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Combining aspectual, nominal, discursive and syntactic conditions: a reassessment of the Dargi ‘antipassive’ vs. ergative valency alternation

ALT Conference - Austin

15 December 2022



East Caucasian (aka Nakh-Daghestanian)

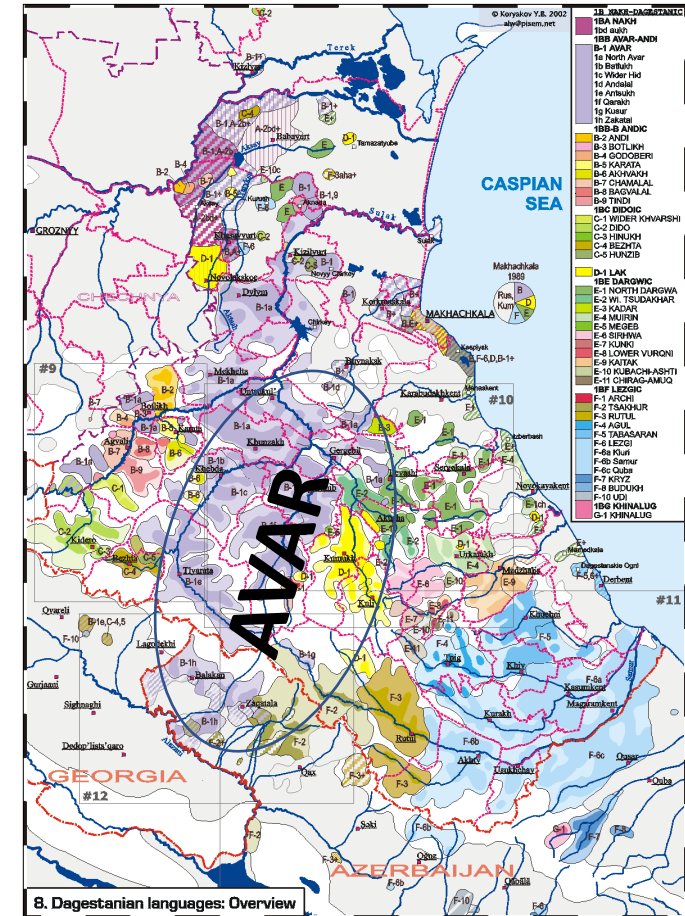
All languages of the family have a case-alignment of the ergative type (e.g. Avar):

Ergative construction

- (1) *insu-ca* *χur* *b-eλ'-ula*
 father.OBL-ERG field(N) N-plough-HAB
 'Father plows the field.'

Aspectual splits are rare and mostly restricted to “binominative” progressive constructions:

- (2) *emen* *χur* *b-eλ'-ul-e-v* *v-ugo*
 father(NOM) field(N) N-plough-IPF-PTCP-M M-COP
 'Father is plowing the field.'

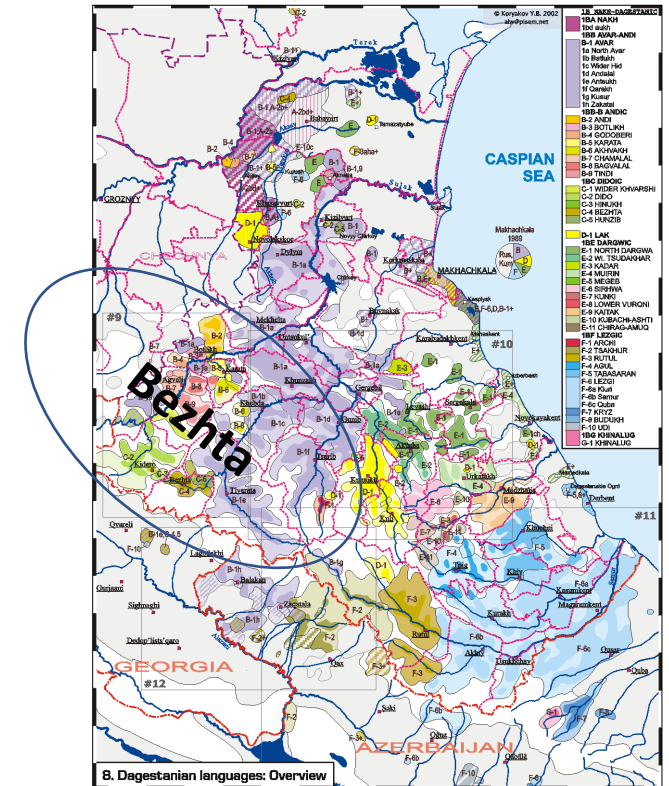


Antipassive constructions

Canonical antipassives are rare, mostly used with aspectual function (e.g. Bezhta)

