

# Structure of Lithuanian

## Class 03: Nominal Phrases: the Basics

### 1 Introduction

Lithuanian nominal phrases are highly inflected. Normally, all elements within a DP decline, i.e. change their endings in order to either agree with the head noun (gender and number concord) or indicate the DP's role in a sentence ( $\sim$  case).

#### 1.1 Gender

Nouns have two inherent genders – masculine and feminine. The neuter gender, inherited from Proto-Indo-European, has been eliminated (with most neuter nouns becoming masculine), for instance:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) O.Balt. \*nizda(n) (n) ‘*nest*’, cf. German ‘*das Nest*’ → Lith. lizdas (m)  
 O.Balt. \*tilta(n) (n) ‘*bridge*’ → Lith. tiltas (m)

Nouns denoting living beings usually have their grammatical gender coincide with their natural gender:

	v́yras (m)	‘ <i>man</i> ’		móteris (f)	‘ <i>woman</i> ’
	vaikìnas (m)	‘ <i>guy</i> ’		merginà (f)	‘ <i>girl</i> ’
(2)	kā́tinas (m)	‘ <i>male cat</i> ’		katẽ (f)	‘ <i>female cat</i> ’
	ā́vinas (m)	‘ <i>male sheep</i> ’		avìs (f)	‘ <i>female sheep</i> ’
	tìgras (m)	‘ <i>male tiger</i> ’		tìgrè (f)	‘ <i>female tiger</i> ’
	inžiniẽrius (m)	‘ <i>male engineer</i> ’		inžinièrè (f)	‘ <i>female engineer</i> ’

In many such pairs, the two words are based on the same root. In this case, one of the forms is often derived from the other by using a suffix, such as the /-in-/ for male animals. In the case of *tigras* or *inžinierius*, the gender switch is only visible through the change of inflectional class.

Nouns denoting things and abstract concepts have arbitrary gender:

- (3) stālas (m) ‘*table*’  
 spìnta (f) ‘*cabinet*’  
 óras (m) ‘*weather*’  
 lietùs (m) ‘*rain*’  
 girià (f) ‘*forest*’  
 síela (f) ‘*soul*’

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<sup>1</sup> A similar elimination of the neuter took place in Latvian: lizda (f), tilts (m).

## 1.2 Number

In modern Lithuanian, nominal phrases can be singular or plural. The dual existed until recently, but has now been replaced with the plural in most dialects and in the standard language:

	Singular	Dual	Plural
(4) Old-fashioned:	vienas v́yras	dù v́yru	trỹs v́yrai
Modern:	vienas v́yras	dù v́yrai	trỹs v́yrai
	‘one man’	‘two men’	‘three men’

Many abstract and mass nouns appear only in the singular, such as *píenas* ‘milk’ or *tiesà* ‘truth’.

Quite a few nouns, including countable objects, are always in the plural:

- (5) žirklės (f.pl) ‘scissors’  
 marškiniai (m.pl) ‘shirt’  
 kelnės (f.pl) ‘pants’  
 metai (m.pl) ‘year’  
 vestuvės (f.pl) ‘wedding’  
 Vėlykos (f.pl) ‘Easter’

While English often resorts to saying *two pairs/units/pieces of N.Pl* in case it’s a countable object without a singular form, Lithuanian uses special numerals with these nouns (to be discussed later).

## 1.3 Case

Apart from grammatical number, Lithuanian nouns have the category of case. As we know from the course on general syntax, case is a morpho-syntactic feature assigned to nominals to indicate the role they have in a sentence. The seven cases of Standard Lithuanian are listed below with accompanying examples.

1. The Nominative: used on sentential subjects and nominal predicates.

- (6) vilk-as miėg-a-Ø  
 wolf-NOM.SG sleep.PRS-TH-3  
 ‘The wolf is sleeping.’

- (7) čia yra vilk-as  
 here be.PRS.3 wolf-NOM.SG  
 ‘This is a wolf.’

2. The Genitive: used in possessive constructions, on objects of negated verbs, after some lexical verbs and after many prepositions (the latter three cases will be discussed thoroughly in subsequent classes):

- (8) vilk-o dañt-ys  
 wolf-GEN.SG tooth-NOM.PL

‘The wolf’s teeth.’

