **The article** is a collection of a number of false and misleading allegations.’

(31)

Nun sind wir im Nirgendwo. **Das Nirgendwo** ist die Sahara.

‘Now we are in nowhere. **Nowhere** is the Sahara.’

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Bare NP1

- 85 bare NPs: 57 were used only once, the other 28 were used more frequently, e.g.

noun	frequency
<i>Grund</i> 'reason'	11
<i>Ziel</i> 'goal'	10
<i>Anlass</i> 'occasion'	7
<i>Auslöser</i> 'trigger'	6
<i>Vorbild</i> 'example'	5
<i>Höhepunkt</i> 'highlight'	5
<i>Ort</i> 'place'	3
<i>Absender</i> 'sender'	3
<i>Eigentümer</i> 'owner'	2
<i>Aufgabe</i> 'task'	2

- These nouns as heads of NP1 have two properties: **uniqueness** and **relationality**.

Uniqueness of bare NP1

■ Three types of nouns:

1. **inherently unique N:** as *Besitzer* ‘owner’, *Vorsitzender* ‘chair’ ...
2. **contextually unique N:** *Schwerpunkt* ‘important point’, *Aufgabe* ‘task’, *Sponsor* ‘sponsor’

(15) **Schwerpunkt** des Programms ist Digitalisierung. #Ein weiterer Schwerpunkt ist die Erhöhung der Sicherheit.

‘The focus of the program is digitization is. Another focus is on increasing security.’

3. **compositionally unique N:** combination with a uniqueness-establishing prefixoid *Kern-*, *Haupt-* or *Grund-* that forces a unique interpretation

(16) **Kernbestandteil** des Glossars ist eine Liste von Fachbegriffen.

‘The core component of the glossary is a list of technical terms.’

[Z13/DEZ.00236]

Relationality of bare NP1

- Bare NP1s have a dependent argument, the so-called „possessor“.
- The possessor (we called „trigger“) may be introduced in the previous discourse:

(17) Solche ambulanten Behandlungszentren [...] erleben in den USA einen **Boom**. **Auslöser** ist Präsident Barack Obamas Gesundheitsreform. [Z14/JUN.00127]
‘Such outpatient treatment centers [...] are experiencing a boom in the USA. The trigger is president Barack Obama’s Health Care Reform.’

- The possessor can also be introduced as a modifier of NP1

(18) b. **Grund dafür** ist die Gewalt. [Z14/APR.00142]
‘The reason for this is violence.’

c. **Höhepunkt des Menüs** ist die Taube mit Sauce Salmis.
[Z10/NOV.04332]

‘The highlight of the menu is the pigeon with Salmis sauce.’

Relationality of bare NP1

■ *Autor vs. Schriftsteller*

- (19) a. Damals ist ein revolutionäres neues Buch erschienen.
Autor (des Buches) war John S.

‘At that time a revolutionary new book was published. The author (of the book) was John S.’

- b. Damals ist ein revolutionäres neues Buch erschienen.
#Schriftsteller war John S.

‘At that time a revolutionary new book was published. The novelist was John S.’

Bare NP1 are Functional Nouns

- Conclusion: Bare NPs as a specificational topic are **unique** and are linked to a discourse-old trigger by bridging evoked by its **relationality**.
- The N that occurs bare as a specificational topic is a **Functional noun** in the sense of Löbner (2011)

	non-unique	unique
non-relational	Sortal noun $\langle e, t \rangle$ stone, book, adjective, water	Individual noun e moon, weather, date, Maria
relational	Relational noun $\langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$ sister, leg, part, attribute	Functional noun $\langle e, e \rangle / \langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle^*$ father, head, age, subject

