

Krechetov killed himself: Transitivity decrease in Tabasaran reflexive constructions

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1. Who is Krechetov and why did he kill himself: the key example

- Tabasaran (Lezgian branch < East Caucasian < Nakh-Daghestanian). All the data for this talk come from the dialect of Mežgöl (southern dialect, Khiv district).
- Like most Dagestanian languages Tabasaran is a morphologically ergative language: Agent is marked by ergative, S and Patient is marked by absolutive.

(1) Krečetov.ži Ma^hha^smad a-k'-nu.
Krechetov.ERG MahamadABS) PF-<NN>kill-PST
'Krechetov killed Mahamad.'

The topic of this talk: In southern dialects of Tabasaran, an unusual pattern of case marking of the complex reflexive is attested in the construction with transitive verbs. Unexpectedly, the second part is marked by dative case, whereas the absolutive marking is ungrammatical.

(2) Krečetov.ži čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
Krechetov.ERG self self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PST
'Krechetov killed **himself**.'

(3) *Krečetov.ži čav čav a-k'-nu.
Krechetov.ERG self self(ABS) PF-<NN>kill-PST
'Krechetov killed himself.'

2. Simple reflexive pronouns: basic facts

- Morphology: case marking

In Tabasaran, there is a special reflexive pronoun for the third person *čav*. In many southern dialects, the reflexive does not distinguish morphologically between ergative and absolutive, the same form *čav* is used for both A and S, see (4-5).

(4) Krečetov-ži čav dumu Ɂ-ap'-nu.
Krechetov-ERG self 3.P(ABS) PF-do-PST
'Krechetov did it himself.'

(5) Krečetov čav Ɂ-uš-nu dina.
Krechetov(ABS) self PF-<NN>go-PST there
'Krechetov went there himself.'

- Emphatic construction

The simple reflexive can be used in the emphatic construction as an intensifier. Usually in such cases, it is assumed that the reflexive behaves like an adjunct to NP. In the emphatic construction, the reflexive is marked by the same case as the argument it intensifies. For example, with a subject experiencer verb the emphatic reflexive that emphasizes the experiencer is marked by dative like the overt experiencer NP (6). In the construction with the verb 'can', the reflexive pronoun intensifying the subject is marked by apud-relative as the subject itself (7).

(6) Krečetov.ži-z ča-z dumu Ɂ-a^s<Ɂ>q:-nu.

Krechetov-DAT self-DAT 3P(ABS) PF-<NN>see-PST
'Krechetov saw it himself.'

- (7) Krečetov.ži-x-an ča-x-an dumu ap'u-z šul-u.
Krechetov-APUD-ELAT self-APUD-ELAT 3P(ABS) do-INF become/can-FUT
'Krechetov can do it himself.'

- Reflexive construction

In reflexive constructions, the simple reflexive occupies a non-subject argument position and is marked by the case the verb requires for the argument. For example, the patient and the stimulus are marked by absolutive (8-9), the addressee is marked by dative (10), the locative argument, for example, of a motion verb a locative case (11).

- (8) Krečetov.ži čav ka-k'-nu.
Krechetov.ERG self(ABS) PF-<NN>kill-PST
'Krechetov killed himself.'
- (9) šur.a-z čav gu:zg.ži-a v-a<r>q:-nu.
girl-DAT self(ABS) mirror-IN PF-<NN>see-PST
'The girl saw herself in the mirror.'
- (10) Madina.ji ča-z bulušk:a kadav-nu.
Madina.ERG self-DAT shirt(ABS) <N>take-PST
'Madina bought herself a shirt.'
- (11) Krečetov ča-x-na v-uš-nu.
Krechetov(ABS) self-APUD-LAT PF-<NN>go-PST
'Krechetov went to his place/home.'

3. Complex reflexive pronouns

The complex reflexive consists of two simple reflexive pronouns. The first reflexive is associated semantically with the subject and is marked by the case the verb requires for its subject. The second reflexive occupies the position of a non-subject reflexivized argument and is in the case appropriate for the position.

