

Postpositions as an emerging category in East Caucasian

Polina Nasledskova, Tatiana Philippova
Linguistic Convergence Laboratory¹, HSE, Moscow

We present an areal-typological study of postpositions in East Caucasian languages. In most of the 36 languages of our sample, postpositions exhibit a range of morphosyntactic features that are not typical of adpositions cross-linguistically. They include the ability of many postpositions to occur without a complement (usually associated with adverbs and nouns rather than adpositions), cf. (1a) and (1b), and agreement of postpositions with the absolutive argument of a clause (usually associated with verbs rather than adpositions), illustrated in (2). This type of agreement is apparently attested much more rarely in the world's languages than agreement of adpositions with their complement (Hagège 2010: 175–176), on which there is a chapter in WALS (Bakker 2013). In East Caucasian, however, it is agreement with the complement that is practically unattested, according to our data.

(1) Ingush (Nichols 2011: 405)

- a. **T'exkaa** **chuhwanahw** *t'um* *joall*.
bone.DAT inside marrow F.be contained.PRS
'There is marrow inside a bone. Inside of a bone is marrow.'
- b. *Mashen* **chuhwanahw** *jy*.
car inside F.be.PRS
'The car is inside.'

(2) Avar (Rudnev 2020: 833)

školał-da *ask'o-w* *jasat* **was** *w-uxana*
school.OBL-LOC near-M girl.ERG boy.ABS M-beat.PRS
'The girl beat the boy up near the school.'

In addition, certain postpositions in East Caucasian languages may co-occur with a dependent noun phrase in a variety of case forms. We are especially interested in cases like (3), where the choice of the case form is apparently not motivated semantically (the interpretation of both options is the same).

(3) Sanzhi Dargwa (Forker, 2020: 156)

{Rasul-**la**; Rasul-**le-rka**} **t:ura** cara=ra sa-č-ib-da
Rasul-GEN Rasul-LOC-EL **outside** other=ADD hither-lead.PFV-PRET-1
'Apart from Rasul I also brought another one.'

We believe that this apparent versatility in case assignment either signals that case assignment properties of a postposition have not settled yet or that there is no case assignment/government relationship between the 'postposition' and the nominal dependent – in other words, the lexeme under consideration is probably an adverb. Thus, case assignment versatility, in our opinion, is evidence that the lexeme has not (fully) postpositionalized yet.

¹ This work is an output of a research project implemented as part of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University).

The typologically uncommon properties described above raise the question of whether East Caucasian languages have the category of postpositions at all or whether lexemes functioning as postpositions can be subsumed under other parts of speech. In fact, some grammar authors do not consider them a separate category, explicitly uniting them with adverbs (e.g., Ibragimov 1978: 108-111²). Other scholars describe postpositions as a separate class of adverbs exhibiting special properties (e.g., Magometov 1970: 169-175). Many grammars do describe such lexemes as postpositions, but this might be an influence of the Russian descriptive linguistic tradition (Magomedova & Abdulaeva, 2007, 701-703, among other grammar sketches found in dictionaries).

In order to get a bird's-eye view of postpositions across the languages of this family, we built a database comprising a number of morphosyntactic and basic semantic properties of these lexemes; the data were collected from the available grammatical descriptions and dictionaries.

Based on the analysis of the accumulated data, we conclude that postpositions in East Caucasian languages are an emerging category. We suggest that there are several stages of postpositionalization of adverbs in East Caucasian languages, beginning from simple juxtaposition of nouns and adverbs and ending with enclitic postpositions similar to case markers. The last stage is so far attested only for some postpositions in the Nakh languages, which also happen not to have a complex, bipartite system of spatial cases typical of other East Caucasian languages. In addition, Nakh postpositions neither exhibit agreement with the absolutive argument, nor include borrowed lexemes, unlike many other East Caucasian languages.

This state of affairs leads us to suggest that there are (at least) three factors slowing down the development of postpositions as a separate category in East Caucasian, namely: (a) agreement of postpositions with the absolutive; (b) rich inventory of spatial cases allowing the expression of subtle distinctions in spatial configuration; (c) presence of borrowed postpositions that are semantically and morphosyntactically distinct from adverb-postpositions.

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² Compare with other descriptions of Rutul (e.g. Alekseev 1994), where the same lexemes that are described only as adverbs by Ibragimov are described as postpositions.

Rudnev, P. 2020. Agreeing adpositions in Avar and the directionality-of-valuation debate. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 51(4), pp. 829–844.