

The adrelative genitive in Udi: syntactic borrowing plus reanalysis

This paper discusses a case of syntactic borrowing whence the adaptation of a certain pattern in the recipient language resulted in the typologically marginal structure which, however, nicely fits into the structure of the recipient language.

In Udi, a Northeast Caucasian language, some arguments of relative clauses occasionally can be marked with the genitive case. Such patterns are found in the major languages of the Transcaucasian area, namely in Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian, yet they are not typical for the Northeast Caucasian family, and it is likely that Udi borrowed its pattern from Azerbaijani.

Curiously, the Udi adrelative genitive construction differs from the Azerbaijani one in several important respects: in particular, “genitivization” is not restricted to subjects of relatives and the genitive phrase can be separated from the relative clause.

I argue that in Udi, the original Azerbaijani pattern (where the genitive is assigned by the nominalized participle) underwent reanalysis, so the modern pattern instantiates the possessor-relative construction, with a relative clause specifying the relation between the possessor and the possessum. This reanalysis was motivated by the fact that the predicates in Udi relative clause display no traits of nominalization (Lander 2008) and hence cannot assign the genitive.

Possessive-relative constructions are reported for several languages of the world including West Armenian, but not East Armenian, which contacted with Udi; cf. Ackerman & Nikolaeva 1997; Ackerman 1998; Hale 2002). Still, they remain somewhat marginal typologically and usually result from reanalysis of some other patterns. The Udi example presumably can reveal some features that are necessary for these constructions or encourage their rise. In addition, it may serve a nice example of adaptation of a borrowed morphosyntactic pattern.

References

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