

Peter Arkadiev (Institute for Slavic Studies, Moscow / Russian State University for the Humanities / Sholokhov Moscow State University for the Humanities), *Dmitry Gerasimov* (Institute for Linguistic Studies, St. Petersburg),
Yury Lander (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow)

PECULIARITIES OF PAST TIME REFERENCE IN CIRCASSIAN

In Circassian languages (Northwest Caucasian family), the Preterite suffix (Adyghe *-b(e)*, Kabardian *-a/-be*) is primarily used to express perfective viewpoint in the past (1-2). However, it also has a number of nontrivial uses that do not follow straightforwardly from its basic meaning. In this fieldwork-based study, we focus on several such instances in which the Preterite can be related to the typological prototype of (resultative) perfect, in that it makes reference to a certain state resulting from the event expressed by the verbal root and overlapping with the reference time.

1) The Preterite suffix is used to form resultative participles, formally identical to Preterite (in case of transitive verbs these forms are different from true Preterites in that they lack the Agent cross-reference prefix) and syntactically used as adjectives (cf. 3a vs. 3b).

2) In certain types of adverbial clauses (Arkadiev & Gerasimov 2007; 2009), addition of the Preterite suffix shifts reference from the action expressed by the verb to its resulting state (cf. 4a vs. 4b).

3) In a number of cases the Preterite falls under the scope of another suffix expressing characteristics of resulting state, such as *-xe* ‘already’ (5) or *-č’aje* ‘very’ (6); such morpheme complexes are able to further attach tense markers, including the Preterite itself (5b).

What all these cases have in common is that the Preterite marker falls in the scope of a higher semantic operator, usually with explicit morphological exponent. It must be remarked, however, that not all wider-scope operators license the resultative reading of Preterite: this effect is not observed, e.g. with markers of epistemic modality and negation. We claim that the resultative interpretation of the Preterite is induced by particular constructions whose semantics is harmonious with such reading.

While many languages of the world employ the same formal marker for past reference and perfect, which can only be differentiated through a broader context, Circassian languages are typologically uncommon in that they allow resultative perfect reading of the preterite only under specific morphosyntactic conditions. Circassian data also fit well into the approach under which the perfect is considered to introduce two different eventualities: an event expressed by the main verb and its arguments and an underspecified state related to this event [Nishiyama & Koenig 2004].

Examples:

1. *pšaše-m pjās'me ə-txə-β* (Adyghe)
girl-OBL letter 3SG.A-write-PST
'The girl wrote a letter (to the end).'
2. *thamex^w-jə-t-č'e sə-səmež'-a* (Besleney Kabardian)
week-LNK-two-INS 1SG.ABS-be.ill-PST
'I was ill for two weeks'.
- 3a. *qebasqe-r ə-bež'^wa-β* (Adyghe)
cabbage-ABS 3SG.A-cook-PST
'She cooked cabbage'
- b. *qebesqe bež'^wa-be* (Adyghe)
cabbage cook-PST
'cooked cabbage' (NP)
- 4a. *qə-zer-jə-β^wet-ew* (Adyghe)
DIR-SIM-3SG.A-find-ADV
'As soon as he finds it'
- b. *qə-zer-jə-β^wetə-be-w* (Adyghe)
DIR-SIM-3SG.A-find-PST-ADV
'While it is still in his possession (after he has found it)'
- 5a. *q-jə-wəbədə-be-xe-ne* (Besleney Kabardian)
DIR-3SG.A-catch-PST-already-FUT
'(By that time,) he will have already caught it'.
- b. *ježe-be-xa-β* (Adyghe)
(3SG.ABS)read-PST-already-PST
'(By that time,) he has already read it'.
6. *g^wəbžə-be-č'eje-š't* (Adyghe)
get.angry-PST-very-FUT
'He will be very angry'.

Abbreviations:

A – agent; ABS – absolutive; ADV – adverbial; DIR – directive; FUT – future; INS – instrumental; LNK – linking element; OBL – oblique case; PST – past; SG – singular; SIM – simultaneity.

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