

From interrogatives to placeholders in Udi and Agul spontaneous narratives

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Abstract:

The paper describes the form and behavior of placeholders in Udi and Agul, two languages belonging to the Lezgian branch of the Northeast Caucasian family. The placeholders found in these languages show clear similarity despite the fact that they developed independently. In both languages, nominal placeholders originate from interrogative pronouns, which in combination with the verb 'do' serve as a source for verbal placeholders. In Udi, placeholders further gave rise to a similative construction describing a set of individuals or events on the basis of their similarity to a specific referent or situation. Finally, we suggest hypotheses concerning the development of placeholders and the correlations between their form and the overall typological profile of a language.

1. Introduction¹

Differing from “canonical” European languages in many remarkable respects and hence being of some interest for both typologists and theorists, the Northeast Caucasian language family has been extensively documented during the last century and a half. Nonetheless, almost no studies of discourse phenomena in these languages have been presented to date. This paper is intended to partly fill this lacuna by exploring and describing a subtype of hesitation markers in two Northeast Caucasian language languages, namely Udi and Agul, both of which belong to the Lezgian branch of the family. Our discussion is confined to placeholders, i.e. conventionalized lexical fillers which replace part of the syntactic structure due to production difficulties on the side of the speaker (see Fox, this volume; Fox et al. 1996; Hayashi & Yoon 2006).

The reason why neither placeholders nor many discourse particles in Northeast Caucasian languages have been investigated in any detail is that most descriptions of these languages and even texts published in them do not present natural data. In particular, most data on Northeast Caucasian languages underwent normalization of some sort like avoiding “redundant words” and adjusting “incorrect forms” and “wrong word order”. Not surprisingly, many processes that are recognized as linguistically relevant in contemporary discourse studies were considered abnormal and hence not deserving any attention. Placeholders were, of course, among the first candidates to be refused as being worthy of description.

In contrast to most previous studies, this paper is based almost exclusively on corpora of non-normalized spontaneous oral narratives consisting of some 1.400 sentences (about 11.000 word tokens) for Udi and about 5.500 sentences (about 49.000 word tokens) for Agul.² The speakers

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² Our Udi corpus was recorded in 2004—2006 in the village of Nizh, Azerbaijan, and represents the Nizh dialect of Udi; a sample of Udi spontaneous speech was published in Ganenkov et al. (2008). The Agul corpus used here was recorded in 2004—2005 by Dmitry Ganenkov, Timur Maisak and Solmaz Merdanova in the village of Huppuq’, Dagestan, and represents the Huppuq’ dialect of Agul.

belong to different age groups ranging from 15 to 70 years, and consequently, we may think that our corpora are indeed more or less representative of oral speech of the two languages.

In both corpora we find a considerable number of occurrences of certain items, formally identical to interrogative pronouns or derived from them, in the placeholder function; cf. the following examples from Udi:

(1) *iz uq:lɛn-χo gir-b-i he-t:-u bap-i, mešik:-ä...*
 REFL:GEN bone-PL gather-LV-AOR **what-NO-DAT** pour_in-AOR sack-DAT
 ‘Having gathered her bones and having put them into WHAT... into the sack...’

(2) *hat:etär sun-aχun jöni-t:un he-b-sa, jäšajňš-sa.*
 that_way each_other-ABL good=3PL **what-do-PRS** live+LV-PRS
 {About two brothers.} ‘So, in such a way they well WHAT-DO... live with each

other.’

In (1), the speaker experiences difficulties in picking up a proper nomination for the indirect object of the verb *bap-* ‘pour in’ and inserts a pronoun *hetu* in the Dative case, later she makes it clear that she meant a sack. In (2), on the other hand, we observe a combination of the same root *he* with the verb ‘do’ appearing when the speaker has difficulty with the nomination of the whole situation. These two kinds of placeholders are contrasted below as nominal vs. verbal placeholders and discussed in detail in Section 2 and Section 3 respectively. In Section 4 we consider an additional function displayed by both nominal and verbal placeholders in the simulative construction referring to a set via one of its members. Finally, in Section 5 we provide some conclusions and discuss questions left open.

