

Animacy agreement in non-verbal predication in Botlikh

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Introduction

Botlikh (< Andic < East Caucasian) has two independent but intersecting gender agreement systems:

- ▶ A. **Inherited** noun class system
- ▶ B. **Innovative** animacy system

Introduction

- (1) iʃ:i čʻ:idu-ku haʋ-a čʻ:ard-u
we.EXCL far-EL see-AOR run-CVB
b-eʎ-a=~~la~~-b ʎʻankʻar
N-go-PROG.CVB=AN.ATTR-N hare[N/AN]
‘We saw a hare running away from afar.’

A. Inherited noun class system

SG	M	F	N	
	w	j	b	
PL	AN			INAN
	r-/l	r-/l	r-/l	b

Botlikh

PL	HPL	NPL
	b	r

Godoberi

Agreement with nominal head (attributive forms, genitive 1) or absolutive argument (verbs, postpositions, adverbs).

A. Inherited noun class system

Some lexemes have variable agreement depending on the parameters of their actual referent:

- (2) gamuš:=c:u-j adam
 buffalo=SIM.ATTR-F person[M/F]
 ‘a woman who looks like a buffalo’

B. Innovative animacy marking system

	AN	INAN
Negative copulas	ɬi-č'i	χu-č'i
Interrogative particles		
Polar	=ɬi.ma	=χu.ma
Content	=ɬi.la	=χu.la
Attributive clitics	=ɬa-CM	=χo-CM
Participles		
Present	-ɬa-CM	-χa-CM
Future	-ɬa-CM	-χo-CM
Ordinal numerals	-ɬa-CM	-χo-CM

Same agreement principles: nominal head / ABS argument.

Animacy agreement

- ▶ Dedicated animacy markers are often not obligatory in their respective domains
- ▶ Animacy shows inconsistent agreement patterns across speakers for both systems
- ▶ Could be due to lesser grammaticalization or ambiguity of referents / a combination of both
- ▶ Humans > animals > insects

(Naccarato & Verhees 2021)

Copula constructions

Defective copula for general present, existential verb 'be' in other tenses.

	Affirmative	Negative
General present	ida	čič'i, χuč'i, guč'i
Aorist	b-uk'-a	b-uk'-i-č'a

Sources

- ▶ Gudava (1967) describes the three negative copulas for general present with the corresponding agreement values (animate, inanimate, neutral)
- ▶ Few examples especially of the inanimate form in the texts recorded by Gudava (1962)
- ▶ No examples of the marked copulas in the Botlikh-Russian dictionaries (Alekseev & Azaev 2019, Saidova & Abusov 2012)

Elicitation

- ▶ Qualitative in-person elicitation with 4 speakers: 2 males + 2 females, ages 50–70+ (Verhees 2021)
- ▶ Translation of different copula constructions from Russian to Botlikh and discussion of the examples
- ▶ *guč'i* was used by default, no contexts where it was not appropriate
- ▶ *tič'i* was preferred for humans and allowed with animals
- ▶ Some suggested it was more appropriate for +female +plural

Elicitation

- ▶ *χuč'i* was generally dispreferred and rarely allowed
- ▶ Some speakers do not see it as a proper word in Botlikh, and associate it with dialectal or L2 speech
- ▶ Others view it as a variant of *guč'i* used in some families or clans
- ▶ But I have not come across anyone who claimed the use of *χuč'i* so far

Survey

Online survey where speakers were asked to judge 89 simple sentences consisting of a subject and a negative copula.



In Botlikh this forms a felicitous sentence negating the presence of a referent: 'X is not [here]' or 'There is no X [here]'.

Survey

stimulus	singular gender	animate	human
book	n	no	no
cockroach	n	yes	no
butterfly	n	yes	no
cat	n	yes	no
cow	n	yes	no
I	m/f	yes	yes
brother	m	yes	yes
sister	f	yes	yes
person	m/f	yes	yes
family	n	yes	yes

Survey

- ▶ 10 stimuli * 2 number distinctions in combination with all three general present copulas = 60
- ▶ same stimuli in plural in combination with the animate plural and inanimate plural forms of the past tense negative copula = 20
- ▶ 9 additional checks:
 - ▶ 7 singular nominals (from the set of 10) in combination with the appropriate form of the past tense negative copula
 - ▶ a human group noun in singular combined with *b-uk'ič'a* (neuter singular) and *r-uk'ič'a* (animate plural)

Respondents

Not aimed at a balanced sample in terms of age or sex. Clearly skewed in favor of women and adults who are neither young nor old (no respondents older than 55, and few younger than 26).