- (9) *iešk-a-u*                      *vil̃k-o*  
 search.for.PRS-TH-1SG wolf-GEN.SG  
 ‘I am looking for the wolf.’

- (10) *bè*              *vil̃k-o*  
 without wolf-GEN.SG  
 ‘Without the wolf.’

In possessive construction, the possessor is normally placed before the possessed.

3. The Dative: typically used in combination with the recipient / benefactive role:

- (11) *dúod-u*              *vil̃k-ui*              *mēs-ą*  
 give.PRS-1SG wolf-DAT.SG meat-ACC.SG  
 ‘I give the meat to the wolf.’

- (12) *perk-ù*              *dóvan-as*              *vaik-áms*  
 buy.PRS-1SG gift-ACC.PL child-DAT.PL  
 ‘I am buying gifts for the kids.’

The dative can also appear on agentive subjects of non-finite embedded clauses. This will be discussed later on.

The dative case does not combine with prepositions in the modern language.

4. The Accusative: used on direct objects of transitive and di-transitive verbs. Also, it is used on many adjuncts, as well as after many prepositions:

- (13) *mat-a-ũ*              *vil̃k-ą*  
 see-TH-1SG wolf-ACC.SG  
 ‘I see the wolf.’

- (14) *at-ẽ-j-o-Ø*                      *kìt-ą*                      *diẽn-ą*  
 PREV-go.PST-EP-TH-3 next-F.ACC.SG day(F)-ACC.SG  
 ‘He came the next day.’

- (15) *eĩn-a-Ø*              *pàs mótin-ą*  
 go.PRS-TH-3 to mother-ACC.SG  
 ‘(S)he’s going to his/her mother’s place.’

5. The Instrumental: used for instruments/means of actions, as well as after a couple of prepositions, the most important one being *su* ‘with’:

- (16) *mergáit-ė*              *rāš-o-Ø*              *tušin-uk-ù*  
 girl-NOM.SG write-TH-3 pen-DIM-INSTR.SG  
 ‘The girl is writing with a pen.’

- (17) *mēs*              *važi-úo-j-a-me*              *tráukin-iu*  
 1PL.NOM go-TH-EP-TH-1PL train-INSTR.SG  
 ‘We are traveling by train.’

- (18) *vaĩk-as*              *žaidž-ia-Ø*              *sù vilk-ù*  
 child-NOM.SG play-TH-3 with wolf-INSTR.SG  
 ‘The child is playing with the wolf.’

6. The Locative: used to denote location in space and time:

- (19) vilk-è      rād-o-me      vaĩk-o      kául-us  
 wolf-LOC.SG find-TH-1PL child-GEN.SG bone-ACC.PL  
 ‘In the wolf, we found the child’s bones.’

7. The Vocative: used to address an entity:

- (20) tū              sēn-as              viĩk-e!  
 2SG.NOM.SG old-M.NOM.SG wolf(M)-VOC.SG  
 ‘You old wolf!’

The vocative is not exactly a real case because it’s always used outside of the main clausal structure. However, most grammars list this form among actual case forms.

## 2 The Delension of Nouns

Lithuanian nouns are divided into several inflectional classes. There is a strong tendency for inflectional classes to be associated with one of the two genders. The endings of the different inflection classes are summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1: The inflectional endings of Lithuanian nouns

#	K	I.a	I.b	II.a	II.b	III	IV.a	IV.b	V
Sg	N.	-as	-is/-ys	-a	-ė	-is	-us	-ius	-uo
	G.	-o	-io	-os	-ės	-ies/-s	-aus	-iaus	-en-s/-io
	D.	-ui	-iui	-ai	-ei	-iai	-ui	-iui	-en-iui
	A.	-ą	-į	-ą	-ę	-į	-ų	-ių	-en-į
	I.	-u	-iu	-a	-e	-imi	-umi	-iumi	-en-iu
	L.	-e	-yje	-oje	-ėje	-yje	-uje	-iuje	-en-yje
	V.	-e/-ai/-au/-y/-Ø	-i/-y	-a	-e	-ie	-au	-iau	-en-ie
#	K	I.a	I.b	II.a	II.b	III	IV.a	IV.b	V
PL	N./V.	-ai	-iai	-os	-ės	-ys	-ūs	-iai	-en-ys
	G.	-ų	-ių	-ų	-ių	-(i)ų	-ų	-ių	-en-ų
	D.	-ams	-iams	-oms	-ėms	-ims	-ums	-iams	-en-ims
	A.	-us	-ius	-as	-es	-is	-us	-ius	-en-is
	I.	-ais	-iais	-omis	-ėmis	-imis	-umis	-iais	-en-imis
	L.	-uose	-iuose	-ose	-ėse	-yse	-uose	-iuose	-en-yse