2. Nominal placeholders

This section describes the behavior of nominal placeholders in Udi and Agul. By nominal placeholders we mean discourse particles that are conventionally used when a speaker fails to produce an appropriate nomination for a referent in discourse. Cross-linguistically, different sources are known for this kind of discourse markers (Podlesskaya 2006; this volume). In both languages discussed here, nominal placeholders go back to interrogative pronouns. Udi and Agul are very similar with respect to the behavior of nominal placeholders. An important difference between the two languages is that Agul employs two nominal placeholders, distinguishing between animate and inanimate referents, whereas Udi makes use of only one placeholder.

2.1. Semantic specification

We start our discussion of nominal placeholders by looking at the degree of semantic specification they demonstrate. As is briefly mentioned above, the placeholders in both languages developed diachronically from and are still identical to the interrogative pronouns *he* ‘what’ in Udi, *fī* ‘what’ and *fīš* ‘who’ in Agul. As is typical of interrogative systems in most languages of the world, a distinction in both languages is made between animate and inanimate interrogative pronouns. The pronouns *he* in Udi and *fī* in Agul refer to inanimate referents, whereas the pronouns *šū* in Udi and *fīš* in Agul denote only animate referents, cf. examples of interrogative uses of these items:

Udi

- (3) χ avar-uz haq:i-ki **šū**-nan vaIn?
 news=1SG take-AOR=COMP **who**=2PL you:PL
 ‘I asked: “Who are you?”’

- (4) **he-ti-u** lazim-a me χ üjār-mu χ za?
what-NO-DAT necessary=3SG:Q DEM girl-PL I:DAT
 ‘For what do I need these girls?’

Agul

- (5) **na** e me gur arf-u-f?
who:ERG COP DEM cup break-PF-NMZ
 ‘Who broke this cup?’

- (6) **fī** e wun B-a-je-f?
what COP you:SG say-IPF-PART-NMZ
 ‘What are you saying?’

Turning to the placeholder function of the interrogative pronouns, it should be said that in Udi the placeholder *he* can be applied for all referents irrespective of their animacy, i.e. human, non-human animate and inanimate referents. Cf. the following examples from Udi, in all of which the placeholder *he* is used in the Dative case (here marking the patient):

- (7) iz p:ap:a-j kul-a-l muč-p:-i, iz p:ap:a-j
 REFL:GEN father-GEN hand-DAT=ADD kiss-LV-AOR REFL:GEN father-GEN
 beIšI la-ne= χ -sa **he-ti-u**, äräq:i-n-ä.
 in_front_of put_on=3SG=ST-PRS **what-NO-DAT** vodka-O-DAT

{Describing wedding ceremony.} ‘Then she kisses her father’s hand, and in front of her father she puts WHAT... vodka.’

- (8) me k:ož-in k:onžlɯʁ-on **he-t-u**, χal-j-al bi-ne-q:-on.
 DEM house-GEN host-ERG **what-NO-DAT** dog-O-DAT take=3SG=ST-POT
 ‘(And at this moment) the master of the house grabs WHAT... the dog.’

- (9) t:e **he-t-u**, amdar-a eIχ-t-i eč-al:t:un.
 DEM **what-NO-DAT** person-DAT take-LV-AOR bring-FUT=3PL
 ‘They will take that WHAT... the man and bring (him).’

In (7), the placeholder *he* is used to replace the inanimate noun *äräqi* ‘vodka’, which is consistent with the interrogative uses of the same item. However, examples (8) and (9) show the use of the placeholder *he* with non-human animate and human referents respectively, which is impossible for the corresponding interrogative pronoun. Note that *he* is the only option here, since the interrogative pronoun *šu* ‘who’ in Udi does not appear as a placeholder at all.

An important difference between two uses of *he* is that in the interrogative function it occurs in a nominalized form if used as the S/P argument, while it is not the case in placeholder uses:

- (10) aj molla, hun mija k:ä-n b-sa?
 VOC Molla you:SG here **what:NA=2SG** do-PRS
 ‘Molla, what are you doing here?’

- (11) bur-e-q-sa lül-in-aχun t:e **he** c:oroj-e-s-a.
 begin=3SG=ST-PRS pipe-O-ABL DEM **what** flow-LV-INF-DAT
 ‘This WHAT begins to flow from the pipe.’

