

# Animacy in Botlikh (handout)

Chiara Naccarato and Samira Verhees

Linguistic Convergence Laboratory at NRU HSE Moscow

Version: March 24, 2021

## Abstract

Agreement with animacy is a prominent and peculiar feature of the grammar of Botlikh (< Andic < Avar-Andic < Avar-Andic-Tsezic < East Caucasian). It is expressed by two independent agreement systems: i) the noun class system inherited from the proto-language; ii) a set of specialized animacy markers that show up on a different set of targets. It remains to be determined to what extent these two systems overlap semantically. In any case, animacy as a distinct agreement value seems to be unique to Botlikh within the East Caucasian family. This handout summarizes what we currently know about the category of animacy in Botlikh, based on the available sources and some preliminary fieldwork conducted in 2019.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	About the language . . . . .	3
1.2	Gender agreement . . . . .	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Noun class system</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Animacy markers</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1	Negative copulas . . . . .	8
3.2	Interrogative particles . . . . .	10
3.2.1	Polar questions . . . . .	10
3.2.2	Content questions . . . . .	11
3.3	Participles . . . . .	12
3.4	Ordinals . . . . .	14
3.5	Attributive clitics . . . . .	15
<b>4</b>	<b>Field survey 2019</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1	Ordinals . . . . .	16
4.2	Plural possessors . . . . .	18
4.3	Plural possessors revisited . . . . .	19
<b>5</b>	<b>Diachrony</b>	<b>22</b>
5.1	Noun class . . . . .	22
5.2	Animacy markers . . . . .	24
<b>6</b>	<b>Summary and future plans</b>	<b>27</b>
	<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>29</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>29</b>

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 About the language

Botlikh belongs to the Andic group within the Avar-Andic-Tsezic branch of the East Caucasian language family. It is spoken in three villages in the Botlikh district of the Republic of Daghestan: Botlikh (12,159), Miarso (1,975) and Ashino (79),<sup>1</sup> by between 5,000 and 8,000 speakers.

Botlikh is an unwritten language, but the Cyrillic script of Avar functions as an ad hoc writing system on social media. Opinions vary on the language's vitality — it is still passed on to children and spoken at home, but some families are shifting to Russian; Botlikh is evaluated as “threatened” in Ethnologue (Simons & Fenning 2018). The main village Botlikh (the administrative center of the eponymous Botlikh district) is multi-ethnic and mixed marriages are not uncommon, which is unusual for highland Daghestan. Avar, Russian and Botlikh are all used for interethnic communication to some extent. This means that there is some L2 speaker input into Botlikh as well as code mixing. The other two villages are most likely mono-ethnic. Little is known about the dialects spoken there, but they are highly mutually intelligible.

Botlikh's typological profile can be briefly summarized as follows:

- mostly agglutinating with elements of fusion;
- morphologically ergative;
- left-branching;
- basic word order SOV;
- four basic cases and a number of complex spatial forms;
- extensive gender agreement on a variety of targets, including typologically uncommon ones like postpositions.

---

<sup>1</sup>Between brackets is the population according to the most recent census: 2010 for Botlikh and Ashino, 2018 for Miarso, via the Russian Wikipedia pages of the respective villages.

Available literature on Botlikh includes:

- one full reference grammar in Georgian ([Gudava 1962](#));
- several short sketches in Russian mostly repeating the same information ([Gudava 1967](#), [Azaev 2000](#), [Saidova 2001](#), [Magomedbekova 2001](#), [Xalidova 2017](#));
- a sketch in English ([Alexeyev & Verhees Forth.](#));
- several works on the lexicon and word formation ([Azaev 1975](#), [Sulejmanova 2013](#), [Alekseyev 2016](#));
- two (!) Botlikh-Russian dictionaries ([Saidova & Abusov 2012](#), [Alekseev & Azaev 2019](#)).<sup>2</sup>

The category of animacy has been described in these sources when discussing the relevant parts of the grammar. Curiously, though, it failed to surprise anyone. Studies of gender / noun class in East Caucasian usually do not mention its existence.

## 1.2 Gender agreement

Botlikh features two distinct and semantically intersecting gender systems: a system of **noun class markers** (Section 2) and a system of **animacy markers** (Section 3). The term **noun class** is commonly used in the literature on East Caucasian gender agreement because gender assignment in these languages is predominantly semantic ([van den Berg 2005](#): 155). In this handout we maintain the term “noun class” because it allows us to make a clear distinction between the inherited system as opposed to the innovative system. It should be kept in mind, however, that both are essentially gender agreement systems in the sense of [Corbett \(1991\)](#).

East Caucasian languages are known for expressing gender agreement on typologically unusual targets such as adverbs, postpositions, and inflectional suffixes. Less exotic targets include verbs and various attributive forms, e.g. adjectives, demonstratives, numerals, etc. Botlikh animacy markers are found on some targets that are unusual even for East Caucasian

---

<sup>2</sup>In 2019 we presented a talk together with George Moroz discussing some significant differences in the linguistic material represented in these two resources. You can find the slides for this talk [here](#).

standards, such as negative copulas and question particles. Attributive forms usually agree with their heads, while verbs and other targets agree with the absolutive argument in the sentence, cf. (Haspelmath 1999: 133).

## 2 Noun class system

The system of noun class markers in Botlikh was inherited from the proto-language and involves cognate agreement markers throughout the family; see Alekseev (1988: 129) on class markers in Avar-Andic.

At first glance the noun class system of Botlikh looks like a typical Andic noun class system with three classes in singular (MASCULINE for male humans, FEMININE for female humans, NEUTER for everything else) and two in the plural.

However, Botlikh's peculiarity with respect to other Andic languages is that it features a distinction between ANIMATE and INANIMATE in the plural, while other Andic languages distinguish HUMAN and NONHUMAN. Table 1 below compares the noun class system of Botlikh with that of Godoberi – Botlikh's closest relative within the Andic group. Botlikh and Godoberi are to some extent mutually intelligible.

Table 1: Noun class markers in Botlikh and Godoberi

	Singular			Plural	
Botlikh	M	F	N	AN	INAN
	w	j	b	r/l*	b
Godoberi	M	F	N	HUM	NHUM
	w	j	b	b	r

\* *l* is an allomorph that occurs in suffixal position.

In the plural Godoberi conflates the M and F classes to a single HUMAN plural class, while the N class corresponds to NONHUMAN in the plural. In Botlikh, the M and F classes form the

AN plural class with part of the nouns from the singular N class, namely animals (including insects). Inanimate objects technically do not differentiate singular and plural in their agreement patterns, since the marker is the same in both cases. As a result, if we compare Godoberi and Botlikh, the plural markers appear “flipped”: *r* for ANIMATE in Botlikh corresponds to *r* for NONHUMAN in Godoberi (see Table 1).

