

Person agreement in a dialect of Tabasaran

Tabasaran belongs to the Lezgian branch of the East Caucasian family, which is spoken in about 100 villages in South Dagestan. In contrast to most other East Caucasian languages, Tabasaran possesses an elaborated system of person agreement. According to the description Kibrik and Seleznyov (1982) based on the dialects of three villages (Khiv, Qandik and Dubek), there are two agreement slots within the verb. The first slot is filled by a ‘syntactic’ agreement marker, whereas the second slot is filled by a ‘communicative’ agreement marker.

Syntactic agreement is obligatory, i.e. if the subject in a sentence is expressed by first person or second person pronoun, the verb obligatorily agrees with it. It is illustrated in example (1) from the Khiv dialect (Kibrik and Seleznyov 1982: 25).

- (1) uzu uvu k̆urč̆: -un-za
I you(SG) beat-PST-1SG:AG
‘I beat you.’

In addition to this obligatory subject agreement, the verb can optionally agree with some other person argument, as is shown in (2).

- (2) uzu uvu k̆urč̆: -un-za-vu
I you(SG) beat-PST-1SG:AG-1SG:PAT
‘I beat you.’

This type of person agreement system is quite typical of the southern area including Khiv, Laka, Qandik, Cuduq, Mežgöl. Dialects spoken in the north possess similar agreement systems. The only major distinction is that the obligatory agreement is not with the subject, but with the absolutive topic.

In this paper, we will describe quite a different agreement system, which is found in the village of Ushnig (Tabasaran district of Dagestan, north dialect area). Similarly to other northern dialects, there is no obligatory subject agreement, i.e. the verb can agree with an absolutive argument other than subject. Moreover, as is illustrated in (3) in contrast to other dialects this agreement marker is not obligatory.

- (3) ivu izu ur̆I-nü.
you(SG) I bring.up-PST
‘You brought me up.’

However, the most striking feature of this dialect is that there exist three agreement slots within the verb. The markers in the first and the second slots cross-reference the topic, while the third marker agrees with any other person argument. Interestingly, none of the three slots is obligatory which creates quite a big number of potentially possible combinations. However, not all of them are actually possible.

- (4) izu ivu ur̆I-nü-ze-zü-vü.
I you(SG) bring.up-PST-1SG-1SG-2SG
‘I brought you up.’

In this paper, we will describe morphology of the agreement system found in the village of Ushnig, propose a set of rules defining possible and impossible combinations of agreement markers and define semantic and pragmatic conditions on the use of agreement markers in each of the slots.