PECULIARITIES IN THE ACTANT ENCODING OF DARGI TRANSITIVE VERBS

Helma van den Berg

Dept. Comparative Linguistics, Leiden University,
The Netherlands,
e-mail: hevdberg@rullet.leidenuniv.nl

Abstract: This paper explores the peculiarities in the actant encoding of transitive verbs in Dargi. While this East Caucasian language shows class agreement according to an ergative pattern, personal agreement is controlled by animacy, with first and second person marked in the verb form. Agreement with both third person agent and patient depends on the information structure. According to the literature, antipassivisation in Dargi takes place by exchanging the absolutive and ergative case-marking acompanied by a change of aspect in the verbal stem. However, the possibilities of the antipassive are limited by at least three constraints.

Keywords: actant encoding, class agreement, personal agreement, antipassive, focus, East Caucasian, Dagestanian, Dargi.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Dargi language is spoken by some 366,000 people, the majority of whom lives in the Daghestan republic (Russia). Dargi belongs to the Lak-Dargi subgroup of the Dagestanian branch of the East Caucasian languages. It has a large dialect variety and it seems appropriate to consider several of it's dialects as separate languages. Dargi has a written standard which in principle is based on one of it's main dialects, viz. Akusha; because of the dialect variety this standard is not functioning well. Dargi examples from Abdullaev (1954) or Abdullaev (1971) have been quoted in general linguistic literature to demonstrate personal agreement and the antipassive construction. Both phenomena are rather uncommon for Dagestanian languages. This paper presents data from the Akusha dialect that throw new light on these phenomena. The data in this paper are based on fieldwork with native speakers of the Akusha dialect[1].

2. CLASS AGREEMENT IN THE VERB

Dargi nouns distinguish number and class. In the singular we find a class for male persons, one for female persons and one for all other objects, whether animate or inanimate. In the plural

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there is a distinction animate and inanimate in the third person; first and second person have a separate pattern of agreement. Agreement is realized by class affixes, that can appear prefixed, infixed or suffixed (table 1).

Table 1: verbal class agreement

	singular	plural	
		1, 2 (pl)	3 (hpl)
M	w	d-, -r-, -r	b
F	r		
N	b	d-, -r-, -r	

Agreement takes place according to an ergative pattern: with the S(ubject) of intransitive verbs and the P(atient) of transitive verbs. The S/P noun has the absolutive case-marking whereas the A(gent) of a transitive verb is expressed by the ergative case (1a, 2a)[2].

(1a)   **dudeš w-ak'-ib-Ø**   'father came'
       (father:ABS M-come-AOR-3)
       neš r-ak'-ib-Ø   'mother came'
       unc b-ak'-ib-Ø   'the bull came'
       urš-bi/rurs-bi b-ak'-ib-Ø   'the boys/girls came'
       unc-i d-ak'-ib-Ø   'the bulls came'

(2a)   **il-i-ni urši w-it-ib-Ø**   '(s)he hit the boy'
       (this-OBL-ERG boy:ABS M-hit-AOR-3)
       il-i-ni rursi r-it-ib-Ø   '(s)he hit the girl'
       il-i-ni unc b-it-ib-Ø   '(s)he hit the bull'

3. PERSONAL AGREEMENT IN THE VERB

Unlike most Dagestanian languages, Dargi shows personal agreement in the verb. The personal markers are different for the various tenses and often combine with the tense suffix into a port-manteau morpheme. In transitive clauses with a 1st and a 2nd person, the verb agrees with P. When a clause combines 1st or 2nd person with a 3rd person, agreement is controlled by animacy: with 1st or 2nd person, whether A or P (Helmbrecht 1996:138). E.g.:

(1b)   **nu r-ak'-i-ra**   'I (F) came'
       (me:ABS F-come-AOR-1)
       Hu r-ak'-i-ri   'you (F) came'[3]
       il r-ak'-ib-Ø   'she came'

(2b)   **nu-ni Hu r-it-i-ri**   'I hit you (F)'
       (me-ERG you:ABS F-hit-AOR-2)
       Hu-ni nu r-it-i-ra   'you hit me (F)'
       il-i-ni nu r-it-i-ra   '(s)he hit me (F)'
       nu-ni rursi r-it-i-ra   'I hit the girl'
       il-i-ni il r-it-ib-Ø   '(s)he hit her'

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[2] In the glosses the following abbreviations are used: 1 1st person, 2 2nd person, 3 3rd person, ABS absolutive, AOR aorist, ERG ergative, F female, FUT future, GER gerund, hpl third person human plural, ipf imperfective, itr intransitive, M male, N neuter, OBL oblique, PL plural (nominal suffix), pl plural (class agreement affix), SUP superessive.

[3] H stands for a voiceless pharyngeal fricative.

