

# Comprehensive Descriptive Grammar of Eastern Circassian (Kabardian)

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This book is intended to be a living document that will be continuously worked on and updated. This also means that it will be incomplete for a long time. However, I believe that it is better to have something incomplete than nothing at all. Also, I hope that that motivates others to contribute to this book. Note, that I intend it to be mainly an online document, thus calling it a book might be out of place, nonetheless this document will be referred to as a book. Because of the nature of this book, it is important to create guidelines as to what this book is about.

I decided to write this book with the main overarching goal to make it easier for others to learn Circassian. In my view a big problem is that most good resources about Circassian are either in Russian, Turkish or Circassian itself. While there are still some very good resources in English, they are either incomplete or not very accessible to non-linguists. This is bad, because it makes it harder for people to learn Circassian, including Circassians who want to relearn the language of their ancestors.

The secondary goal is to actually write a comprehensive descriptive grammar. While reading a grammar might not be the most productive way to learn a language, I think in the context of Circassian it is a worthwhile endeavor. The main reason is simply because of how different the language structure is from most other languages (ergative agreement, polypersonality, preverbs, etc). Thus having a comprehensive grammar can be very helpful for linguists and language learners alike, as the main point of that is to study the structure of the language.

To reconcile these two goals, I intend to write this book in a way that it can be used as a reference for linguists and language learners alike. First of all, the idea is that the book would have two big parts, the grammar part and the learning part. The grammar part will resemble most other comprehensive descriptive grammars, however with the explicit goal to also be a potential learning resource. This would include many examples, maybe even in excessive amount, which might be too much for a comprehensive descriptive grammar, however it might give a better feel for the language. In addition, while the book will try to keep a linguistics appropriate language, an attempt will be made to explain the various concepts. The learning part will be much more focused on simply understanding how to form various phrases and meanings without a big emphasis on the grammatical structure.

Another goal of this book is to describe the history, culture and society. For that there will be its own part.

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.

Another function of this book is compile my Circassian language learning into one source. This means I am not a native speaker, however I am of Circassian descent and thus I have a personal connection to this language. This will probably assure that work on this project will never be completely halted, at worst only paused. Also keep in mind, I'm not a linguist, however I had big interest in linguistics since my childhood.



**Part I**

**Society, Culture and History**





# **Part II**

# **Grammar**



**Part III**

**Phonology**



**Part IV**

**Morphology**



## Chapter 2

# Adjective

### 2.1 Qualitative Adjectives

- (1) a. color:
- i. **плъыжь** *płəʒ* ‘red’
  - ii. **хужь** *xʷəʒ* ‘white’
  - iii. **щхъуэ** *ɕxʷa* ‘gray’
  - iv. **щыху** *ɕʰəxʷ* ‘blue’
  - v. **щхъуантлэ** *ɕxʷantʰa* ‘green’
- b. fell/hair color:
- i. **гъуэ** *ɣʷa* ‘red’
  - ii. **къуэху** *qʷaxʷ* ‘brown-gray’
  - iii. **брул** *bɣəwɫ* ‘chaly’
  - iv. **тхъуэ** *tχʷa* ‘bulany’
- c. spatial and temporal qualities:
- i. **ин** *jən* ‘big’
  - ii. **бгъуэ** *bɣʷa* ‘wide’
  - iii. **жьжъэ** *ʒəʒa* ‘far’
  - iv. **лъахъшэ** *ləχʃa* ‘low’
  - v. **куу** *kʷəw* ‘deep’
- d. properties and qualities of things directly perceived by the senses:
- i. **лэфI** *lʰəf* ‘sweet’
  - ii. **сыр** *sər* ‘bitter’
  - iii. **цабэ** *ɕabə* ‘soft’
  - iv. **хъурей** *χʷəraj* ‘round’
  - v. **псынцлэ** *psənɕʰa* ‘light’
  - vi. **хуабэ** *χʷabə* ‘warm’
- e. physical qualities of people and animals:
- i. **цлалэ** *ɕʰaɫa* ‘young’
  - ii. **уэд** *wad* ‘thin’
  - iii. **дэгы** *dagʷ* ‘deaf’
  - iv. **хуахуэ** *xʷaxʷa* ‘brave’
- f. qualities of character and mental disposition:
- i. **бзаджэ** *bza:dʒa* ‘evil, cunning’
  - ii. **пагэ** *paɣa* ‘proud’
  - iii. **нэпсей** *nəpsaj* ‘greedy’