The situation is quite different in Agul, which employs two placeholders *fī* and *fīš* corresponding to the interrogative pronouns *fī* ‘what’ and *fīš* ‘who’. Generally, the distribution of the two placeholders is consistent with the original interrogative uses and depends on the humanness of a referent. While *fī* is usually used for non-human (animate or inanimate) referents, *fīš* denotes human referents. Cf. example (12) where the placeholder *fī* in the plural is used instead of inanimate referents ‘graves’ and example (13) where the placeholder *fīš* (the stem is *na-* in oblique cases) is used in the place of persons’ names:

- (12) le hür-i-n jaʔ-ani-ʎ ʎa-ji **fi-p:ur**, naq’-ar-ar.
 DEM village-O-GEN center-O-INTER INTER:be-PST **what-PL** grave-PL-PL
 ‘There were WHATs... graves in the center of that village.’

- (13) **na-s** aʁ-a-a zun, me we jazna
who-DAT say-IPF-PRS I DEM your:SG brother_in_law

q'ulban-a-s-na č̣e ge **na-s**, rahman-a-s, aʁ-a-a zun...

Qurban-O-DAT=ADD your:PL DEM **who-DAT** Rahman-O-DAT say-IPF-PRS I

‘Then I tell WHOM... your brother-in-law Qurban and your WHOM... Rahman, I tell...’

Interestingly, apart from such narrative uses, the placeholder *fiš* can even be used to address people in dialogues, cf. the following examples, where the placeholder follows the vocative proclitic *ja*:

(14) ha q:azi, ja q:azi, ja **fiš**, isa aʁ-a-j haraj-ar q'-u-ne
 PTCL Qazi VOC Qazi VOC **who** Isa say-IPF-CONV cry-PL do-PF-PFT
 zun ge-wur-i-s.

I DEM-PL-O-DAT

‘Hey, Qazi, Qazi, hey WHO... Isa’, – cried I to them.

This use often occurs in everyday communication and is not perceived as impolite, especially when produced by elder speakers. It just indicates that the speaker cannot recall the correct name. This possibility of replacing proper names when addressing others distinguishes Agul from Udi, for which such uses are not attested in our corpus.

Nonetheless, in Agul the non-human placeholder *fī* is also sometimes used for human referents. Such uses are quite rare, and the exact conditions for them are not clear. However, one can assume that in these cases the placeholder *fī* plays a role of a ‘default’ placeholder, marking that the speaker has verbalization difficulties but without specifying animacy of the referent. Cf. the following examples:

(15) qa-j x-u-ne p:ač:ah-di-q sa ru... **fi**,
 POST:be-CONV become-PF-PFT king-O-POST one [daughter] **what**
 sa ruš, bat'ar ruš.

one daughter beautiful daughter

‘The king had a dau... WHAT, a daughter, beautiful daughter.’

(16) me ŋ-a-j-e ajč'-u-na uč-i-n küče-ji
 DEM go-IPF-CONV-COP go_out-PF-CONV REFL-O-GEN street-IN
fi-ti-n, q:unši-n χul-a-s.

what-O-GEN neighbour-GEN house-O-DAT

‘And then he goes away and approaches his WHAT’s... his neighbour’s house on his street.’

To sum up, these facts show that the placeholders in the two languages have semantic properties different from those of the corresponding interrogative pronouns. In particular, the placeholders based on ‘what’ pronouns have a wider range of uses than the interrogative pronouns. In Udi, the placeholder *he* covers all possible kinds of referents, while the Agul placeholder *fi* serves as a default placeholder when the semantic properties of a referent are not yet fully accessed or irrelevant.

The data presented above allow us to distinguish several important parameters of variation. First of all in importance is the number of placeholders available in a particular language and the division of labor among them. Semantically, the data from Udi and Agul allow us to distinguish four different uses, viz. placeholders can stand for (i) human referents, (ii) non-human animate referents, (iii) inanimate referents, (iv) proper names in addressing.

2.2. Syntactic status of nominal placeholders

As is shown in the previous section, nominal placeholders are usually used instead of nouns when they cannot be easily retrieved at the moment of speech production. The examples given earlier demonstrate that placeholders usually take all necessary nominal morphology, i.e. they are integrated into the syntactic structure and receive case and number morphology required by their syntactic position.