Interim conclusion

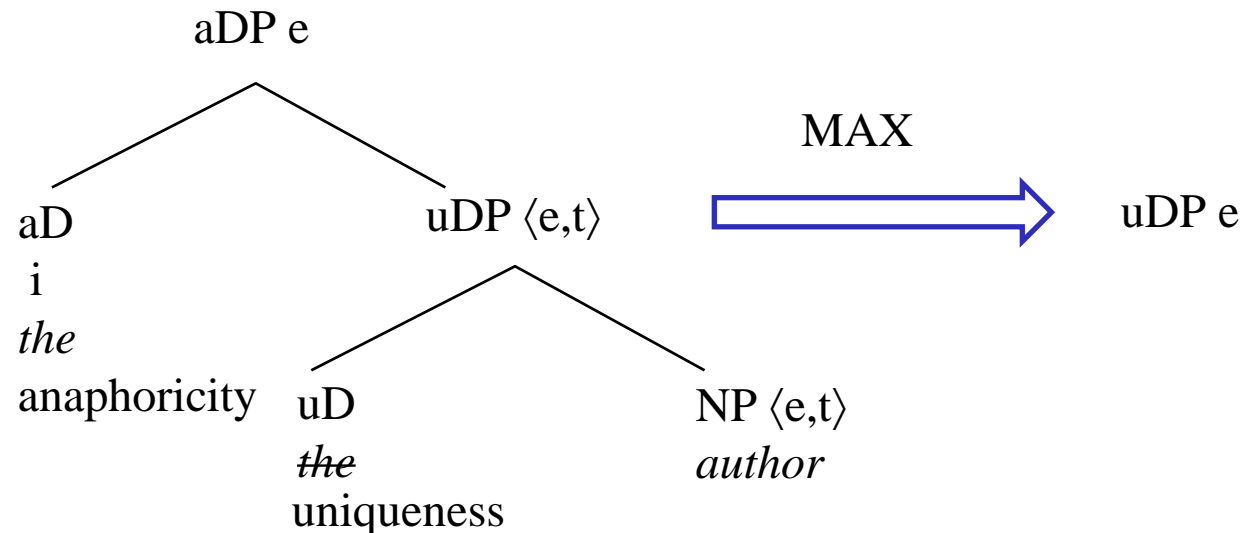
- Bare NP1 as specificational topic is as a **predicate**
- Bare NP1 is unique and relational, it denotes a **functional concept**
- NP1 as a specificational topic is linked to a discourse-old trigger by **bridging evoked by the relationality** of the noun.
- Bare NP1 is a type of **uniqueness based definites**

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Ingredient 1: Cheng, Heycock & Zamparelli (2017)

- Cheng, Heycock & Zamparelli (2017) map the anaphoric/unique distinction onto **two distinct syntactic levels** (different labels used here)
- aDP denotes an **individual**, while uDP denotes a **maximal/singleton property**.
- uD may be realized by a **weak** or **zero** article



Ingredient 2: Coppock & Beaver (2015)

- The semantic analysis of definites by Coppock & Beaver (2015): The **basic** use of definite expressions is **their predicative non-referential use**.

(20) He is **the ambassador** to Spain.

- The basic contribution of the definite determiner is to indicate **uniqueness without indicating existence**.

- The **existence** of the referent of the definite predicate NPs is cancelable:

(21) He is not **the ambassador** to Spain, because Spain doesn't have an ambassador here.

Ingredient 2: Coppock & Beaver (2015)

- **Uniqueness** cannot be canceled.

(21) # He is not **the ambassador** to Spain – there are two.

- The definite article preserves the predicative status of the NP and only adds a **uniqueness requirement**.

(23) $the_{uniqueness}$: $\lambda P. \lambda x [\partial(|P| \leq 1) \wedge P(x)]$ (Coppock & Beaver 2015: 395)

for plural *THE* s. (Coppock & Beaver 2015: 398, FN 21, Coppock & Beaver 2012)

Application to bare specificational topics

- The **existence** of the referent of bare definite NP1 is **cancelable**:

(25) ^{OK}**Direktor** des Goethe-Instituts ist nicht Peter Schulz, denn es gibt momentan gar keinen Direktor.

‘The principal of the Goethe Institute is not Peter Schulz, because there is currently no principal.’

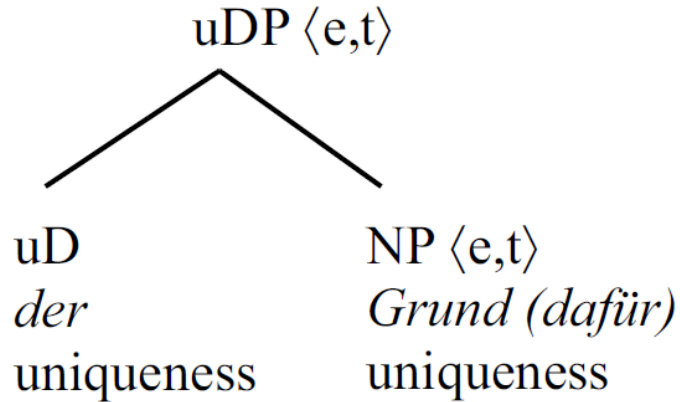
- The **uniqueness** is **not cancelable**:

(26) # **Direktor** des Goethe-Instituts ist nicht Peter Schulz, denn es gibt momentan zwei Direktoren.

‘The principal of the Goethe-Institute is not Peter Schulz, because there is currently two principals.’