(3) *öždi* *qarandi* *j-ö:t'ö-yö*
 boy.ERG hole(N) N-dig-PST
 'The boy **dug** a hole.' (ergative construction)

(4) *öžö* *qarandi-ja-d* *ö:t'ö-lä:-jo*
 boy(NOM)(M) hole-OBL-INSTR (M)dig-ANTIPASS-PST
 'The boy **was digging at** a hole.' (antipassive construction)



Unfortunately, there are no data on the frequency of the Bezhta antipassive, all the examples cited by Comrie et al. (2015) being obviously elicited.



Deobjective derivation

Avar:

- (5) *emen* (*χur-i-v*) *v-eλ'-ar-u-le-v* *v-ugo*
father(NOM) field-LOC-M M-plough-DEOBJ-PTCP-M M-COP
'Father's occupation (right now) is to plow (in the field, of course).'

But:

- not a canonical antipassive (no object; the “object” can be retrieved if it can be made into something else, e.g. a locative adjunct in (5));
- possible with many transitive verbs of occupation => special agent-noun derivation:

v-eλ'-ar-uqan 'plowman'

j-uq'-ar-uqan 'sewstress'

- not productive, quite allomorphic, looks old



The ergative construction in Dargi

- A is marked with a case ending *-li* which is also the stem for further oblique cases, while
- P is unmarked and **triggers prefixed gender/number agreement** on the predicate;
- Dargi also has person agreement suffixed on the verb, with A/S (accusative) alignment, here the 1st person suffix *-da*:

(6) *du* *Ɂam-r-iχ-ub-da* *urq'asa-liš:u-ra=de.*
1NOM(F) near-F-be.PF-PRET-**1** window-APUD-F:DIR=THITHER
'I(FEM) moved towards the window.'

(7) *da-li* *barxbarq'-ib-da* *urči* *urq'asa-liš:u-ba=de.*
1OBL-ERG N.send.PF-PRET-**1** horse(N) window-APUD-N:DIR=THITHER
'I drove the horse towards the window.'



Alternative, ‘antipassive’ construction

- (8) *durħa^ɕ-li* *ʕinc-b-e* *d-uk-ulisay*
child-ERG(M) apple-PL-**NOM(N)** **N.PL**-eat.IPF-PRES.M
‘The BOY is eating apples.’ (ergative, focus on A)

- In the alternative construction, A is in the unmarked nominative and triggers prefixal agreement on the verb; P is usually expressed and marked with the oblique plural (**-a**);
- the verb shows no other marking (unlike the Bezhta antipassive and the Avar deobjective):

- (9) *durħa^ɕ* *ʕinc-b-a* *uk-ulisay.*
child(**NOM**)(M) apple-PL-**OBL** (**M**)eat.IPF-PRES.M
‘The boy is eating apples.’ (antipassive, predicate focus)



Alternative, ‘antipassive’ construction

- **The alternative construction is used in imperfective tenses, and if the patient is semantically plural** (numbered and plural NPs; distributive constructions with a singular noun; mass nouns), when a permanent property is predicated about the topical A; the plural P may be further marked with **-li**, the “ergative” case, more properly an oblique (glossed OBL below):

(10) *k:urt:a* *čičb-na-li* *b-ilʔ-aʕn.*
fox(**NOM**)(**N**) chick-PL.OBL=**OBL(ERG/ACC)** N-steal.IPFV-3EVT:ITR
‘The fox steals (/ is a thief of) chicks.’



- The ergative construction is still possible if A is in **focus**:

(11) *k:urt:a-li* *čičb-n-e* *d-ilʔ-aʕ.*
Fox-OBL/ERG chick-PL-NOM N.PL-steal.IPFV-3EVT:TR
‘The fox steals chicks (...but the wolf steals sheep).’