The following examples illustrate the asymmetry between the two languages: cows in Botlikh pattern with people rather than shoes, while in Godoberi donkeys pattern with apples rather than people.<sup>3</sup>

### Botlikh

- (1)
- a. ha-l            adam-al  
DEM-AN.PL man-PL  
'These men.'
  - b. r-ita-l                            zin-e  
AN.PL-missing-AN.PL COW-PL  
'Missing cows.'
  - c. ha-b            tufla-baʔi  
DEM-INAN.PL shoe-PL  
'Those shoes.'

### Godoberi

- (2)
- a. b-aɣar            adami-ke  
HUM.PL-old man-PL  
'Old men.'
  - b. r-aɣar            hamaxi-be  
NHUM.PL-old donkey-PL  
'Old donkeys.'
  - c. r-eč'uɣa            iča-be  
NHUM.PL-big apple-PL  
'Big apples.'

---

<sup>3</sup>Throughout this handout, examples in Botlikh are from Saidova & Abusov (2012) unless indicated otherwise, the Godoberi examples are from Kibrik, Tatevosov & Eulenberg (1996: 25).

Targets of noun class agreement in Botlikh include: verbs, adjectives, demonstratives, numerals, inflectional suffixes, postpositions, adverbs, attributivizing clitics. The position of the marker in a target can be prefixal, infixal or suffixal, depending on the part of speech or the particular stem in which the slot occurs. Attributive forms usually agree with their nominal heads, while verbs and other targets agree with the absolutive argument (3)

- (3) hu-j heʔa j-ac'-a-rudi ida=χo-b našar go-l  
 DEM-F up F-reach-TH-TEMP COP=ATR.INAN-N rope DEM-AN.PL  
 wac:i-lu-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.'

### 3 Animacy markers

Botlikh features an additional agreement system of animacy markers, which has no parallel in any related or neighboring language. This second system appears to overlap semantically with the noun class system: it distinguishes animate from inanimate referents irrespective of number. The animacy markers all share the same elements associated with a particular value: *ʔ* for animates and *χ* for inanimates. While noun class markers have agreement marking as their primary function, the animacy markers primarily fulfill other morphosyntactic functions. Agreement is expressed by the choice for one of two affixes. Targets of animacy agreement include: negative copulas, interrogative particles, attributive clitics, non-past participles, and ordinal numerals. A preliminary survey of examples found in Saidova & Abusov (2012) and in the texts included in the grammar by Gudava (1962) showed that targets differ in terms of how consistently they agree with animacy, as will be detailed in the following sections. Ordinals seemed to be the most consistent, which is why we decided to focus our first field survey on ordinals (see Section 4.1). So far it seems that animacy marking is often not obligatory in its respective domains.

Table 2: Animacy markers in Botlikh

Target	Animate	Inanimate
Negative copula	ɬi-č'i	χu-č'i
Interrogative particle		
Polar	=ɬi.ma	=χu.ma
Content	=ɬi.la	=χu.la
Attributive clitic	=ɬa-CM*	=χo-CM
Participle		
Present	-ɬa-CM*	-χa-CM
Future	-ɬa-CM*	-χa-CM
Ordinal numeral	-ɬa-CM*	-χa-CM

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

### 3.1 Negative copulas

The affirmative copula *ida* has three negative equivalents, which consist of a suppletive stem and a regular negation suffix *-č'i*. All of these forms have present tense reference.<sup>4</sup>

- *χu-č'i* – inanimate
- *ɬi-č'i* – animate
- *gu-č'i* – neutral

The neutral form *guč'i* seems to be the most frequent and can always replace the other two. Example (4) below was elicited.

- (4) hu-j učitel'nica gu-č'i  
DEM-F teacher COP-NEG  
'She is not a teacher.'

---

<sup>4</sup>Past tense copular sentences take a negative form of the existential verb *b-uk'i* 'be', which lacks the animacy distinction.



When asked whether (5) was also possible, our consultant commented that this was actually better. Example (6) was deemed impossible, because it would mean that the person we are talking about is inanimate.

- (5) hu-j učitel'nica **ɦi-č'i**  
 DEM-F teacher AN.COP-NEG  
 OK 'She is not a teacher.'
- (6) hu-j učitel'nica **χu-č'i**  
 DEM-F teacher INAN.COP-NEG  
 \* 'She is not a teacher.'

The grammar sketch in Saidova & Abusov (2012: 556) mentions the existence of the “negative particles” *χu-č'i* (with a supposed free variant // *ču-č'i* that is not attested elsewhere) and *ɦi-č'i*, but the dictionary contains only examples of *guč'i*. Examples (7)-(9) are from texts recorded by Gudava (1962). In example (8), the copula agrees with *adam* ‘person’, while in example (7) it agrees with the subject *naɣar* ‘thing’.

- (7) hena hark':u-di hiλ'-u ida aznaj-bahaduri-χi: hena di-b  
 now wife.OBL-ERG say-CVB COP Aznaj-Bahadur.OBL-APUD now I.OBL-N(GEN)  
 ih-i naɣar **χu-č'i**  
 make-INF thing INAN.COP-NEG  
 'Now the wife said to Aznaj-Bahadur: "Now there is nothing I can do."'
- (8) hu-b adam **ɦi-č'i**, du-b anč:u=χ:a  
 DEM-N person AN.COP-NEG you.OBL.SG-N(GEN) shadow=EMPH  
 'That **is not** a person, it is your shadow!'
- (9) gaɣa hinu b-uk'-a **gu-č'i** eštu-b=k'wala k'wanar  
 there inside N-be-CVB COP-NEG which-N=INDEF light  
 'There **was no** light whatsoever inside there.'

The affirmative copula also heads periphrastic tenses. Of the negative copulas, neutral *guč'i* and the animate form *ɦič'i* (10) are attested in this context.

- (10) has:aʔati=talu=la      hiʕ'-u    ga-š:u-j                      hark'i i ša=la      j-aʔ-a  
 right\_now=QUOT=ADD say-CVB DEM-M.OBL-F(GEN) wife    home=ADD F-go-CVB  
 tok'ab reʔa j-iχ:-u              ʕi-č'i  
 ?      ?      F-appear-CVB AN.COP-NEG  
 "Right now," said his wife. She went inside the house and **did not show** herself again.'

## 3.2 Interrogative particles

Interrogative particles consist of the same root elements as the negative copulas (*ʕi-* for animate and *χu-* for inanimate) and a question marker: *ma* for polar questions and *la* for content questions. The animacy marker is optional and often omitted.

