

Fieldtrip to Botlikh

Samira Verhees & Chiara Naccarato

Convergence Lab Seminar - 01.10.2019

Fieldtrip

- ▶ Who: Samira Verhees and Chiara Naccarato
- ▶ When: 1 – 9 August 2019
- ▶ Where: Botlikh district, Daghestan
- ▶ Aims: collect a survey on the agreement patterns of ordinal numerals, translate texts recorded by T.E. Gudava ([Gudava 1962](#)), collect some lexical data (Swadesh lists)

Fieldtrip

- ▶ Who: Samira Verhees and Chiara Naccarato
- ▶ When: 1 – 9 August 2019
- ▶ Where: Botlikh district, Daghestan
- ▶ Aims: collect a survey on the agreement patterns of ordinal numerals, translate texts recorded by T.E. Gudava ([Gudava 1962](#)), collect some lexical data (Swadesh lists)
- ▶ Additional tasks: find more consultants to work with, collect some preliminary observations on the sociolinguistic situation in Botlikh and Miarso

Background on the language and village(s)

The Botlikh language

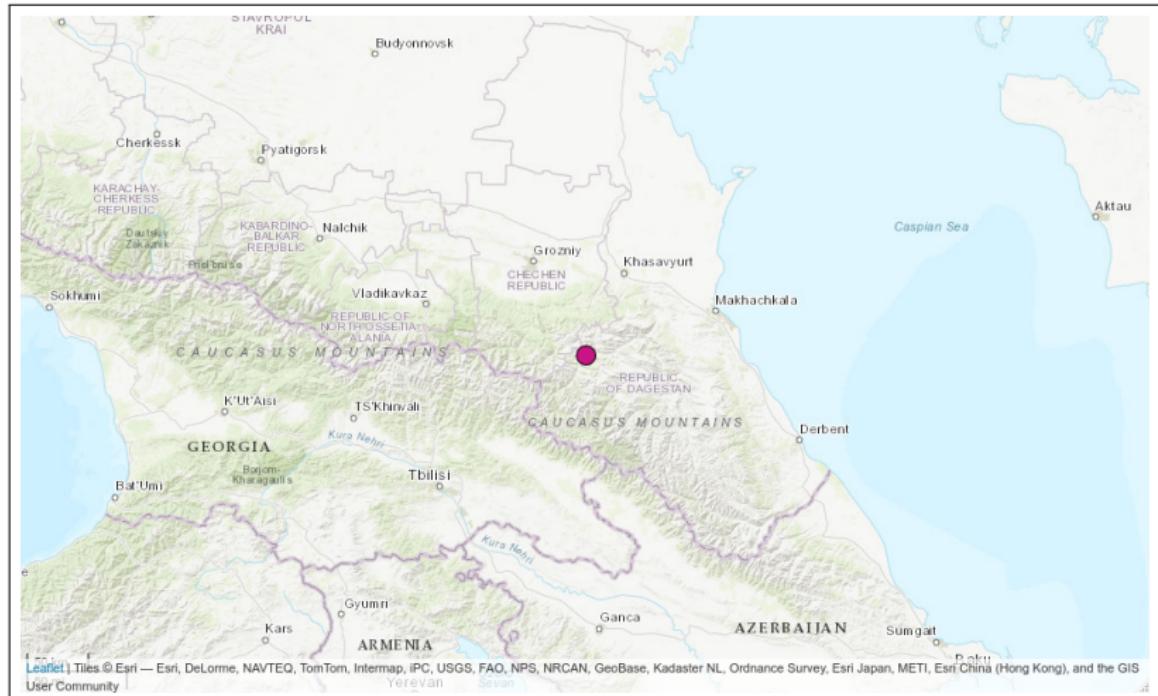
- ▶ Botlikh > Andic group > East Caucasian language family
- ▶ Unwritten
- ▶ ~5000-8000 speakers
- ▶ Mostly spoken in 4 villages in northwestern Daghestan:¹
 - ▶ Botlikh (main village) - pop. 12.159
 - ▶ Miarso (founded as *khutor* several hundred years ago) - pop. 1714
 - ▶ Ashino (small *khutor*) - pop. 79
 - ▶ Ankho (even smaller *khutor* not mentioned by consultants) - pop. 35

¹Population figures from the 2010 census, accessed via the Russian Wikipedia pages of the respective villages.

