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CASE SHIFT AND VERB CONCORD IN GEORGIAN

Kim Braithwaite

Ever since the first grammatical studies of the Georgian verb system, with its features of ergativity and polypersonalism, linguists have been puzzled by what I term "case shift" in Georgian transitive verb structures. Within the full conjugation of a single transitive verb, the subject and object pronouns "shift cases" depending on the paradigmatic subset or "tense series." In the six paradigms of Series I, which includes the present, the subject is nominative and the object is dative. In Series II, with its two paradigms including the aorist, subject shifts to ergative and object shifts to nominative. In Series III, whose paradigms include the perfect, the shift is to dative subject and nominative object--seemingly the reverse of Series I. If there is an indirect (oblique) object, it is dative in both Series I and II but goes into a postpositional construct in Series III.

Chart A gives two transitive samples for each series--one with subject and object only, the other with an added indirect object. In Series I, the subject is nominative igi while the direct and indirect objects are both dative mas. In Series II, subject has shifted to ergative man and the object to nominative igi, while the indirect object is again dative mas. In the "inverted" Series III, subject is now dative mas and the object is nominative igi, while the indirect object is postpositional mistvis.

For instructive contrast and for their crucial role in my analysis, Chart A also shows two types of nontransitive verbs, one with and one without an object. The subject is nominative igi throughout the nontransitive conjugation, and the (oblique) object is dative mas. (Several other subtypes not directly germane to this paper are not illustrated).

Domestic and outside linguists alike have seized on the ergativity of Series II, also the inversion of Series III, to argue that the Georgian verb is "different in kind" from, say, Indo-European. Some have said that subject and object are invalid as applied to Georgian grammar, and so on. I do not propose here to decide whether notions like subject and object are universal or language-specific, nor am I immediately concerned about the nature of ergativity, whether it reflects something special in the psyche of those who use it, or whatever. My focus here is on case shift, and for reasons of time and space I'll confine it to Series I and II.

CHART A. TENSE SERIES, VERB TYPE, AND CASE

	<u>Subj</u>	<u>IObj</u>	<u>Obj</u>	<u>Samples</u>
SERIES I (Present)				
<u>Trans</u>	Nom		Dat	igi (Nom) hxaṭavs mas (Dat) 'he paints it'
<u>Trans+</u> <u>IObj</u>	Nom	Dat	Dat	igi (Nom) mihcems mas (Dat) mas (Dat) 'he will give it to him'
<u>Nontrans</u>	Nom			igi (Nom) kreba 'it disappears'
<u>Nontrans+</u> <u>IObj</u>	Nom	Dat		igi (Nom) hçvdeba mas (Dat) 'he reaches for it'
SERIES II (Aorist)				
<u>Trans</u>	Erg		Nom	man (Erg) daxaṭa igi (Nom) 'he painted it'
<u>Trans+</u> <u>IObj</u>	Erg	Dat	Nom	man (Erg) mihca mas (Dat) igi (Nom) 'he gave it to him'
<u>Nontrans</u>	Nom			igi (Nom) gakra 'it disappeared'
<u>Nontrans+</u> <u>IObj</u>	Nom	Dat		igi (Nom) çahçvda mas (Dat) 'he reached for it'
SERIES III (Perfect)				
<u>Trans</u>	Dat		Nom	mas (Dat) dahuxaṭavs igi (Nom)
<u>Trans+</u> <u>IObj</u>	Dat (Pos)		Nom	mas (Dat) mihucia mistvis (Pos) igi (Nom)
<u>Nontrans</u>	Nom			igi (Nom) gamkrala 'it has disappeared'
<u>Nontrans+</u> <u>IObj</u>	Nom	Dat		igi (Nom) çahçvdomia mas (Dat) 'he has reached for it'

Specifically, if Georgian is "an ergative language," what is it doing with the nominative-dative line-up in Series I--a line-up which somewhat resembles the nominative-accusative line-up of the familiar languages? How does this ergative line-up relate to the nominative-dative? Why this "case shift?" These are the puzzles that have vexed Georgian scholars.

My explanation is that Series I and Series II constructions have distinct auxiliary formations of a quite ordinary sort specified in their respective underlying abstract structures ("deep structure" or whatever). These come to be reflected at the overt level in the disparate verb elements and subject-object cases.

