

Antipassivization and Grammatical Relations in Georgian

Grammatical relations and the notion of subjecthood in Georgian has long been a topic of linguistic inquiry (Marr and Brière 1931, Tschenkéli 1958, Chikobava 1968, Aronson 1970, Shanidze 1973, Aronson 1979, Harris 1981). The basic difficulty lies most obviously in case assignment (see table 1). Although frequently described as ‘ergative’, Georgian more closely resembles a Split-S language (Dixon 1994) in that two separate conjugations of intransitive predicates, the second and the third, have distinct properties in terms of case assignment and verbal agreement.

What is more, on top of this, a kind of split-system has verbs from the first through third conjugations mark their notional subjects with nominative case in the present/future series, while in the aorist subjects receive ergative case in the first (transitive) and third (‘unergative’ intransitive) conjugations but nominative case in the second (‘unaccusative’ intransitive) conjugation. This has been analyzed (Palmer 1994: 78-82) as a kind of obligatory detransitivization in the present series, whereby the transitives of the first conjugation demote their agent to the nominative case and their notional direct object to the dative case. This has some surface plausibility, in that aorist series verbs with the ‘ergative’ construction lack one of the (usually overt) imperfectivizing thematic suffixes extant in the present/future series (see (2)). In this conception, these thematic suffixes are thus a kind of antipassive which has the well-known corollary effect of changing the aspectual state of the verb from perfective to imperfective (Tsunoda 1988).

There are however a number of difficulties with this analysis. Firstly, if the thematic suffixes really are detransitivizing suffixes, one would expect that the demoted dative-marked patients of transitive verbs of the first conjugation would be optional, given that a true antipassive construction typically has the function of backgrounding the patient, but this is not the case (see (1)). Secondly, one would expect that the now demoted dative-marked patient of first conjugation transitive verbs could not be cross-referenced with object markers identical to the object markers in the aorist series (where the ergative construction holds), but rather by the indirect object markers or by nothing at all (i.e., as adjuncts). However, these objects are so cross-referenced, as in (2). Perhaps most damagingly, these putatively antipassivized present series verbs can themselves be passivized, as in (3).

Given these facts, reanalysis of the thematic suffixes as aspectual markers is more appropriate. Within the framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar, I will argue that the appearance of antipassivization is a diachronic, not a synchronic, fact (Harris 1985, Tuite 1987), and that synchronically thematic suffixes formally contribute aspectual and case agreement features but otherwise do not affect valency. The underlying default case marking expected from Lexical Mapping Theory (Levin 1986, Bresnan 1990) thus only arises when verbal roots are not preempted by other morpholexical processes.

Series / Conj.	1 st Conj.	2 nd Conj.	3 rd Conj.	4 th Conj.
<i>Present/Future</i>	Nom _{AG} – Dat _{PAT} – Dat _{GOAL}	Nom _{PAT}	Nom _{AG}	Dat _{EXP} – Nom _{PAT}
<i>Aorist</i>	Erg _{AG} -Nom _{PAT} – Dat _{GOAL}	Nom _{PAT}	Erg _{AG}	Dat _{EXP} – Nom _{PAT}
<i>Perfect Evidential</i>	Dat _{EXP} – Nom _{PAT} – -tvis _{GOAL}	Nom _{PAT}	Dat _{AG}	Dat _{EXP} – Nom _{PAT}

Table 1. Note: 1st conjugation predicates are mostly transitive; 2nd and 3rd conjugations are mostly intransitive; 4th conjugation verbs are transitive psych-verbs.

- (1) Revaz-i xed-av-s
 Revaz-NOM see-TH-3SG
 ‘Revaz sees him/her/them’ (Not: *Revaz sees.)
 (That is, even when the argument is pro-dropped, the interpretation of the objects is referential to something earlier in the discourse.)
- (2) a. m-a-sc’or-eb-s. (With thematic suffix)
 1PAT-CAUS-be.correct-TH-3SG
 ‘He is correcting me.’
 b. ga-m-a-sc’or-a (Without thematic suffix)
 PRVB-1PAT-CAUS-be.correct-3SGAOR
 ‘He corrected me.’
- (3) a. Revaz-i sit’q’va-s sazgv-r-av-s. Active
 Revaz-NOM word-DAT define-TH-3SG
 ‘Revaz is defining the word.’
 b. Sit’q’va i-sazgv-r-eb-a Passive
 Word.NOM SV-define-TH-3SG2NDCONJ
 ‘The word is being defined.’
 (Here ‘SV’ denotes ‘subjective version’, which is used to derive passive verbs.)

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