### 2.1.1 Relative Adjectives

All relative adjectives are derived in the Kabardino-Circassian language. Relative adjectives, unlike qualitative adjectives, do not change by degrees of comparison, do not form the form of evaluations. Native relative adjectives can express:

- (2) a. relation of time:
- i. **нобэрей** *nawbaraj* ‘today’ (cf. **нобэ** *nawba* ‘today’)
  - ii. **дыгъуэпшыхырей** *dəwʷapʃəħaraj* ‘yesterday, evening’ (cf. **дыгъуэпшыхъ** *dəwʷapʃəħ* ‘yesterday evening’)
  - iii. **нэгъабэрей** *naɣa:baraj* ‘last year’ (cf. **нэгъабэ** *naɣa:ba* ‘last year’)
  - iv. **зымахуэрей** *zətaɣʷaraj* ‘referring to some past day’
  - v. **ещанэгъэрей** *jaɕa:naɣaraj* ‘referring to the third year’
- b. relation to place:
- i. **ицхъэ** *jəɕħa* ‘upper’ (cf. **цхъэ** *ɕħa* ‘head’)
  - ii. **ипэ/япэ** *jəpa/ja:pa* ‘front’ (cf. **пэ** *pa* ‘nose’)
  - iii. **модрэй** *mawdraj* ‘other’
  - iv. **икIэ** *jətʃʼa* ‘last’ (cf. **кIэ** *tʃʼa* ‘tail’)
- c. numerical relations:
- i. **защIэ** *zaɕʼa* ‘single’ (cf. **зы** *zə* ‘one’)
  - ii. **тIуащIэ** *tʷaɕʼa* ‘double’ (cf. **тIу** *tʷəw* ‘two’)



# Chapter 3

## Verb

The verb is the

### 3.1 Transitivity

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

Below the intransitive verb **лѣтѣс** *lɛtɛs* 'to look' and transitive verb **лѣтѣс** *lɛtɛs* 'to see' are used to demonstrate that. With **лѣтѣс** *lɛtɛs* 'man' man and **лѣтѣс** *lɛtɛs* 'tree'.

- (3) a. **лѣтѣс лѣтѣс** *lɛtɛs lɛtɛs* 'the man will look'  
b. **лѣтѣс лѣтѣс** *lɛtɛs lɛtɛs* 'the man will see the tree'

However, in both cases, those base verbs can get indirect objects in the ergative case (**-м -m**), usually by deploying preverbs. A frequent example is the use of the preverb **е- ja-** 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 **елѣтѣс** *jɛlɛtɛs* (not that **э a** became **ы ə**).

- (4) a. **лѣтѣс лѣтѣс елѣтѣс** *lɛtɛs lɛtɛs jɛlɛtɛs* 'the man will look at the tree'  
b. **лѣтѣс лѣтѣс елѣтѣс** *lɛtɛs lɛtɛs jɛlɛtɛs* '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.

### 3.2 Potential Form

There are two potential forms which modify the verb in a such a way that it expresses a potential. One form is formed through the prefix **хуэ-** *xuɛ-* while the other is formed through the suffix **-ф -f**. The latter can only be used with transitive verbs (as it makes them intransitive) and the latter can be used by all verbs.

### 3.2.1 Suffix -ф -f

- (5) a. бзу мэлъэтэф *bzaw małataf* ‘birds can fly’  
 b. сыжейфыккым *səzajəfəqəm* ‘I can’t sleep’  
 c. сыжейфынутэккым *səzajəfənəwtaqəm* ‘I can’t sleep’

### 3.2.2 Prefix хуэ- х<sup>w</sup>а-

The prefix potential form is morphologically more complex. It only works with transitive verbs, since it works by ‘deleting’ the subject in the ergative and transfers the subject role to the argument of the prefix хуэ- х<sup>w</sup>а-.