### 3.2.1 Polar questions

The polar question marker *ma* is typically attached to the main predicate (11), (12), but it can be moved to shift focus to another constituent, cf. (14). Structurally, the question markers look quite similar to the negative copulas (with the animacy markers occupying the position of a root morpheme). Unlike the negative copulas, however, the interrogative forms do not form predicates, see example (12), where the polar question particle attaches to the copula, rather than replacing it. (Note that the copula itself is often omitted, as in (13).)

- (11)    ẽča-baʕi    ink-o:=ʕi-**ma**  
 chicken-PL eat-CAUS.AOR=AN-Q  
 'Did you feed the chickens?'
- (12)    ruħ      ida=χu-**ma**  
 strength COP=INAN-Q  
 'Do you have strength?'
- (13)    hã:, min=ʕi-**ma**  
 ah you.SG=AN-Q  
 'Ah, is that you?'
- (14)    k'wahał=**ma** w-ah-u  
 sick=Q      M-become-AOR  
 'Have you become sick?'

In case the animacy markers are present, they agree with the absolutive argument in the clause. It is unclear what happens when there are multiple absolutive arguments.

### 3.2.2 Content questions

Content questions are formed with an interrogative pronoun or question word and a content question marker. In the absolutive, the interrogative pronouns are: *ẽ-w*, *ẽ-j*, *e-b* ('who' – male, female, animal) / *e-b* ('what'), and *ẽ-l* (plural). In case the gender/animacy of the referent is unknown, the speaker can use the unspecified variants *en* // *ẽ*, as in example (15). If there is case marking, the question marker follows it. Similar to the polar question marker, the content question marker can be detached from its canonical host (22).

The oblique forms are *ẽe-* (for animates) and *ẽũ-* (for inanimates). The corresponding forms from Godoberi distinguish human (*ẽe-*) vs. nonhuman (*ẽun-*) referents (Gisatullina & Toldova 1996: 40). Ataev (1988) identified the distinction in terms of animacy found in Botlikh oblique interrogative pronouns as archaic, though he did not propose a diachronic scenario for the development of these items.

- (15) *iš-qe en=ẽi-la*  
home.OBL-APUD who=AN-Q  
'Who is at home?' (unspecified)
- (16) *e-b=ẽi-la beł'-u*  
who-N=AN-Q shed.OBL-SUP  
'Who is in the shed?' (addressing an animal)
- (17) *inda=ẽi-la min baluɣ-i*  
when=AN-Q you.SG mature-INF  
'When will you grow up?'
- (18) *ẽe-j=ẽi-la hu-j ješi*  
who.OBL.AN-F(GEN)=AN-Q DEM-F daughter  
'Who's daughter is that?'
- (19) *inda.j=dera=ẽi-la bišti barš:-a r-uk'i*  
when=until=AN-Q you.PL offend-CVB AN.PL-be-INF  
'Until when will you be arguing?'

- (20) hã, hena inu=χu-la du-j b-it-a-b arsi m-is-i  
 well now where=INAN-Q you.SG.OBL-DAT N-get\_lost-PST.PTCP-N money N-find-INF  
 ‘Well, where to find your lost money now?’
- (21) ece-b=χu-la palto g<sup>w</sup>anzi  
 which-N=INAN-Q coat good  
 ‘Which coat is good?’
- (22) e-b piša χu-la du-b  
 what-N skill INAN-Q you.SG.OBL-N(GEN)  
 ‘What is your skill?’

In example (23), the use of the animate marker could be motivated by metonymy – the airplane is identified with the person flying it, though this requires further investigation.

- (23) go-b s:amalet ina=hi-la burd-ata  
 DEM-N airplane where=AN-Q fly-PROG.CVB  
 ‘Where is that airplane flying to?’

### 3.3 Participles

Animacy is also marked on non-past participles, see Table 3 below.<sup>5</sup> Participle suffixes additionally contain a slot for noun class agreement. In case of masculine noun class agreement, a vowel alternation *a-o* occurs. The masculine class marker *-w* may be omitted in the process.

Table 3: Participle suffixes

	Base	Animate	Inanimate
Present	infinitive stem	-la-CM / (-lo-(w))	-χa-CM / (-χo-(w))
Future			-χo-CM
Past	bare stem	-a-CM	

In addition to regular attributive uses, participles in Botlikh head relative clauses and occur in periphrastic tenses. So far we have no examples of participles in periphrastic tenses

<sup>5</sup>This paradigm was constructed by M.E. Alexeyev. Not all examples concur with the analysis, supposed present tense forms are sometimes interpreted as marking future and vice versa. There seems to be quite a lot of variation in this area, which requires further investigation.

showing animacy agreement, they use the inanimate form by default. The subject of the imperfect construction *j-ik'i-χa-j-j-ik'-a* [F-be-IS-INAN.PRS.PTCP-F F-be-AOR] in example (24), for example, is a female human (as the class markers make clear) but the inanimate participle suffix is used.

- (24) den zuk'o riu-di imu-j sandu indaɣala š:ajt'ane musa=la  
 I small time.OBL-ERG father.OBL-DAT together always Shaitane place=ADD  
 c'rimd-u j-ik'-i-χa-j j-ik'-a χadal  
 guard-CVB F-be-IS-INAN.PRS.PTCP-F F-be-AOR at\_night  
 'When I was young I always guarded Shaitane<sup>6</sup> at night with my father.'

In other contexts participles agree with their nominal heads (25)-(26), analogous to the suffixal noun class slot.

- (25) b-ič-i-χo-b q'ai  
 N-sell-IS-INAN.FUT.PTCP-N thing  
 'a thing that will be sold'
- (26) b-ič-i-ɬa-b unsa  
 N-sell-IS-AN.FUT.PTCP-N ox  
 'an ox that will be sold'

There are, however, quite a few cases of apparent mismatches. In example (27) it is possible that the participle suffix agrees with the object of the verb, i.e. 'trolleybus'.<sup>7</sup>

- (27) taralejbus i<b>č-i-χo-w adam  
 trolleybus drive<N>-IS-INAN.PRS.PTCP-M person  
 'a person who drives a trolleybus'

In example (28), however, this is clearly not the case. Possibly only a limited number of verbs can attach either suffix.

<sup>6</sup>Shaitane is an area at the edge of the village where some people have their orchards.

<sup>7</sup>Note that in example (27), the infixal noun class marker which forms part of the verbal lexeme agrees with a different constituent than the suffixal class marker that belongs to the participle suffix, cf. examples (25)-(26), where all markers agree with the same constituent.

