

How much 'Udi' is Caucasian Albanian?

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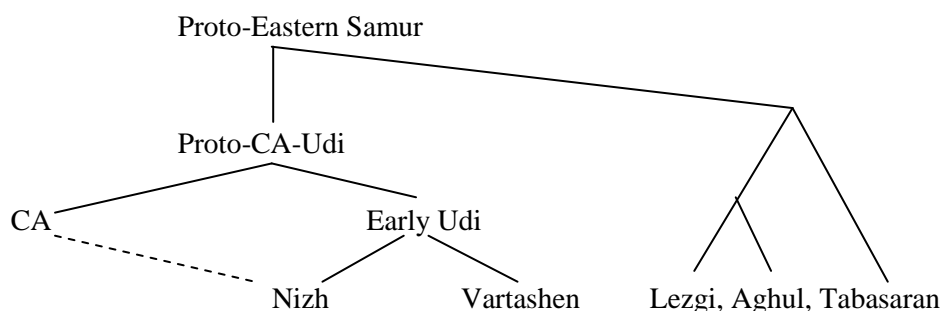
Abstract

Udi, a Lezgian language, has since long been considered as the descendant of an early medieval language conventionally called Caucasian Albanian (CA). CA is said to have been the dominant language of the Christian Kingdom of Caucasian Albania (roughly 300-700 AD). The major textual source for CA is given by the so-called Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests (CAPs) that have been deciphered and edited in the years 2003-2009 (Gippert et al. 2009). Being written in the 6th or 7th century AD, the CAPs thus represent the oldest textual records for an East Caucasian language. Many data stemming from the CAPs seem to corroborate the above-mentioned hypothesis according to which Udi is an immediate residue of CA. This hypothesis dwells upon observations related to phonology, morphosyntax, derivational morphology, and syntax, as well as to the lexicon. For instance, both CA and the Vartashen variant of Udi know a so-called 'third series or sibilants' (in fact palato-alveolar affricates and fricatives) unique within East Caucasian. With respect to morphosyntax, we can describe a similar pattern of case markers (ergative *-en* ~ *-in*, Dative *-a* ~ *-u* ~ *i* etc.) The again (with respect to East Caucasian) unique plural marker *-ux* (CA *-owx*) is present in both languages. Another features are the parallel use of the referentializer *-o*, a set of mood-specific copulae (e.g. *te* negation, *bu* assertion, (CA) *eñe* ~ (UDI) *gi-/yi-* condition), the presence of a clitic indicating general past reference (*-y*), and the use of a strongly 'nominal' negator (*nut-* ~ *-nut*) that cannot be found elsewhere in the Eastern Caucasus. Syntactically, both languages are marked for an ergative case pattern except for personal pronouns that is strongly accusativized. This is evinced by the presence of a parallel, dative-based O-Split (unspecific/specific) that had been borrowed from Iranian and by the use of personal agreement clitics that copy referents in S/A function (or IO function with *verba sentiendi*) onto the verb (again a structural borrowing from Iranian). Of the roughly 1.000 basic lexical types documented in the CAPs, nearly one quarter has perfect matched in Udi, often without any phonetic change (e.g. the numerals *sa* 'one', *p'a*^ε (CA *p'a*) 'two', *xib* 'three', *biq* 'four', *qo* 'five' etc.).

Nevertheless, the CAPs data also evince that CA differs from present-day Udi with respect to major points of phonology, grammar, and lexicon. Some of these differences can be accounted for by assuming (more or less) regular shifts from CA to Udi, such as the phonetic shift $\mathfrak{s}^{\epsilon} > \mathfrak{s}$ as in *iṣ^εa* > *iṣ'a* 'near', *ñ* > *y*, as in *p'oñe* > *p'oy* 'thus, well', *ž-* > *y-* as in *žan* > *yan* 'we', or *l'* > *y* as in *l'aq'* > *yaq'* 'way', *bi'a-* 'die (present)' > Udi *biyesun* (masdar) 'to die'. On the morphological level, we can safely describe for instance the loss of the Lezgian *s-dative in Udi still preserved in CA, the shift of the

present tense ablaut variant of the thematic marker (-a) towards a modal marker, the shift of the dative-marked infinitive (-esa) towards a present tense marker, and the reduction of the original bi-dimensional pattern of locative case forms to a mono-dimensional pattern in Udi. However, the CAPs data also entail innovative features that are not shared by Udi, be it in their original form, be it in terms of variation. For instance, CA is marked for a pronominal genitive -ya that does not show up in Udi, e.g. *o-ya* 'his', *ağ-ya* 'her', *et'a* (that is *e-t'-ya*) 'its'. Furthermore, CA is characterized for a paradigm of definite articles (by itself unique within East Caucasian) that distinguishes semantically motivated classes (male *o*, female *ağ*, neuter, *e*, plural *e*). Udi lacks this feature completely. Whereas in Vartashen Udi, monosyllabic nouns are by large marked for stem extensions typical for Lezgian (Eastern Samur), CA shows traces of this pattern only. In this respect, CA is more close to Nizh Udi than to Vartashen Udi. Another feature is the focal agreement clitic of the third person plural that shows up (in S/A function) as -q'un in Vartashen and as -t'un in Nizh, but which is -n in CA (corresponding to the third person singular clitic). In addition, third person agreement clitics know an 'intensive' form in CA that can be added to the standard clitic -n(e) the presence of which again is conditional by features of tense. Udi shows no traces of this system. On the other hand, Udi verbs may take the option to endoclitisize agreement markers, a pattern totally alien to CA. On the lexical level, Udi is marked for some terms the etymology of which can safely be related to Proto-Lezgian, but that are substituted by loans in CA.

In my paper, I want to illustrate and evaluate some of the features mentioned above (including specific features of syntax not mentioned here). I will argue that Udi is rather a 'niece' of CA than its 'daughter'. Accordingly, Udi is not directly related to CA but to a language that had once been a dialect of Proto-CA-Udi:



The CAPs data suggest that CA-Udi was not a marginal Lezgian language as generally assumed. Rather it can be shown that this proto-language once had been part of the Eastern Samur division of Proto-Lezgian (relating CA-Udi more closely to Lezgi, Tabasaran, and Aghul). Due to early language contact especially with varieties of Northwest Iranian (Median, later on with Middle Northwest Iranian languages and with Armenian) the character of CA-Udi as an Eastern Samur language gradually became obscured. By the times of the Christian kingdom of Caucasian Albania, at least two descendants of this proto-language may have been spoken, CA (in the regions of ancient Barda'a/Partav, today *Bərdə*) and Early Udi (on the southern slopes of the Great Caucasus mountain chain). Later on, most of the CA speakers switched to either Armenian or Azeri, but a smaller portion - having migrated to the north after the arrival of Islam - seem to have mixed their language with local Early Udi, a process that then gave rise to the emergence of the Nizh variant of Udi.

References

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