

Comprehensive Descriptive Grammar of Eastern Circassian (Kabardian)

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July 5, 2023

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Goal and motivation

This book is intended to be a living document that will be continuously worked on and updated. Because of that, it is important to have a clear goal in mind.

The main goal of this book is to provide a comprehensive description of the Eastern Circassian language, i.e. Kabardian. However, this book will also contain a lot of information about the speakers of the language, their culture, and their history.

The intended target audience are linguists, language learners, and native speakers of Kabardian. It might seem weird and overkill that a comprehensive descriptive grammar is targeted at language learners, however in my experience there are far too few resources which go into adequate detail about the grammar of the language without it only being understandable to linguists. In my honest opinion, learning Circassian is made much easier once one understands the grammar better. Because of that this book will try to strike a balance between being linguistically precise and being accessible to non-linguists. Thus, for example, this book will contain a lot of examples, which might be redundant for linguists, but will be helpful for non-linguists, either to get a better feel for the language or to make it easier to learn.

The book will be divided into three parts. The first part will be a general introduction to the language, its history, and its speakers. The second part will be a comprehensive description of the grammar of the language. The third part will be a learning guide specifically targeted at language learners, where a big emphasis will be put on expressing certain ideas and explaining certain quirks and concepts in a way that is easy to understand for non-linguists.

While this book mainly focuses on Eastern Circassian (Kabardian), it will also contain information about Western Circassian (Adyghe) where it is relevant, as well as Ubykh, Abkhaz and Abaza, as comparing them can create more insight. Maybe there will be even their own parts in the book, but that is not certain yet. A secondary goal is to promote everything which is adjacent to the Circassians in some way.

Part I

Society, Culture and History

Part II

Grammar

Chapter 2

Phonology

Chapter 3

Morphology

3.1 Verb

The verb is the

3.1.1 Transitivity

The main overarching category for a verb is transitivity. A verb can be transitive (лѣѣс) and intransitive (лѣѣмѣс). The main difference is that a base intransitive verb governs only over 1 argument, the subject in the absolutive/nominative case (-p), while a base transitive verb governs over 2 arguments, the subject in the ergative case (-м) and the direct object in the absolutive/nominative case (-p).

Below the intransitive verb **лѣѣн** *pl̥an* ‘to look’ and transitive verb **лѣѣгѣун** *l̥axʷən* ‘to see Y’ are used to demonstrate that. With **лѣѣ** *l̥ə* ‘man’ man and **жѣг** *ʒə* ‘tree’.

- **лѣѣр лѣѣнѣ** *l̥ər pl̥anɕ* ‘the man will look’
- **лѣѣм жѣгѣр илѣѣгѣунѣ** *l̥əmt ʒəgər j̥l̥axʷənɕ* ‘the man will see the tree’

However, in both cases, those base verbs can get indirect objects in the ergative case (-м), usually by deploying preverbs. A frequent example is the use of the preverb *e-* with intransitive verbs, which is a very generic way to add an indirect object. In many ways it is equivalent to ‘to’ or ‘at’ or the French ‘à’. Thus leading to the verb **еплѣѣн** (not that *ə* became *ы*).

- **лѣѣр жѣгѣм еплѣѣнѣ** ‘the man will look at the tree’
- **лѣѣм жѣгѣр илѣѣгѣунѣ** ‘the man will see the tree’

As one can see, intransitive and transitive verbs can have 2 arguments and if that is the case the cases are switched. While with an intransitive with 2 arguments the subject is in the absolutive/nominative with an (indirect) object in the ergative, the transitive verb has it the other way around, the subject is in the ergative case while the (direct) object is in the absolutive/nominative.

Important to note, that while morphologically there is only one ergative case, it is useful to differentiate between the 'pure' ergative and the oblique case. The 'pure' usage would be only in regards to the use as subject, while the oblique usage would be everything else. More on that later.

Chapter 4

Vocabulary

This chapter will explore the vocabulary.

4.1 Semantic Categories

4.1.1 Kinship

This category is about family.