- (28)    ila        id-i-χo-w                      waša  
          mother love-IS-INAN.PRS.PTCP-M son  
          ‘a son who loves his mother’

The grammar sketch in Saidova & Abusov (2012: 556) mentions the forms *q<sup>w</sup>ard-i-χo-b* [write-IS-INAN.FUT.PTCP-N] ‘which will be written’, *q<sup>w</sup>ard-i-ła-j* [write-IS-AN.FUT.PTCP-F] ‘the one[F] who will write’. Our consultant translated ‘the girl who is writing a letter’ as follows:

- (29)    kaʁat q<sup>w</sup>ard-i-χa-j                      ješik’wa  
          letter write-IS-INAN.PRS.PTCP-F girl  
          ‘the girl who is writing a letter’

When asked about (30), she commented that it is not ungrammatical, but that it has future tense reference. We are not yet sure how to interpret this discrepancy, but perhaps it is relevant to point out that the same consultant did identify animacy as a relevant parameter when choosing between negative copulas, see Section 3.1.

- (30)    kaʁat q<sup>w</sup>ard-i-ła-j                      ješik’wa  
          letter write-IS-AN.PRS.PTCP-F girl  
          ‘the girl who will be writing a letter’

### 3.4 Ordinals

The ordinal markers coincide with the future participle suffixes. They attach to a special form of the numeral (ending in *-i* or *-j*), which looks similar to the infinitive stem formant that precedes the participle suffix. Like other attributive forms, they agree with their nominal heads (31).

- (31)    w-uł-u        ida ha-w    habu-j-χo-b                      iša  
          M-enter-CVB COP DEM-M three-TH-INAN.ORD-N room  
          ‘He entered the third room.’

However, there are cases in which it seems that agreement is controlled by an absolutive argument from an adjacent constituent (32).

- (32) **k'e-ji-ł-a-b**      **reha-di**      w-ãʔ-ida w-ał'adasi:u-w waša  
 two-TH-AN.ORD-N night.OBL-ERG M-go-PF M-middle-M son  
 'On the second night, the middle son went.'

Most frequently this concerns examples in which the nominal head is semantically ambiguous with respect to animacy, e.g. 'grade', so it might also be the case that variation in such cases depends on this ambiguity, rather than on a different agreement pattern, cf. examples (33) and (34).

- (33) go-w uškola-łi      **hac'a-j-χo-b**      **kalasa-łi**      ida  
 DEM-M school.OBL-IN ten-TH-INAN.ORD-N grade.OBL-IN COP  
 'He is in the tenth grade at school.'

- (34) **ištu-j-ł-a-b**      **kalasa-łi**      hił'i w-eχ:-u  
 five-TH-AN.ORD-N grade.OBL-IN down M-stay-AOR  
 'He stayed in the fifth grade (for another year).'

### 3.5 Attributive clitics

The attributive clitics have the same form as the future participle and ordinal suffixes: =χo-*CM* for inanimate, and =ł-a-*CM* for animate. They attach to converbal forms (35), the present tense copula (which does not have a regular participial form) (36), and more complex constituents like functive phrases (38).<sup>8</sup> Attributive clitics can be distinguished from participle suffixes because the latter attach to the infinitive stem, while attributive clitics require no modification of the host and can attach to different types of constituents.

- (35) b-iž-ata=**χo-b**      ruša  
 N-grow-PROG.CVB=INAN.ATR-N tree  
 'a growing tree'
- (36) ida=**χo-b**      na:      haκ-a  
 COP=INAN.ATR-N thing show-AOR  
 '[They] showed all the things that there were.'

<sup>8</sup>Example (38) is from the dictionary by [Alekseev & Azaev \(2019\)](#).

The attributive form of *ida* has a lexicalized meaning of ‘real, factual, indeed, really’ (37).

- (37)    *ida=la-l*                      *g<sup>w</sup>anzi adam-al*  
          COP=AN.ATR-AN.PL good    person-PL  
          ‘really good people’

- (38)    *Ɂ<sup>w</sup>anek’wa=Ɂun=lo*  
          boss=FUNC=AN.ATR.M  
          ‘[one] who is acting as boss’

An interesting case is the verb *barš:i* ‘offend’. According to Saidova & Abusov (2012: 63–64), it has a participle form *barš:i-χo-w* ‘touchy’ (i.e. easily offended), and an attributivized form based on the general converb (here with the suffix *-a*) *barš:a=to-w* ‘offended’.

## 4 Field survey 2019

In the summer of 2019 we conducted a survey to verify whether the ordinal suffixes can agree with a constituent other than their nominal head and, if so, under which conditions this occurs (Section 4.1). We also collected some additional data from the same speakers to test noun class agreement for plural possessors (Section 4.2). We repeated the latter test in 2021 using an online survey method (Section 4.3).

### 4.1 Ordinals

The elicitation task consisted of 15 sentences including ordinal numerals to be translated from Russian into Botlikh. Two sentences included two ordinals each, so we had a total of 17 stimuli, i.e. combinations of ordinal numeral and nominal head. The nominal head modified by the ordinal was either unambiguously animate / inanimate (e.g. ‘daughter’, ‘year’) or ambiguous with respect to animacy (e.g. ‘grade’), and it was either the absolutive argument or the head of an adverbial phrase; for ambiguous heads we proposed examples of both situations (cf. Table 4);



Table 4: Stimuli used in the survey

Stimulus	Animacy	Absolutive argument	Adverbial phrase
daughter	animate	1	0
wife	animate	1	0
son	animate	1	0
people/nation	ambiguous	1	2
family	ambiguous	1	3
grade	ambiguous	1	3
year	inanimate	0	3

We consulted 13 speakers of Botlikh and one speaker of Miarso. The results of the survey can be summarized as follows:

- ordinal suffixes mostly agree for animacy with the nominal head they modify;
- we got 24 / 202 unexpected answers (produced by 9 speakers in 11 questions) and in all such cases an animate marker was used where we expected an inanimate marker;
- in all such cases the nominal heads were known ambiguous nouns ('grade', 'family', 'people'),<sup>9</sup> and they were not necessarily the heads of adverbial phrases (39); in most cases the noun class marker of the ordinal remained neuter singular (39a), but two speakers used a plural marker (39b);

- (39) a. **buʁu-j-ʁa-b**      **χalq'**    hǎnq'u-di      ʁ'u-de-χi  
four-TH-AN.ORD-N people house.OBL-ERG rock.OBL-AD  
'The fourth people/nation live in the mountains.'
- b. **buʁu-j-ʁa-l**              **χalq'**    ʁumru ih-u      req'-e  
four-TH-AN.ORD-AN.PL people life      make-AOR mountain.OBL-SUP  
'The fourth people/nation live in the mountains.'

<sup>9</sup>All these nouns belong to the third (neuter) noun class, so we would expect an inanimate marker in such cases.

