RENÉ LACROIX
Université Lyon 2 – Lumière, France

The preroot vowel *a*- in the Laz verb

In the Laz verb, there is a slot just before the root for a morpheme called "preroot vowel". There are four preroot vowels. Their main function is to perform modifications on the valency of the verb. The paper deals with the preroot vowel *a*-.

The preroot vowel *a*- has four functions which will be examined in turn.

1) The preroot vowel *a*- has an applicative-like function, in which it encodes the addition of a dative NP cross-referenced by an affix of the second series of cross-referencing affixes (glossed II), without changing anything else in the construction. This derivation occurs principally with intransitive verbs. Thus from (1) we obtain (2); (3) is another example of this construction:

(1)   bere   i-mt'-u
        child   PRV-flee-AOR.I3S
        The child fled.

(2)   bere   m-a-mt'-u
        child   II1S-PRV-flee-AOR.I3S
        The child fled from me.

(3)   çobani-s   per   a-mt'-udort'un
        shepherd-DAT   colour PRV-flee-PPF.I3S
        The shepherd turned pale. ("colour fled from the shepherd")

There are only a few transitive verbs which can present this derivation:

(4)   padishahi-k   gardiani-s   ma-sum-an   k'oç   a-k'vand-u
        sultan-ERG   warder-DAT   ORD-three-ORD   man   PRV-wish-AOR.I3S
        The sultan asked the warder to bring the third man.

This mechanism departs from prototypical applicative derivation in that the promoted participant is not treated as a direct object, since it is marked by the dative. But one could widen the definition of the notion of applicative so that it includes such phenomena, observed in the other Kartvelian languages, but also in the African language Kanuri.

2) The preroot vowel *a*- has a potential use in which no argument is added or suppressed, but the encoding of the subject is modified: it stands in the dative case and is cross-referenced by an affix of series II. Moreover, there is a 3rd person singular affix of series I, which does not refer to any argument and cannot be put into correspondence with any noun phrase. This derivation can occur with intransitive as well as transitive verbs. From (5) (intransitive) we obtain (6):

(5)   b-ul-u
        I1S-go-THS
        I go.

(6)   va   m-a-l-e-n
        NEG   II1S-PRV-go-THS-I3S
        I can't go.

From (7) (transitive) we obtain (8):

(7)   t'epsi-te   gza-s   gama-p-ç-are
        tray-INSTR   path-DAT   PREV-I1S-sell-FUT
        I will sell it on the road with a tray.

(8)   ma   ndgha-s   ancak vit   ngroshi-sh   xalva gama-m-a-ç-e-n
        1S   day-DAT   only ten   piastre-GEN helva PREV-II1S-PRV-sell-THS-I3S
        I can sell only ten piastres of halva per day.

3) The preroot vowel *a-* permits deriving a verbal form with the meaning of an action done *accidentally, by mistake, involuntarily*. Here again, the subject stands in the dative and is cross-referenced by a series II affix. There is a 3rd person singular affix (series I), which does not refer to any argument and cannot be put into correspondence with any noun phrase:

(9)   do-m-a-tk-u
        PREV-II1S-PRV-say-AOR.I3S
        I said it accidentally / by mistake / unwillingly.

4) The preroot vowel *a-* occurs in the basic form of some verbs implying an experiencer such as 'be afraid'', 'remember', 'be tired' and 'fall asleep'. Here again, the subject is in the dative and is cross-referenced by a series II affix. There is a 3rd person singular affix (series I), which does not refer to any argument and cannot be put into correspondence with any noun phrase:

(10)   bozo-s mut   var   g-a-shin-e-t'u
        girl-DAT   nothing   NEG   PREV-PRV-remember-THS-IMPFT.I3S
        The girl didn't remember anything.

With the verb 'fall asleep', the subject appears in most cases in the absolutive and not in the dative. This can be taken as an indication of the fact that with this verb, the subject is taking a feature of a prototypical subject (prototypical intransitive subject appears in the absolutive) :

(11)   bozo   d-a-ncir-u-doren
        girl   PREV-PRV-fall.asleep-AOR.I3S-EVD
        The girl fell asleep.

Moreover, if the dative subject is in the 3rd person plural, its plurality is marked on the verb. This is another indication of the fact that it is taking properties of the prototypical subject.

Such constructions (subject marked by the dative, 3rd person singular affix which does not refer to any argument and cannot be put into correspondence with any noun phrase) are reminiscent of an impersonal construction found in the Slavonic languages (for example Bulgarian *igrae mi se* 'I want to play'). In conclusion, I will propose a brief comparison with the functions of the preroot vowels of Georgian.

List of abbreviations

AOR	aorist	ORD	ordinal
DAT	dative	PPF	pluperfect
EVD	evidential	PREV	preverb
ERG	ergative	PRV	preroot vowel
FUT	future	S	singular
GEN	genitive	THS	thematic suffix
IMPF	imperfect	I	first series of cross-referencing affixes
INSTR	instrumental	II	second series of cross-referencing affixes
NEG	negation		