Knowns and unknowns in the history of the Northern Talyshi tense-aspect-mood system
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This paper will discuss the diachrony of the TAM system, and especially the marking of various imperfective categories, in the Northern Talyshi (NT) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, one of the major Iranian varieties of the Caucasus.

The Talyshi dialects, spoken either side of the Azerbaijan-Iran border in a region extending along the coast of the Caspian Sea, belong to the North-Western branch of the Iranian languages; within this branch Talyshi is most closely related to the Tati group of inland north-western Iran (Stilo 2015). However, little distinctly Talyshi or Tati linguistic material is attested from before the twentieth century, meaning that we lack direct evidence for the development of the verb system in these varieties specifically; what is more, some features of the Talyshi (and especially the NT) verb are not known in Tati or anywhere else in NW Iranian. Inevitably, our knowledge of the synchronic morphology of NT is not matched by our understanding of how things came to be this way.

Nonetheless, some diachronic claims about the NT verb can be made with reasonable confidence. The most readily comprehensible features of the system are of two opposing kinds: either they continue very early developments, which are thus shared widely across the family and whose development is captured in our historical attestations of other Iranian varieties, or they have grammaticalized recently enough for us to recognize their links with elements still found elsewhere in the language. Meanwhile, the more problematic features of the system are those which are ancient enough to be opaque in terms of the morphological material involved, but at the same time are not sufficiently general across Iranian to be securely understood on comparative grounds. With this in mind, in the present paper I attempt to distinguish between the diachronic layers of morphological material which have gone to make up the current NT verb system, showing how much we understand about them on the basis of comparative Iranian, internal and areal linguistic indications, and which issues still pose substantial problems of diachronic analysis.

Both tense and aspect are implicated in the most striking and fundamental morphosyntactic split affecting NT verbal behaviour, which sees past perfective tense formations employing ergative alignment, while imperfective and non-past tense forms are associated with accusative alignment. This split is illustrated in examples (1) and (2), containing present subjunctive and perfect indicative forms of *pəydo karde* ('evident do', = 'find') respectively:

(1) az   ın   dızd-i   bəpe   pəydo   bı-kə-m
     1.**DIR**   this   thief-**OBL**   must   evident   MOD-do[I]-1
     'I <u>must find</u> this thief'

(2) mand-e   vaxt   ni,   dızd=ım   pəydo   kard-ə
     stay-INF   time   COP.NEG.3   thief.**DIR**=1.**OBL**   evident   do[II]-PRF
     'There is no time to lose, I <u>have found</u> the thief'

In (1) the subject of *pəydo karde* is in the direct form and controls agreement on the verb, whose object shows oblique marking; while in (2) it is the object that is found in the direct form, the subject being marked by an oblique pronominal clitic.

The diachronic underpinnings of this phenomenon are well understood. Split alignment is widespread in the Iranian family (Haig 2008), and can be traced back to the development of a periphrastic perfect in Old Iranian: the construction seen in (3) (from the Old Persian Behistun inscription of Darius the Great) developed into the unmarked preterite formation across Iranian, but the logical subject retained its original oblique marking, entailing ergative alignment in this and all later tenses based on it, including the NT perfect.

(3) avaθā=šām   hamaranam   **kr̥ta-m**
     thus=6.GEN   battle.NOM(NEUT) **do.PTC-NEUT**
     'thus of them/by them battle is done', i.e. 'thus they have done battle'

The likeness between *kardə* in (2) and *kr̥tam* in (3) reflects the historical origins of the NT past perfective tenses in this Old Iranian perfect participle construction; *kard-* is traditionally called the 'past stem' of this verb (also 'stem II'), in opposition to the 'present stem' (or 'stem I') *kə-* seen in subjunctive *bıkəm*.

 However, this morphological distinction between the two stems found in the verb paradigm does not go hand in hand with the morphosyntactic split just discussed, and the stem *kard-* is by no means a marker of past tense or perfectivity in general. For one thing, it is found in the infinitive, *karde*; this use of the past stem to form the infinitive is likewise an ancient and widespread Iranian phenomenon, which does not require any special explanation within NT.

 On the other hand, it is more unusual in the Iranian context to find the so-called past stem characterizing the *present* indicative, as it does in NT *kardeydəm* 'I do/am doing'; in fact, this particular formation has no analogue even in the other Talyshi dialects. However, among other evidence, the existence of a corresponding past progressive with the form *kardeydə bim* 'I was doing' allows us to recognize that we are dealing here with a syntagm involving the copula; in turn, the non-finite element *kardeydə* can be identified as reflecting infinitive *karde* marked with a version of locative *=ədə*, a postposition which is still found in NT in its own right. This reconstruction, plausible on semantic grounds (< 'I am in doing'), also tallies with the existence of a structurally identical formation in Azerbaijani, where *-mAK-TA* (infinitive + locative) followed by the copula marks the present progressive (Miller 1953).

 The future tense *bəkardem* gives signs of being older and more thoroughly embedded in the verb system than present *kardeydəm*, but lends itself to an explanation along similar lines. NT possesses a spatial preposition *bə* 'to, at', meaning that it is not hard to envisage the grammaticalization of an allative construction based on the infinitive here. However, it is notable that elsewhere in Azerbaijan, in the SW Iranian dialect of Muslim Caucasian Tat, a parallel innovation in the verb system (*bæ* + infinitive + copula) is found with *present* meaning (Grjunberg 1963). Accordingly, we should probably suppose that NT *bəkardem* also began life with a general present meaning (based on the locative sense of *bə*, 'at') in an areal development shared with Muslim Tat, but was later restricted to future senses upon the rise of the new present *kardeydəm*; shifts of this kind are documented in Haspelmath (1998).

We can thus make substantial headway in accounting for the above developments, which recognizably belong to the most ancient and the most recent stages in the evolution of NT from Old Iranian. However, as an example of a phenomenon apparently of an intermediate time depth which poses more serious problems, I consider the imperfect *əkəym* 'I used to do'. This precise formation, built on the present stem prefixed by a so-called 'augment' *ə-*, is thoroughly grammaticalized in NT but found nowhere outside the Talyshi dialect continuum (Stilo 2015); meanwhile, neither this prefix nor the vocalic suffix *i/y* preceding the personal endings can be confidently identified with elements existing elsewhere in NT, as was possible for the morphological material in the present and future tense forms. Moreover, as I will show, some of the plausible cross-linguistic connections which can be suggested for these elements complicate the picture rather than elucidating it: in particular, the Tati and Central Talyshi evidence may even cast doubt on the grammaticalization scenario just put forward to explain the future *bəkardem*. Perhaps the boundary between known and unknown is not where we think it is.

References

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