Age	Female	Male	Total
16-25	3	2	5
26-35	4	4	8
36-45	5	0	5
46-55	5	1	6
Total	17	7	24

Expectations

Acceptability of general present negative copulas + different controllers

- ▶ *χuč'i* no longer carries a functional distinction and is poorly evaluated in general
- ▶ *tič'i* is acceptable with animates but not with inanimates and preferred for humans, females, and plural animates. Animals > insects
- ▶ *guč'i* is always acceptable and systematically evaluated as the better option compared to marked forms

Expectations

Acceptability of past tense negative copulas + the same controllers

- ▶ The two agreement systems do indeed overlap semantically
- ▶ Inherited system is older and more entrenched, resulting in more consistent patterns and better evaluations on average
- ▶ Within the inherited system, agreement with singular is more entrenched than plural

Results

Animacy is the relevant parameter guiding agreement patterns and their acceptability.

Examples that were correct assuming a rigid agreement system were evaluated as much better on average than incorrect examples (4.38 / 1.92).¹

¹Average score (min. 1 / max. 5) over all 24 respondents.

Results: inanimate

- *χuč'i* no longer carries a clear functional distinction ✗, and is generally poorly evaluated ✓

χuč'i was evaluated as slightly better with inanimates (2.88) than with animates (1.69).

	<i>χuč'i</i>	<i>łič'i</i>	<i>guč'i</i>
book	3.33	1.13	5
books	2.41	1.54	4.83

Results: animate

- ▶ *tič'i* is indeed acceptable with animates (and not with inanimates) ✓, but generally evaluated as better with humans ✓ (with a slight preference for +female within the human domain ✗+plural within the animate domain ✓, and animals > insects ✓)

Results: animate

stimulus	number	average score
book	sg	1.125
books	pl	1.541666666666667
cockroach	sg	2.916666666666667
cockroaches	pl	4.041666666666667
butterfly	sg	3.25
butterflies	pl	3.916666666666667
cow	sg	3.583333333333333
cows	pl	3.625
cat	sg	4.083333333333333
cats	pl	4

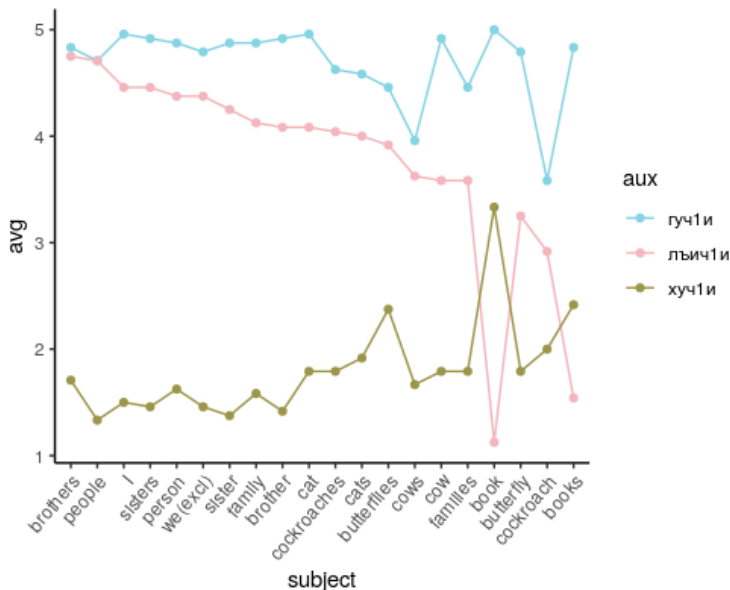
Results: animate

stimulus	number	average score
family	sg	4.125
families	pl	3.58333333333333
brother	sg	4.08333333333333
brothers	pl	4.75
sister	sg	4.25
sisters	pl	4.45833333333333
person	sg	4.375
people	pl	4.70833333333333
I	sg	4.45833333333333
we(excl)	pl	4.375