- (6) a. схуошх *sx<sup>w</sup>awfɬ* ‘I can’t eat it’  
 b. мыщэ сэ сыхуошх *məʃa sa sɬ<sup>w</sup>awfɬ* ‘the bear can eat me’

It seems possible that this prefix and the benefactive хуэ- х<sup>w</sup>а- are related.

- (7) a. X сэ сишхащ ‘X ate me’  
 b. X сэ Z сыхуишхащ ‘X ate me for Z’  
 c. сэ Z сыхуэшхащ ‘ate me for Z’ or ‘I was eaten for Z’  
 d. сэ Z сыхуэшхащ ‘Z was able to eat me’

## 3.3 Participles

Kabardian has a rich participle morphology. In fact, Kabardian is a very participle heavy language and one can even argue that many verb forms, which are usually not regarded as participles, are in fact participles.

The various participle types are divided into whether they represent an argument of a verb, where in this case they take on the slot of that argument, or whether they represent something else, usually more adverbial in nature, like place, time, reason, manner, etc.

Other than not being able to change the grammatical category of mood, participle can mark for everything else what normal verbs can.

### 3.3.1 Absolute Participle

The absolute participle denotes the absolute argument of a verb. If that verb is intransitive, it refers to the subject, if it is transitive it refers to the direct object. Absolute participles are marked by a null morpheme.

Intransitive verbs:

- (8) a. кӀуэр *k<sup>w</sup>ar* ‘one, who goes’ (cf. кӀуэн *k<sup>w</sup>an* ‘to go’)  
 b. жэр *zar* ‘one, who runs’ (cf. жэн *zan* ‘to run’)

Intransitive verbs with preverbs:

- (9) a. ежэр *jazar* ‘one who waits for Y’ (cf. ежэн *jazan* ‘to wait for Y’)  
 b. еплыр *japɬar* ‘one who looks at Y’ (cf. еплын *japɬan* ‘to look at Y’)  
 c. едӀуэр *jadaɬar* ‘one who listens to Y’ (cf. едӀуэн *jadaɬan* ‘to listen to Y’)

Transitive verbs:

- (10) a. илӀэгъур *jɬak<sup>w</sup>ar* ‘one, whom X sees’ (cf. лӀагъун *ɬak<sup>w</sup>an* ‘to see Y’)  
 b. ишэр *jəʃar* ‘one, whom X leads’ (cf. шэн *ʃan* ‘to lead Y’)  
 c. итыр *jətər* ‘that, what X gives’ (cf. тын *tən* ‘to give Y’)

Transitive verbs with preverb:

- (11) a. зэхихыр *zaxəjɬar* ‘one, whom X hears’ (cf. зэхэхын *zaxəxən* ‘to hear Y’)  
 b. жыпӀар *zəpɬar* ‘that, what you said’ (cf. жыпӀэн *zəpɬan* ‘to say Y’)  
 c. иритыр *jərəjtər* ‘that, what X gives to Z’ (cf. етын *jatən* ‘to give Y to Z’)

### 3.3.2 Ergative Participle

The ergative participle denotes the ergative argument of a verb. This participle is only present in transitive verbs and refers to the subject. It is marked by **зы-** *zə-*.

Transitive verbs:

- (12) a. **зылгъыр** *zəlakʷər* ‘one, who sees Y’ (cf. **лгъун** *lakʷən* ‘to see Y’)  
 b. **зышэр** *zəʃər* ‘one, who leads Y’ (cf. **шэн** *ʃən* ‘to lead Y’)  
 c. **зытыр** *zətər* ‘one, who gives Y’ (cf. **тын** *tən* ‘to give Y’)

Transitive verbs with preverb:

- (13) a. **зэхэзыр** *zaxəzəxər* ‘one, who hears Y’ (cf. **зэхэын** *zaxəxən* ‘to hear Y’)  
 b. **жызыр** *zəzəʔər* ‘one, who said Y’ (cf. **жыэн** *zəʔən* ‘to say Y’)  
 c. **езытыр** *jəzətər* ‘one, who gives Y to Z’ (cf. **етын** *jətən* ‘to give Y to Z’)

### 3.3.3 Oblique Participle

The oblique participle denotes the oblique argument of a verb. This participle is present in every verb which has an oblique argument, usually only possible by having a preverb. It is marked by **зы-** *zə-*. One can argue that it is simply the ergative participle, but simply applied on a preverb, however it may be useful to differentiate them, because oblique participles don’t denote the subject of a verb (the ergative participle can only denote the subject) in addition they exist for transitive and intransitive verbs (the ergative participle only exists for transitive verbs).