4. PERSONAL AGREEMENT IN FOCUS

Verb forms with 3rd person A and P are inconclusive as to which 3rd person (A or P) is encoded, except for the so-callled 'analytic' forms of the present and perfect tenses. They consist of an imperfective or perfective gerund and a personal ending; with 3rd persons the auxiliary **sa-B** 'be' is added[4].

The auxiliary can agree with both A or P: agreement with A is neutral. When the verb form agrees with P both for class and person, P is in focus. It is stressed that the action is carried out on this very P and not on another object and the fact that it is carried out on this P, is more important than the fact that it is carried out by a certain A. This adstructs the communicative component of the actant encoding (see Kibrik 1979:63). Compare the neutral agreement in (3a, 4a) with P in focus in (3b, 4b).

(3a) **dudeš-li-Ø xä b-uc-i-l sa-y**   'father caught the dog'
     (father-OBL-ERG dog:ABS N-take-AOR-GER be-M)

(3b) **dudeš-li-Ø xä b-uc-i-l sa-b**   'father caught the *dog*, it is a dog father
     (father-OBL-ERG dog:ABS N-take-AOR-GER be-N)   caught (not a fox)'

(4a) **dudeš-li-Ø džuz b-uč'-ul sa-y**   'father reads a book'
     (father-OBL-ERG book:ABS N-read$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)

(4b) **dudeš-li-Ø džuz b-uč'-ul sa-b**   'it is a *book* father reads (not a
     (father-OBL-ERG book:ABS N-read$_{ipf}$-GER be-N)   newspaper)'

This difference in encoding A and P is only visible in the third person present or perfect tense, with third person A and P of different noun classes. When A and P belong to the same noun class (3c) or when A or P are first or second person (3d), focus can not be expressed materially.

(3c) **dudeš-li-Ø urši Ø-uc-i-l sa-y**   'father caught the boy'
     (father-OBL-ERG boy:ABS M-take-AOR-GER be-M)

(3d) **nu-ni xä b-uc-i-l-ra**   'I caught the dog'
     (me-ERG dog:ABS N-take-AOR-GER-1)

5. ANTIPASSIVE CONSTRUCTION

The literature on Dargi syntax pays a lot of attention to the following phenomenon: Dargi allows for an antipassive construction in which A is encoded as an intransitive S; the former P in the absolutive becomes a complement in an oblique case (ergative or locative), or is omitted. This construction stresses the fact that S conducts an action for a period of time, the action is his habit etc. The antipassive construction has a lot of constraints however. An example from Abdullaev (1971:261), cited by Comrie (1973:245), is:

(4c) **nu-ni džuz b-uč'-ul-ra**   'I read a book'
     (me-ERG book:ABS N-read$_{ipf}$-GER-1)

(4d) **nu džuz-li-Ø Ø-uč'-ul-ra**   'I (M) am engaged in reading a book'
     (me:ABS book-OBL-ERG M-read$_{ipf}$-GER-1)

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[4]This auxiliary is always printed separately in standard Dargi texts and in some dialects pronounced as a separate word. In Akusha however, the auxiliary is a clitic: synchronically these forms is are not analytic anymore. Compare: Standard Dargi **rursi r-ak'-i-li sa.r.i** with Akusha Dargi **rursi r-ak'-i-l-sa-r** 'the girl came'. For reasons of consistency I continue to write the cliticized auxiliary separately: **rursi r-ak'-i-l sa-r** (girl:ABS F-come-AOR-GER be-F).

and compare (4a) with (4c)

(4e) **dudeš džuz-li-Ø Ø-uč'-ul sa-y**   'father is engaged in reading a book'
      (father:ABS book-OBL-ERG M-read$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)

and also

(5a) **qubzar-li-Ø qu b-alc-ul sa-y**   'the farmer ploughs the field'
      (farmer-OBL-ERG field:ABS N-plough$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)
(5b) **qubzar qu-li-č'i-w w-alc-ul sa-y**   'the farmer ploughs away at the field'
      (farmer:ABS field-OBL-SUP-M M-plough$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)

5.1. First constraint

The antipassive construction only occurs with tense forms from imperfective verb stems, e.g. the present, the future, the imperfect, and the imperfective imperative. The hypothetical antipassive (perfective) aorist in (4f) is incorrect.

(4f) ***dudeš džuzli welč'un**

An exception in this regard are the verbs **-erdž/-udž** 'drink' and **-erk/-uk** 'eat'. They allow an antipassive in the aorist with an imperfective verbal root (see also Abdullaev (1954:107, 171), Helmbrecht (1996:142) who give examples with this verbs as the general rule, and Kibrik (1979) for the dialect of Chirag).