Nouns of classes I.a and I.b are uniformly masculine.<sup>2</sup> The endings *-is/-ys* and *-i/-y* in class I.b alternate depending on whether they are stressed or not. The ending *-as* is never stressed (see below).

<sup>2</sup> Nouns whose stem-final consonant is palatalized before *-as* in class I.a are declined in a slightly different way (combining the types I.a and I.b): *N. kėlias, G. kėlio, D. kėliui, A. kėlių, I. kėliù, L. kėlyjė, V. kėjį*. There are only a few nouns that decline this way. The vocative form of *vėlnias* ‘devil’ is *vėlnie*.

- (21) vėjas ‘wind’  
brólis ‘brother’  
kambarỹs ‘room’

The vocative singular endings *-e/-ai/-au/-Ø* are chosen as follows:

- if the final stem consonant is */-j/*, *-au* is used:

(22) vėj-as ‘wind’ → vėj-au!

- if the noun is a diminutive with the suffix *-(i)uk-*, zero is used in the vocative:

(23) Petr-iùk-as ‘little Peter’ → Petriùk!

- if the noun is a personal name (except for the cases discussed above), *-ai* is used:

(24) Ráimund-as ‘Raimund’ → Ráimundai!

- in all other cases, *-e* is used:

(25) mišk-as ‘forest’ → mišk-e!

Nouns of class II.a are predominantly feminine. A solid group of exceptions are nouns denoting male occupations and male last names in *-a*.

- (26) várna (f) ‘crow’  
tetà (f) ‘aunt’  
balà (f) ‘swamp’  
But:  
kolegà (m) ‘(male) colleague’  
Daukšà (m) *male last name*

Nouns of class II.b are always feminine:

- (27) ùpè ‘river’  
kárvē ‘cow’  
Also:  
kolègè ‘(female) colleague’  
Daukšienè ‘wife of Daukša’

The vast majority of the nouns in class III are feminine. Whether or not the final stem consonant palatalizes in the genitive plural is subject to idiosyncratic variation:

- (28) žuvìs (Gen.Pl. žuvū) ‘fish’  
ántis (Gen.Pl. ánčiu) ‘duck’  
pušìs (Gen.Pl. pušū) ‘pine tree’  
širdìs (Gen.Pl. širdžiū) ‘heart’

Those class III nouns which are masculine (there are literally only a few of them) look exactly the same as the feminine ones, except in the dative singular where they take *-iui*:

- (29)    *ántis* (f) ‘*duck*’ → Dat.Sg. *ánč-iai*  
          *dantìs* (m) ‘*tooth*’ → Dat.Sg. *dañč-iui*

All nouns in class IV are masculine. If the stem-final consonant is non-palatal, these nouns have their own plural paradigm. If it is, however, palatal, the plural declension is imported from class I.b:

- (30)    *sūnùs* ‘*son*’ → Gen.Sg. *sūnaũs*, Nom.Pl. *súnūs*  
          *profèsorius* ‘*professor*’ → Gen.Sg. *profèsoriaus*, Nom.Pl. *profèsoriai*

Nouns of class V are masculine. They have the stem augment *-en-* before the inflectional endings. In the nominative singular, the augment fused with the ending producing *-uo*.

In addition to all of these patterns, there are a handful of irregular and indeclinable nouns in Lithuanian. Examples of irregular nouns can be found in the Appendix. Indeclinable nouns are recent borrowings: *taksi* ‘*taxi*’, *želė* ‘*gel*’ etc..

