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A study in relational grammar
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GEORGIAN SYNTAX

A study in relational grammar

ALICE C. HARRIS
Research Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Vanderbilt University
FOR JIM
Foreword

This book addresses a number of central issues in linguistic theory.

The first and most fundamental issue is that of the relevance of the notions ‘subject’, ‘direct object’, and ‘indirect object’ to syntactic description. Georgian has been claimed to be a language to which these notions are not relevant. It therefore provides a particularly good test of the basic claims of relational grammar. The issue of the relevance of grammatical relations to Georgian syntax also affects other issues. These include: (i) the viability of linguistic universals stated in terms of grammatical relations, and (ii) the extent to which Georgian is different from other languages.

In this book, Dr Harris brings out generalizations in Georgian grammar that can be captured in terms of grammatical relations, but not in terms of case or word order. She penetrates the complexities of Georgian morphology to reveal the underlying syntactic generalizations. The result is a striking confirmation of the relevance of grammatical relations to grammatical description. At the same time, Dr Harris shows that Georgian has constructions such as Passive, Object Raising, Causative Clause Union, and others found in better-known languages. Thus, Georgian is not as different from other languages as has been claimed in earlier work on Georgian. Indeed, Georgian is shown to have exactly the constructions and kinds of phenomena that have been claimed in relational grammar to characterize natural languages and to require description in terms of grammatical relations.

The analysis of Georgian presented in this book also bears on what promises to be another central issue in syntactic theory in the 1980s: the question of whether or not it is necessary to posit more than one syntactic level. Working in a derivational framework, Dr Harris shows that there are rules and generalizations in Georgian that refer to distinct syntactic levels. Most striking here are the rules that refer to the initial level, those that refer to the final level, and those responsible for
Foreword

the marking of ‘retired terms’ – nominals that bear a term relation at one level and a non-term relation (chomeur or emeritus) at a subsequent level. These results constitute a significant challenge to theories that claim that a single level is sufficient for syntactic description.

This book illustrates the kinds of contributions that theory can make to the understanding of individual languages, and the study of individual languages to the development of linguistic theory. One of the principal problems this book addresses is that of the Georgian case system. Traditional descriptions state that transitive clauses in Georgian occur in three distinct case patterns. Dr Harris argues convincingly that Georgian has the Inversion construction, in which the subject is demoted to indirect object and the direct object promoted to subject. Once Inversion is recognized in Georgian grammar, the three case patterns are reduced to two. Another traditional problem in the Georgian case system concerns intransitive clauses. Intransitive verbs are divided into two classes, each of which is associated with a different case pattern. This raises two questions: (i) What determines the class assignment of intransitive verbs? (ii) Are there generalizations uniting the case patterns in intransitive clauses with those in transitive clauses? Dr Harris analyzes the case patterns of intransitive clauses in terms of the Unaccusative Hypothesis, under which there are two fundamentally different types of initially intransitive clauses: one with an initial subject and the other with an initial direct object. She shows that under this analysis, the assignment of intransitive verbs to the two classes is not arbitrary, and that there are indeed generalizations uniting the case patterns in transitive and intransitive clauses. This book thus shows how theoretical constructs can illuminate language-particular phenomena such as the Georgian case system. At the same time, the Georgian data provides evidence for these theoretical constructs.

In addition to its contributions to linguistic theory and its exemplification of relational grammar, this book also gives a good picture of what a portion of the grammar of a morphologically complex language looks like. It provides clear, refutable analyses of syntactic phenomena in what initially appears to be an unusually complex language. These analyses are in a form that facilitates comparison with other languages and the study of linguistic universals. Indeed, this work provides one of the best and most thorough studies yet available in English of the syntax of a non-Indo-European language. The interplay of theory and
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description that has produced this extensive documentation of Georgian syntax is a model of syntactic investigation itself.

David M. Perlmutter

San Diego, California
12 June, 1980
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Preface

This investigation of Georgian syntax originated as my 1976 dissertation at Harvard University; additional chapters were written in the fall of 1977. The work is based on interviews with native speakers of Georgian. The interviews were conducted during a twelve-month stay in Tbilisi in 1974–5 and a short research visit in 1977 and were supplemented by work with Georgians in the United States from 1973 to 1978. The research was supported in part by the International Research and Exchanges Board, by a Sinclair Kennedy Fellowship from Harvard University, and by the National Science Foundation.

Although I have had occasion in this monograph to question many assumptions and claims made by traditional Kartvelologists, I view my work as a continuation, not a contradiction, of theirs. Without the foundation laid by Chikobava, Shanidze, Topuria, Tschenkéli, Vogt, and many other specialists, this work would have been impossible.