(6a) **urši-ni šin d-erdž-ib-Ø**   'the boy drank water'
      (boy-ERG water pl-drink-AOR-3)
(6b) ***urši šinni werdžib**
(6c) **urši šin-ni-Ø Ø-udž-ib-Ø**   'the boy was engaged in drinking water'
      (boy water-OBL-ERG M-drink$_{ipf}$-AOR-3)

5.2. Second constraint

A second constraint is that the verb and it's actants have to allow for a durative meaning: sudden or single events can not be described with an antipassive. Therefore the complement has to be an uncountable, collective noun or a plural in order for the action to be carried out during a period of time.

(7a) **urši-ni istakan b-älč'-ul sa-y**   'the boy breaks the glass'
      (boy-ERG glass:ABS N-break$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)
(7b) ***urši istakanni wälč'ul say**
(7c) **urši istakan-t-a-Ø w-älč'-ul sa-y**   'the boy breaks glasses'
      (boy:ABS glass-PL-OBL-ERG M-break$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)

5.3. Third constraint

The third constraint is that the antipassive construction only occurs with A and P that are unequal in agentivity. Clauses with equally agentive A and P as in (3e) may look like antipassives, but are in fact transitive constructions with focussed P and uncommon word order[5].

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[5] The common word order for example (3e) would be: **xä-li-Ø dudeš Ø-urc-ul sa-y.**

(3e) **dudeš xä-li-Ø Ø-urc-ul sa-y**   'the dog catches *father*, father is caught
      (father:ABS dog-OBL-ERG M-take$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)   by the dog'

The examples (8a-c) show that the same verb allows or disallows for an antipassive construction depending on the agentivity of *both actants*.

(8a) **dudeš-li-Ø dušman karš-ul sa-y**   'father kills the enemy'
      (father-OBL-ERG enemy:ABS kill:M$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)
(8b) **dudeš dušma-y karš-ul sa-y**   'the enemy kills *father*'
      (father:ABS enemy:OBL-ERG kill:M$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)
(8c) **dudeš ʕär-m-a-ni karš-ul sa-y**   'father is engaged in killing hares'
      (father:ABS hare-PL-OBL-ERG kill:M$_{ipf}$-GER be-M)

5.4. Antipassive in the future tense

The Dargi future tense has different endings for transitive and intransitive verbs: compare the intransitive future endings in (9a) with the transitive endings in (9b).

(9a) **nu r-udz-us**   'I (F) shall work'
      (me:ABS F-work$_{ipf}$-FUT1$_{itr}$)
      Hu r-udz-ud   'you (F) will work'
      il r-udz-ar   'she will work

(9b) **nu-ni džuz b-uč'-as**   'I shall read a book'
      (me-ERG book:ABS N-read$_{ipf}$-FUT1)
      Hu-ni džuz b-uč'-ad   'you will read a book'
      il-i-ni džuz b-uč'-a   '(s)he will read a book'

The antipassive construction is considered intransitive to such extent that it shows intransitive future tense endings most of the time.

(4g) **dudeš-li-Ø džuz b-uč'-a**   'father will read a book'
      (father-OBL-ERG book:ABS N-read$_{ipf}$-FUT3)
(4h) **dudeš džuz-li-Ø Ø-uč'-ar**   'father will be engaged in reading a book'
      (father:ABS book-OBL-ERG M-read$_{ipf}$ FUT3$_{itr}$)

5.5. Labile verbs and antipassive

Besides intransitive verbs with or without a complement and transitive verbs with or without a complement, Dargi has a small number of labile verbs, that are used either transitively or intransitively. These verbs allow for both transitive and intransitive future endings. The intransitive future ending is also used with the antipassive of a transitive labile verb. Compare the transitive (labile) verb form (7d), the intransitive (labile) verb form (7e) with the antipassive (labile) verb form in (7f).

(7d) **urši-ni istakan b-älč'-a**   'the boy will break the glass'
      (boy-ERG glass:ABS N-break$_{ipf}$-FUT3)
(7e) **istakan b-älč'-an**   'the glass will break'
      (glass:ABS N-break$_{ipf}$-FUT3$_{itr}$)
(7f) **urši istakan-t-a-Ø w-älč'-an**   'the boy will be engaged in breaking glasses'
      (boy:ABS glass-PL-OBL-ERG M-break$_{ipf}$-FUT3$_{itr}$)

6. CONCLUSION

The data in this paper show the pecularities of Akusha Dargi actant encoding. This description is a prerequisite for the further study of the syntax and semantics of these constructions. It seems that both the focus construction and the antipassive are mostly used to convey a particular semantic nuance and not to facilitate any syntactical construction. As far as we are able to conclude, Dargi shows morphological ergativity only, which is weakened by the patterns of personal agreement. More elaborated data on Dargi morphology and syntax will be presented in Van den Berg (forthcoming).

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