Table 2: Sample noun paradigms

		I.a	I.b	II.a	II.b
		<i>man</i>	<i>brother</i>	<i>crow</i>	<i>cow</i>
Sg	N.	výras	brólis	várna	kárvė
	G.	výro	brólio	várnos	kárvės
	D.	výrui	bróliui	várnai	kárvei
	A.	výrą	brólį	várną	kárvej
	I.	výru	bróliu	várna	kárve
	L.	výre	brólyje	várnoje	kárvėje
	V.	výre	bróli	várna	kárve
PL	N./V.	výrai	bróliai	várnos	kárvės
	G.	výrų	brólių	várnų	kárvių
	D.	výrams	bróliams	várnoms	kárvėms
	A.	výrus	brólius	várnas	kárves
	I.	výrais	bróliais	várnomis	kárvėmis
	L.	výruose	bróliuose	várnose	kárvėse
		III	IV.a	IV.b	V
		<i>duck</i>	<i>market</i>	<i>professor</i>	<i>autumn</i>
Sg	N.	ántis	tuĩgus	profėsorius	ruduõ
	G.	ánties	tuĩgaus	profėsorius	rudeñs
	D.	ánčiai	tuĩgui	profėsoriumi	rùdeniui
	A.	ántį	tuĩgų	profėsorium	rùdenį
	I.	ántimi	tuĩgumi	profėsoriumi	rùdeniu
	L.	ántyje	tuĩguje	profėsoriumje	rudenųjė
	V.	ántie	tuĩgau	profėsorium	rudenie
PL	N./V.	ántys	tuĩgūs	profėsorium	rùdenys
	G.	ánčių	tuĩgų	profėsorium	rudenų
	D.	ántims	tuĩgums	profėsoriums	rudenims
	A.	ántis	turgūs	profėsorius	rùdenis
	I.	ántimis	tuĩgumis	profėsoriums	rudenimis
	L.	ántyse	tuĩguose	profėsoriumose	rudenysė

### 3 Nominal Accentuation

Nominal accentuation is one of the most difficult topics when learning Lithuanian grammar. It is very strongly recommended that the students spend a considerable amount of time understanding this section and return to it regularly during the entire duration of the course.

We will begin by talking about nominal stems. A lot of native nominal stems in Lithuanian are monosyllabic. These stems can be divided into two groups:

- stems with the falling tone, i.e. such roots which have two moras and are, when accented, stressed on the first one:

(31) v́yr- ‘man’, kélm- ‘tree stump’, láim- ‘happiness’

- stems with the rising or short tone, i.e. roots whose last mora is stressed when they are accented:

(32) laĩk- ‘time’, bìt- ‘bee’, iĩd- ‘dish’

In addition to this dichotomy, stems can be *strong* and *weak*. Weak stems are prone to giving up their accent, while strong stems retain it more consistently (this will become clear in just a minute). By combining the two dichotomies, we get the following four types of stems:

- strong stems with a non-final mora bearing accent (Class 1):  
v́yr- (m) ‘man’, v́árn- (f) ‘crow’;
- strong stems with the final mora accented (Class 2):  
iĩd- (m) ‘dish’, raĩk- (f) ‘hand, arm’;
- weak stems with a non-final mora bearing accent (Class 3):  
kélm- (m) ‘tree stump’, žmón- (f) ‘wife’;
- weak stems with the final mora accented (Class 4):  
vaĩk- (m) ‘child’, daĩn- (f) ‘song’.<sup>3</sup>

The inflectional endings of Lithuanian nouns are also not homogeneous when it comes to their prosodic properties. Thus, endings can also be *strong* or *weak*. Weak endings do not compete with noun stems for stress. A good example is the nominative singular ending *-as* of Class I.a nouns which is never stressed:

(33) v́yras, iĩdas, kélmas, vaĩkas

A strong ending, on the other hand, competes with stems for primary stress. If a stem is strong, it will win. However, if the stem is weak, the strong ending will be stressed. A typical strong ending is the dative plural termination *-áms*:

(34) v́yrams, iĩdams  
kelmáms, vaikáms

<sup>3</sup> From now on, all nouns will appear in the glossary with their respective class numbers.