- none of the speakers used the animate marker for the unambiguously inanimate head ‘year’ spontaneously, but four speakers allowed it;
- the animate form was rejected only 33/97 times where it was not used initially;
- by contrast, most speakers unanimously rejected inanimate markers with unambiguously animate heads, only two speakers allowed this variation in one specific case;
- the Miarso speaker used exclusively the  $\chi o$ -CM form throughout the survey, which might suggest that the animate/inanimate distinction is absent in Miarso.

## 4.2 Plural possesseees

The second elicitation task consisted of 14 noun phrases of the type [my X], with a variety of plural possesseees.<sup>10</sup> The aim of this task was to check the agreement pattern of the possessive pronoun. Possessive pronouns have a suffixal noun class slot (which functions as a genitive case marker), e.g. *di-j ješi* [I.OBL-F(GEN) daughter] ‘my daughter’, *di-w waša* [I.OBL-M(GEN) son] ‘my son’. For plural possesseees, the choice is between *-l* (animate) and *-b* (inanimate). A total of 12 speakers from Botlikh were consulted.

Table 5 below lists the stimuli and the number of speakers that classified them as either animate or inanimate. Most of the stimuli were expected to be possibly ambiguous. The survey initially lacked unambiguously animate or inanimate referents for comparison (‘houses’ and ‘books’ were added later). Nonetheless, the results suggest an underlying hierarchy of animacy, where humans are more unambiguously animate, while insects and less important or exotic animals are more variable. Still, they behave differently from inanimate objects. The order of the stimuli in the table reflects their relative rank in the hierarchy. Personifications of humans (such as dolls) are considered inanimate objects, while mythological creatures (e.g. angels) are animate. Animacy does not seem to be a transferable property: dead people are also “animate”. Animals used as food turned out to be a poor stimulus. Speakers com-

<sup>10</sup>This survey was collected less systematically than the previous one. Some questions were added later, and not all questions were asked of all participants.

mented that it was unnatural to speak of fried lamb, one would use a word for meat from a lamb, rather than the word used to refer to live animals. One speaker used the suffixal marker *-r*, which is the genitive case marker (and not a noun class marker) in Avar.

Table 5: Plural possessee elicitation task

stimulus	animate	inanimate	total
babies	9	0	9
dead people	11	0	11
angels	8	4	12
cockroaches	7	6	13
parrots	6	4	10
fried lambs	6	6	12
monkeys	6	6	12
butterflies	4	8	12
bacteria / microbes	3	6	9
dolls	2	10	12
fried fish	2	10	12
administration (government organ)	1	10	11
houses	1	6	7
books	0	2	2

### 4.3 Plural possessee revisited

In early 2021 we decided to revisit the plural possessee survey discussed in the previous section using an online survey method.<sup>11</sup> In the online survey, we did not control participation: the survey was viewed by an average of 126 users, and about 120 of them viewed all of the questions.<sup>12</sup> The average number of participants (i.e. subscribers who voted for an answer) was 68, and the average percentage of votes with respect to views was 53%. Due to the nature of the medium, we have no metadata on the speakers who participated.

In this new survey we did not ask speakers to translate a noun phrase, but rather asked

<sup>11</sup>Speakers were surveyed on Instagram, a social media app that is very popular in the Republic of Daghestan. We collected data through our account about the Botlikh language (*botlikh\_rasha*), which at the time had a subscriber count of 372. We used the survey options in the “stories” environment on Instagram – the questions and the results (in terms of percentages) can be viewed in our pinned highlights *опросы* (‘surveys’).

<sup>12</sup>In the Instagram stories environment, each survey question is a separate panel. Since users cannot be forced to view all of the questions, the number of viewers varies.

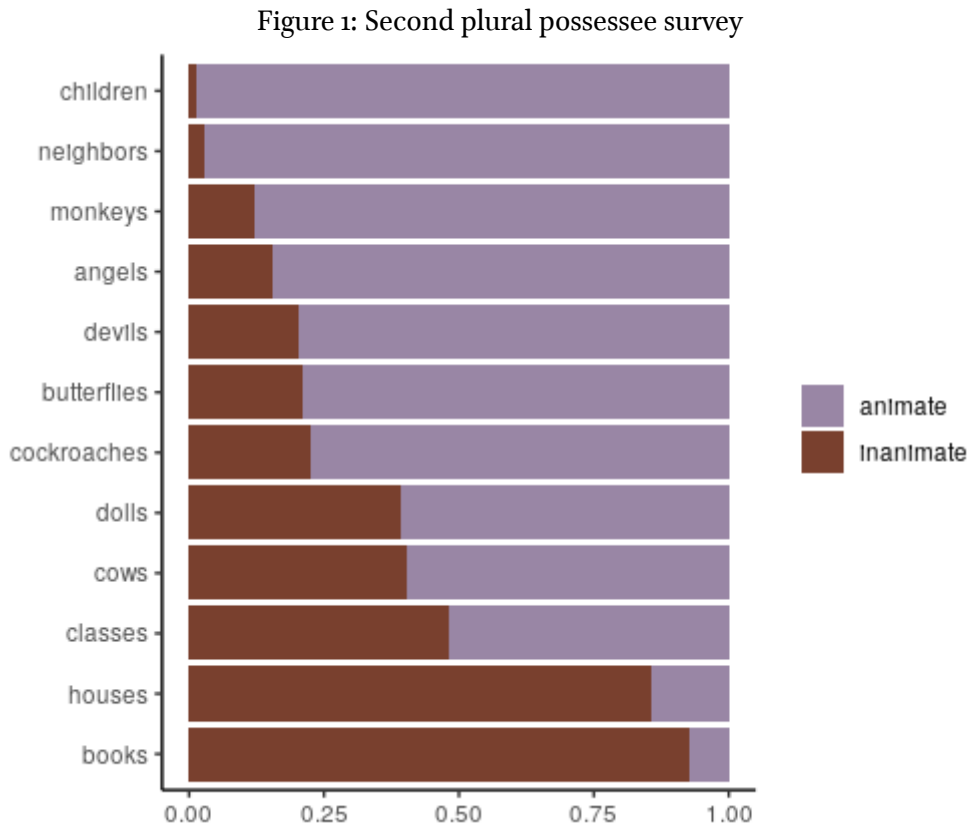
them to pick a form of the personal pronoun to go with a given plural form, e.g. *di-b / di-l zine* [I.OBL-INAN.PL(GEN) / I.OBL-AN.PL(GEN) cows] ‘my cows’. We also removed items that turned out to be conceptually problematic in the previous survey, such as fried animals. Table 6 below compares the stimuli elicited in the two surveys.