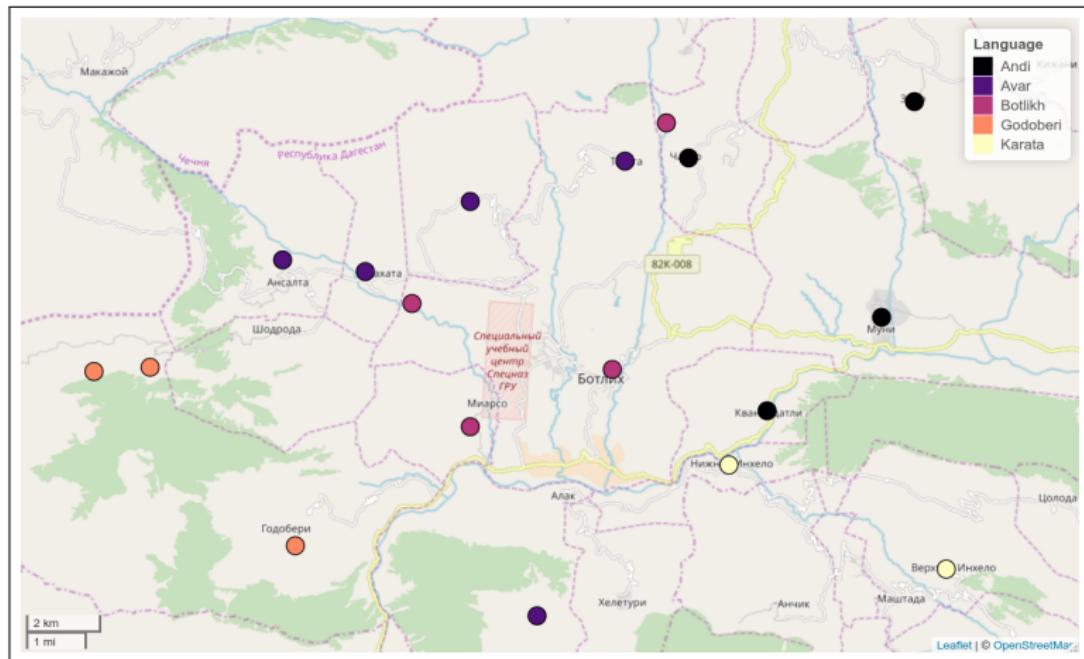
The Botlikh language

- ▶ Each village has its own dialect
- ▶ Speakers distinguish between them, but they are fully mutually intelligible
- ▶ Opinions vary on the language's vitality — it is still passed on to children and spoken at home, but some families/children are shifting to Russian
- ▶ Direct neighbors of Botlikh include other Andic languages (Andi, Karata, Godoberi) and Avar

Botlikh on the map



Botlikh on the map



The village

- ▶ Botlikh is the administrative center of the eponymous district, which was formed in 1929
- ▶ Already in the 19th century, Botlikh had become an important trading center, which, according to ([Wixman 1980](#): 59) slowed down the assimilation of Botlikhs by Avars
- ▶ Contemporary Botlikh is fairly urbanized: there is a decent road from Buinaksk / Makhachkala to Botlikh and there are a lot of shops and other facilities (e.g. a hospital, a hotel, and even a sushi restaurant)

The village

- ▶ The village consists of two distinct parts: the “old village” and the *mikrorayon* — a sort of suburb built in the 1970s to house the employees of a new factory
- ▶ Most ethnic Botlikhs live in the old village, while Avars and other Andic people tend to live in the Mikrorayon
- ▶ Botlikhs have garden plots outside the old village centre, where they grow fruit trees like apricots, peaches, etc. but also vegetables, corn, pumpkins
- ▶ Cattle breeding is less common and in decline

Map of the village



Language use in the village

- ▶ Botlikh is used at home and by Botlikhs among each other
- ▶ Avar, Russian and Botlikh are all used for interethnic communication, so there is L2 speaker input into Botlikh and code mixing
- ▶ Avar was historically an important lingua franca (used in communication with neighbors), and Botlikhs have been subsumed under Avars during census since the 1930s
- ▶ Many Botlikhs still consider themselves “a type of Avars”, though there is a small movement of Botlikh patriots who advocate for the recognition of Botlikh as a separate ethnic group

Language use in the village

- ▶ Russian is currently gaining dominance at the expense of Avar as L2
- ▶ Children at kindergarten speak mostly Russian
- ▶ There are two opposing attitudinal tendencies regarding language use at home: some families promote the use of Russian by children, because they associate it with upward social mobility, while others make a point of speaking only Botlikh at home, because they value the preservation of their native language

Language use by children



Language use in the family

- ▶ Mixed marriages with other local people, as well as Russian wives, are quite common
- ▶ Interestingly, in case of mixed marriages women are not required to learn the language of their husband, and they pass on their native language to the children
- ▶ (A mixed Andi-Godoberi couple who live in Botlikh reported that they speak Avar to each other, while each speaks to the children in their own native language)