In addition to being strong or weak, any ending can be *attracting* or *non-attracting*. An attracting ending will attract stress from any stem (weak or strong) whose final mora is accented. When this happens, the stress will always go onto the first mora of the attracting ending. A weak attracting ending is the instrumental singular *-u*:

- (35) v́yr+u → v́yru  
 iĩd+u → indù  
 kélm+u → kélmu  
 vaĩk+u → vaikù

A classic strong attracting ending is the nominative singular formative for Class II.a feminine nouns:

- (36) várn+à → várna  
 raĩk+à → rankà  
 žmón+à → žmonà  
 daĩn+à → dainà

With all the examples above in mind, the following picture emerges:

- A weak non-attracting ending (A) will never have stress;
- A weak attracting ending (B) will only have stress after stems whose last mora would otherwise be stressed;
- A strong non-attracting ending (C) will have stress after weak stems;
- A strong attracting ending (D) will have stress after weak stems, as well as strong stems with stress on the last mora.

Depending on the accent type of the stem, four accentuation patterns exist: <sup>4</sup>

Table 3: Accent types of noun stems

	Accent Class 1	Accent Class 2	Accent Class 3	Accent Class 4
A	várn-ą	raĩk-ą	žmón-ą	daĩn-ą
B	várn-a	rank-à	žmón-a	dain-à
C	várn-oms	raĩk-oms	žmon-óms	dain-óms
D	várn-a	rank-à	žmon-à	dain-à

In this course, we will only learn the accent types of the endings for classes I.a and II.a:

<sup>4</sup> The endings in the table are: -ą (Acc.Sg), -a (Instr.Sg), -oms (Dat.Pl), -a (Nom.Sg).

Table 4: Accent types of noun endings, classes I.a and II.a

	Singular		Plural		Singular		Plural	
	I.a		I.a		II.a		II.a	
N	-as	(A)	-aĩ	(C)	-à	(D)	-os	(A)
G	-o	(A)	-ũ	(C)	-õs	(C)	-ũ	(C)
D	-ui	(A)	-áms	(C)	-ai	(A)	-óms	(C)
A	-ą	(A)	-us	(B)	-ą	(A)	-as	(B)
I	-u	(B)	-aĩs	(C)	-a	(B)	-omìs	(C)
L	-è	(D)	-uosè	(C)	-ojè	(C)	-osè	(C)
V	-e	(A)	=N		-a	(A)	=N	

Table 5: Accent types of noun endings, all classes

#	K	I.a	I.b	II.a	II.b	III	IV	V
Sg	N.	-as (A)	-ỹs (C)	-à (D)	-ẽ (C)	-ìs (C)	-ùs (C)	-uõ (C)
	G.	-o (A)	-io (A)	-õs (C)	-ẽs (C)	-iẽs (C)	-aũs (C)	-eĩs (C)
	D.	-ui (A)	-iui (A)	-ai (A)	-ei (A)	-iai (A)	-ui (A)	-eniui (A)
	A.	-ą (A)	-į (A)	-ą (A)	-ę (A)	-į (A)	-ų (A)	-enį (A)
	I.	-u (B)	-iu (B)	-a (B)	-e (B)	-imì (C)	-umì (C)	-eniù (A)
	L.	-e (D)	-yjè (C)	-ojè (C)	-èjè (C)	-yjè (C)	-ujè (C)	-enyjè (C)
	V.	-e (A)	-y (C)	-a (A)	-e (A)	-iẽ (C)	-aũ (C)	-eniẽ (C)
#	K	I.a	I.b	II.a	II.b	III	IV.a	V
PL	N./V.	-aĩ (C)	-iaĩ (C)	-os (A)	-ès (A)	-ys (A)	-ūs (A)	-enys (A)
	G.	-ũ (C)	-iũ (C)	-ũ (C)	-iũ (C)	-(i)ũ (C)	-ũ (C)	-enũ (C)
	D.	-áms (C)	-iáms (C)	-óms (C)	-éms (C)	-ìms (C)	-ùms (C)	-enìms (C)
	A.	-us (B)	-ius (B)	-as (B)	-es (B)	-is (B)	-us (B)	-enis (A)
	I.	-aĩs (C)	-iaĩs (C)	-omìs (C)	-èmìs (C)	-imìs (C)	-umìs (C)	-enimìs (C)
	L.	-uosè (C)	-iuosè (C)	-osè (C)	-èsè (C)	-ysè (C)	-uosè (C)	-enysè (C)