Results: neutral

- ▶ *guč'i* is acceptable with any type of controller ✓, and is systematically evaluated as the better option in comparison to the copulas marked for animacy ✓

Results: neutral

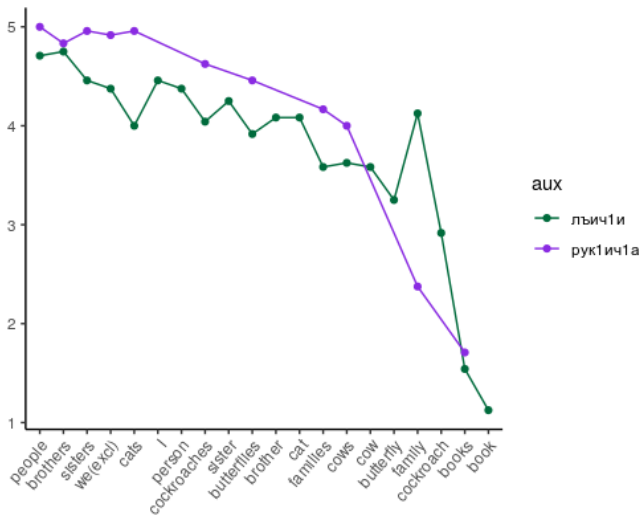


Results: systems

- ▶ the two agreement systems do indeed overlap semantically based on their behavior with the same controllers ✓
- ▶ the inherited system is more entrenched / grammaticalized, resulting in better evaluations and more consistent agreement patterns ✓

The animate forms from both systems largely follow a similar trendline: humans > animals > insects, but in the inherited system the difference between different animates appears more levelled.

Results: systems



Results: inherited sg vs. pl

- ▶ additionally, whether the singular domain of the inherited system is more entrenched / grammaticalized, since it appears to be older ✕

correct	number	average score
no	pl	2.129167
yes	pl	4.708333
yes	sg	4.761905

Summary

- ▶ Animacy is the relevant parameter governing agreement patterns of plural noun class marking and animacy markers in the negative copula domain
- ▶ At least within this domain, the inherited system outperforms the innovative one
- ▶ Both systems show traces of an animacy hierarchy: human > animal > insect, though it is less pronounced in the inherited system
- ▶ The innovative system prefers plural animates over singular

Summary

- ▶ Animacy marking in the negative copula domain is disappearing: one member of the opposition is already no longer accepted by many speakers, and barely acceptable in the contexts where it should, in theory, be appropriate (assuming a rigid agreement system)
- ▶ A neutral copula with no preference for agreement class is ousting the other two (one a lot faster than the other)

Tentative diachronic hypothesis

- ▶ Botlikh was on track to develop a general plural noun class as in Avar
 - ▶ + *-r* was originally a singular class IV marker; the suffixal allomorph *-l* is a later development and was likely borrowed from Avar
 - ▶ + 2 respondents evaluated the combination of plural animate marking with an inanimate plural referent as 'excellent'

Tentative diachronic hypothesis

- ▶ The inherited system first marked only human plurals (still a preference for humans)
- ▶ It gradually expands to include animals
- ▶ Around this time, the innovative agreement system appeared, following the same pattern
- ▶ Systems converge semantically
- ▶ Development towards general plural in the inherited system is halted due to the binary opposition in the innovative system

Abbreviations

AN	animate 3, 4, 6
AOR	aorist 3
ATTR	attributivizer 3, 5
CM	noun class marker slot 6
CVB	converb 3
EL	elative 3
EXCL	exclusive 3
F	feminine 4, 5
HPL	human plural 4
INAN	inanimate 4, 6
M	masculine 4, 5
N	neuter 3, 4
NPL	non-human plural 4
PL	plural 4
PROG	progressive 3
SG	singular 4
SIM	similative 5

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