Table 6: Plural possessee stimuli

category	expectation	survey1 stimulus	survey2 stimulus
human	animate	babies	children
	animate		neighbors
	variable	dead people	
mythological	variable	angels	angels
mythological	variable		devils
human effigy	variable	dolls	dolls
collective	variable	administration (government organ)	
	variable		classes / grades
animal	animate		cows
animal as food	variable	fried lambs	
	variable	fried fish	
exotic animal	variable	parrots	
	variable	monkeys	monkeys
	variable	cockroaches	cockroaches
insect	variable	butterflies	butterflies
	variable		
microorganism	variable	bacteria / microbes	
object	inanimate	houses	houses
	inanimate	books	books

Problematic in survey 2 were the stimuli ‘cows’ and ‘classes/grades’. In the former case, several speakers commented that they preferred the collective noun *buc’i* ‘cattle’ (which nonetheless triggers animate plural agreement). In the case of ‘classes/grades’, a plural form *kalasa-baʔi* from one of the dictionaries was used, but a number of speakers did not recognize the word. This could have something to do with the fact that the command of Russian is growing among speakers of Botlikh, and older borrowings that underwent some phonetic adaptation are being ousted by variants that are closer or identical to the Russian source lexeme. We included this stimulus in the present survey because this concept proved variable

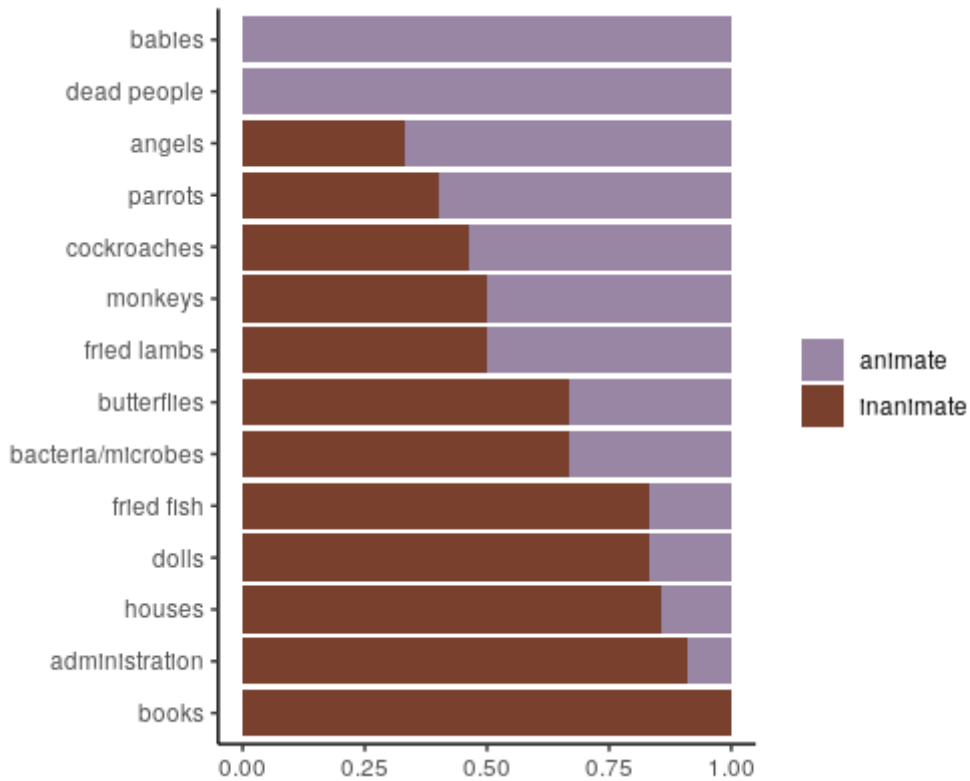
in the ordinal data (4.1): a grade or class can be perceived as an object / abstract concept, or as a group of people, in which case it should trigger animate agreement, but due to the confusion, we failed to properly verify this. Figures 1 and 2 below show the proportion of animate vs. inanimate agreement for the stimuli of both surveys.



Both images reveal a certain hierarchy of animacy, with humans being the most animate, and objects being the least animate. Anything in between those two categories seems variable. We have not been able to establish clear rankings within the variable category. The high inanimate score for ‘cows’ in Figure 1 could be due to the fact that some speakers considered the plural form *zine* unnatural, as mentioned above. This question also had one of the lowest participation rates (46% of those who viewed the question answered it, compared to an average of 53%), which could indicate that speakers generally did not like the question. The ranking in Figure 2 seems more categorical, but keep in mind that these results are based on data from a much lower number of participants.

Both images suggest that animacy is an important factor in noun class agreement in Bot-

Figure 2: First plural possessee survey



likh, but that the system is not completely grammaticalized. At least for some speakers, the animate marker seems to function as a general plural marker.

## 5 Diachrony

### 5.1 Noun class

The most common type of noun class system for Andic is the one found in Godoberi, with three singular classes (masculine human (M), feminine human (F), and a residual neuter class (N)), and two plural classes, distinguishing humans (HPL) from nonhumans (NPL). The system of Andi, which does not reduce the number of classes in the plural, is considered archaic (see an overview of gender-marking systems in Table 7 below).

The Botlikh system appears to have frozen in an intermediate stage between Andi and Avar, which has only one plural class. In Botlikh the former singular class markers *r* (prefixal) and *l* (suffixal) were repurposed to mark agreement with plural humans and other animates.

Inanimate objects do not distinguish plural. The animacy hierarchy displayed by the agreement patterns discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 could indicate that Botlikh was initially on track to develop a human/nonhuman distinction like the other Andic languages. Possibly it developed further under the influence of the general plural marker in Avar (which incidentally looks identical), but for some unknown reason the development halted at animates (one speaker we surveyed used an animate plural marker for the stimulus ‘houses’, because they interpreted the *-l* as a general plural marker).

The fact that the Botlikh system developed from a system similar to that of Andi, is confirmed by relict singular forms in certain collocations. The expression in (40) can be found in the texts recorded by Gudava (1962).

- (40)   ce-r    ziu-di...  
          one-IV day.OBL-ERG  
          ‘One day..’

