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Kabardian Non-finite Forms with Arbitrary Subject Reference

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This paper focuses on a certain kind of non-finite form that occurs in complement clauses of commentative predicates such as *heləmet-s'* 'interesting', *ʔ°eχ°əšχ°e-s'* 'important', *tənš-s'* 'easy' and modal predicates *x°ən* 'allowed, possible' and *x°ənq'ən* 'not allowed, not possible'. The characteristic feature of these forms is that the complement subject is arbitrary, i.e. lacking specific reference. It is the second person singular prefix *wə-* (*w-, p-, p'-, b-*) that is used to mark the arbitrary subject reference. Even if these forms have high frequency in Kabardian, they have not been noticed before in the literature on Caucasian languages (cf. standard Kabardian grammars *GK48, GK57, GK70*).

Preliminaries

Kabardian (or East Circassian) is a West Caucasian language, spoken by approximately 400,000 in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic in the Northern Caucasus. Outside of the Caucasus there are large groups of speakers in Turkey, Syria, and Jordan.

A striking feature of the language is the highly synthetic structure of verbal forms, including cross-reference markers of the subject, as well as several objects and various inflectional and derivational affixes.

Kabardian is an ergative language, marking the subject of intransitive and direct object of transitive verbs with the absolutive case (*-r*) and the subject of transitive verbs with the ergative case (*-m*). The other cases are the instrumental (*-č'e*) and adverbial (*-u*) cases.

An even more distinctive aspect of intransitive and transitive verbs is that they show different alignment of cross-reference markers – the verbal structure is always present in the clause, whereas case marking does not show up on all nouns and potentially case marked personal pronouns are frequently dropped. In intransitive verbs the initial position is occupied by the subject and in transitive verbs one finds the direct object in the initial position. The subject marker of a transitive verb is the cross-reference marker that is closest to the root.

(1) a. *Intranstive verb*
         Subject–Object(s)–   Root–   Tense/Mood–Assertive
         sə-   b-   d-   je-   z'-   a-t
         S:1SG- O:2SG- COM- O:3SG- wait- PAST-long.ago
         'I together with you waited for him then'

     b. *Transitive verb*
         Dir. object–Objects–Subject–Root–Tense-Assertive
         w-   je-   s-   tə-   n-   s'
         O:2SG-   O:3SG- S:1SG- give- FUT- ASSERT
         'I will give you to him'

The cross-reference markers in the verb give full specification of person and number of subject, direct object, indirect and oblique objects (comitatives, benefactives, locatives etc.), which allows personal subject and object pronouns to be used only when needed for emphasis. This applies equally to personal pronouns and cross-reference markers in clauses with finite and non-finite forms. In (2), all pronouns may be dropped. Note also the close phonological similarity between the personal pronouns and the cross-reference markers.

(2) (Se) s-o-s''e   (wə) (se) sə-q'ə-zerə-p-š-a-r
     I   S:1SG-DYN-know.PRES you me   O:1SG-DIR-PART-S:2SG-lead-PAST-ABS
     'I know that you brought me here.'

Word order is rather free, allowing SOV, VSO and SVO. The most neutral order is SOV, in both simple and complex sentences.

The division between finite and non-finite forms in Kabardian is a division between free and dependent forms. The non-finite forms may include both subject agreement and tense, but may not occur as free root forms. All verb forms in complement clauses are non-finite (cf. Kumakhov & Vamling 1993, in preparation).

We refer to Kumakhov 1989 for a comprehensive study of verbal and nominal categories in Kabardian. Kumakhov & Vamling 1992 gives a short overview of Kabardian morphology and clause structure. The transcription used in the paper is based on Kumakhov 1981 with some changes. A chart of the transcription is given in Kumakhov & Vamling 1993:130-131. Abbreviations occurring in the glosses are given at the end of the paper.