I am deeply indebted to David Perlmutter for ideas about language universals that helped inspire the research reported here; his insights and criticism have improved this work in many ways. I am grateful to Dee Ann Holisky for her willingness to debate with me any aspect of the structure of Georgian and for her fine eye for the detail of language. I wish also to extend a special thanks to my Georgian teacher for her long-suffering tolerance of my ideas about the structure of her language.

I am grateful to Bernard Comrie for criticism that was extremely valuable in revising this work. I wish to thank Stephen Anderson for introducing me to the problems of ergativity, which led to my working on Georgian. In addition, Judith Aissen, Winfried Boeder, Jorge Hankamer, George Hewitt, Susumu Kuno, Paul Postal, Hans Vogt, the students in my class on Georgian syntax and other members of the Department of Linguistics at Harvard University have read parts of the analysis presented here and have given valuable comments. They do not necessarily agree with the views presented.
Preface

A great many Georgians, in the United States and in Georgia, have helped me – as informants, as teachers, as colleagues, and as friends. I am grateful, too, to the libraries of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, of Tbilisi State University, and of the Linguistics Institute of the Georgian Academy of Sciences for helping me to acquire research materials.

Earlier or different versions of three chapters of the present work have been separately published; these are:


**Notes on presentation**

1. **Transliteration.** The following system is used:

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<tr>
<th>Georgian letter</th>
<th>Phonetic equivalent</th>
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<td>ა, ე, ი, კ, ლ, ნ, ნ, ნ</td>
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Notes on presentation

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2. A note on glosses

The morphology of the Georgian verb is very complex, and there is no way to escape the use of examples with complicated verb forms. In addition to the lexical meaning of the root, a single verb form may code the following information:

- person of subject
- person of direct object
- person of indirect object
- number of subject
- number of direct object
- number of indirect object
- tense
- aspect (complete/incomplete, habitual/non-habitual)
- voice
- mood
- direction and orientation
- causative/non-causative (cf. ch. 5)
- version (cf. ch. 6)
- etc.

In this work, the gloss of a verb will not include all this information for two reasons: (i) A great deal of it is irrelevant to the topic of this monograph and would simply overwhelm the reader with a mass of material not necessary for interpreting particular examples. (ii) Although Georgian is generally agglutinative, the information necessary to interpret particular examples cannot always be attributed to any particular morpheme. Therefore, the principle behind my glosses is that they should give only that information which will enable the reader to understand the example in the context of the point under discussion. Since one of the main concerns of this monograph is the correspondence between case and grammatical relation, case is always clearly marked. Since case varies with Series and Class of the governing verb, those are always marked in the verb gloss. The grammatical relation is not
marked in the gloss, but it is discussed at length in the text. Particulars are given below.

2.1 Analytic gloss. In the analytic gloss, which is directly below the Georgian example, the information carried by one word is hyphenated together in English; e.g. dagera ‘he-wrote-it’. Analytic glosses are not generally given for examples quoted in the text itself.

2.1.1 Nouns. Plurality is indicated by plurality in the English word, not by a ‘PL’; e.g. zaylebi ‘dogs’, not ‘dog-PL’.

Case is not noted separately in capitals; genitives are indicated separately, not by an English genitive; e.g. zaylis ‘dog-GEN’, not ‘dog’s’. An exception to this is the possessive reflexive, tavis-, which is genitive with secondary case marking; it is glossed ‘self’s’.

While nouns and most pronouns have a complete declension in Georgian, first and second person personal pronouns and a few others do not. These personal pronouns use a single form for the cases of greatest concern to us, the ergative, nominative, and dative. For example, me represents the ergative, nominative, and dative of ‘I, me’. In the examples, a case is always specified for these pronouns, on the basis of the case used in the comparable sentence for a noun or third person pronoun.

Positionals (adpositions) in Georgian are all postpositions. Some are written together with the noun in Georgian and are hyphenated to the noun in the English gloss; e.g. saxlii ‘house-in’ from saxl- ‘house’. A few postpositions are not written with the noun in Georgian; I have followed the Georgian spelling conventions, both in the Georgian example and in the English gloss; e.g. zaylis mier ‘dog by’. Postpositions govern particular cases, but these play no part in the discussion, and so are generally not included in the glosses.

The Georgian alphabet has no capitals, so proper names are not capitalized in Georgian. I have followed this spelling convention in the examples transliterated here, but have capitalized the English gloss so that the reader can identify those words as proper names; e.g. goča ‘Gocha-nom’.

2.1.2 Verbs. Because case patterns vary with Series and Class of the verb, and because these characteristics would not otherwise be apparent to the reader, they have been included in the gloss of every verb. They are always the last two elements in the analytic gloss. Series is always indicated with a Roman numeral, in text and gloss alike; Class is always
indicated with an Arabic numeral. For example, daçera ‘he-wrote-it-II-1; rçeba ‘he-stays-I-2’. (These elements are not relevant to the rules discussed in §4 of the Introduction, and therefore are not included until ch. 1.)