**A typological rarissimum:
ergative/accusative
syncretism**



Nominative pivot preference

In literary Dargi, the use of the non-ergative construction is particularly frequent after sequential converbs:

- (12) *durħaʿ galga-liči ac'-ili ħinc-ba uk-ulisay.*
child(NOM) tree-SUPER(LAT) climb.PF-CV apple-PL.OBL (M)eat.IPF-PRES.M
'The boy has climbed on the tree and is eating apples.'

Since the northern Dargi lects on which the literary language is based have long been in contact with **Kumyk**, this complex coverbal construction could be copied on the equivalent Turkic construction with S/A pivot:

- (13) *ulan terek-ge min-ip alma aša-y.*
boy tree-DAT climb-SEQ apple eat-PRS
'The boy has climbed on the tree and is eating apples.'



Discussion

The choice of the accusative alignment is determined by a complex semantic configuration:

- 1) verbal aspect,
- 2) argument plurality,
- 3) a hitherto undetected discursive factor.

-- **This semantic configuration is reminiscent of the set of conditions favoring the use of antipassives across languages (Cooreman 1994, Givón 2001, Polinsky 2017, Sansò 2017, 2018, among many others).**

BUT...



Discussion

- Creissels (2016): the alternative construction is **not an antipassive proper** but a case of A-lability with obligatory P coding: **(i)** there is no formal change on the verb, and **(ii)** the same morphological case is used to flag some types of obliques (in particular, instrumental adjuncts) and the P argument in the alternative construction.
- In the dialect under study, however, **most transitive verbs allow for this alternative construction**, in contrast to the usually restricted set of labile verbs, especially A-labile ones, **in related languages** (e.g. only three A-labile verbs in Andi: *k'ari* 'vomit', *baʔi* 'read' (tr.) / 'study' (intr.), and *urbun* 'invent' (tr.) / 'think' (intr.), cf. Kaye et al., to appear) **and across languages** (cf. Næss 2007: 126ff.).
- Moreover, in canonical cases of A-lability P is not expressed.
- **Not a canonical case of A-lability either!**



Reconstruction of Dargi indirect case markers and oblique formants

-li seems cognate with

- the Bezhta instrumental (**-d**)
- the commonest, inanimate ergative marker in Avar (**-l** or **-d**), **-di** in Andic, Lezgian...
- the unspecified locative marker **-di** found in Avar, Andic,
- the syncretic genitive/ergative marker **-l** of Lak,
- the default oblique/genitive marker **-ži** of Kryz and oblique genitive marker **-di/ni** of Tsakhur.

⇒ Points to an original
genitive (< ablative) < instrumental

-a seems cognate with

- the Tsez animate ergative case (**-a**)
- the Avar locative case (**-(d)a**),
- the Lezgetic locative (inessive) case (**-a**),
- The animate **ergative** marker **-a** of Lezgian,
- as well as with the higher animate **oblique/genitive** marker **-a** of Kryz.

⇒ Points to a syncretic
locative / (animate) ergative



Comparison

There is no historical or sociolinguistic reason to suspect an external (Turkic) influence on Dargi to explain this valency alternation, because it is present in all dialects, including those not at all in contact with Kumyk. It is therefore likely that both constructions go back to proto-Dargi. Two possible scenarios:

- a) **either Dargi innovated this complex split, giving rise to the rare 'ergative/accusative' polyfunctionality,**
- b) or all other branches have generalized the ergative construction (but for the few instances of bi-nominative (progressive) constructions).



Diachrony

Apart from Bezhta there is no comparable alternation in other branches of the family, and the Bezhta antipassive is marked on the verb and not to be disconnected from the Avar deobjective.

The Dargi alternation is unmarked on the verb and should indeed be interpreted in terms of lexical lability, but the marked patient of the non-ergative construction is possibly to be viewed as **a partitive** in origin, rather than as an instrumental.

The originally genitive formant *-li* has evolved into both an ergative and a partitive (two common paths across languages, cf. Givón 1980, Valenzuela 2010, Luraghi & Kittilä 2014 among others) **giving rise to the unusual ergative/accusative syncretism in Dargi.**



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