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# Between noun incorporation and “lexical affixation” in Abaza

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## 1 Introduction

The polysynthetic Northwest Caucasian languages have been traditionally considered to lack noun incorporation (NI). Indeed, if NI is understood as productive and lexically unrestricted morphological compounding of the verbal root with the root of its (usually) patientive argument (cf. Baker 1988 or, more recently, Olthof 2020), then such phenomenon is clearly lacking in Northwest Caucasian. However, in many typological studies of NI (e.g. Mithun 1984, 2000, de Reuse 1994, Massam 2009) this phenomenon is defined more broadly to also include unproductive and restricted noun-verb compounding as well as cases when the relation of the nominal root to the verbal root is distinct from the patient.

What the Northwest Caucasian languages, especially Abaza and Abkhaz, are rich in is the so-called preverbs, i.e. verbal prefixes expressing spatial meanings. From a typological perspective, the Northwest Caucasian preverbs can be linked to the notion of “lexical affixes”, which have very concrete semantics resembling that of roots (Mithun 1997; Mattissen 2004: 190–194), denoting e.g. body-parts, salient artifacts or natural objects, locations, and various adverbial notions (Mattissen 2006: 297–333).

Historically, the Northwest Caucasian preverbs mostly go back to incorporated nouns with relational or locational semantics (Lomtadidze 1983), exemplifying a cross-linguistically well-attested path of development (Mithun 1984: 885–887; Mithun 1997: 365–366; Kinkade 1998; Mattissen 2006). I shall argue, however, that some of these preverbs can be considered incorporated nouns synchronically as well and that in general these elements form a cline from more root-like to more affix-like behaviour.

The data for this paper comes from Abaza (ISO 639-3 *abq*), which is spoken by ca. 35 000 people in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic in the Russian North Caucasus (for an outline of Abaza grammar in English see Lomtadidze et al. 1989, O’Herin 2002). The system of preverbs in Abaza and their combinatorics with verbal roots has been amply described in Klychev (1995), which, together with a number of published texts, is the primary source of examples in this paper.

## 2 Noun incorporation in Abaza

Abaza boasts more than a hundred simplex and complex spatial preverbs. They occur in the middle of the prefixal template being preceded by the absolutive cross-reference prefixes, subordinators and applicatives and separated from the verbal root by the ergative and indirect object prefixes and markers of negation and causative (1).

- (1) *a-wasa*    *a-š’acara*    *jə-la-wə-m-sa-n*  
DEF-sheep DEF-lawn    3SG.N.ABS-LOC.mass-2SG.M.ERG-NEG-shave-IMP  
‘Do not shear the sheep on the lawn.’ (Klychev 1995: 145)

While many of the Abaza preverbs do not have apparent lexical cognates or can be traced back to lexical (usually nominal) roots only etymologically, some have clear synchronic counterparts among nouns. Two subclasses of these can be singled out, which I shall discuss in turn.

## 2.1 Body-part nouns

A considerable number of preverbs is constituted by body-part nouns, a feature Abaza shares with other Northwest Caucasian languages as well as cross-linguistically (Fleck 2006; Mattissen 2006: 310–315; Massam 2009: 1090). Some of these are clearly grammaticalized and have replaced their original meaning with that of spatial configuration, cf. *qa* ‘head’ (2).

- (2) *a-čʰkʷən a-zəχʰ d-a-qa-č-t*  
DEF-youth DEF-spring 3SG.H.ABS-3SG.N.IO-LOC. **above**-sleep(AOR)-DCL  
‘The boy fell asleep over the spring of water.’ (Klychev 1995: 258)

However, alongside the more grammaticalized preverbs like *qa-* in (2) there exist a number of preverbs that retain their body-part meaning, e.g. *lakta-* ‘face’ (3) or *qʷda* ‘neck’ (4). Note that such nouns are accompanied by a personal prefix cross-referencing their notional possessor that becomes an indirect object of the verb.

- (3) *a-saba s-a-rə-lakta-pl-əw-n*  
DEF-dust CSL-3PL.IO-LOC. **face**-pour-IPF-PST  
‘Dust was pouring onto their faces.’ (Klychev 1995: 154)
- (4) *arqan-gʻəj s-a-qʷdə-j-χ-χə-n*  
rope-ADD CSL-3SG.N.IO-LOC. **neck**-3SG.M.ERG-take-RE-PST  
‘He took the rope off its (the stallion’s) neck.’ (Abaza Tales 2015: 142)

Some of such body-part nouns undergo metaphorization, cf. the two uses of *napə-* ‘hand’ (this noun always occurs with the preverb *ça-* ‘under’) in (5) and (6).

