

Passives and modal passives in Ossetic

Arseniy Vydrin

The paper deals with peculiarities of two passive (1), (3) and three modal passive (4), (6), (8) constructions in modern Iron Ossetic (East Iranian)¹. All of them except one passive construction (1) are not attested in the Ossetic grammars, however, they are widely used in texts as well as in Ossetic speech. All constructions consist of a verbal derivate and an auxiliary (usually *wæwæn* ‘to be’). The first passive construction consists of the past participle and the auxiliary *wæwæn* ‘to be’, the agent is marked by Ablative (1). The initial non-passive construction for (1) is (2), where the finite verb is used. The second passive construction consists of the participle in *-gæ* and the auxiliary, the agent is marked by Ablative (3). The modal passive construction of deontic necessity consists of the participle in *-gæ* and the auxiliary, the agent is marked by Dative (4). The initial non-passive construction for (3) and (4) is an emphatic construction with the form in *-gæ* and an auxiliary verb *kænæn* ‘to do’ (5). The modal passive construction of participant-external necessity consists of the future participle in *-inag* and the auxiliary *wæwæn* ‘to be’, the agent is marked by Dative (6). The construction is derived from the non-passive prospective construction where the future participle is also used (7). The last modal passive construction consists of a nominalized form in *-æn*, the auxiliary and an adverb *žæn* ‘difficult’ or *ænsôn* ‘easy’ (8). The initial construction for (8) is (9) where the adverb *žæn* ‘difficult’ or *ænsôn* ‘easy’ (or any other) forms a complex predicate with the auxiliary *wæwæn* ‘to be’, the experiencer is marked by Dative and the verb is in infinitive form.

The paper focuses on distinctions between passive and modal passive constructions in modern Ossetic. To the best of our knowledge, there is no special research of modal passives cross-linguistically². However, from special studies devoted to passives (Xolodovič 1974; Siewierska 1984; Shibatani 1988; Abraham, Leisiö 2006 among many others) one can see that usually a language either don’t have a modal passive (like English does) or its modal passive differs from the standard passive in a way that makes them at least quite non-prototypical passives. For example, in most well-studied European languages modal ‘passive’ constructions differ from standard passive by almost obligatory absence of the agent (e.g. in Russian), tense and aspect restrictions (e.g. in Lithuanian cf. Geniušienė 1987, 109–118; Geniušienė 2006, 32–33]) and almost obligatory use of adverbs or negation (e.g. in Russian cf. Xrakovsky 1991).

In the paper, I will show that Ossetic modal passive constructions lack the features listed above (but note that in the modal passive construction with a nominalization in *-æn* an adverb *žæn* ‘difficult’ or *ænsôn* ‘easy’ is obligatory used), however, they differ from standard passive constructions morphosyntactically and semantically. The agent is marked by Ablative in the passive constructions, while all of the modal passive constructions use Dative. The passive constructions are semantically neutral, while the modal passive constructions can have semantics of deontic necessity (4), participant-external necessity (6) and participant-external possibility (8). The standard passive constructions can not be used with intransitive verbs, while some of the modal passive constructions can be formed from intransitive verbs. In the paper I will also show morphosyntactic and semantic differences between the first and the second passive constructions as well as between each of the three modal passive constructions.

The Ossetic data, compared to the most well-studied European languages, shows that languages may have modal passives with different morphosyntactic properties. It opens a prospect for a further typological study of the modal passives and related problems of modality-voice interaction.

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² The only typological study of modality-voice interactions is [Narrog 2010]. However, Heiko Narrog does not examine modal passives in detail.

First passive construction with past participle

- (1) *Xæzar aræžt u k^wəšžə-t-ə k'ux-æj*
 house build.PART.PST be.PRS.3SG worker-PL-GEN hand-ABL
 'The house is built by the workers' (lit. 'by the hands of the workers')

Initial non-passive construction

- (2) *k^wəšžə-tæ xæzar aræžt-oj*
 worker-PL.NOM house build.PST-TR.PST.3SG
 'The workers built the house.'

Second passive construction with participle in -gæ

- (3) *Sjužet kæn-gæ u Afæqo-jæ*
 plot do.PRS-PART be.PRS.3SG Afako-ABL
 'The plot is created by Afako' [Makh dug, №8, 2002, pp. 127].

Modal passive construction of deontic necessity with participle in -gæ

- (4) *dæwæn dæ urok-tæ kæn-gæ štə*
 you.SG.DAT POSS.2SG homework-PL.NOM do.PRS-PART be.PRS.3PL
kænnod dæ šk'ola-gæ a-tær-zəštə
 or 2SG.ENCL.GEN school-GEN PREF-drive-FUT.3PL
 'You must do your homework or you will be expelled from your school'.

Emphatic construction with participle in -gæ

- (5) *mæ læg jæ card-cær-æn-bon-t-ə*
 POSS.1SG man POSS.3SG life-live.PRS-NMLZ-day-PL-GEN
n^wəž-gæ kod-t-a
 drink.PRS-PART do.PST-TR-PST.3SG
 'My husband DRANK all his life' [Max dug, № 4, 2001, pp. 131].

Modal passive construction with future participle in -inag

- (6) *mæ bon səw-ən nə ba-wəzæn, goræt-mæ*
 POSS.1SG strength go-INF NEG PREF-be.FUT.1SG town-ALL
šəmaxæn wəzənæn xæšš-inag
 you.PL.DAT be.FUT.1SG bring.PRS-PART.FUT
 'I won't be able to go, you will have to bring me to the town' http://allingvo.ru/PROSE/matteo_falkone.htm.

Prospective construction with future participle in -inag

- (7) *wədon štə dune šæxi ba-kæn-inag*
 they be.PRS.3PL world their.self PREF-do.PRS-PART.FUT
 'They are going to conquer the whole world' [Texov F. D. Vyraženie modal'nosti v osetinskom jazyke. Tbilisi, 1970, pp. 96 (Modality in the Ossetic language. In Russian)].

Modal passive construction with nominalization in -æn

- (8) *asə fəš-tæ nən žən ær-caxš-æn štə*
 this ram-PL.NOM 1PL.ENCL.DAT difficult PREF-catch.PRS-NMLZ be.PRS.3PL
 'It is hard for us to catch these rams' (lit. 'These rams can be caught by us with difficulty').

Initial construction for (8)

- (9) *žən u adæjmag-æn jæ xorž ax^wər-tæ nə-wwaz-ən*
 difficult be.PRS.3SG man-DAT POSS.3SG good habit-PL.NOM PREF-leave.PRS-INF
 'It is difficult for a man to get of his good habits' [Max dug, № 6, 2001, pp. 79].

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