However, an important question is the syntactic status of the placeholders, i.e. whether the placeholder stands for only the head noun or replaces the whole noun phrase. In fact, both possibilities are attested. It seems that whether the placeholder is a lexical or phrasal category depends on the exact moment when production difficulties occur.

Most typically, the placeholders appear when the speaker has a clear idea of what to say next and has started producing a new noun phrase. But having produced a part of the material, e.g. some nominal modifiers, the speaker fails to retrieve the head noun and replaces it with the placeholder. Hence, placeholders standing for a noun can have various nominal dependents, cf. examples from Udi:

The placeholder with a quantifier

(17) bitüm **he-t:ox-o**, beš bitüm mähäl-ox-o ožax
 all **what-NO-PL-DAT** our all part_of_village-PL-DAT sacred_place
 bu-jax.

COP=1PL:POSS

‘In all WHAT... in all our parts of village there are many sacred places.’

The placeholder with a possessive pronoun

(18) ho, mo-t:-oʋ-on k:al-e-ne, o, vi he maja,
yes DEM-NMZ-PL-ERG call=3SG=LV:PRS PTCL your:SG **what** where+3SG:Q
išq:ar?

husband

‘Now, they are calling: “Hey, where is your WHAT... husband?”.’

The placeholder with the numeral sa ‘one’ (functioning like indefinite article)

(19) parč-in-a č:evk:i, sa he-t:-aj boš laχ-i,
cloth-O-DAT take_out-AOR one **what-NO-GEN** inside put_above-AOR

sa p:at:nos-i boš parč-in-a laχ-i...

one tray-GEN inside cloth-O-DAT put_above-AOR

‘Having taken the cloth out, having put it on a WHAT, having put the cloth on a tray...’

However, sometimes speakers experience difficulties already at the moment when they plan what to say next. Hence, they need time to recall not only the word itself, but the entity that is spoken about. Then, placeholders appear instead of the whole noun phrase, cf. the following examples from Udi:

(20) beš ajiz-e sa medsestra he-t:-u-ne taʋ-o,
our village-DAT one doctor **what-NO-DAT=3SG** go-POT
q:onši-n k:oj-a.

neighbour-GEN house-DAT

{Beginning of a story.} ‘One day a doctor in our village goes to WHAT... to her neighbour’s house.’

(21) tac-i he-t:-u p:ap:-at:an, beš k:iož-a ilša ereq:luʋ-a
go-AOR **what-NO-DAT** reach-TEMP our house-DAT close garden-DAT
p:ap:-at:an...

reach-TEMP

‘I went and when I came to WHAT... when I came to the nut-tree garden near our house...’

Finally, placeholders can also be used as general hesitation markers when the speaker does not know what to say and is planning the next portion of discourse. When producing the placeholders in such cases, a speaker has no particular word or constituent in mind, which will

be replaced by the placeholders. Naturally, only the non-animate placeholder *fi* has this function in Agul, which confirms its inclination towards the ‘default’ status, cf.:

- (22) ʔüš-i qaj-na-a ge ha-ge gelhen-d... **fi**,
 night-TMR return:PF-RES-PRS DEM EMPH-DEM [Gelhen-O] **what**
 χalanžer-i-l-as hup:uq'-di.
 Khalanjar-O-SUPER-ELAT Huppuq-LAT
 ‘At night he came back from Gelhen... WHAT, from Khalanjar to Huppuq.’

3. Verbal placeholders

Verbal placeholders are widely used in Udi and Agul instead of a particular verb (alone or with its dependents) when the speaker cannot think of the appropriate word to be used. As a rule, in such cases the morphological properties of the target word (i.e. its inflections) are successfully accessed by the speaker and they appear on the placeholder.

In both languages, verbal placeholders are combinations of a non-human/universal nominal placeholder ‘what’ (resp. *he* in Udi and *fi* in Agul) with the semantically general verb ‘do’.³ The verbs *b-* ‘do’ in Udi and *aq’-* ‘do’ in Agul both have regular inflection, and when used as parts of verbal placeholders they take the necessary verbal morphology.