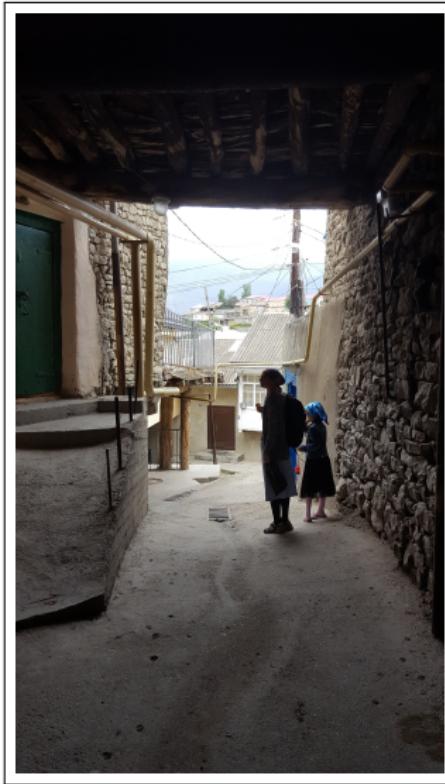
The old village



The old village



The old village



Miarso

- ▶ Founded as a khutor either ~200-250 or ~500-600 years ago
- ▶ Population: between ~1700 and ~2500

Miarso

- ▶ Founded as a khutor either ~200-250 or ~500-600 years ago
- ▶ Population: between ~1700 and ~2500
- ▶ ~20 minutes from Botlikh on foot
- ▶ Other close villages: Godoberi, Ansalta, Tando, Rakhata, Shodroda
- ▶ People from Godoberi and villages in the Tsumadinsky district used to stop in Miarso on their way to the Botlikh bazar

Miarso

- ▶ Founded as a khutor either ~200-250 or ~500-600 years ago
- ▶ Population: between ~1700 and ~2500
- ▶ ~20 minutes from Botlikh on foot
- ▶ Other close villages: Godoberi, Ansalta, Tando, Rakhata, Shodroda
- ▶ People from Godoberi and villages in the Tsumadinsky district used to stop in Miarso on their way to the Botlikh bazar
- ▶ Many Russian wives
- ▶ Men are mostly engaged in the construction industry and in fruit trading (people from Miarso are sometimes called *bananchiki*)

Botlikh grammar

Literature

- ▶ Only one full reference grammar (*in Georgian*) ([Gudava 1962](#))
- ▶ Several short sketches mostly repeating the same information
- ▶ Almost no studies on specific topics in grammar
- ▶ Two recent dictionaries ([Saidova & Abusov 2012](#)), ([Alekseev & Azaev 2019](#))

Gender and animacy

- ▶ Botlikh features two independent systems for gender agreement
 1. A common East Caucasian noun class system
(SG: M, F, N – PL: AN, INAN)
 2. Dedicated markers for distinguishing animate vs. inanimate referents
- ▶ The semantics of animacy as a category remains largely unclear
- ▶ Agreement patterns of the dedicated animacy markers, which show up on various unusual targets such as negative auxiliaries and question particles, have never been studied

Ordinal survey

- ▶ Ordinal numeral suffixes express animacy agreement
- ▶ As a rule, they agree with the nominal head
- ▶ Two examples from the dictionary by (Saidova & Abusov 2012) and a text recorded by (Gudava 1962) featured a mismatch between the suffix used and the animacy status of the nominal head

Ordinal survey

- ▶ Ordinal numeral suffixes express animacy agreement
- ▶ As a rule, they agree with the nominal head
- ▶ Two examples from the dictionary by (Saidova & Abusov 2012) and a text recorded by (Gudava 1962) featured a mismatch between the suffix used and the animacy status of the nominal head
- ▶ So we conducted a survey with 13 speakers of Botlikh (and 1 speaker of Miarso)
- ▶ To check whether a mismatch is acceptable and under which circumstances

Ordinal survey

- (1) k'eki-ɬa-b reha-di w-ãʔ-ida w-aɬ'adasis:u-w waša
two-AN.ORD-N night-ERG M-go-PF M-middle-M son
'On the second night, the middle son went.'