The infinitive with arbitrary subject reference

What are the options if one wants to leave the specification of the identity of the subject open, given the obligatory presence of the cross-reference markers in the verb? One might expect either a special subject marker for this purpose or an extension of the use of one of the markers in the system. Kabardian has chosen the latter option. The prefix that has acquired this function is formally identical to the second person singular marker *wə*- (*w*-, *p*-, *p'*-, *b*-) and is obligatory in such forms. The marker stands in its ordinary subject position (in example (3) the third person direct object is not overtly marked).

(3) ʔ°eχ°əšχ°e-s'   a   tχəłə-r   p-tχə-nə-r
     important.(PRES)-ASSERT this book-ABS S:2SG-write-INF-ABS
     'It is important to write this book.'

It is possible for the form to accomodate object markers with determined reference along with the marker of arbitrary reference. In the verb below, apart from the arbitrary subject, the direct object (causee) and the version object (beneficiary) are represented by determined referents.

(4) G°əγ°-t   s-a-χ°e-b-γe-k'°e-n-č'e
     difficult-IMP   O:1SG-IO:3PL-V-S:2SG-CAUS-go-INF-INSTR
     'It was difficult to make me go for them (for their benefit).'

Subject pronoun

There is no special pronoun that is used for a subject of arbitrary reference. The insertion of a second singular subject pronoun is not allowed in this construction (5a), at least not with the same interpretation. If a personal pronoun is inserted, the only possible interpretation is a second person singular subject (5b).

(5) a. ʔ°eχ°əšχ°e-s'   a   tχəłə-r   *we p-tχə-nə-r
         important.(PRES)-ASSERT this book-ABS you S:2SG-write-INF-ABS
         'It is important to write this book.'

     b. ʔ°eχ°əšχ°e-s'   a   tχəłə-r   we p-tχə-nə-r
         important.(PRES)-ASSERT this book-ABS you S:2SG-write-INF-ABS
         'It is important that you write this book.'

This appears to be the only position in the language where a personal pronoun with corresponding cross-reference markers in the verb is

blocked. The position of the complement subject is thus required to be empty.

The morphology of the infinitive with arbitrary subject reference
As seen from (4), the morphological potential of the arbitrary forms is rich, including categories such as causative, negation, applicatives (benefactive), comitative, locative and directional marking, reflexive etc. One may note certain restrictions, though. Compared to the ordinary infinitive, the infinitive with arbitrary subject reference may not accomodate the marker of potentialis:

(6) a. We   wə-že-fə-n   χ°ej-s'
         you   S:2SG-run-POT-INF have.to-ASSERT
         'You have to be able to run.'

     b. *Tənš-s'   wə-že-fə-n-č'e
         easy-ASSERT   S:2SG-run-POT-INF-INSTR
         'It is easy to be able to run.'

Case marking
The non-finite form is case marked. Apart from the expected absolutive case (-∅ or -r) – the subject case assigned by intransitives –, one also finds the instrumental (-č'e) and adverbial (-u) cases. Although one does find differences between uses of the cases, they are in many instances so close that they are functionally interchangeable.

(7) a. Deγ°e-s'   w-e-płə-n-∅
         good-ASSERT   S:2SG-IO:3SG-look-INF-ABS
         'It is nice to look at him.'

     b. Deγ°e-s'   w-e-płə-nə-r (=-č'e, -u)
         good-ASSERT   S:2SG-IO:3SG-look-INF-ABS (=-INSTR, -ADV)
         'It is nice to look at him.'

One notable difference in the distribution of cases is related to word order. The ∅-marked absolutive is not found when the complement predicate is preposed, whereas the other markings (8) are not sensitive to word order.

(8) W-e-płə-nə-r/*-∅ (=-č'e, -u)   deγ°e-s'
     S:2SG-IO:3SG-look-INF-ABS (=-INSTR, -ADV) good-ASSERT
     'It is nice to look at him'

Only the instrumental case is allowed when the verb contains the marker of repeated action (-re)[1].

(9) a. γeš'eγ°en-t   wə-k'°e-n-č'e-re
         interesting-IMP   S:2SG-go-INF-INSTR-RP
         'It was interesting to go there (over and over again).'

     b. *γeš'eγ°en-t   wə-k'°e-n-∅ /(u-re)
         interesting-IMP   S:2SG-go-INF-ABS / (ADV-RP)
         'It was interesting to go there (over and over again).'