ERG-DAT verb

- (12a) Krečetov.ži kucil.i-z jeb-nu.
Krechetov(ERG) puppy-DAT hit-PST
'Krechetov hit the puppy.'
- (12b) Krečetov.ži čav ča-z jeb-nu.
Krechetov(ERG) self self-DAT hit-PST
'Krechetov hit himself.'

DAT-ABS verb

- (13a) šur-az Krečetov v-a<r>q:-nu.
girl-DAT Krechetov(ABS) PF-<NN>see-PST
'The girl saw Krechetov.'
- (13b) šur-az ča-z čav gu:zg.ži-a v-a<r>q:-nu.
girl-DAT self-DAT self(ABS) mirror-IN PF-<NN>see-PST
'The girl saw herself in the mirror.'

However, in transitive constructions with the ERG-ABS argument marking, an unusual pattern of case marking of the complex reflexive emerges: the second reflexive pronoun is marked not by absolutive, as we would expect, but by dative.

- (14) Krečetov.ži čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
 Krechetov-ERG self self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PST
 'Krechetov killed himself.'
- (15) *Krečetov.ži čav čav a-k'-nu.
 Krechetov-ERG self self(ABS) PF-<NN>kill-PST
 'Krechetov killed himself.'

Note that the verb 'kill' is a labile verb. In transitive constructions with an ergative marked agent, it means 'kill', while in intransitive constructions it means 'die'. In reflexive constructions with labile verbs, there is also another possibility of argument case marking. The overt NP-antecedent of the reflexive usually expressed by ergative can appear in absolutive, still retaining the semantics of transitivity. Some informants consider the absolutive marking more felicitous than the ergative one, although the latter is not completely rejected either.

- (16) Krečetov čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
 Krechetov(ABS) self self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PST
 'Krechetov killed himself.'

With strictly transitive verbs, the overt NP can show up only in the ergative case, whereas Absolutive is ungrammatical. The second part of the complex reflexive is still marked by dative.

- (17) Mašhamašd.ži čav ča-z ɤ-uʰ<r>ɣ-nu.
 Mahamed.ERG self self-DAT PF-<NN>save-PST
 'Mahamed saved himself.'
- (18) *Mašhamašd čav čaz ɤ-uʰ<r>ɣ-nu.
 Mahamed(ABS) self self-DAT PF-<NN>save-PST
 'Mahamed saved himself.'

4. Typological parallels. Possible explanations of the deviation from canonical transitivity

The common understanding of core case marking in functionalist typology is that it serves as a device to distinguish between the arguments of a bivalent clause. One of the essential criteria of transitivity is the polar distribution of control and affectedness over the core participants of a clause.

➤ Naess (2007: 30): The Maximally Distinct Arguments Hypothesis

There should be a polar distribution of agentive and patientive properties across the participants of a fully transitive event.

According to Naess, three parameters maximally distinguish Agent and Patient: Volitionality, Instigation, and Affectedness. Prototypical Agent will be [+VOL, +INST, -AFF], and of Patient [-VOL, -INST, +AFF].

Cross-linguistically, deviations from prototypical transitivity is often associated with a shift in case marking. The reflexive construction where the agent and patient participants are physically the same entity seems to be the case of such a deviation, since here at least two violations of the prototypical transitivity pattern occur: (i) Agent is affected and (ii) Patient is volitional.

5. Factors affecting the behavior of the construction

Some facts suggest that the semantics does play a role in the reflexive construction:

- Negation as a clausal operator changing the value of certain semantic features of arguments in the clause.

Indeed, in the negative reflexive construction some informants allow the construction with canonical case marking, see examples with the labile verb ‘kill’ (19) and with transitive verb ‘lift’ (20). These examples also show that there are no morphological restrictions to use two morphologically identical forms *čav čav*.

(19)a. Ma^hama^d.ži / Ma^hama^d čav ča-z ɤa-k'-un-dar,
 Mahamed.ERG /Mahamed(ABS) self self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PST-NEG
 žarar.i ɤa-k'-nu.
 other.ERG PF-<NN>kill-PST

b. Ma^hama^d.ži čav čav ɤa-k'-un-dar, žarar.i ɤa-k'-nu.
 Mahamed.ERG self self PF-<NN>kill-PST-NEG other.ERG PF-<NN>kill-PST
 ‘Mahamed did not kill himself, someone killed him.’

