

Ordinal numerals and animacy in Botlikh

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The Botlikh language

- ▶ Andic group > East Caucasian language family
- ▶ Unwritten
- ▶ ~5000-8000 speakers
- ▶ Mostly spoken in 3 villages in Northwestern Daghestan (Russian Federation): Botlikh, Miarso, Ashino. Minor dialectal differences.
- ▶ One full reference grammar in Georgian ([Gudava 1962](#)),¹ one dictionary ([Saidova & Abusov 2012](#)) (+ another dictionary in preparation)

¹+ several short sketches mostly repeating the same information.

The Botlikh language

- ▶ 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
- ▶ Main village Botlikh is multi-ethnic and mixed marriages are quite common (which is unusual for Daghestan). Avar, Russian and Botlikh are all used for interethnic communication, so there is L2 speaker input into Botlikh and code mixing

Gender agreement: noun class

- ▶ Noun class (= gender) agreement system inherited from the proto-language
- ▶ Semantically transparent assignment
- ▶ Three classes in singular: M - male humans, F - female humans, N - neuter (residual gender)
- ▶ Two classes in plural: animates vs. inanimates. (Other EC languages distinguish human vs. non-human in plural.)

Gender agreement: noun class

Table 1: Noun class markers in Botlikh and Godoberi

Botlikh				Godoberi			
SG	M	F	N	M	F	N	
	w	j	b	b	w	j	b
PL	AN		INAN		HUMAN		NHUMAN
	r/l*	r/l*	r/l*	b	b	b	r

* l is an allomorph that occurs in suffixal position.

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DEM-F up F-reach-TEMP COP=ATR-N rope DEM-AN.PL
wac:ilu-di hiλ'a b-il-o
brother.PL.OBL-ERG down N-throw-AOR
'And when she had come up, those brothers threw the rope down.'

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Attributive forms usually agree with their nominal heads, verbs and other forms agree with an absolute argument.

Gender agreement: animacy markers

- ▶ Additional agreement system for animacy regardless of number
- ▶ Innovation of Botlikh
- ▶ Overlaps with the noun class system semantically
- ▶ Some forms are double marked

Gender agreement: animacy markers

- (2) k'eki-**ɬa-j** ješi
two-AN.ORD-F girl
'the second girl (= daughter)'
- (3) k'eki-**ɬa-b** zini
two-AN.ORD-N
'the second cow'
- (4) k'eki-**χo-b** ziw
two-INAN.ORD-N day
'the second day'

Gender agreement: animacy markers

Table 2: Animacy markers in Botlikh

Form	Animate	Inanimate
Negative copula	hi-č'i	χu-č'i
Interrogative particle	=hi.ma	=χu.ma
Question word formant	=hi.la	=χu.la
Attributive clitic	=la-CM*	=χo-CM
Present participle	-la-CM*	-χa-CM
Future participle	-la-CM*	-χo-CM
> Ordinal numeral	-la-CM*	-χo-CM

*a variant *to-* appears in the environment of the masculine noun class suffix *-w.*

Ordinals

- ▶ Based on examples from the dictionary + a small collection of texts (~15.000 words, mostly folklore), in the vast majority of cases:
- ▶ Ordinals agree with their nominal heads
- ▶ Use is consistent with animate vs. inanimate distinction

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- ▶ Use is consistent with animate vs. inanimate distinction
- ▶ Speakers mention animacy as the reason for a certain choice

Ordinals

Agreement with a controller that is not the nominal head?

- (5) ištuj-**la**-b kalasa-**li** hiλ'i w-eχu
 five-AN.ORD-N grade-IN down M-stay.AOR
 'He stayed **in the fifth grade** (for another year).'

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As opposed to:

- (6) go-w uškola-**li** hac'aj-χo-b kalasa-**li** ida
 DEM-M school-IN ten-INAN.ORD-N grade-IN COP
 'He is **in the tenth grade at school**.'

Ordinals

Perhaps ‘grade’ is simply an ambiguous word.

- (7) ha<r>aža-l kalas:e
mix<AN.PL>-AN.PL grade.PL
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- (8) k'eki-ča-b reha-di w-ã?-ida w-ač'adasis:u-w waša
two-AN.ORD-N night-ERG M-go-PF M-middle-M son
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Variation seems possible when the ordinal modifies the head of an adverbial group.

Survey

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And under which conditions does this occur?

- ▶ Elicitation task translating from Russian to Botlikh
- ▶ 15 sentences with ordinal numerals (+ 2 sentences with 2 each = 17 questions/stimuli):
 - ▶ Modifying an absolute subject or the head of an adverbial phrase
 - ▶ Unambiguously animate / inanimate heads ('daughter', 'year') and ambiguous cases like 'grade' or 'family'
 - ▶ For each head we had an expectation

Results

- ▶ 13 speakers of Botlikh (+1 from Miarso)
- ▶ Same answer for all speakers in 6/17 questions
- ▶ 24 / 202 unexpected answers were produced (by 9 speakers in 11 questions)²

