Person hierarchy and direct/inverse marking in the Laz verb ‘give’

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It is well known that in certain languages, person-marking in verbs depends on a 1/2>3 person hierarchy. Most often, the person hierarchy determines the marking of the A and O arguments. One exception to have been noticed in the literature in Jamul Tiipay, a Yuman language (Miller 2001:162-163; Siewierska 2004:60), where the person hierarchy determines the marking of the Recipient (R) and Theme (T) of ditransitive constructions: either the R or the T is cross-referenced, depending on which one is higher on the 1>2>3 person hierarchy. This analysis of Jamul Tiipay is called into question by Haspelmath (2007:93-94), who claims that “the rule seems to be that any 1st or 2nd person object (whether R or T) is indexed on the verb, while no 3rd person object is indexed on the verb”. It will be argued that person marking in Jamul Tiipay ditransitive constructions does involve a 1>2>3 person hierarchy.

Laz (South Caucasian) is a further instance of a language where the person hierarchy determines the marking of the R and T arguments. In constructions involving the verb ‘give’, either the R or the T is cross-referenced, depending on which one is higher on the 1>2>3 person hierarchy. In (1), for instance, the 1st person R is cross-referenced (cf. m-), to the exclusion of the 2nd person T. In (2), by contrast, the T is cross-referenced, to the exclusion of the R.

(1) 1st Recipient > 2nd Theme

*Baba-skani-k si ma va mo-m-če-ase.*
father-POSS2SG-ERG 2SG 1SG NEG PV-II1-give-FUT.I3SG
‘Your father won’t give you to me.’ (own field data)

(2) 1st Theme > 2nd Recipient

*Baba-k var me-m-če-am-s.*
father-ERG NEG PV-II1-give-TH-I3SG
‘My father won’t give me to you.’ (Dumézil 1937, text 7)

Forms of the verb ‘give’ in Laz take one of two preverbs: me- and mo-. Generally, these preverbs mark deictic orientation: mo- indicates a movement towards the reference point (mo-bulur ‘I am coming’) and me- a movement away from the reference point (me-bulur ‘I am going’). With the verb ‘give’, the alternation between me- and mo- is determined by the person of the Recipient: me- is used when the R is 2nd or 3rd person (ex.2 and 3) and mo- when it is 1st person (ex.1).

(3) Hemu-s me-k-če-are.
DEM-DAT PV-II2-give-FUT.I1/2SG
‘I will give you to him.’ (Žent’i 1938, text 89)

Cross-linguistically, the expected situation in ditransitive constructions is for the R to be higher on the person hierarchy than the T. In Laz, when the R is higher than the T on the 1>2/3 person hierarchy, the preverb mo- is used. That is, mo- marks the expected situation; it can thus be compared to a direct marker. When the R is lower on the 1>2/3 person hierarchy, me- is used, which can thus be compared to an inverse marker.

Another similarity between the preverbs me-/mo- and direct/inverse markers is that they reduce the ambiguity of person-marking: in a form such as me-m-č-ame-s (ex.2), the 1st
person prefix \textit{m-} does not tell whether the 1\textsuperscript{st} person participant is the T or the R. Since the preverb \textit{me-} indicates that the R is 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} person, the 1\textsuperscript{st} person participant can only be the T. Cross-linguistically, orientation-marking expressions, such as \textit{mo-} and \textit{me-}, are one attested source for the development of direct/inverse markers (DeLancey 2001).

\textbf{Abbreviations}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
\textbf{DAT} & dative & \textbf{SG} & singular \\
\textbf{DEM} & demonstrative & \textbf{TH} & thematic suffix \\
\textbf{ERG} & ergative & \textbf{1} & 1\textsuperscript{st} person \\
\textbf{FUT} & future & \textbf{2} & 2\textsuperscript{nd} person \\
\textbf{NEG} & negation & \textbf{I} & Set I cross-referencing affix \\
\textbf{POSS} & possessive & \textbf{II} & Set II cross-referencing affix \\
\textbf{PV} & preverb & & \\
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\textbf{References}