(20)a. Ma^hama^d.ži čav ča-z χl-ar-in-a za<?>-un-dar.
 Mahamed.ERG self self-DAT hand-PL-SUPER-ELAT <NN>lift-PFT-NEG

b. Ma^hama^d.ži čav čav χl-ar-in-a za<?>-un-dar.
 Mahamed.ERG self self hand-PL-SUPER-ELAT <NN>lift-PFT-NEG
 ‘Mahamed did not lift himself on his hands.’

However in the construction with Absolutive Subject it is impossible.

(21) *Krečetov čav čav ɤa-k'-un-dar.
 Krechetov(ABS) self self PF-<NN>kill-PST-NEG
 ‘Krechetov killed himself.’

- Plural complex reflexives: canonical marking of complex reflexive induces reciprocal interpretation of the plural complex reflexive (22a), where the dative construction only has a strict reflexive reading (22b).

(22)

a. baž-ar.i čp:i čp:i ɤ-u<r>č-nu.
 boy-PL.ERG self(PL) self(PL.ABS) PF-<NN>beat-PST
 ‘The boys beat each other.’

b. baž-ar.i čp:i čp:i-z ɤ-u<r>č-nu.
 boy-pl.ERG self(PL) self(PL)-DAT PF-<NN>beat-PST
 ‘The boys beat themselves.’

Open issues

- Why does the case shift occur only in constructions with the complex reflexive, but not in constructions with the simple reflexive where the semantic features of the Agent and Patient are also reversed?
- Transitive construction with ‘more canonical’ Agent and Patient semantic features can have also case-shifting, for example with the verb ‘draw’.

(23) (Ma^hama^d šli ka?nu? Who drew Mahamed?)
 Duvu čav ča-z ka<?>-nu.
 3.p(ERG) self self-DAT <NN>draw-PST
 ‘He drew himself.’

- Animate/inanimate

The same case marking occurs in the reflexive construction with inanimate subject.

(24) haʃjvn.i čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
horse.ERG self self-DAT PF-<N>kill-PFT
'The horse killed itself.'

- The complex *čav čaz* is a single entity in terms of information structure.

čav čaz is part of focus that is formed by reflexive complex and the predicate.

(25) fu Krečetov.ži-z ka-b-x-nu? /What's happened to Krechetov?
Duvu/dumu čav ca-z a-k'-nu.
3.P(ERG)/ 3.P(ABS) self(ABS)self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PFT
'He killed himself.'

Čav caz can be focus itself.

(26) Krečetov šli ak'nu? / Who killed Krechetov?
duvu/dumu čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
3.P(ERG)/ 3.P(ABS) self(ABS) self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PFT
'He killed himself.'

Čav caz can be a topic together with predicate

(27) šli čav ča-z a-k'-nu?
Who(ERG) self(ABS) self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PFT
'Who killed himself?'

Čav caz cannot be separated. The complex is not used if only the patient argument is focus or topic.

(28) Krečetov.ži fuž ak'nu? / Whom did Krechetov kill?
*duvu/dumu čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
he (ERG)/ he(ABS) self(ABS) self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PFT
'He killed himself.'

(29) šli čav a-k'-nu? / Who killed himself?
*Krečetov.ži čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
Krechetov-ERG self(ABS) self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PST
'Krechetov killed himself.'

Čav caz cannot belong to the topical domain together with the subject if the predicate is in focus.

(30) (Krečetov.ži čav čaz fuž kap:nu? /What has Krechetov done to himself?)
*duvu/dumu čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
he (ERG)/ he(ABS) self(ABS) self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PFT
'He killed himself.'

- The interaction with the additive particle *-ra*.

Semantics of the particle *-ra*: ‘to add a new participant to a situation that has been already introduced into the discourse’. In principle, the additive can be attached to the reflexive pronoun, for example, in the construction with simple reflexive.

- (31) Maʿhamaʿd.ʒi vari a-kʻ-nu qa čav-ra a-kʻ-nu.
 Mahamed.ERG all(ABS) PF-<NN>kill-PST and self(ABS)=ADD PF-<NN>kill-PST
 ‘Mahamed killed everyone and killed himself.’

