

The Archaic Position of the Category of Voice in Kartvelian: A Comparative Analysis

The Kartvelian languages include a highly stratified system of aspectual series and diathetic classes. In Common Kartvelian we have reconstructed three series of imperfective, perfective/punctiliar, and perfect/resultative aspects. We may also delineate four general verb classes grouped around the category of voice - active-transitive, mediopassive, "medioactive" intransitive, and a broad "stative" group.

The aspectual system of Kartvelian strongly resembles that of Ancient Greek and Sanskrit, with ablaut-induced stem changes to mark different aspects (fully explained in Gamqrelidze/Machavariani 1965). This system, reconstructed for Late Proto-Indo-European, differed from Kartvelian by its use of an *o*-grade, reduplicated perfect. However, later research has revealed that the Indo-European perfect endings are related to the Anatolian *-hi* conjugation, and that these endings were related to what Jay Jasanoff (2003) has termed the "protomiddle" conjugation on the supposed second laryngeal. It would appear in such a system that active-inactive voice relations are more archaic than perfective/imperfective aspect, the latter resulting from a division within the active voice.

Kartvelian, meanwhile, also shows a very strong parallel in the morphological formation of the perfect and the middle. Both provoke inverse grammatical relations, with the subject or experiencer in the dative-accusative case, while the direct object of perfect verbs stands in the nominative. At the same time, the mediopassive verb class appears to be formed by derivational means from the active-transitive class, with the addition of adfixes (in Georgian these are *i-*, *-d-*, and, more rarely, *-n-*).

The "medioactive" class (Class III according to Aronson 1990 and Harris 1985) includes many verbal roots lacking any transitive partner. Many of these verbs, being naturally of durative aspect, contain morphological similarities to the "stative" class, particularly in the frequent presence of the version marker **i-* and the stem marker **-ej* (Georgian *-i*), most notably in non-present tense forms.

Our lack of understanding of the semantics of Kartvelian stem markers (e.g., Georgian *-eb-*, *-ev-*, *-ob-*, *-i-*, *-av-*, *-am-*; Svan *-a:l-*, *-šg-*) continues to block a more thorough reconstruction of the Common Kartvelian verbal system. However, the morphological composition of the Kartvelian verb classes, and the distribution of TAM markers therein, suggest that the category of voice is more ancient than that of aspect within these languages. If we are to accept the typological theories of Klimov (1977), this would support the position of Common Kartvelian as an active-stative language. Strong typological similarities between Kartvelian and the areal peculiarities of the surrounding Indo-European languages further complement this hypothesis.

References

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