

Explorations in Kartvelian marginal verb classes: Medial verbs with version vowel /e/.

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Among the categories marked in the Kartvelian verb is the one commonly known as “version”, associated with a vowel prefix directly preceding the verb root. The topic of this talk will be one of the four version vowels, the prefix /e-/. In all four Kartvelian languages, /e-/ — or its Laz-Mingrelian cognate /a-/ — appears in formally passive verbs with an indirect object. In Old Georgian and Svan, in addition, a small number of non-passive verbs are also marked by the version vowel /e-/, a fact that led some linguists to speculate that this prefix might once have had a broader distribution.

On the basis of a comparison of the Svan and Old Georgian data, I will formulate a formal and semantic profile of the nonpassive verbs that allow /e/-version. These verbs are atelic (medial), and most of them distinguish a monovalent form in /i/-version from a bivalent form in /e/-version. The presence of such verbs in both Georgian and Svan implies that a verb class of this type is likely to be old in Kartvelian. I will also argue that the anomalous morphology of the 1st and 2nd-person aorist forms of the Georgian verb root /-c-/ “give”, which appear to have the version vowel /e-/, is due to umlaut of the original prefix /a-/, conditioned by the tense/mood suffix.