✓ In the transitive construction with the complex reflexive marking, it is also possible to attach the particle *-ra* to any of the components of the complex reflexive.

- (32)a. Madin.i čj-ir.i-z fu-vuš kadav-nu
 Madina.ERG sister-PL=DAT something <N>take-PST
 qa duvu čav ča-z=ra buluška kadav-nu.
 then 3.P(ERG) self self-DAT=ADD shirt(ABS) <N>take-PST
 ‘Madina bought (her) sisters something and she bought the shirt also herself.’

- b. Madin.i čj-ir.i-z fu-vuš kadav-nu
 Madina.ERG sister-PL=DAT something <N>take-PST
 qa duvu čav=ra ča-z buluška kadav-nu.
 then 3.P(ERG) self-add self-dat shirt(ABS) <N>take-PST
 ‘... and she bought the shirt also herself.’

✓ In the intransitive construction with the complex reflexive, the additive particle *-ra* can be also attached to either of the both parts:

- (33) a. dumu bicʻ-ur.i-z vi-lig-nu qa dumu čav čaz=ra
 3.P(ABS) small-PL-DAT PF-<NN>look-PST then 3.P(ABS) self self-DAT=ADD
 vi-lig-nu.
 PF<NN>look-PST

- b. dumu bicʻ-ur.i-z vi-lig-nu qa dumu čav=ra ča-z
 3.P(ABS) small-PL-DAT PF-<NN>look-PST then 3.P(ABS) self=ADD self-DAT
 vi-lig-nu.
 PF<NN>look-PST
 ‘She looked after the children and herself.’

❖ However, in the transitive construction with <Erg, Abs> case marking only Agent can accept the particle *-ra* (34), while none of the reflexives in the complex can take it (35).

- (34) Maʿhamaʿd.ʒi=ra čav ča-z χl-ar-in-a za<?>-nu.
 Mahamed.ERG=ADD self self-DAT hand-PL-SUPER-ELAT <NN>lift-PFT
 ‘... and also Mahamed lifted himself on his hands.’

(35) (Mahamed is very strong.)

- Maʿhamaʿd.ʒi vari baž-ar za<?>-nu qa dumu *čav=ra ča-z ||
 Mahamed.ERG all boy-PL(ABS) <NN>lift-PST then 3.P(ABS) self=ADD self-DAT ||
 *čav ca-z=ra χl-ar-in-a za<?>-nu.
 self self-DAT=ADD hand-PL-SUPER-ELAT PF-<NN>lift-PST
 ‘Mahamed lifted all the boys and lifted also himself.’

- In the transitive construction the complex *čav čaz* is in the same focus or topic domain and separated from full NP expressed Subject.

- Fixed word order

In the transitive construction with the complex reflexive, a change of the linear order of two reflexives is impossible, see (36).

- (36) *Krečetov.ẓ̌i ča-z čav jik'u-b uži dar.
 Krechetov(ERG) self-DAT self <NN>kill-MASD good COP(NEG)
 'It is bad that Krechetov killed himself.'

The rearrangement is also prohibited in sentences with the overt subject NP in the absolutive with the labile verb.

- (37) *Krečetov ča-z čav jik'u-b uži dar.
 Krechetov(ABS) self-DAT self <NN>kill-MASD good COP(NEG)
 'It is bad that Krechetov killed himself.'

- ✓ However, note that it is not a general property of the complex reflexive. In ditransitive constructions with the ERG-DAT marking, the order of two parts of the complex reflexive can be inversed (38). The same is true of intransitive constructions with e.g. the ABS-DAT marking, as in (39).

- (38) a. Maʕhamaʕ.ẓ̌i čav ča-z ʕadaʕu-b uži dar.
 Mahamed.ERG self self-DAT <N>take-MASD good COP(NEG)
 b. Maʕhamaʕ.ẓ̌i ča-z čav ʕadaʕu-b uži dar.
 Mahamed.ERG self-DAT self <N>take-MASD good COP(NEG)
 'It is not suitable for Mahamad that he bought himself.'