Person Agreement is indicated by the appropriate pronouns in the following order: subject, verb root, indirect object, direct object; e.g. gcem ‘I-give-you-it-I-1’. All terms are indicated in the gloss, though they may be disguised in Georgian by zero markers or morphophonemic rules (cf. ch. 1, § 3).

Gender is included to aid the reader, although it is not indicated in Georgian. Third person singular subjects are glossed ‘he’ except when a female name is used, or when the subject must be inanimate. Objects are glossed ‘it’ except when animacy is indicated by a noun in the clause, or when an animate would be more natural.

Number Agreement is indicated in the gloss only when it is clearly marked in the Georgian.

\[
\begin{align*}
mazleve & \quad saçukrebs. \\
he-gives-me-it-I-1 & \quad gifts-DAT \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘He gives gifts to me’.

Although ‘gifts’ is plural, it does not trigger Number Agreement; this fact is reflected in the ‘it’ of the analytic gloss of the verb. In the following example, number of the indirect object is indicated morphologically and is glossed:

\[
\begin{align*}
guazleve & \quad saçukrebs. \\
he-gives-us-it-I-1 & \quad gifts-DAT \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘He gives gifts to us.’

Tense is indicated in analytic glosses only by the present, past, and future forms of the English verb; e.g. daçers ‘he-will-write-it’. The simple (habitual) present in English is used in analytic glosses for the present; this is used for brevity only and implies no claim as to the nature of this tense in Georgian.

When it is important that some morpheme be identified in the verb form, as in the discussions of agreement, the important morphemes will be isolated by hyphenating or using heavy type. In some instances the corresponding element in the gloss is in heavy type also; e.g. momçera ‘he-wrote-me-it-II-1’. Otherwise, parts of the verb will not be separated by hyphens.
2.1.3 Adjectives. In Georgian, attributive adjectives do agree with the nouns they modify, but the case is not fully apparent. For this reason and because it is not important to the discussion, no case is indicated for adjectives that precede their head nouns.

2.2 Final gloss. The final gloss gives the sentence which corresponds most closely in English, including the tense, which is the appropriate one in English. In some instances, English has no corresponding syntactic rule, and the sentences in which the rule has applied and those in which it has not have the same gloss.

Final glosses are sometimes omitted from ungrammatical sentences, since those sentences do not always have a meaning. But if it would not be clear what the ungrammatical sentences show, a final gloss is given in parentheses, that corresponds to the intended meaning of the sentence.

2.3 Quotational form. When a noun is referred to in the text, it is usually quoted in its nominative case form or in its stem form (without case marking). A verb will be quoted in its masdar (nominalized) form, unless that is inappropriate, in which case it will be given in a finite form; this will be made apparent by the gloss.

3 Diagrams
This work uses the conventions of the ‘network’ diagramming developed for relational grammar (Perlmutter & Postal 1977). A clause and the elements which constitute it are represented as nodes. Arrows connecting the clause node with other nodes indicate that the latter are dependents of the clause. Labels on the arrows indicate the grammatical relations which various elements bear to the clause; only the central grammatical relations (cf. p. 5 below) are indicated in network diagrams. The predicate relation is labeled ‘P’. The subject relation is marked ‘1’, the direct object relation ‘2’, and the indirect object relation ‘3’. Benefactives are marked as ‘B’. For example, network (1)
Notes on presentation

should be read as ‘gela’ is the subject of the matrix clause (or of the verb, codna “know”); and its direct object is the clause consisting of the predicate șekerva “sew”, the subject nino, the direct object perangi “shirt”, and the benefactive bavšvi “child.” This corresponds to the sentence (2).

(2) gelam icis, rom nino ƙeraus perangs bavšviştvis.
    Gela he-knows that Nino she-sews shirt child-for
    ‘Gela knows that Nino is sewing a shirt for the child.’

Levels are indicated as in (3), where Benefactive Version has applied to make the benefactive an indirect object.

(3)

This network indicates, among other things, ‘bavšvi is an initial benefactive and a final indirect object’.

Retired subjects, direct objects, and indirect objects are marked ‘R-1’, ‘R-2’, and ‘R-3’, respectively. Other symbols used are introduced where appropriate.

4 The reader

The monograph is written primarily for syntacticians who know little or nothing of Georgian. For this reason, material that will be of interest only to the Georgian specialist is put, as often as possible, into notes or appendices. The complexities of case marking and verb agreement are introduced gradually.

5 The dialect described

This monograph is based on work with informants in Georgia and the United States from 1973 to 1978. The dialect described here is that spoken in the capital city of Georgia, Tbilisi (Tiflis). In those instances where I have isolated two dialects among my informants, I have made reference to this fact in the text or in a footnote. No attempt is made to account for divergences found in dialects outside Tbilisi or in earlier periods, or for phenomena restricted to written Georgian.