Hierarchical alignment in Kartvelian: the problem of ditransitives

Kartvelian languages are not the first place one looks for hierarchical alignment, but in fact one subtype of ditransitive construction manifests hierarchical alignment in a number of Kartvelian languages: the so-called person-function constraint in Georgian, Megrelian and Svan. In this talk, I will argue that these constructions illustrate the basic independence of alignment types between transitive and ditransitive constructions, while posing problems for theories that seek to reduce person-function phenomena to either thematic role or to surface constituency and facts of case.

The basic facts are as in (1) (see also Harris 1981). Although ditransitives and transitives share the same complicated system of morphological blocking well known for Georgian, they differ in that ditransitives betray an interesting gap in the syntactic distribution of features and grammatical functions not seen in transitives: first and second persons may be associated with recipients of ditransitives and the themes of monotransitives, they may not be associated with themes of ditransitives. However, Georgian has two ways to circumvent this problem. As in (2), one can convert the illicit first or second person pronoun into a third person possessive phrase headed by tav ‘head, self’ (aka ‘tavization’); or one can exceptionally agree with the secondary object instead of the primary object. Because this is the only context in which verbs ever agree with secondary objects, we can say that Georgian in fact has ditransitive hierarchical alignment without also having monotransitive hierarchical alignment. This much would be interesting in itself, but the same facts hold in other Kartvelian languages ((3) and (4)).

Various proposals have been made in various frameworks to explain the distribution of features into arguments. Perhaps most famous among these are structuralist arguments that localize the problem in the system of case/constituent structures: neither nominalizations (6) isomorphic to either case/constituent structures or thematic roles. However, Georgian has two ways to circumvent this problem. As in (2), one can convert the illicit first or second person pronoun into a third person possessive phrase headed by tav ‘head, self’ (aka ‘tavization’); or one can exceptionally agree with the secondary object instead of the primary object. Because this is the only context in which verbs ever agree with secondary objects, we can say that Georgian in fact has ditransitive hierarchical alignment without also having monotransitive hierarchical alignment. This much would be interesting in itself, but the same facts hold in other Kartvelian languages ((3) and (4)).

Various proposals have been made in various frameworks to explain the distribution of features into arguments. Perhaps most famous among these are structuralist arguments that localize the problem in the system of case-assignment, as with Bonet (1991). Evidence that this cannot be so is that Georgian famously splits case assignment across different tense-aspect series and, in this context, completely disregards whatever case is being assigned, as you can see in (5). Interestingly, this is even true for the ‘demoted’ argument in the inverse construction in (5c) which is formally not marked by a grammatical case at all, but by a postpositional phrase headed by =tvis ‘for’. On the other hand, certain data bring into question Haspelmath (2004)’s semantically based analysis involving thematic roles: neither nominalizations (6) nor derived causatives behave as he predicts. I will argue this is because the constraint is defined on a level of grammatical functions not isomorphic to either case/constituent structures or thematic roles.

(1) 3 OBJ; 1 or 2 OBJ2
   a. *van-o-m (šen) še-a-dar-a givi-s
      Vano-NARR 2Sg PVB-PRV-compare-AOR3SG Givi-DAT
      ‘Vano compared you to Givi’
   b. *van-o-m (me) še-a-dar-a givi-s
      Vano-NARR 1Sg PVB-PRV-compare-AOR3SG Givi-DAT
      ‘Vano compared me to Givi’

(2) a. Tavization:
   1 or 2 OBJ (AGR); 3 [< 1 or 2] OBJ2
      Vano-m še-a-dar-a Anzor-s šen-i tav-i / (*šen)
      VANO-NARR PVB-PRV-send-AOR3SG Anzor-DAT 2SGPOSS-NOM head-NOM 2SG
      ‘Vano compared you to Anzor’
   b. Second-Object Agreement: 3 OBJ; 1 or 2 OBJ2 (AGR)
      van-o-m še-g-a-dar-a Anzor-s šen
      Vano-NARR PVB-2-PRV-compare-AOR3SG Anzor-DAT 2SG
      ‘Vano compared you to Anzor’ (Harris 1981: 48)
(3) **MEGRELIAN**

a. **Present** \([\text{SUBJ}_{\text{nom}} + \text{AGR} \sim \text{OBJ}_{\text{dat}} \sim \text{OBJ2}}\)

\[\text{Vano} \quad \text{Anzor-s} \quad \text{a-dar-en-s} \quad \text{ma} \]
\[\text{Vano}_{\text{NOM}} \quad \text{Anzor-DAT} \quad \text{PRV-compare-TH-3SG} \quad 1SG\]

‘Vano is comparing me to Anzor’

b. **Present** \([\text{SUBJ}_{\text{nom}} + \text{AGR} \sim \text{OBJ}_{\text{dat}} \sim \text{OBJ2} + \text{AGR}}\)

\[\text{Vano} \quad \text{Anzor-s} \quad \text{m-a-dar-en-s} \quad \text{ma} \]
\[\text{Vano}_{\text{NOM}} \quad \text{Anzor-DAT} \quad 1SG-PRV-compare-TH-3SG \quad 1SG\]

‘Vano is comparing me to Anzor.’