Commentative matrix predicates
The infinitive with arbitrary subject reference occurs primarily with commentative predicates (cf. Noonan 1985) as *deγ°e* 'wonderful' *xarzəne, f'ə* 'good', *γes''eγ°en, tełəže* 'interesting', *g°əγ°* 'difficult' *tənš, psəns''aγ°e* 'easy, convenient', *nes'xejaγ°e, g°əq'ejaγ°e* 'sad'. They are stative verbs derived from adjectives. The non-finite complement thus occurs in subject position of the corresponding stative verbs.

Various affixes may be added to such forms: version, tense, interrogative, assertive and other. The tense of such commentative predicates is usually limited to an opposition between 'present – imperfect'. Due to the adjectival nature of the root, it is also possible to use comparative forms, which are marked by *dade* 'very, more', followed by tense, negation and other:

(10) G°ə-dədə-t-q'əm   w-q'efe-nə-r
      difficult-more-IMP-NEG   S:2SG-dance-INF-ABS
      'It was not particularly difficult to dance.'

There is also a parallel analytic form of certain commentative predicates, derived from adjectives and a copular verb. However, the infinitive with arbitrary subject reference does not occur (11b) in complements of such analytic matrix predicates.

(11) a. Heləmet-s'   tχəłə-r   p-tχə-nə-r
          interesting-ASSERT   book-ABS   S:2SG-write-INF-ABS
          'It is interesting to write the book.'

      b. *Heləmet   me-x°-∅   tχəłə-r   p-tχə-nə-r
          interesting   S:3SG-be-PRES   book-ABS   S:2SG-write-INF-ABS
          'It is interesting to write the book.'

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[1] The suffix *-re* originates from the coordinative suffix *-re*. In its use in the non-finite form with arbitrary subject reference it has completely lost its coordinative meaning.

Commentative predicates including version marker fe-

A group of commentative predicates includes the verb prefix *fe-*. The cross-reference prefix in such forms marks the person to whom the comment is attributed. A number of such matrix verbs take the non-finite form with arbitrary subject reference.

(12) a. s-f'e-zaχ°e-s'   wə-laz'e-n-č'e
          O:1SG-V-right-ASSERT   S:2SG-work-INF-INSTR
          'It seems right to me to work.'

      b. T'-f'e-q'abəl-te-q'°əm   w-e-płə-nə-r
          O:2PL-V-normal-IMP-NEG   S:2SG-IO:3SG-look-INF-ABS
          'It seemed strange to us to look at him.'

      c. S-f'e-ʔeχ°əšχ°e-q'əm   w-je-ʒe-nə-r
          O:1SG-V-important-NEG   S:2SG-IO:3SG-study-INF-ABS
          'It doesn't seem important to me to study.'

Not all commentative predicates derived from adjectives and the applicative verb prefix *fe-* allow the non-finite form with arbitrary subject reference in the complement. However, when the matrix predicates are negated, the use of the non-finite form with arbitrary subject reference increases. In (13) the benefactive meaning of the prefix *fe-* is weakened. The sentence may also be translated as 'It is not interesting to me to look at him.'

(13) S-f'ə-γes''eγ°ə-n-q'əm   w-e-płə-n-č'e
      S:2PL-V-interesting-FUT-NEG   S:2SG-IO:3SG-look-INF-INSTR
      'It doesn't seem interesting to me to look at him.'

The arbitrary subject marker in gerunds and participles

In the last section we will see that the use of the second person singular subject prefix as a marker of arbitrary reference is not limited to infinitives. It occurs in both gerunds and participles, two non-finite categories that exhibit tense, subject-object agreement (gerunds, participles) and case (participles).

Gerunds

In (14) the gerund is used as a modifying adverbial to an arbitrary infinitive. Here we find agreement in subject markers; both the complement predicate *wə-s'əsən(u)* 'sit' and the modifying adverbial predicate *wə-məs''ew* 'doing' include the arbitrary subject reference marker.

