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LACIM 2022 - Abstract

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Affixation in the Caucasus – a quantitative typological approach

The Caucasus contains some of the world's most elaborate affixation patterns (Daniel & Ganenkov 2009: 671), which is paired with some of the world's largest consonant inventories (Beguš 2020: 699). The languages of the Caucasus therefore constitute a highly interesting case to examine the possible correlations between morphology and consonant inventories from a phonological perspective. The Caucasus is furthermore interesting as it contains three endemic language families which all have rich morphology but with clear differences in affixation patterns. The project is twofold as it examines both the phonology and typology of affixation in the languages of the Caucasus. I have compiled a database of 10,555 nominal and verbal affixes from 55 languages from five language families spoken in the Caucasus, i.e. Kartvelian, Nakh-Dagestanian, Northwest Caucasian, Turkic and Indo-European. These affixes have been coded for affix type, grammatical function and phonological form. The phonological form of each affix has been coded according to its phonotactics, i.e. syllable structure, and thereafter its consonants and vowels. The consonants were coded according to place of articulation, manner of articulation and if the consonant is voiced or voiceless. The grammatical functions were divided into 23 grammatical variables where the most important were case, number, person, tense, mood, aspect, preverbs and converbs. This means that each affix is connected to a commensurable grammatical function, its phonological form and the language it occurs in, which enables a fine-grained analysis of the genealogical and geographical distribution of certain morphological functions.

Certain grammatical categories were expressed by means of affixation in all 55 languages of the database, i.e. case, number, tense, aspect and mood, which in itself is not very surprising. It is however interesting to find that there is no specific grammatical case that is found in all 55 languages, mainly due to the division between the three endemic primarily ergative language families and the accusative Indo-European and Turkic languages. There are some further genealogical asymmetries as the genitive and dative cases are absent in the Northwest Caucasian languages (Kumaxov 2013; Hewitt 2010; Fenwick 2011; Smeets 1984; Rogava & Keraševa 1966) but almost universally found in the remaining four families of the Caucasus. The instrumental case is rather unexpectedly the only specific case to be found in all five language families of the Caucasus, but its distribution within the families varies as it is absent in the Turkic Kipchak languages, e.g. Karachay-Balkar (Seegmiller 1996; Filonenko 1940), and it is present in all Nakh languages (Nichols 1994; Nichols 2011; Holisky & Gagua 1994). It is however only sporadically found in Dagestan, e.g. Dargwa (Musaev 2002: 48), most Lezgian languages (Haspelmath 1993; Authier 2009; Babaliyeva 2013) and all Tsezic languages (Comrie & Polinsky 2020; Comrie, Khalilov & Khalilova 2015; Forker 2013).

The most interesting typological findings relate to preverbs and converbs, as these are grammatical categories that are found throughout the Caucasus but are seldom analysed from an areal perspective across family boundaries. Spatial preverbs are particularly interesting as these are found in all language families of the Caucasus except Turkic (Johanson & Csató 1998). The importance of differentiating the direction and orientation of spatial preverbs, which is conventionally done for Nakh-Dagestanian local cases, has been recognized by e.g. Rostovtsev-Popiel (2016). There are some important similarities between the function of spatial preverbs and local cases and some languages encode the same spatial meanings with both preverbs and local cases, e.g. Aghul (Magometov 1970) and Kaitak Dargwa (Temirbulatova 2004). Spatial preverbs often convey much more specific meanings however, e.g. Kabardian *ʔepə-* ‘to/in/from the hand(s)’ (Kumaxov 2013: 206) and Abkhaz *g^wala-* ‘to/from/in the heart’ (Hewitt 2010: 119), which is highly interesting as spatial preverbs referring to the hand are generally found in the Northwest Caucasian languages (Hewitt 2010: 115; Fenwick 2011; Rogava & Keraševa 1966: 128) but also in e.g. Ingush (Nichols 2011: 365), Itsari Dargwa (Sumbatova & Mutalov 2003: 63), Sanzhi Dargwa (Forker 2020: 218) and Aghul (Magometov 1970: 159). The Dargic languages and Chechen share numerous preverb orientations with the Northwest Caucasian languages (Forker 2020; Sumbatova & Mutalov 2003; Magometov 1963; Čokaev 1970) which surprisingly also holds true for Laz (Rostovtsev-Popiel 2016; Lacroix 2009). Kartvelian preverbs mainly express deictic functions but they also have some of the richest inventories of directional preverbs (Rostovtsev-Popiel 2016), which are only surpassed by Abkhaz (Hewitt 2010) and Shapsug Adyghe (Smeets 1984). These directional preverbs often convey the same grammatical functions however and these preverbs are also found in Nakh-Dagestanian languages such as Chechen (Čokaev 1970), Lezgian (Haspelmath 1993), Kryz (Authier 2009) and Iranian languages such as Ossetic (Abaev 1964) and Talysh (Schulze 2000).

Converbs are a category of non-finite verb forms whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination (Sheyanova 2019: 235) and they are found in all Nakh-Dagestanian and Turkic languages of the Caucasus (Ganenkov & Maisak 2020; Johanson & Csató 1998). The existence of converbs in Northwest Caucasian is not universally accepted, but it is clear that these languages all have verbal affixes with the same grammatical functions as typical converbs (Hewitt 2010; Kumaxov 2013; Paris 1989; Fenwick 2011). Converb-like constructions are also present in Laz (Holisky 1991; Lacroix 2009) and Juhuri (Authier 2012), while Ossetic appears to have one general converb (Bagaev 1965: 359). The most remarkable finding is that there are approximately 14 specialized converbs that are frequently found regardless of language family, where the most important in descending order are the simultaneous (‘while’), immediate anterior (‘as soon as’), temporal (‘when’), conditional (‘if’), anterior (‘after’), causal (‘because’) and concessive (‘although’) converbs. The surprisingly widespread presence of immediate anterior converbs in 37 of the 55 languages of the database is fascinating, especially since the closest thing to an immediate *posterior* converb (‘right before’) has only been found in Chechen (Jakovlev 1940: 268). These tendencies can either reveal something about subordination in general or present patterns that are possibly characteristic of the Caucasus.

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