Intransitive verbs with preverbs:

- (14) a. **зэжэр** *zəzər* ‘one, whom X waits for’ (cf. **эжэн** *jəzən* ‘to wait for Y’)  
 b. **зэплгъыр** *zəpɫər* ‘one, who X looks at’ (cf. **еплгын** *jəpɫən* ‘to look at Y’)  
 c. **зэдэюэр** *zədəʔər* ‘one, who X listens to’ (cf. **едэюэн** *jədəʔən* ‘to listen to Y’)  
 d. **сызгытесыр** *səzətəjsər* ‘that, what I sit on’ (cf. **тесын** *təjsən* ‘to sit on Y’)

Transitive verbs with preverb:

- (15) a. **зыритыр** *zərajtər* ‘one, to whom X gives Y’ (cf. **етын** *jətən* ‘to give Y to Z’)

Sentence Examples:

- (16) a. **дыгъуасэ хыджэбз сызыхуэзар дахэщ** *dəʷa:sa xədzəbz səzəxʷazər da:xaʃ* ‘the girl, whom I met yesterday is pretty’ (cf. **хуэзэн** *xʷazan* ‘to meet Y’)

### 3.3.4 Temporal Participle **щы-** *ʃə-*

This participle denotes time as well as location, depending on the context. It is marked by **щы-** *ʃə-*.

- (17) a. **щылажэр** *ʃəʒa:zər* ‘when X works’ (cf. **лэжэн** *ʒəzən* ‘to work’)

Sentence Examples:

- (18) a. **ар щылажэр унэрщ** *ar ʃəʒa:zər wənərʃ* ‘he works at home’ (lit. ‘where he works is home’)  
 b. **ар щылажэр сощлэ** *ar ʃəʒa:zər sawʃə* ‘I know where/when he works’  
 c. **уэ укышщыкӀуэжам щыгъуэ сэ унэм сыщылакӀым** *wa wəqəʃəkʷəzətm ʃəʷa sa wənəm səʃəʔa:qətm* ‘I wasn’t home when you arrived’  
 d. **сыщилгъум, ар жаш** *səʃəjɫəʷətm, ar ʒa:ʃ* ‘When he saw me, he ran away’

### 3.3.5 Adverbial Participle зэры- *zarə-*

The manner participle denotes the manner. It is marked by зэры- *zarə-*.

- (19) a. зэрылажьэр *zarə*ʒaʒar 'how, X works' (cf. лажьэн *ʒaʒan* 'to work')
- b. зэрильэгъур *zarə*ʎavʷər 'how, X sees' (cf. льагъун *ʎavʷən* 'to see Y')

This is frequently used in complement clauses as a generic complementizer.

- (20) a. анэм ещІэ и кІуэр кызыэрыкІуэжынур *a*nam jaɕʹa jə kʷʹar qəzarəkʷʹaʒənəwr 'mother knows, that her son will return (home)'
- b. щІалэм хъыбар сīgъэщІащ фызэрысымаджар *ɕʹa*ʒam xəbar səjvaɕʹaɕ fəzarəsəma:dʒar 'the boy let me know, that you were sick'
- c. сэ сщыгъупщэнкым узэрылэжьэнур *sa* sɕəvʷəpɕanqəm wəzarəʒaʒanəwr 'I won't forget, that you'll work'