Chart B shows the personal pronouns in the relevant cases. The fact that the 1st and 2nd person pronouns do not undergo any overt change has implications elsewhere in the grammar.

CHART B. PERSONAL PRONOUNS

3rd Person

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
Nom	igi	isini
Erg	man	mat
Dat	mas	mat

1st/2nd Persons

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
1	me	čven
2	šen	tkven

Next, the internal morphology of the finite verb form. It may include subject and object concord markers, various formants, tense and mood elements--up to a total of 11 including the root. Some segmented examples are shown in Chart C.

We will be concerned only with the personal concord markers and one other crucial element, the stem format which I'm relating to the auxiliary distinctions mentioned. Chart D shows the verb-internal subjective and objective concord markers, the latter including a variety I call extra-vertive.

It is important to emphasize that the labels on these items are strictly that: names of convenience to refer to invariant overt elements, regardless of what underlying function they may reflect. The terms subject and object, on the other hand, refer to the conventional notions--call them "real," "logical," or whatever--regardless of how they show up in the overt structure. Failure to keep this distinction in mind has led many

CHART C. SAMPLES OF VERB-INTERNAL MORPHOLOGY

a-gvi-š-en-eb-en 'they will build it for us'
 a = preverb
 gvi = objective (extravertive) person marker, 1st plural
 š-en = root 'build'
 eb = stem formant (discussion to follow)
 en = subjective person marker, 3rd plural

v-ar 'I am'

v = subjective person marker, 1st person
 ar = root 'be'

da-v-h-a-ḵvir-d-eb-o-d-e-t '[that] we be observing him'
 da = preverb
 v = subjective person marker, 1st person
 h = objective person marker, 3rd person
 a = benefactive (version) marker
 ḵvir = root 'observe'
 d = inchoative (inceptive) element
 eb = stem formant
 o = copular element
 d = nonpresent
 e = subjunctive
 t = subjective plural

CHART D. SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE/EXTRAVERTIVE CONCORD MARKERS

	<u>Subjective</u>		<u>Objective</u>		<u>Extravertive</u>	
	<u>Sg</u>	<u>Plu</u>	<u>Sg</u>	<u>Plu</u>	<u>Sg</u>	<u>Plu</u>
1	v-	v-.-t	m-	gv-	mi-	gvi-
2	h-	h-.-t	g-	g-(t)	gi-	gi-..(t)
3	{-s} {-a}	{-en} {-es}	h-	h-(t)	hu-	hu-..(t)

linguists down blind alleys when faced with, for example, the inversion of Series III, where the extravertive (objective) marker hu- marks the real subject, and so on.

At this point I must announce a serious caveat on the element h-, the marker of 2nd person subjective and 3rd person objective, seen in the samples and in Chart D. In actual speech or writing, this h- of mine would appear in variant forms or not show at all, depending on

phonological and other factors. Since my arguments depend crucially on its presence or absence in a given structure, I have placed it artificially in all relevant contexts, partly on the basis of older language stages.¹

Subject and object pronouns can be deleted, and the verb itself can "stand for" the whole sentence. This has led most analysts to claim that the verb "contains" all the pronominal information. I argue that the verb form, with or without external pronouns, simply relates via concord rules to a fully-specified structure, and whatever elements it does contain owe their overt existence to this underlying structure and to the rules that apply before the pronouns are deleted. This is no revolutionary claim on my part, of course, but most Georgian specialists haven't seen it that way.

If we go by the Chomskyan vision or something like it, whatever rules attach these elements and markers have to operate uniformly and mechanically on successive underlying structures. This, regardless of the original (deep structure) configuration and regardless of the effects of early rules that distort or restructure the original (cf. *it*-Raising, *Equi-NP* Deletion, *Passive*, and so on in English). It is here, then, that we look for clues to the puzzles of *Case Shift*.