3.1. Verbal placeholders in Udi

The Udi verbal placeholder is the combination *he-b-* ‘what-do’. In the following three examples *he-b-* occurs in the form of the Perfect *he-b-e*, the Present *he-b-sa*, and the Dative case of the Infinitive *he-b-s-a*.⁴ The first two clauses are finite and contain the personal markers *-tun* ‘3PL’

³ This combination of a nominal part with semantically general lexemes like ‘do’, ‘be, become’ or ‘say’ as light verbs is a typical structure of complex verbs, abundant in Lezgi languages; see the discussion below of whether verbal placeholders in Udi and Agul can be treated as special instances of such complex verbs.

⁴ Note that the Present *he-b-sa* (where *-sa* is the Present marker) and the Dative case of the Infinitive *he-b-s-a* (where *-s* is a phonetically reduced Infinitive marker *-es* and *-a* is the Dative marker) are formally identical. At the

and *-jan* ‘1PL’ on the focussed constituents, which in both cases are adverbial noun phrases — *penec:aun* ‘with a plow’ in (23) and *čapažaven* ‘with a knife for cutting greens’ in (24). The Infinitive in the Dative case is used in (25) as the head of a complement of the verb *burq-* ‘begin’:

- (23) *t:e vaχt:in amdar-χo-n očlal-a bist:un-un, ez-sun-un,*
 DEM time-GEN man-PL-ERG ground-DAT plant+MSD-GEN plough+LV-MSD-GEN
kašI-sun-un därden gele vädä penec:aun-t:un he-b-e...
 dig+LV-MSD-GEN for much period plow-ABL=3PL **what-do-PFT**
äš-b-e.
 work-LV-PFT

‘People of older times in order to plant (crops), to plough and to dig, for a long time WHAT-DID... worked with a plow.’

- (24) *meč:a čapažav-en=jan čIak:... he-b-sa... k:ac:e.*
 nettle-DAT special_knife-ERG=1PL [press] **what-do-PRS** cut-LV:PRS
 {From a culinary recipe.} ‘With a special knife we press... we WHAT-DO, cut the nettle.’

- (25) *aruβ-o aruχ-b-i bur=jan=q-sa he-b-s-a.*
 fire-DAT make_fire-LV-AOR begin=1PL=ST-PRS **what-do-INF-DAT**
 {Describing home-brewing.} ‘We light a fire and begin to WHAT-DO.’

In (23), the speaker is trying to think of the correct lexeme and first uses *he-b-e* ‘what-did’, after which he finds the appropriate word *äš-b-e* ‘worked’.

Another example of finding the correct word can be seen in (24), which illustrates self-repair. In this text the speaker tells about the way of cooking traditional flat cakes with greens (nettle, onions, mint and coriander), and at this point she says about how the filling should be prepared. Speaking about what is done by means of a special knife with the nettle, she first chooses the wrong word *čIak:e* ‘(we) press’, which she does not even fully pronounce. Then she is trying to correct herself and uses the placeholder *he-b-sa* ‘(we) what-do’ in the Present tense, after which the appropriate word *k:ac:e* ‘(we) cut’ is produced.

Finally, in (25) we see the use of a placeholder without the subsequent self-repair. The story is about home-brewing, and before example (25) is uttered, the narrator describes the preparation

same time, clauses headed by the Infinitive never take personal markers, which are always present in the clauses with the Present tense.

of the home-brewing machine and the pan with water where cherry-plums are put. Probably, instead of the placeholder *he-b-s-a* ‘(begin) to do what’, the speaker wanted to say something like ‘to boil water in the pan’, but he stopped here and proceeded with the next phrase (‘The pan slowly begins to boil’).

In the first two examples, verbal placeholders substitute just one word — the verb which the speaker could not think of at the moment. In (23) it is the verb *äš-b-* ‘work’, in (24) it is *kač-p-* ‘cut’. However, in many cases the placeholder stands for a more elaborate description of a situation, including both the verb and its dependents. Cf. (26), taken from a story about a king who decided to stir up enmity between two brothers. The narrator came to the point when the king undertakes the second attempt to cause a quarrel, and at this moment *he-ne-b-sa* ‘(the king) what-does’ anticipated the verbal phrase ‘sends a man’, not just the verb ‘sends’ — this is quite clear from the word order:

(26) me pač:č:aḡ-en p:urum **he-ne-b-sa...** amdar jaq:a-ne-b-sa.