- (5) *a-kʷtəvʰ s-napə-ça-p.č-t*  
DEF-egg 1SG.IO-LOC. **hand**-LOC.under-break(AOR)-DCL  
‘The egg broke in my hands.’ (Klychev 1995: 170)
- (6) *də-r-napə-ça-ša-t a-hažʰrat-kʷa*  
3SG.H.ABS-3PL.IO-LOC. **hand**-LOC.under-fall(AOR)-DCL DEF-robber-PL  
‘[A man] was attacked by (lit. fell under the hands of) robbers.’ (AbLu 10:30)

## 2.2 Non-relational nouns

Another common lexical source of Abaza preverbs are non-relational nouns denoting salient landmarks such as *čʰwə-* ‘oven’, *gara-* ‘cradle’ (7), *čkara-* ‘courtyard’, *qʷa-* ‘ashes’ (8) etc.

- (7) *a-sabəj d-gara-l-gʷa-n d-žəkʷə-l-χ-t*  
DEF-child 3SG.H.ABS-LOC. **cradle**-3SG.F.ERG-put-PST 3SG.H.ABS-LOC.out-go-RE(AOR)-DCL  
‘She put the child into the cradle and went away.’ (Klychev 1995: 67)
- (8) *ajnəž d-qʷa-la-j-gʷa-t*  
DEF + giant 3SG.H.ABS-LOC. **ashes**-LOC.mass-3SG.M.ERG-put(AOR)-DCL  
‘He threw the giant into the ashes.’ (Klychev 1995: 273)

When incorporated, such nouns may, like body-part nouns, refer to a concrete landmark, as in (7) and (8), but may also function as *sui generis* “verbal classifiers” (Aikhenvald 2000: 149–171; Mithun 1984: 863ff) corresponding to a referential landmark expressed by a full noun phrase whose root can be both identical to the preverb (9) or different (10).

(9) *rə-čɣʷa*            *d-čɣʷa-pχa-t*  
 3PL.IO-oven    3SG.H.ABS-LOC.oven-get.warm(AOR)-DCL  
 ‘He warmed himself at their oven.’ (Klychev 1995: 213)

(10) *wadərɣʷana*    *a-ḵʷadəgʷ*            *wə-čḵara-l-ḵ*  
 then                    DEF-courtyard    2SG.M.ABS-LOC.yard-go-NPST.DCL  
 ‘Then you’ll enter their courtyard.’ (Abaza Tales 2015: 85)

### 2.3 Affinity of incorporated nouns with preverbs

As already said, incorporated nouns in Abaza fall into one distributional class with other spatial preverbs, many of which, even if diachronically descending from nouns, are highly grammaticalized and desemantized. Moreover, some of the incorporated noun roots discussed above have developed a vowel alternation distinguishing between essive/lative vs. elative forms (12), similarly to many preverbs (11) (Avidzba 2017), which testifies to their greater integration into the system of verbal spatial prefixation.

(11) a.    *a-ḡanžʷa*    *a-ɣʷara*            *j-ta-pssɣa-χ-t*  
 DEF-crow    3SG.N.IO-nest    3SG.N.ABS-LOC.in-fly-RE(AOR)-DCL  
 ‘The crow flew back into its nest.’ (Klychev 1995: 197)

b.    *a-warba*    *a-ɣʷara*            *j-tə-pssɣa-t*  
 DEF-eagle    3SG.N.IO-nest    3SG.N.ABS-LOC.in.ELAT-fly(AOR)-DCL  
 ‘The eagle flew out of its nest.’ (Klychev 1995: 205)

(12) a.    *aɣʷ*                    *čɣʷa-l-ga-t*  
 DEF + trough    LOC.oven-3SG.F.ERG-carry(AOR)-DCL  
 ‘She brought the trough to the oven.’ (Klychev 1995: 211)

b.    *d-čɣʷə-r-ga-χ-t*  
 3SG.H.ABS-LOC.oven.ELAT-3PL.ERG-carry-RE(AOR)-DCL  
 ‘They carried him out of the oven.’ (Klychev 1995: 218)

## 3 Discussion

If Abaza indeed has noun incorporation, then this is a typologically rather peculiar case of NI. First, while NI occurs with body-part nouns and a number of non-relational nouns, the class of nouns allowing incorporation is apparently closed. The productivity of NI in terms of verbs allowing it is hard to assess; for some preverbs, Klychev (1995) lists hundreds of verbs combining with them, while for others just a dozen combinations are recorded. Second and most importantly, in all cases incorporated nouns serve as spatial modifiers of the verbal root and never denote affected patients or instruments. This contrasts with incorporated nouns and lexical affixes described in the typological literature. Finally, incorporated nouns in Abaza fall into one class with unequivocal spatial prefixes themselves mostly originating from nouns, which suggests that there have been several successive waves of NI in Abaza.

### Abbreviations

1 — 1<sup>st</sup> person; 2 — 2<sup>nd</sup> person; 3 — 3<sup>rd</sup> person; ABS — absolutive; ADD — additive; AOR — aorist; CSL — cislocative; DCL — declarative; DEF — definite; ELAT — elative; ERG — ergative; F — feminine; H — human; IMP — imperative; IO — indirect object; IPF — imperfect; LOC — locative; M — masculine; N — non-human; NEG — negation; NPST — non-past; PL — plural; PST — past; RE — reffective; SG — singular.

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