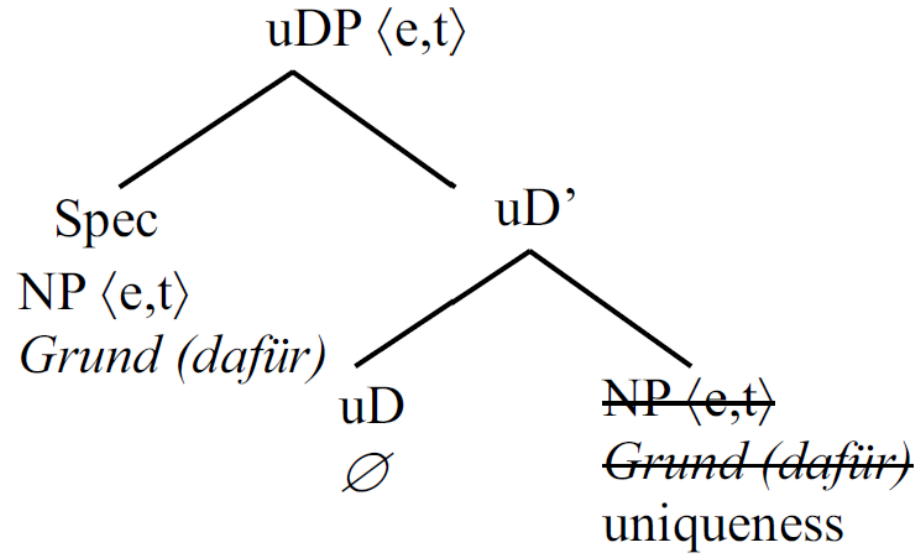
- Bare NP1 behaves like predicative definites in the analysis of Coppock & Beaver (2015). → This analysis and the analysis by Cheng et al. (2017) can be applied to them.

Analysis: NP1



$der_{unique} : \lambda P. \lambda x [\partial(|P| \leq 1) \wedge P(x)]$

$[Grund]_{NP} : \lambda x [\partial(|reason| \leq 1) \wedge reason(x)..]$



$[Grund]_{NP} : \lambda x [\partial(|reason| \leq 1) \wedge reason(x)..]$

- Integration of the possessive relation to a disrouce old argument:

(27) a. [*Grund*]_{NP} : $\lambda x [\partial(|\text{reason}| \leq 1) \wedge \text{reason}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x) = \mathbf{y}_i]$

b. [*Vater*]_{NP}: $\lambda x [\partial(|\text{father}| \leq 1) \wedge \text{father}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x) = \mathbf{y}_i]$

Conclusion 1

- The condition for the bare use of NPs in specificational clauses is that they are **predicates** that denote a **functional concept** with the features [+ unique] and [+ relational].
- Bare NPs as specificational topics can be considered as an instance of **uniqueness-based definites**.

Discussion: comparison to other uniqueness-based definites

- Uniqueness-based definites in German may occur with a **reduced form** of the article (Schwarz 2009).

(28) Ich gehe zum **Abteilungsleiter**.

‘I am going to the department manager.’

- But why is complete reduction of the article / bare NP is not possible here?

(28‘)* Ich gehe zu \emptyset **Abteilungsleiter**.

‘I am going to the department manager.’

Possible answer:

- This is an argument position, which is assigned case. In (28) the NP gets case from the preposition
- In German, def. article indicates not only definiteness but also **case**. 33

Discussion: comparison to other uniqueness-based definites

But why can uniqueness-based definites in predicate position occur without article? What about case marking?

(29) a. **Abteilungsleiter** ist Peter.

‘The department manager is Peter.’

b. Peter ist **Abteilungsleiter**.

‘Peter is the department manager.’

Answer: The predicate position is a syntactically **ungoverned** position (Geist 2013): it is **not assigned case**.

- Since no case is assigned to the predicate NP and uniqueness is indicated by the functional noun itself, there is no need for an overt article.

Conclusion 2

- Unlike argumental uniqueness-based definites, predicative uniqueness-based definites as specificational topics (i) are not assigned case and (ii) are unique by their own. These properties enable the omission of the definite article.

Further Implication

- Schwarz (2013): Strategy of marking uniqueness/familiarity distinction in argument positions in German: two different forms of the article
- NEW: **In the predicative position**, German has a different strategy of marking the uniqueness/familiarity distinction

- **GERMAN**

	uniqueness definiteness	familiarity definiteness
argument position	weak article	strong article
predicative position	optional article	obligatory article

Thank you!

Selected references

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Acknowledgments

- This work was supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG), via the project grant number GE 2136/3-1, project “The fine structure of the Russian noun phrase: A comparative perspective” (<https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/445439335>).

- Project homepage
<https://www.ling.uni-stuttgart.de/en/institute/ilg/research/projects/dfg-projekt-fine-structure-of-noun-phrase/>