DEM king-ERG again **what=3SG=do-PRS** man send=3SG=LV-PRS

‘And then the king again WHAT-DOES... sends a man (to the younger brother).’

Another example from the same tale shows that while recalling (or choosing the appropriate designation for) the situation to be described, the speaker can even change the polarity of the utterance. In (27) the speaker renders the words of an old woman sent by the king to the younger brother and his wife in order to slander the elder brother. Reproducing her words and telling that the elder brother took the gold, the story-teller first fails to say what else was wrong in the brother’s behavior. At this point, the placeholder *he-ne-b-sa* ‘what-does’ in the affirmative Present form is used. Possible continuations could be ‘...and he deceives you’ or ‘...and he hides (the gold) from you’, but the speaker finally chooses the negative clause ‘...and he does not give you (the gold)’:

(27) neχ=e, kala vič-en q:izil-a eIχ-t:i **he-ne-b-sa...**

say:PRS=3SG big brother-ERG gold-DAT take-LV-AOR **what=3SG=do-PRS**

vaIχ te-ne tašta...

you:PL:DAT NEG=3SG give+PRS

‘She says (to the wife): the elder brother has taken the gold and he WHAT-DOES... does not give (it) to you.’

However, if the negative polarity choice remains unchanged, the negative marker can be expressed only with the placeholder, and not reproduced with the correct lexical form. Thus, in

(28) the clitic complex *te-ne* ‘negation + third singular’ is not repeated when the verb form *lavk:e* ‘put on’ is being retrieved:

(28) beIšI-aun χüjär-en **te-ne** **he-b-e...** var-a bovočal
 in_front_of -ABL girl-ERG NEG=3SG **what-do-PFT** boy-DAT ring
 lavk:e.
 put_on-PFT

{Describing the wedding ceremony.} ‘In older times the bride did not WHAT-DO... put on the wedding-ring on the groom’s finger. (But nowadays they both put rings on each other’s fingers.)’

Examples like (27) and (28) support the idea that the placeholders fill in for any part of the nomination which happens to be inaccessible to the speaker. In the case of verbal placeholders the chunk of temporarily “eluded” information ranges from the verbal lexeme alone (in fact, just the verbal root) to the verb together with grammatical particles (like the negation marker), complements and possibly even adjuncts.

3.2. Verbal placeholders in Agul

The Agul verbal placeholder is the combination of the nominal placeholder *fi* ‘what’ with the verb *aq’-* ‘do’. The first vowel of the verb is often dropped in speech, so the verbal placeholder normally looks like *fi-q’-* ‘what-do’.⁵

The examples of the verbal placeholder use which we give below are similar to those discussed above for Udi. In (29) the Present Habitual form of the placeholder is used, and it anticipates the form of the appropriate lexical verb *χaje* ‘(they) bring’. In (30) the placeholder occurs in the Perfective Converb form marking precedence in time, and *fi-q’una* ‘after having what-done’ is also followed by a more elaborate description of the situation (‘after he restored collective farms’):

(29) aχp:a **fi-q’-a-j-e...** χ-a-j-e guni – xed.
 then **what-do-IPF-CONV-COP** carry-IPF-CONV-COP bread water

⁵ Apart from *aq’-* ‘do’, the dropping of initial vowel is characteristic of a few other frequent verbs, e.g. *av-* ‘say’ and *ic’-* ‘give’. Note also that a lexicalized combination *fi-q’as* also displays this dropping (and consisting of ‘what’ plus the Infinitive of the verb ‘do’) is used as a question word meaning ‘why?’, ‘what for?’.

{Describing the wedding ceremony.} ‘Then they WHAT-DO... bring food (lit. bread and water).’

- (30) aχp:a st:alin-a **fi-q’-u-na...** k:alχuz-ar qaq’-u-na
 after Stalin-ERG **what-do-PF-CONV** collective_farm-PL repair-PF-CONV
 iže x-u-ne aχp:a.
 good become-PF-PFT after

{Speaking about the hard life in the village after the WW2.} ‘Then after Stalin WHAT-DID... restored collective farms (“kolkhozes”), it became better.’