(4) **SVAN**

a. **Present screeve** \([\text{SUBJ}_{\text{hom}} + \text{AGR} \sim \text{OBJ}_{\text{dat}} + \text{AGR} \sim \text{OBJ2}}\)

\[\text{Vano} \quad \text{Anzor-s} \quad \text{x-a-mjēn-e} \quad \text{mi} \]
\[\text{Vano}_{\text{NOM}} \quad \text{Anzor-DAT} \quad 3-PRV-compare-3 \quad 1SG\]

‘Vano is comparing me to Anzor.’

b. **Present screeve** \([\text{SUBJ}_{\text{hom}} + \text{AGR} \sim \text{OBJ}_{\text{dat}} \sim \text{OBJ2} + \text{AGR}}\)

\[\text{Vano} \quad \text{Anzor-s} \quad \text{m-a-mjēn-e} \quad \text{mi} \]
\[\text{Vano}_{\text{NOM}} \quad \text{Anzor-DAT} \quad 1SG-PRV-compare-3 \quad 1SG\]

‘Vano is comparing me to Anzor’

(5) Georgian tense/aspect splits ignoring case and constituency in PFC contexts

a. Present series \([\text{NOM}_{\text{AG}} \sim \text{DAT}_{\text{REC}} \sim \text{DAT}_{\text{th}}}\]

\[\text{Ivane} \quad \text{Mariam-s} \quad \text{šen} \quad \text{a-dzl-ev-s} \]
\[\text{John}_{\text{NOM}} \quad \text{Mary-DAT} \quad 2SG \quad \text{PRV-give.PRES-TH-3SG} \]

‘John is giving you to Mary.’

b. Aorist series \([\text{NARR}_{\text{ag}} \sim \text{DAT}_{\text{REC}} \sim \text{NOM}_{\text{th}}}\]

\[\text{Ivane-m} \quad \text{Mariam-s} \quad \text{šen} \quad \text{mi-s-c-a} \]
\[\text{John}_{\text{NARR}} \quad \text{Mary-DAT} \quad 2SG \quad \text{PVB-3-give.AOR-AOR3SG} \]

‘John gave you to Mary.’

c. Perfect series \([\text{DAT}_{\text{AG}} \sim \text{TVIS}_{\text{REC}} \sim \text{NOM}_{\text{th}}]}\]

\[\text{Ivane-s} \quad \text{Mariam-isa=tvīs} \quad \text{šen} \quad \text{mi-u-c-i-a} \]
\[\text{John}_{\text{DAT}} \quad \text{Mary-GEN=for} \quad 2SG \quad \text{PVB-PRV-give.PERF-PERF-3SG} \]

‘John has apparently given you to Mary.’

(6) Nominalizations do not abide by the constraint (Bonet 1991)

a. **2 REC; 3 TH**

\[\text{mis-i} \quad \text{ča-bar-eb-a} \quad \text{šen=tvis} \]
\[\text{3POSS-NOM} \quad \text{PVB-render-TH-MAS.NOM} \quad 2SG=for \]

‘turning him over to you’ (lit. ‘his rendering to you’)

b. **3 REC; 2 TH**

\[\text{šen-i} \quad \text{ča-bar-eb-a} \quad \text{mis=tvis} \]
\[\text{2SGPoss-NOM} \quad \text{PVB-render-TH-MAS.NOM} \quad 3SG=GEN=for \]

‘turning you over to him’ (lit. ‘your rendering to him’)

(7) Derived causative ditransitive verb ‘make teach’ behaving exactly like non-derived verbs (see (5))

a. *Zurab-i da-a-sc’avl-in-eb-s Mariam-s me

\[\text{Zurab}_{\text{NOM}} \quad \text{PVB-PRV-teach-CAUS-TH-3SG} \quad \text{Mary-DAT} \quad 1SG\]

‘Zurab is making Mary teach me’

b. *Zurab-ma da-a-sc’avl-in-a Mariam-s me

\[\text{Zurab}_{\text{NARR}} \quad \text{PVB-PRV-teach-CAUS-AOR3SG} \quad \text{Mary-DAT} \quad 1SG\]

‘Zurab made Mary teach me’

c. *Zurab-s da-u-sc’avl-in-eb-i-a Mariam-isa=tvīs me

\[\text{Zurab}_{\text{DAT}} \quad \text{PVB-PRV-teach-CAUS-TH-PF-3SG} \quad \text{Mary-GEN=for} \quad 1SG\]

‘Zurab has apparently made Mary teach me’

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**Works Cited**