Table 7: Avar-Andic gender systems

SG	M	F	AN	INAN1	INAN2	Andi (Zilo)
	w	j	b		r	
PL	M	F	AN	INAN1	INAN2	
	w	j		b	r	
SG	I	II	III	IV	V	Chamalal
	w	j	b	l	j	
PL	HPL		NPL			
	b		j			
SG	M	F	N			Godoberi
	w	j	b			
PL	HPL		NPL			
	b		r			
SG	M	F	N			Botlikh
	w	j	b	b		
PL	AN			INAN		
	r/l			b		
SG	M	F	N			Avar
	w	j	b			
PL	PL					
	r/l					

## 5.2 Animacy markers

As mentioned earlier, the animacy markers show a consistent correspondence of stem-consonants and agreement value:  $\chi$  for inanimates,  $\ell$  for animates, suggesting that the markers originate from two distinct lexical sources. Unfortunately, we have no straightforward



source candidates for either of the markers, though it seems very likely that they are of verbal origin, which to our knowledge is cross-linguistically unattested (Corbett 1991, Audring 2016). Typologically more common sources of gender marking include demonstrative and personal pronouns. In Botlikh, however, these particular forms do not match the animacy markers in terms of either their formal appearance or distributional characteristics.

In Naccarato & Verhees (2019) we discussed some arguments in favor of the verbal origin hypothesis:

- the animacy markers take the place of the verb stem in the case of negative copulas, which have the same structure as a regular negated verb, only with an animacy marker occupying the place of the stem, cf.  $\chi i$  ‘take’ –  $\chi-e-w\check{c}i$  [take-HAB-NEG] ‘does not take’, vs.  $ida$  ‘is’ –  $\chi u-\check{c}i$  [INAN-NEG] ‘is not’ (Section 3.1);
- as a possible counter-argument, the interrogative forms have a structure similar to the negative copulas but do not form predicates (Section 3.2) (although a predicativizing interrogative particle *xiro* is attested in the Zilo dialect of Andi – possibly the interrogative forms in Botlikh simply lost their predicativizing function);
- the nonpast participles look like (past) participle forms (*-a-CM*) of full verbs with a truncated stem. For example:  $\lambda'-a-b$  [say-PST.PTCP-N] is the truncated past participial form of  $hi\lambda'-i$  [say-INF], which looks structurally similar to the nonpast participle suffixes  $\iota a-b$  and  $\chi o-b$ ;
- the negative forms of the nonpast participles look similar to the negative past participle forms of full verbs, cf.  $ih-a-b$  [make-PST.PTCP-N]  $\rightarrow ih-i-\check{c}'a-b$  [make-IS-NEG.PTCP-N],  $ih-i-\chi a-b$  [make-IS-INAN.PRS.PTCP-N]  $\rightarrow ih-i-\chi-i-\check{c}'a-b$  [make-IS-INAN.PRS.PTCP-IS-NEG.PTCP-N]. Note that a formant *-i-* (INFINITIVE STEM) appears after  $\chi$ -, as in the case of (full) lexical verbs;
- ordinal numeral and future participle suffixes in other Avar-Andic languages (which incidentally look similar to the Botlikh forms) originate from lexical verbs like ‘say’ and

possibly ‘walk’ (see (Naccarato & Verhees 2019) for more detail), which suggests that lexical verbs are an eligible source for such markers in these languages.

We found cognates for some of the forms in other Andic languages, but they do not occur in pairs as in Botlikh. The only parallel we have discovered so far (though it is a bit of a stretch), are various particles with a pair-wise distribution, such as reported speech markers in Andi. Andi has reportative markers *ɬodi* (co-occurs with aorist predicates) and *ɣodi* (occurs with all other predicates), and quotative markers *ɬoɣodu* and *ɣodu*, which are distributed analogously. At least the quotative markers seem to contain a converb suffix (*-du*) and likely originate from lexical verbs, in particular speech verbs (though the exact source lexemes also remain unclear in this case). These particles look vaguely similar to the more autonomous animacy markers (i.e. the interrogative forms and the copulas), and are also distributed in pairs, though based on a completely different (and also highly unusual) parameter. Tense-based distribution of pairs of particles is also attested in Godoberi (polar question markers: *da*, *wu*; quotative markers: *ɬa*, *wa*; quotatives marking epistemic certainty: *ɬaqi*, *waqi*).

Due to the lack of clear parallels in closely related languages, the system of animacy markers must be considered a unique innovation of Botlikh. It is evidently less old than the noun class system inherited from the proto-language. However, it is difficult to evaluate the relative age of the specific development of plural agreement in Botlikh. It is possible that Botlikh halted the development of *r/l* towards a general plural marker in order to semantically align the noun class system with the animacy markers. At this point, it is impossible to establish where the animacy distinction appeared first. By now at least, the two systems appear to have converged, though it remains to be verified to what extent the two systems overlap semantically in specific cases.

It is remarkable that Botlikh managed to innovate an agreement system in a relatively short time-frame, since these are generally considered to develop over the course of millennia (Dahl 2004: 112, 200).<sup>13</sup> In the case of Botlikh, this would be impossible, since there is no trace

---

<sup>13</sup>To be fair, though, the system of animacy markers appears to be an example of an uncanonical agreement system: it is semantically transparent and marking is often not obligatory / the distinction is poorly grammaticalized.

of it in other closely related languages, including Godoberi. Although we have no reliable data for when the splits in the Andic branch occurred, Botlikh and Godoberi are similar enough in both lexicon and grammar to be mutually intelligible, suggesting a very recent split. There is some evidence that the category may be absent in the Miarso dialect as well, which would make the development even more recent.

## 6 Summary and future plans

Botlikh features two independently operating gender systems:

- a common East Caucasian noun class system which distinguishes male humans, female humans and everything else in the singular, and animate and inanimate referents in the plural;
- a second system, unique to Botlikh, which comprises a rather odd set of animacy markers seemingly originating from the same (lexical) sources.

Animacy markers appear on different targets, but their use seems to be consistent only in the case of ordinal numerals. A survey conducted in Botlikh in the summer of 2019 and focused on ordinal numerals generally confirmed our expectation that animacy marking in such environment is quite consistent, and that ordinals normally agree for animacy with their nominal heads. The variation we observed with respect to the choice/allowance of unexpected markers (which mainly concerned the choice/allowance of an animate marker where an inanimate marker was expected, but not the other way around) was mostly related – but not limited – to cases in which the head itself was semantically ambiguous in terms of animacy. This suggests that the system is not fully grammaticalized, which is also confirmed by the non-compulsory nature and/or inconsistent use of animacy markers with targets other than ordinal numerals.

Further investigation on animacy markers in Botlikh includes the following:

- a fine-grained study of agreement patterns of animacy markers with different types of targets;

- an in-depth account of the semantics of the category of animacy, both in the noun class system and in the system of dedicated animacy markers;
- an investigation of whether the category is expressed (and if so, on which targets) in the Miarso dialect;
- a reconstruction of the possible origins of animacy markers in Botlikh. A preliminary attempt at a (very tentative) reconstruction was proposed in a talk we gave on October 24<sup>th</sup> 2019 at the “Caucasian languages: Typology and diachrony” conference held in Moscow at the Institute of Linguistics RAS (Naccarato & Verhees 2019), in which we argued for a likely verbal origin of such markers based on some structural features of the targets and a comparative analysis of possible cognates in other Andic languages.

