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Locative classification in Laz

Caucasian languages are well known for their sophisticated systems of locational expressions in both nominal and verbal domains: North East Caucasian languages display rather large systems of locational cases, whereas in North West and South Caucasian languages spatial information is often additionally encoded on verbs through a comparatively large number of preverbs with topological and/or deictic functions. Within the group of South Caucasian languages, the largest inventories of spatial preverbs can be found in Mingrelian and Laz. Thus, for the various dialects of Laz, inventories consisting of up to 42 preverbs have been reported (Holisky 1991).

Apart from the preference as to the domain of expression of spatial configurations (mainly nominal vs. preferably verbal), the Caucasian language families tend to display systematic differences in their systems of locational expressions. In contrast to the rather straightforward semantics of locational cases, a subgroup of preverbs in Laz and Mingrelian do not merely denote configurations of figure and ground, but also classify the ground with respect to certain properties. For instance, in the Ardeşen variety of Laz, there are 5 preverbs that can be used to express configurations of a figure which is in a containment configuration to its ground (Kutscher 2003), the choice of the preverb depending on the characteristic properties of the referent of the ground-NP. Thus, for denoting a configuration of a figure with a container with a broad opening (e.g. a bowl (cf. (1a)), the preverb *ce-* 'in.broad' is used, while for a tubelike container with a small opening (e.g. the traditional *ťiǩina* 'pannier'- a long smallish basket to be carried on the back) the preverb *dolo-* 'in.narrow' is used, cf. (1b).

(1)   a.   *ošǩuri tazi   ce-zun*
               apple bowl in.broad-lie:3s:PRS
               'the apple is in the bowl'

      b.   *ošǩuri ťiǩina   dolo-zun*
               apple pannier   in.narrow-lie:3s:PRS
               'the apple is in the pannier'

The phenomenon of the classification of the ground in a figure - ground configuration - was first reported by Allen (1977), who established the term 'locative classification' as a covenient label for it. Crosslinguistically, locative classification is a rare phenomenon (Aikhenvald 2000). It can take place in the nominal (adpositional marking, cf. Aikhenvald/Green 1998) as well as in the verbal domain (verbal classifiers referring to locative arguments, cf. Friedrich 1970).

In my talk, I will show that locative classification in Laz takes place in the verbal domain. I will give an overview of the set of preverbs which classify grounds in Laz and contrast it with the comparatively smaller and systematically different sets of preverbs in the genetically close South Caucasian languages Georgian and Svan on the one hand and with Allan's (1977) and Aikhenvald's findings (2000, Aikhenvald/Green 1998) on locational classification in the nominal domain on the other.

References

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