(14) Jemək'°-t   maχ°e psom zəri   wə-mə-s''e-w
      disgraceful-IMP day   all   nothing S:2SG-NEG-do.(PRES)-GER

      wə-s'ə-sə-n(u)
      S:2SG-LOC-sit-INF
      'It's disgraceful to sit all day, doing nothing.'

Participles

Participial complement predicates that include the arbitrary subject reference marker are found in the complements of modal predicates such as *x°ən* 'allowed, possible' and *x°ənq'ən* 'not allowed, not possible'.

(15) Wə-k'°   x°ə-nu-s'
      S:2SG-go.(PRES.PART)   possible-FUT2-ASSERT
      'It's possible to go.'

The ordering with the matrix predicate following the complement is the most common, but the reverse *X°ə-nu-s' wə-k'°* is also possible. In combination with an adverb this allows different interpretations (16a), whereas (16b-c) correspond to one translation:

(16) a. X°ə-nu-s'   psəns''e-w   wə-k'°
          possible-FUT2-ASSERT   quick-ADV   S:2SG-go.(PRES.PART)
          1. 'It's possible to go quickly.'
          2. 'It's soon possible to go.'

      b. Psəns''e-w   wə-k'°   x°ə-nu-s'
          quick-ADV   S:2SG-go.(PRES.PART)   possible-FUT2-ASSERT
          'It's possible to go quickly.'

      c. Wə-k'°   psəns''e-w   x°ə-nu-s'
          S:2SG-go.(PRES.PART)   quick-ADV   possible-FUT2-ASSERT
          'It's soon possible to go.'

Another case of participles with arbitrary subject reference is found in (17). Both *wə-k'°e* and *zərə-mə-x°ə-nu-r* are participles, but only *wə-k'°e* includes a marker of arbitrary reference.

(17) a. Se s-s''-a-q'əm   wə-k'°e
          I   S:1SG-know-PERF1-NEG   S:2SG-go.PRES.PART

          zərə-mə-x°ə-nu-r
          that-NEG-be-FUT2-ABS
          'I didn't know that it wasn't possible to go.'

b. Se   s-s'əɣ°əps'-a-q'əm)   wə-k'°e
   I   S:1SG-forget-PERF1-NEG)   S:2SG-go.PRES.PART

zərə-mə-x°ə-nu-r
that-NEG-be-FUT2-ABS
'I didn't forget that it wasn't possible to go.'

As illustrated in (18), the participle is the usual form of the complement predicate chosen with matrix verbs such as 'know'.

(18) (Se)   s-o-s''e   (wə) (se)
     I   S:1SG-DYN-know.PRES   you me

sə-q'ə-zerə- pša-r
O:1SG-here-that-S:2SG-lead-PAST-ABS
'I know that you brought me here.'

The forms may be coordinated, as illustrated in (19).

(19) Se   s-łeɣ°-a-s'   wə-k'°e-re
     I   S:1SG-see-PERF1-ASSERT   S:2SG-go.PRES.PART-COORD

wə-q'e-k'°e-ž   zərə-mə-x°ə-nu-r
S:2SG-ORIENT-go.PRES.PART   that-NEG-be-FUT2-ABS
'I saw that it wasn't possible to go away and return.'

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Abbreviations

ABS	Absolutive
ASSERT	Assertive
CAUS	Causative
COOR	Coordinative
DIR	Directional verbal prefix
DYN	Dynamic
ERG	Ergative
GER	Gerund
IMP	Imperfect
INF	Infinitive
INSTR	Instrumental
IO	Indirect object marker
COM	Comitative
LOC	Locational verbal prefix
NEG	Negating affix
O	Object marker
ORIENT	Orientation
PART	Participle
PERF	Perfect
PLUP	Pluperfect
POT	Potentialis affix
PRES	Present
RP	Repeated action
S	Subject marker
V	Version (benefactive and other rlations)