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## Liaison and grammaticalization in Northern Akhvakh

### 1. Introduction.

In Northern Akhvakh, word boundaries are often blurred by a liaison process. The initial consonant of the second word is deleted, and the vowels brought into contact merge into a long vowel whose quality combines features of the two underlying vowels. For example, in *beq'ida bik<sup>w</sup>ari* ‘would have come (N)’ → *beq'idēk<sup>w</sup>ari*, the underlying sequence ...*a* (*b*)*i*... is realized ...*ē*...

If the deleted consonant is *m*, the vowel resulting from fusion retains the nasality feature, as in *ha miša* ‘this place’ → *hēša*

Liaison limited to the fusion of two vowels may also occur if the second word has no initial consonant, as in *ila ima* ‘parents’ (lit. ‘mother father’) → *ilēma*.

Evidence that this process really blurs word boundaries is provided by the observation of nasality.

Liaison is restricted by the nature of the initial consonant of the second word, but not by the grammatical nature of either the ending of the first word or the beginning of the second word. It does not depend on the precise syntactic nature of the relationship between the two words either, provided there is a relatively direct link between them. It is mainly conditioned by the fact that, either the two words in contact constitute a usual collocation, or one of them is a grammatical word.

For most word combinations affected by this process, liaison is common but clearly optional, but in some cases it tends to become obligatory, resulting in lexical or grammatical change.

### 2. Liaison and the lexicon

Liaison may result in the transformation of initially transparent word combinations into more opaque lexical units, as illustrated by the following examples:

*k'eha miša* |eye|nose| → *k'ehēša* ‘face’  
*ilada mik'e* |orphan|child| → *iladēk'e*  
*ha miša* |this|place| → *hēša*  
*ik<sup>w</sup>a ik'a* |small|big| → *ik<sup>w</sup>ēk'a* ‘small or big’  
*rik'a beqari* |lump|form.PF| → *rikāqari* ‘A lump has formed’  
*q'eli bišurula* |mouth|N.hold.INF| → *q'elīšurula* ‘fast’  
*geḷa bašurula* |inside.ALL|HPL.gather.INF| → *geḷāšurula* ‘retire (HPL)’

*jeṭē(he) jik'ōruLa* |F.leave.CVB|F.be.CAUS.INF| → *jeṭik'ōruLa* 'abandon (F)'

If agreement markers are present at the end of the first word or at the beginning of the second one, liaison may result in the creation of a word with infixed agreement markers. If an agreement marker is present at the beginning of the first word too, liaison may result in the creation of a word with both prefixed and infixed agreement markers.

### 3. Liaison and grammaticalization

Liaison is particularly productive in constructions providing a periphrastic expression of typically grammatical meanings, resulting in the emergence of forms expressing the same meaning synthetically. The paper I would like to deliver at the workshop will concentrate on the emergence of new grammatical forms that still coexist with the construction from which they are emerging via liaison:

Participle + *riṭi* 'at the moment' → temporal converb

Negative converb + *bik'urula* 'be' → negative infinitive

Infinitive + *miča* 'let it be found' → optative

Infinitive + *mičala* 'if it is found' → 'if only'

Tense auxiliary → tense marker

Converb + *boḷurula* 'occur' → terminative aktionsart

Adjective/noun + *boḷurula* 'become' → adjective/noun-to-verb derivation

*buḡurula* 'fall' → obligative marker

*bit'urula* (causative auxiliary) → causative marker

### 4. Conclusion

By way of a conclusion, I would like to emphasize that a systematic description of this aspect of Northern Akhvakh morphology is of particular interest for a general theory of 'univerbation', since due to the productivity of liaison in the present state of Northern Akhvakh, this language provides an opportunity to observe the initial phase of a wide variety of processes likely to result in the emergence of new grammatical forms.