Ordinal survey: preliminary results

- ▶ Only the animate marker seems to occur with unexpected heads
- ▶ Specifically with known semantically ambiguous nouns (e.g. 'grade' may trigger animate or inanimate agreement also with noun class markers)
- ▶ 4/13 speakers allowed using an animate marker with the unambiguously inanimate head 'year' (though none produced it naturally)
- ▶ We are not sure what makes this possible

Ordinal survey: preliminary results

- ▶ Only the animate marker seems to occur with unexpected heads
- ▶ Specifically with known semantically ambiguous nouns (e.g. ‘grade’ may trigger animate or inanimate agreement also with noun class markers)
- ▶ 4/13 speakers allowed using an animate marker with the unambiguously inanimate head ‘year’ (though none produced it naturally)
- ▶ We are not sure what makes this possible
- ▶ Possibly, it is a remnant of another, older function of the animate marker, and an indication that the system is not yet fully grammaticalized (see a more detailed discussion on our slides from SLE 2019 at github/sverhees/2019sle_ordinals), though this requires further investigation

Ordinal survey

- ▶ Surprisingly, the animate/inanimate distinction seems to be absent in Miarso (based on the answers of one very consistent speaker)
- ▶ The category is also absent in Godoberi, Botlikh's closest relative on family-level — possible cognate markers are attested but fulfill different functions
- ▶ Further investigation of the Miarso dialect is necessary to determine whether Miarso lost the category, or Botlikh invented it independently *after* Miarso split off (which was most likely only several hundred years ago)

Other topics

- ▶ We know next to nothing about the agreement patterns of animacy markers on all of the other targets besides ordinals
- ▶ These include: negative auxiliaries, question particles, attributive markers and participle suffixes (an overview is in our SLE slides)
- ▶ The exact semantics of the category of animacy also remains somewhat unclear — the label “animacy” was used by Gudava, and speakers readily mention animacy (or in lay terms “living beings” as opposed to other referents) as a motivation for using specific forms
- ▶ It is unclear how the animacy distinction developed in the noun class system

Other topics

- ▶ Legend has it that Botlikh features tones, possibly lexical ones (cf. X.G. Azaev's description of a mysterious phonetic feature with a few minimal pairs ([Azaev 2000](#): 348))
- ▶ Impressionistically, Botlikh prosody does seem to feature peculiar tone patterns not observed in, e.g., Andi
- ▶ But so far we have not been able to confirm Azaev's minimal pairs

Other topics

- ▶ Some other topics remain entirely unresearched:
- ▶ There are at least 5 demonstrative pronouns — it is mostly unclear which contrasts they express
- ▶ Negation — Botlikh has four negative auxiliaries: two marked for animacy, one neutral and then one more
- ▶ Discourse particles

Other topics

- ▶ Some other topics remain entirely unresearched:
- ▶ There are at least 5 demonstrative pronouns — it is mostly unclear which contrasts they express
- ▶ Negation — Botlikh has four negative auxiliaries: two marked for animacy, one neutral and then one more
- ▶ Discourse particles
- ▶ ... and many other things.

Future plans

Plans

- ▶ Translate and gloss the remainder of the Botlikh texts recorded by T.E. Gudava and X.G. Azaev in the 1950s-1970s
- ▶ (In total ~15.000 words, mostly folklore)
- ▶ Add two small, new texts we recorded during the fieldtrip

Plans

- ▶ Translate and gloss the remainder of the Botlikh texts recorded by T.E. Gudava and X.G. Azaev in the 1950s-1970s
 - ▶ (In total ~15.000 words, mostly folklore)
- ▶ Add two small, new texts we recorded during the fieldtrip
- ▶ Study the agreement patterns of animacy marking on other targets
- ▶ Attempt a tentative reconstruction of where the animacy markers come from (talk at a conference this month)
- ▶ Quantitative comparative analysis of the two available dictionaires, study the variation between them (talk at a conference this month together with George Moroz)

Botlikh museum



Shajt'ane



Shajt'ane



The mill



The mill



Juice factory Ambré



The road to Makhachkala



Булұу. Спасибо!



Abbreviations

AN animate 27

ERG ergative 27

M masculine 27

N neuter 27

ORD ordinal numeral 27

PF perfect 27

References

-  Alekseev, M.E. & X.G. Azaev. 2019. *Botlixsko-russkij slovar'* [Botlikh-Russian dictionary]. Moscow: Academia.
-  Azaev, Xalil G. 2000. 'Botlixskij jazyk [Botlikh]'. In Gadzhi G. Gamzatov (ред.), *Jazyki Dagestana* [Languages of Daghestan], 346—359. Moscow/Makhachkala: Vostok (Oriens).
-  Gudava, E., Togo. 1962. *Botlixuri ena* [The Botlikh language]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.
-  Saidova, Patimat A. & Magomed G. Abusov. 2012. *Botlixsko-russkij slovar'* [Botlikh-Russian dictionary]. Makhachkala: IJaLI.
-  Wixman, Ronald. 1980. *Language aspects of ethnic patterns and processes in the North Caucasus*. University of Chicago, Department of Geography.