Table 4.1: Kinship Terms

Term	Translation	Notes
адэ <i>ada</i>	‘father’	
анэ <i>ana</i>	‘mother’	
дадэ <i>da:da</i>	‘grandfather’	
нанэ <i>na:na</i>	‘grandmother’	
адэшхуэ <i>adaʃxʷa</i>	‘grandfather’	more formal
анэшхуэ <i>anaʃxʷa</i>	‘grandmother’	more formal
бын <i>bən</i>	‘child’	
кѳуэ <i>qʷa</i>	‘son’	
пхѳу <i>pχʷə</i>	‘daughter’	
бынырылѳху <i>bənərətχʷ</i>	“	
кѳуэрылѳху <i>qʷərətχʷ</i>	“	
пхѳурылѳху <i>pχʷərətχʷ</i>	“	
кѳуэш <i>qʷaʃ</i>	‘brother’	said by males
дэлѳху <i>daʃxʷ</i>	‘brother’	said by females
шыпхѳу <i>ʃəpχʷ</i>	‘sister’	
кѳуэшырылѳху <i>qʷaʃərətχʷ</i>	“	
шыпхѳурылѳху <i>ʃəpχʷərətχʷ</i>	“	

The terms **адэ** *ada* and **анэ** *ana* denote ‘father’ and ‘mother’, respectively. For the generation above, **адэшхуэ** *adaʃxʷa* and **анэшхуэ** *anaʃxʷa* denote ‘grandfather’ and ‘grandmother’, respectively, derived with the suffix **шхуэ** *ʃxʷa* which denotes bigness, thus literally ‘big father’ and ‘big mother’. On the other hand, **дадэ** *da:da* and **нанэ** *na:na* are the more endearing forms of the former and are also used when referring to them.

Table 4.2: Kinship Terms

Term	Translation	Notes
тхъэмадэ <i>thama:da</i>	‘husband’s father’	
гуащэ <i>g^wa:ʃa</i>	‘husband’s mother’	
пщыкхъуэ <i>pʃəq^wa</i>	‘husband’s brother’	
пщыпхъу <i>pʃəpχ^w</i>	‘husband’s sister’	
щыкхъу адэ <i>ʃəq^w a:da</i>	‘wife’s father’	
щыкхъу анэ <i>ʃəq^w a:na</i>	‘wife’s mother’	
щыкхъу щлалэ <i>ʃəq^w ʃ^wa:la</i>	‘wife’s son’	
щыкхъу хъыджэбз <i>ʃəq^w χədʒabz</i>	‘wife’s daughter’	
фызабэ <i>fəza:ba</i>	‘widow’	
лфыгуабэ <i>l^wəv^wa:ba</i>	‘widower’	
зэиншэ <i>zəjənʃa</i>	‘orphan’	
ибэ <i>jəba</i>	‘orphan’	

The terms describing the direct offspring are **бын** *bən* ‘child’, **кхъуэ** *q^wa* ‘son’ and **пхъу** *pχ^wə* ‘daughter’. The term **пхъу** *pχ^wə* ‘daughter’ had likely ‘woman’ as its main meaning, as it is frequently combined with other words to refer to females, some of them will be seen below.

The terms describing siblings are **кхъуэш** *q^waʃ*, **дэлху** *daɬχ^w* for ‘brother’ and **шыхъу** *ʃəpχ^w* ‘sister’. Females always refer to their brother as **дэлху** *daɬχ^w*, while males as **кхъуэш** *q^waʃ*. The term **кхъуэш** *q^waʃ* ‘brother’ appears to be a compound word of **кхъуэ** *q^wa* ‘son’ and **шы** *ʃə* which is an archaic way to refer to ‘brother’, as it is still used in Western Circassian **шы** *ʃə* ‘brother’. The term **шыхъу** *ʃəpχ^w* ‘sister’ is a compound word of **шы** *ʃə* ‘brother’ and **пхъу** *pχ^wə* ‘daughter’. This and some other uses suggest that the original meaning of **шы** *ʃə* was closer to ‘relative’, ‘kin’ or ‘sibling’.

Part III

Learning Guide

Chapter 5

Learning