## Abbreviations

<b>AD</b> adessive	<b>INF</b> infinitive
<b>ADD</b> additive	<b>IS</b> infinitive stem
<b>AN</b> animate	<b>IV</b> fourth singular noun class
<b>AOR</b> aorist	<b>M</b> masculine
<b>APUD</b> apud locative	<b>N</b> neuter
<b>ATR</b> attributivizer	<b>NEG</b> negative
<b>CAUS</b> causative	<b>NHUM</b> non-human
<b>COP</b> copula	<b>OBL</b> oblique
<b>CVB</b> converb	<b>ORD</b> ordinal numeral
<b>DAT</b> dative	<b>PF</b> perfect
<b>DEM</b> demonstrative	<b>PL</b> plural
<b>EMPH</b> emphatic particle	<b>PROG</b> progressive
<b>ERG</b> ergative	<b>PRS</b> present
<b>F</b> feminine	<b>PST</b> past
<b>FUNC</b> functive	<b>PTCP</b> participle
<b>FUT</b> future	<b>Q</b> question particle
<b>GEN</b> genitive	<b>QUOT</b> quotative
<b>HUM</b> human	<b>SG</b> singular
<b>IN</b> inessive	<b>SUP</b> superessive
<b>INAN</b> inanimate	<b>TEMP</b> temporal converb
<b>INDEF</b> indefinite	<b>TH</b> thematic element

## References

Alekseev, Mixail E. 1988. *Sravnitel'no-istoričeskaja morfologija avaro-andijskix jazykov* [*Historical comparative morphology of Avar-Andic languages*]. Moscow: Nauka.

- Alekseev, Mixail E. & Xalil G. Azaev. 2019. *Botlixsko-russkij slovar'* [*Botlikh-Russian dictionary*]. Moscow: Academia.
- Alekseyev, Mikhail E. 2016. 'Botlikh'. In Peter O. Müller, Ingeborg Ohnheiser, Susan Olsen & Franz Rainer (eds.), *Word-formation. An International Handbook of the Languages of Europe. Volume 5*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Alexeyev, Mikhail E. & Samira Verhees. Forth. 'Botlikh'. In Yuri Koryakov & Timur Maisak (eds.), *The Caucasian Languages. An International Handbook. Volume 2*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ataev, Boris M. 1988. Ob odnom reliktovom javlenii botlixskogo jazyka [About a relict phenomenon in Botlikh]. Tezisy dokladov XII respublikanskaja naučno-praktičeskaja konferencija molodyx učenyx i specialistov Dagestana "Molodež' i naučno-texničeskij process", Maxačkala.
- Audring, Jenny. 2016. Gender. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. <https://oxfordre.com/linguistics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.001.0001/acrefore-9780199384655-e-43#acrefore-9780199384655-e-43-div1-5>.
- Azaev, Xalil G. 1975. *Leksika i slovoobrazovanie botlixskogo jazyka* [*Lexicon and word formation in Botlikh*]. Tbilisi State University dissertation.
- Azaev, Xalil G. 2000. 'Botlixskij jazyk [Botlikh]'. In Gadzhi G. Gamzatov (ed.), *Jazyki Dagestana* [*Languages of Daghestan*], 346–359. Moscow/Makhachkala: Vostok (Oriens).
- van den Berg, Helma. 2005. The East Caucasian language family. *Lingua* 115(1-2). 147–190.
- Corbett, Greville G. 1991. *Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dahl, Östen. 2004. *The growth and maintenance of linguistic complexity*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Gisatullina, Yu. & S. Toldova. 1996. Pronouns. In Aleksandr E. Kibrik, Sergej G. Tatevosov & Alexander Eulenberg (eds.), *Godoberi*. München/Newcastle: Lincom Europa.
- Gudava, Togo E. 1962. *Botlixuri ena* [*The Botlikh language*]. Tbilisi: Mecniereba.

- Gudava, Togo E. 1967. 'Botlixskij jazyk [Botlikh]'. In Evgenij A. Bokarev & Ketevan V. Lomatidze (eds.), *Jazyki narodov SSSR. Tom 4. Iberijsko-kavkazskie jazyki* [*Languages of the peoples of the USSR. Volume 4. Ibero-Caucasian languages*], 293–306. Moscow: Nauka.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 1999. Long distance agreement in Godoberi (Daghestanian) complement clauses. *Folia Linguistica* 33(1-2). 131–152.
- Kibrik, Aleksandr E., Sergej G. Tatevosov & Alexander Eulenberg. 1996. *Godoberi*. München/Newcastle: Lincom Europa.
- Magomedbekova, Zagidat M. 2001. 'Botlixskij jazyk [Botlikh]'. In Mixail E. Alekseev, Georgij A. Klimov, Sergej A. Starostin & Jakov G. Testelec (eds.), *Jazyki mira. Kavkazskie jazyki* [*Languages of the world. Caucasian languages*], 228–236. Moscow: Academia.
- Naccarato, Chiara & Samira Verhees. 2019. Towards a tentative origin of animacy markers in Botlikh. Presentation at Caucasian Languages: Typology and Diachrony 23–24.10.2019, Institute of Linguistics RAS, Moscow. [https://github.com/sverhees/2019\\_Animacy-origin](https://github.com/sverhees/2019_Animacy-origin).
- Saidova, Patimat A. 2001. 'Botlixskij jazyk [Botlikh]'. In Viktorija N. Jarceva & Viktor A. Vinogradov (eds.), *Jazyki Rossijskoj Federacii i sosednix gosudarstv. Ènciklopedija v 3-x tomax* [*The languages of Russia and adjacent states. Encyclopaedia in 3 volumes*], 222–228. Moscow: Nauka.
- Saidova, Patimat A. & Magomed G. Abusov. 2012. *Botlixsko-russkij slovar'* [*Botlikh-Russian dictionary*]. Makhachkala: IJaLI.
- Simons, Gary F. & Charles D. Fenning. 2018. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World. 21st edition*. Dallas/Texas: SIL International.
- Sulejmanova, Džavgarat I. 2013. *Otraslevaja leksika botlixskogo jazyka* [*Thematic lexicon of Botlikh*]. IJaLI Makhachkala dissertation.
- Xalidova, Rašidat Š. 2017. Lingvističeskij portret botlixskogo jazyka [A linguistic portrait of the Botlikh language]. *Vestnik Akademii Nauk Čečenskoj Respubliki* 34(1). 77–81.