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Kartvelian Languages between the Indo-European and Caucasian Type

About the Direction of the Transformational Processes

Gerhardt Deeters expressed the opinion that Kartvelian languages have common typological features with both Indo-European and North Caucasian Languages. He supposed the direction of change from North Caucasian to Indo-European type. This opinion was shared by T. Gamkrelidze and G. Machavariani. On the modern stage of Kartvelian and Indo-European investigations, the opposite direction of transformations can be argued. The features, which Kartvelian has in common with Indo-European are more fundamental and can be regarded as more ancient, than the features, which it has in common with the North Caucasian.

In the paper, this problem is discussed from the viewpoint of phonemic and morphophonemic, morphological and syntactic typology.

The ablaut system, reconstructed in Common Kartvelian, is isomorphic to the ablaut system, reconstructed in Common Indo-European. In modern Kartvelian languages, especially in Megrelian-Laz and Georgian, this system is undergoing change due to unification tendencies. Svan as the more conservative language among the Kartvelian languages preserves the main characteristics of Kartvelian ablaut system

The canonical root structure of Common Kartvelian is of CVC- type, as in Common Indo-European. The canonical root structure of North Caucasian languages is CV-. The root structure is conservative feature of the languages. In Georgian and Megrelian ?Laz the dominant syllable structure has become CV, but the dominant root structure of the root remains CVC-. So this conservative characteristic Kartvelian languages share with Indo-European and not with Caucasian languages.

The morphological type of Common Kartvelian must be defined as flexional. The system of word formation, umlaut processes, reconstructed in Common Kartvelian, polyfunctionality of the morphemes and conjugational forms, polyparadigmaticity ? all this reveals the flexional/fusion and not agglutinative character of Common Kartvelian. Typological index of J. Greenberg, examined for Kartvelian languages, shows the flexional character of Svan (0.32) and Georgian (0.41), while the unification tendencies have transformed the Megrelian-Laz in the direction of agglutination.

The split ergativity in Kartvelian (Svan and Georgian) is aspectual determined and typologically belongs to the type observed in Indo-Iranian languages. In Common Kartvelian, no common marker for the Ergative case can be reconstructed (G. Nebieridze). The syntactic construction, reconstructed in Common Kartvelian, is of Active type, as in Common Indo-European.

According to this data, the main typological characteristics the Common Kartvelian are very close to those of Common Indo-European and the changes must have taken place in the direction of the Caucasian type due to area contacts or internal evolution.