## 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>a:da</i>	‘father’	
анэ <i>ana</i>	‘mother’	
дадэ <i>da:da</i>	‘grandfather’	
нанэ <i>nana</i>	‘grandmother’	
адэшхуэ <i>a:daʃx<sup>w</sup>a</i>	‘grandfather’	more formal
анэшхуэ <i>anaʃx<sup>w</sup>a</i>	‘grandmother’	more formal
бын <i>bən</i>	‘child’	
кѳуэ <i>q<sup>w</sup>a</i>	‘son’	
пхѳу <i>pχ<sup>w</sup>ə</i>	‘daughter’	
бынырылѳху <i>bənəɾəʃx<sup>w</sup></i>	‘	
кѳуэрылѳху <i>q<sup>w</sup>arəʃx<sup>w</sup></i>	‘	
пхѳурылѳху <i>pχ<sup>w</sup>ərəʃx<sup>w</sup></i>	‘	
кѳуэш <i>q<sup>w</sup>aʃ</i>	‘brother’	said by males
дэлѳху <i>daʃx<sup>w</sup></i>	‘brother’	said by females
шыпхѳу <i>ʃəpχ<sup>w</sup></i>	‘sister’	
кѳуэшырылѳху <i>q<sup>w</sup>aʃərəʃx<sup>w</sup></i>	‘	
шыпхѳурылѳху <i>ʃəpχ<sup>w</sup>ərəʃx<sup>w</sup></i>	‘	

The terms **адэ** *a:da* and **анэ** *ana* denote ‘father’ and ‘mother’, respectively. For the generation above, **адэшхуэ** *a:daʃx<sup>w</sup>a* and **анэшхуэ** *anaʃx<sup>w</sup>a* denote ‘grandfather’ and ‘grandmother’, respectively, derived with the suffix **шхуэ** *ʃx<sup>w</sup>a* which denotes biggness, thus literally ‘big father’ and ‘big mother’. On the other hand, **дадэ** *da:da* and **нанэ** *nana* are the more endearing forms of the former and are also used when referring to them.

The terms describing the direct offspring are **бын** *bən* ‘child’, **кѳуэ** *q<sup>w</sup>a* ‘son’ and **пхѳу** *pχ<sup>w</sup>ə* ‘daughter’. The term **пхѳу** *pχ<sup>w</sup>ə* ‘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 **кѳуэш** *q<sup>w</sup>aʃ*, **дэлѳху** *daʃx<sup>w</sup>* for ‘brother’ and **шыпхѳу** *ʃəpχ<sup>w</sup>* ‘sister’. Females always refer to their brother as **дэлѳху** *daʃx<sup>w</sup>*, while males as **кѳуэш** *q<sup>w</sup>aʃ*. The term **кѳуэш** *q<sup>w</sup>aʃ* ‘brother’ appears to be a compound word of **кѳуэ** *q<sup>w</sup>a* ‘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

Table 4.2: Kinship Terms

Term	Translation	Notes
тхъэмадэ <i>thama:da</i>	‘husband’s father’	
гуащэ <i>g<sup>w</sup>a:sa</i>	‘husband’s mother’	
пщыкъуэ <i>pɕəq<sup>w</sup>a</i>	‘husband’s brother’	
пщыпхъу <i>pɕəpχ<sup>w</sup></i>	‘husband’s sister’	
щыкъу адэ <i>ɕəq<sup>w</sup> a:da</i>	‘wife’s father’	
щыкъу анэ <i>ɕəq<sup>w</sup> ana</i>	‘wife’s mother’	
щыкъу цIалэ <i>ɕəq<sup>w</sup> ɕ’a:la</i>	‘wife’s son’	
щыкъу хъыджэбз <i>ɕəq<sup>w</sup> χədʒabz</i>	‘wife’s daughter’	
фызабэ <i>fəza:ba</i>	‘widow’	
лIыгъуабэ <i>l’əɣ<sup>w</sup>a:ba</i>	‘widower’	
зэиншэ <i>zəjənʃa</i>	‘orphan’	
ибэ <i>jəba</i>	‘orphan’	

term **пщыпхъу** *pɕəpχ<sup>w</sup>* ‘sister’ is a compound word of **пщы** *pɕə* ‘brother’ and **пхъу** *pχ<sup>w</sup>* ‘daughter’. This and some other uses suggest that the original meaning of **пщы** *pɕə* was closer to ‘relative’, ‘kin’ or ‘sibling’.

**Part V**

**Syntax**





## **Chapter 5**

# **Relative Clause**



## **Chapter 6**

# **Adverbial Clause**



## **Chapter 7**

# **Complement Clause**



**Part VI**

**Learning Guide**





# **Chapter 8**

## **Learning**