CONCORD IN SERIES I AND II

In both Series, ALL subjective markers reflect "real subject" whether the structure is transitive or not, and regardless of pronoun cases, as seen in samples 1-4:

SAMPLES:

- Series I
- (1) $\begin{array}{c} \text{igi h-xa\text{t}av-s mas} \\ \text{Nom O} \quad \quad \quad \text{S Dat} \end{array}$ 'he paints it'
- (2) $\begin{array}{c} \text{igi kreb-a} \\ \text{Nom} \quad \quad \text{S} \end{array}$ 'it disappears'
- Series II
- (3) $\begin{array}{c} \text{man da-xa\text{t}-a igi} \\ \text{Erg} \quad \quad \quad \text{S Nom} \end{array}$ 'he painted it'
- (4) $\begin{array}{c} \text{igi ga-kr-a} \\ \text{Nom} \quad \quad \quad \text{S} \end{array}$ 'it disappeared'

When it comes to objective concord, however, a crucial discrepancy emerges. The following transitive samples show that in Series I, objective h- marks the object or the indirect object, both dative, while in Series II h- marks only an indirect object, also dative, but the direct object--nominative--is not marked at all:

SAMPLES:

	<u>Series</u>		
(5)	I	<pre> /-----\ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ igi h-klav-s mas Nom O S Dat </pre>	'he slaughters it'
(6)	II	<pre> /-----\ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ man da-kl-a igi Erg S Nom </pre>	'he slaughtered it'
(7)	I	<pre> /-----\ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ igi h-parav-s mas mas Nom O S Dat Dat </pre>	'he steals it from him'
(8)	II	<pre> /-----\ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ man mo-h-par-a mas igi Erg O S Dat Nom </pre>	'he stole it from him'

In other words, 3rd person objective h- marks only a dative object, never a nominative.²

THE STEM FORMANT. PROPOSED EXPLANATION

To illustrate the behavior of the stem formant, Chart E matches two different past tenses--imperfect from Series I (the series-mate of the present), and aorist from Series II (the values of these are quite parallel to those of Spanish imperfect and preterite, respectively):

CHART E. PAST TENSES DISTINGUISHED BY STEM FORMANT

<u>StFo</u>	<u>Series I</u> (Imperfect)	<u>English Gloss</u>	<u>Series II</u> (Aorist)
av	h-xaṭ-av-d-a	'he painted it'	da-xaṭ-a
am	h-dg-am-d-a	'he stood it'	da-dg-a
eb	h-ḱid-eb-d-a	'he hung it'	da-ḱid-a
em	[mi]-h-c-em-d-a	'he gave it to him'	mi-h-c-a [with IO]
i	h-ḱr-i-d-a	'he cut it'	da-ḱr-a
ob	h-gm-ob-d-a	'he denounced him'	da-gm-o [o ← a]
op	h-q-op-d-a	'he divided it'	ga-q-o [o ← a]
∅	h-cer-∅-d-a	'he wrote it'	da-cer-a

REMARKS: The formant ∅ is easily motivated.
Only av, eb, and ob serve to coin new verbs in the modern language.

Ignoring the full range of distinct functions, if we gloss the imperfect as "was -ing" rather than as a simple past, it reflects my belief that the machinery of Series I, with the stem formant, is analogous to the progressive formation in the Chomskyan AUX framework or something like it. This, basically, is my proposal. Now to elaborate, starting with a brief recap of salient points:

One, subjective marks the real subject regardless of case shift, and regardless of transitivity. Two, h- marks only a dative object. Three, the "vanishing h-" coincides exactly with the "shift" from nominative to ergative. Finally, all this ties in with the presence of a stem formant in Series I and the lack of it in Series II. These are the big clues pointing to a reasonable explanation.

Now we ask ourselves, aside from the indirect objects of transitive verbs, where else in Georgian do we find a 3rd person object expressed invariably by the dative pronoun outside the verb and marked by h- inside the verb? The answer: in NONtransitive verbs that have an (oblique) object, for example:

SAMPLES:

	<u>Series</u>		
(9)	I	igi h- <u>çvd</u> -eb-a mas	'he reaches for it'
(10)		igi h-exmar-eb-a mas Nom O S Dat	'he helps him'
(11)	II	igi <u>ça</u> -h- <u>çvd</u> -a mas	'he reached for it'
(12)		igi da-h-exmar-a mas Nom O S Dat	'he helped him'
(13)	III	igi <u>ça</u> -h- <u>çvd</u> -omi-a mas	'he has reached for it'
(14)		igi da-h-xmar-ebi-a mas Nom O S Dat	'he has helped him'

My claim is that the overt machinery of a Series I transitive is behaving morphologically like that of a nontransitive plus object, and that is why we have the nominative-dative line-up in Series I that has bothered linguists about Georgian's "ergative language" status. There are parallels to be found in languages all over the world. Aspect and auxiliary elements closely interact with, and often redistribute, subject-verb and verb-object relations.