## 4 Exercises

### 4.1 Case endings and accent

Insert the correct case endings and accents into the following sentences. Above each noun, put ‘m’ or ‘f’ indicating its gender.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (37) jìs yrà vaik__ nam__<br>‘He is in the child’s house.’                     | (48) ses__ vyr__ vólgo žuv__<br>‘The sister’s husband is eating a fish.’             |
| (38) karv__ gēria vand__<br>‘The cow drinks water.’                            | (49) ses__ broľ__ vólgo tris žuv__<br>‘The sister’s brothers are eating three fish.’ |
| (39) broľ__ mātō vaik__<br>‘The brother sees the children.’                    | (50) jìs dúoda vaik__ akm__<br>‘He gives the stones to the children.’                |
| (40) jìs eĩna iš nam__<br>‘He is walking out of the house.’                    | (51) varn__ yrà med__<br>‘The crow is in the tree.’                                  |
| (41) vaik__ yrà lizd__<br>‘The children are in the nest.’                      | (52) vaik__ dúoda varn__ žuv__<br>‘The children give the crows the fish (pl).’       |
| (42) ses__ sédi sù broľ__<br>‘The sister is sitting with the brother.’         | (53) ses__ mýli vyr__ ir vaik__<br>‘The sister loves (her) husband and children.’    |
| (43) vyr__ vólgo su vaik__<br>‘The man is eating with the children.’           | (54) jìs tūri ses__<br>‘He has a sister.’  |
| (44) vaik__ mātō ses__<br>‘The kids see the sisters.’                          | (55) jìs gēria sù ses__<br>‘He is boozing with (his) sister.’                        |
| (45) akm__ yrà aĩt stal__<br>‘The stone is on the table.’                      | (56) vaik__ sédi med__<br>‘The children sit in the trees.’                           |
| (46) jìs eĩna sù akm__ rank__<br>‘He is walking with the stone in (his) hand.’ | (57) dvì karv__ yrà aĩt nam__<br>‘Two cows are on top of the house.’                 |
| (47) čià yrà lizd__<br>‘Here are nests.’                                       |  |

### 4.2 Transcription

Transcribe the sentences from the previous exercise in IPA.

## Glossary

All verbs are in the present tense. The singular and the plural forms in the third person are always identical for all verbs.

výr-as (1)	man, husband	akm-uõ (Acc. ãkm-en-ĩ, 3)	stone
vaĩk-as (4)	child	vand-uõ (Acc. vánd-en-ĩ, 3)	water
stãl-as (4)	table	bról-is (I.b, 1)	brother
várn-a (1)	crow	sēsė (2)	sister
lizd-as (4)	nest	žuvìs (III, Gen.Pl. žuvų, 4)	fish
mėd-is (I.b, 2)	tree	rankà (2)	hand, arm
tuĩgus (2)	market	aĩt + G	on
nãm-as (4)	house	ĩš + G	out of / from
jìs	he	sù + I	with
yrà	is, are	čìà	here
mýli	loves	ĩr	and
sėdi	sits		
eĩna	walks		
tùri	has/owns		
mãto	sees		
mėta	throws		
vãlgo	eats		
gėria	drinks		
dúoda	gives		

## Bibliography

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## Appendix I. Irregular nouns

Table 6: Some of the irregular nouns

	šuo (m) ‘dog’	sesuo (f) ‘sister’	petys (m) ‘shoulder’	duktė (f) ‘daughter’
N	šuõ	sesuõ	petỹs	duktẽ
G	šuõs	seseřs	petiẽs	dukterřs
D	řuniui	sẽseriai	pẽciui	dùkteriai
A	řunį	sẽserį	pẽtį	dùkterį
I	řuniù/-imì	sẽseria/-imì	petimì	dukterimì/-ia
L	řunyjà	seseryjà	petyjà	dukteryjà
V	řuniẽ	seseriẽ	petỹ	dukteriẽ
N/V	řunys	sẽserys	pečiaĩ	dùkterys
G	řunỹ	seserỹ	pečiũ	dukterỹ
D	řunims	seserims	pečiaĩms	dukterims
A	řunìs	sẽseris	pečiùs	dùkteris
I	řunimìs	seserimìs	pečiaĩs	dukterimìs
L	řunysè	seserysè	pečiuosè	dukterysè

The nouns *patì* ‘wife’ and *martì* ‘daughter-in-law’, despite their unusual Nom.Sg ending, are declined like soft nouns of Class II.a: *G.Sg. pačiõs*, *D.Sg. pačiai* etc.