- (39) a. dumu čav ča-z güz.ẓ̌i-a ligu-b uži dar.
 3.P(ABS) self self-DAT mirror-IN <NN>look-MASD good COP(NEG)
 b. dumu ča-z čav güz.ẓ̌i-a ligu-b uži dar.
 3.P(ABS) self-DAT self mirror-IN <NN>look-MASD good COP(NEG)
 'It is bad that she is (constantly) looking at herself in the mirror.'

At least, two facts (fixed order of two parts within the complex and inability to attach the additive) distinguish the 'dative' construction from all other instances of the complex reflexive.

7. Getting closer to the nature of the construction?

Which case, ergative or absolutive, does the first part *čav* have in the complex in transitive construction with <Erg; Abs> marking?

At first glance, one may plausibly suggest that it is in the ergative case, since the basic rule says that the first part of the complex reflexive is in the case of the (overt) subject.

Some facts, however, suggest that the first part of the reflexive may be in the absolutive.

- Gender agreement

Like in most other Dagestanian languages, gender agreement on the lexical verb is controlled by the absolutive argument.

Čav can be in absolutive, since there must be an absolutive argument that controls gender agreement on the verb. Otherwise, we would have default neuter agreement.

(40) ha^jvn.i čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
horse.ERG self self-DAT PF-<N>kill-PFT
'The horse killed itself.'

(41) Krečetov.ži čav ča-z a-k'-nu.
Krechetov.ERG self self-DAT PF-<NN>kill-PFT
'Krechetov killed himself.'

- The complex reflexive *čav čaz* in intransitive constructions

The complex *čav čaz* with the same case marking is also possible in intransitive constructions (42-44), with the interpretation that an event occurs without external causation.

(42) dumu čav ča-z ꞑa-ax-nu.
3.p(ABS) self(ABS) self-DAT pf-<NN>fall_asleep-PST
'He fell asleep himself (without causation).'

(43) χu^s čav ča-z šišl.i-a adax-nu.
flour(ABS) self(ABS) self-DAT sack(IN)-ELAT <N>spill-PST
'The flour spilled out from the sack itself.'

(44) dumu čav ča-z ꞑ-uš-nu.
3.p(ABS) self(ABS) self-DAT PF-<NN>go-PST
'He went himself (nobody drove him).'

For some informants the construction with *čav čaz* is more felicitous with unaccusative verbs like in ex. (42)-(43) than with unergative verbs like in example (44).

It is quite clear that dative in the complex *čav čaz* in intransitive constructions is a 'dummy case' devoid of any specific semantic content (cf. Russian *сам по себе*).

Interestingly, the complex reflexive in intransitive constructions shows the same two properties attested for 'dative' transitive constructions: (i) fixed order of the two components within the complex, (45), and (ii) the components cannot attach the additive (46).

(45) *Ma^hhama^d čaz čav ꞑa-ax-nu.
Mahamad(ABS) self-DAT self-ABS PF-<NN>fall_asleep-PST

(46) a. Ma^hhama^d *čav=ra ča-z || *čav ča-z=ra ꞑa-ax-nu.
Mahamad(ABS) self=add self-DAT || self(abs) self-DAT=ADD PF-<NN>fall_asleep-PST
'Mahamad fell asleep himself'.

It is likely that in transitive constructions with the complex reflexive, the two parts have the ABS-DAT case marking, regardless of the fact that the agent overtly expressed by a full NP is marked by Ergative. In this case, the whole construction must be interpreted not as we did it in the beginning of the talk where the two parts are considered to be distributed between the subject and object positions. Instead, I propose that there is no ergative-marked reflexive at all, but the object slot is occupied by the complex reflexive otherwise attested with intransitive predicates (47).

- (47) a. Krechetov-ERG [self-ERG]_{SUBJ} [self-DAT]_{OBJ} killed
b. Krechetov-ERG [self-ABS self-DAT]_{OBJ} killed

The question, however, remains why and how the intransitive pattern of ‘self occurring event’ spread to transitive constructions and, more importantly, why it blocks ‘normal’ transitive case marking on the reflexive.