Now let's draw a parallel in English:

SAMPLES:

- (15) 'he shells peas'
'he shelled peas'
- (16) 'he is shelling peas'
'he was shelling peas'
- (17) 'he is a mealymouthed sidewinder'
'he was really in a pickle this time,' etc...

Samples (15) and (16)--both transitive--are clearly counterparts of one another. What distinguishes them is the aspectual machinery; (15) is the simple formation, (16) is progressive. In the Chomskyan framework, they differ by small but essential AUX distinctions in the deep structure. Now note that 'he' is the subject in all three samples, 15 through 17, regardless of transitivity. In sample (15) the concord is directly between 'he' and the verb 'shells' or 'shelled.' Rules of affix attachment and number agreement have applied quite mechanically. But in (16), the progressive counterpart, the subject-verb concord strictly speaking is not between 'he' and the transitive verb 'shell,' but rather between 'he' and the 'is/was'. The verb stem 'shell-' gets ING attached and is placed entirely outside of concord with the subject.³

If we focus on just that portion of the line-up in (16), we have to say that the 'he is/was' is nontransitive. Morphologically, at any rate, it is identical to the 'he is/was' portion of the intransitive samples in (17), and indeed it has gone through exactly the same rules of affix attachment and number agreement.

Something like this is clearly going on in Georgian. In effect, the Series II forms without stem formant are equivalent to the English simple forms, with just the tense and person markers. The subject agrees with the verb directly in Series II, and as it happens the Georgian transitive requires the ergative-nominative line-up. The Series I forms have more machinery: the stem formant intrudes, so to speak, between subject and verb, so that the ergativity condition does not hold and the complex behaves like a nontransitive, requiring the subject to be in the nominative. The relation between verb and direct object is similarly loosened, "demoting" it to oblique status and calling for a dative pronoun marked internally by h-.

A reasonable question arises here: Why no discussion of any simple present in Georgian? In modern standard Georgian the Series I present does duty for a range of present tense functions, including both simple and progressive (cf. the extended use of progressive in dialects of Irish English today). But Old Georgian also had a Series II simple present, called the permansive, which died out sometime in the last few hundred years. So the verb system is undergoing restructuring, and eventually no doubt my analysis will cease to be valid except in a diachronic or etymological context.

If my analysis holds water, it buys a number of explanations and also opens up new puzzles, new lines of exploration in the rich field of

Georgian verb studies. I have not had time in this paper to discuss the machinery of the inverted Series III forms, but my research to date, using the same approach and framework, points to a reasonable and relatively simple explanation there as well.

Thus, the seemingly intractable Georgian verb system is quite amenable to the kind of analysis applicable to more familiar languages. At the same time, new questions are raised with cross-linguistic and perhaps universal implications.

FOOTNOTES

1. In the modern standard language, h-concord is severely eroded, and in actual usage it is somewhat muddled. Where it does occur it appears as h, s, x, or \emptyset depending on the environment (for example, $h \rightarrow \emptyset / _V$, etc.) and except in a couple of conservative mountain dialects h- no longer marks 2nd person subjective at all. Current academy norms decree that h- should mark only an indirect or oblique object, never a direct object, but all this is complicated by dialect mixing and by confusion in usage. Many dialects lack any overt h- altogether, and in most others it has fallen into the disuse or misuse typical of dying morphological norms, cf. English "whom" (disuse) and "for he and I" (misuse). In standard Georgian, overt h-concord has been on its last legs for several hundred years. My justification is that it does persist in the living language, however confused and sporadic, and it continues to interact, sometimes overtly and sometimes not, with the other machinery discussed here.

2. In contrast, 1st and 2nd person objective m- and g- mark the direct object in both Series I and II. This remarkable discrepancy, tied in with the disparities between 1st/2nd and 3rd persons alluded to earlier and others not touched upon here, is of profound interest not only in Georgian but also for cross-linguistic characterization of the pronominal systems of human language.

3. A number of linguists have discussed different aspectual mechanisms by which the transitivity relation between the verb and its accompanying subject-object entities is, so to speak, broken up or diluted, cf. 'he is busy shelling peas', 'he is in the middle of painting the bathroom,' and so on for the subject; 'he plays at tennis', 'he's writing on his dissertation,' etc. for the object.

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