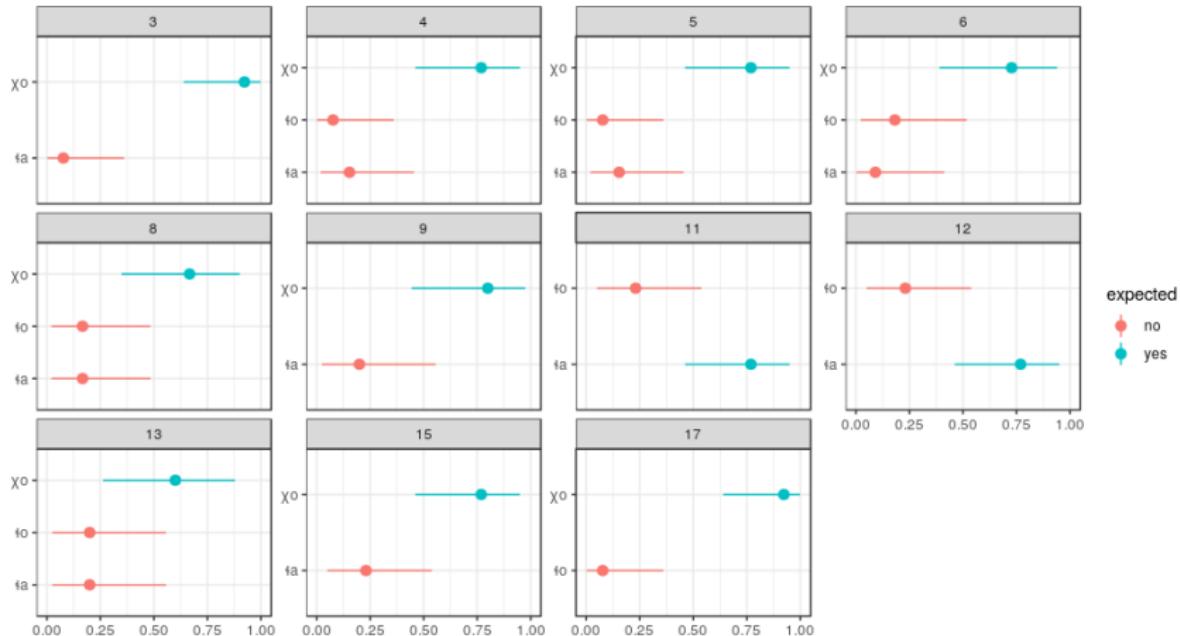
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- ▶ Same answer for all speakers in 6/17 questions
- ▶ 24 / 202 unexpected answers were produced (by 9 speakers in 11 questions)²
- ▶ In all cases the animate marker was used where we expected inanimate
- ▶ Heads were known ambiguous nouns ('grade', 'family', 'people'), and the ordinal was not necessarily in the adverbial group

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'The fourth people/nation live in the mountains.'

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(10) *buṣuj-ɬa-l χalq' fumru ih-u req'-e*
four-AN.ORD-AN.PL people life make-AOR mountain-SUP
'The fourth people/nation live in the mountains.'

Results

- ▶ None of the speakers used the animate marker for 'year', but four speakers allowed it
- ▶ Two speakers allowed an inanimate marker with an animate head, each in one specific case. All other speakers unanimously rejected such attempts.
- ▶ By contrast: the animate form was rejected only 33/97 times where it was not used initially

Results

Side-note

Our Miarso speaker (not taken into account so far) used only the *χo-CM* form, and rejected all my suggestions to rephrase with *ta-CM* // *to-CM* saying: “that’s what they say in Botlikh, we don’t say that”.

Summary

- ▶ The distribution of ordinal suffixes mostly agrees with the nominal head in terms of animacy
- ▶ The animate form can appear with typically inanimate heads
- ▶ In some cases because the heads are ambiguous in terms of animacy, in which case both markers are allowed

Summary

- ▶ The distribution of ordinal suffixes mostly agrees with the nominal head in terms of animacy
- ▶ The animate form can appear with typically inanimate heads
- ▶ In some cases because the heads are ambiguous in terms of animacy, in which case both markers are allowed
- ▶ We do not have an explanation for cases where the animate marker may co-occur with an unambiguously inanimate head
- ▶ It could be a remnant of an old function for the animate marker (e.g. counting vs. singling out, as in Godoberi ([Tatevosov 1996: 241–243](#)))
- ▶ ... but our survey did not contain many such cases
- ▶ And we forgot to include animals as heads

Thank you!



Abbreviations

AD	ad 25–28
AN	animate 6–8, 10, 14–18, 25–28
AOR	aorist 6–8, 14, 15, 25–28
ATR	attributivizer 6–8
COP	copula 6–8, 14, 15
DEM	demonstrative 6–8, 14, 15
ERG	ergative 6–8, 16–18, 25–28
F	feminine 6–8, 10
IN	in 14, 15
INAN	inanimate 10, 14, 15
M	masculine 14–18
N	neuter 6–8, 10, 14–18, 25–28
OBL	oblique 6–8
ORD	ordinal numeral 10, 14–18, 25–28
PF	perfect 16–18
PL	plural 6–8, 16–18, 25–28
SUP	super 25–28
TEMP	temporal converb 6–8

References

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