

Backward control in Kabardian

Some constructions in Kabardian exhibit what has been called "backward control" (e. g. Polinsky & Potsdam 2002): syntactic properties of an argument of a verb in the subordinate/dependent/embedded phrase determine the syntactic properties of the argument it shares with the verb in the main/matrix clause, rather than vice versa, as is the default case ("forward control") in more familiar languages.

The relevant syntactic property in Kabardian is case assignment:

- (1) *ś'āla-mtxələ-r* *yə-hə-nwə* *x^way-ā-ś*
boy-ERG book-NOM 3sg.-carry-inf. want-pret.-ind.
"The boy wanted to carry the book"

In (1), the case marking of the subject of the main verb is unexpected; since *x^wayn* "want" is intransitive, its subject should be in the nominative case, rather than the ergative/oblique. The reason for this marked case assignment is that the dependent verb, *hən* "carry" is transitive, and its subject, which is coreferential with the subject of *x^wayn*, must be in the ergative case. Therefore, the case assignment of an argument of the verb in the main clause is determined by the verb in the subordinate clause. If the verb in the subordinate clause is intransitive, its subject will be in the nominative case, and the subject of *x^wayn* "want" will also be in the nominative:

- (2) *ś'āla-r* *k^wa-nwə* *0-0-x^way-āt*
boy-NOM go-fut. 3sg.-3sg.-want-impf.
"The boy wanted to go"

The same principle of case assignment accounts for the following example containing the causative construction:

- (3) *l'əžə-m ś'āla-m* *χədžabzə-r* *yə-r-yə-ğa-h-ā-ś*
old man-ERG boy-ERG girl-NOM 3sg.-3sg.-3.sg.-caus.-carry-pret.-af.
"The old man made the boy carry the girl"

In (3), the causee (*ś'āla*- "boy") is in the ergative/oblique case, rather than the nominative, because it is the transitive subject of the embedded verb *hən* "carry", not because it is the causee of the morphologically derived causative verb. If the embedded verb is intransitive, such as *džan* "read", the causee will be in the nominative case (Kumaxov (ed.) 2006: 436):

- (4) *yagadžāk^wa-m* *yadžāk^wa-r* *wasa-m* *q'-rə-y-ğa-dž-ā-ś*
 teacher-ERG pupil-NOM poem-ERG dir.-3sg.-3sg.-caus.-read-pret.-af.
 "The teacher made the pupil read the poem"

This shows that in both nuclear (causative) subordination and core subordination (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997), Kabardian has structures in which the argument structure of the subordinated verb determines case assignment of the argument shared with the main verb. This paper will offer a unified account of backward control constructions in Kabardian, using data obtained from native informants and examples of Kabardian subordinate constructions analysed in Kumaxov & Vamling 1998.

Since similar constructions involving backward control are found in other NW Caucasian languages (e. g. Adyghe), as well as in the neighboring NE Caucasian languages, such as Dido (or Tsez, e. g. Polinsky 2006), but they appear to be rather rare cross-linguistically, it will be argued that backward control is a (globally recessive) areal feature characteristic of (some) languages of the Northern Caucasus.

References

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