Like in (25) from Udi, in Agul we also have examples when the verbal placeholder remains “suspended” and the narrator fails to find the appropriate description of the situation. Cf. (31) where the placeholder *fi-q’une* ‘what-did’ in the Perfective Past substitutes for something like ‘worked (there)’ — however, the speaker does not specify this and proceeds to subsequent events (‘...and after that I returned here’):

- (31) gal-u zawsk:lad x-u-na, ha-gi-sa-?
 winter_pasture-IN storekeeper become-PF-CONV EMPH-DEM-LOC-IN
fi-q’-u-ne... jeri-muja is-a zun zawsk:lad x-u-na
what-do-PF-PFT seven-eight year-TMR I storekeeper become-PF-CONV
 gi-sa-as qaj-ne zun aχp:a mi-č.
 DEM-LOC-IN:ELAT return:PF-PFT I after DEM-LAT

‘I was a storekeeper on the winter pasture, and there I WHAT-DID... for seven or eight years I was a storekeeper and then I returned here.’

As the next example shows, the situation which is substituted for by a verbal placeholder is not always described by a transitive verb (cf. examples like (29) and (30) above). In both parts of (32) the placeholder *fi-q’aje* ‘what-does’⁶ governs the Ergative case of the demonstrative *mi* ‘this[ERG]’, probably according to the case frame of the verb ‘do’. However, when the speaker provides the full description of the situation, it happens to be denoted by the intransitive verb, and the noun phrase is put in the appropriate case. In the first part of (32), it is the verb *ŋaje* ‘goes’ that governs the Absolutive *me* ‘this’ (referring to the woman, who is the main character of the story). In the second part, the main character is changed, and instead of saying something

⁶ The Present Habitual form is used here as a narrative tense (“historical present”), which is a common phenomenon in Agul.

about the woman the speaker tells about her child, cf. *fat:arxaje gada* ‘(her) son falls down’, with *gada* in the Absolutive again:

- (32) *mi fi-q'-a-j-e... uč-i-n ha-te gada-ra*
 DEM:ERG **what-do-IPF-CONV-COP** REFL-O-GEN EMPH-DEM son=ADD
fa-j ɣ-a-j-e me. (...) aχp:a fi-q'-a-j-e
 APUD:be-CONV go-IPF-CONV-COP DEM after **what-do-IPF-CONV-COP**
mi... nac'-u-ɣ-di š-u-f, fat:arx-a-j-e gada
 DEM:ERG river-O-INTER-LAT go-PF-NMZ fall_out-IPF-CONV-COP son
ha-ge nac'-u-ɣ-di.
 EMPH-DEM river-O-INTER-LAT

‘(Then) she WHAT-DOES... she goes away with her son. (...) And then she WHAT-DOES... after she entered the river, her son falls into that river.’

This example clearly shows that the verbal placeholder can stand not just for a particular verbal lexeme, but for the whole description of a situation, including the verbal phrase with all its dependents, and sometimes even with the main participant.

In a similar manner, the placeholder in the beginning of the utterance in (33) precedes the whole clause, headed by the intransitive verb *šune* ‘went’ and including an adverbial clause and other dependents:

- (33) *aχp:aj fi-q'-u-ne... u, š-u-ne me-wur jarH-a-j tufang*
 then **what-do-PF-PFT** yes go_away-PF-PFT DEM-PL beat-IPF-CONV rifle
ha-te rak:-a-l-di...
 EMPH-DEM door-O-SUPER-LAT

‘And then they WHAT-DID... yes, they went to the doors, firing their rifles...’

Cf. also (34), where the placeholder *fi-q'unaje* has the form of the Resultative Participle modifying the noun *waxt* ‘time’ and is supposed to describe the period by means of referring to some situation which held true at that time. It is not impossible that at the moment she produced the placeholder, the speaker had not yet got a clear idea of what this situation and its participants would be. Ultimately she produces a clause headed not by a regular verb in the Resultative Participle, but by a stative verb *ame* ‘stay inside’ in the (neutral) participle form:

- (34) *fi-q'-u-naje... čun mi-sa-? am-e waxt: e ha-te.*
what-do-PF-PART:RES you:PL DEM-LOC-IN IN:stay-PART time COP EMPH-DEM
 ‘It was when WHAT-DID... it was (lit. is) a time when you still lived here.’

An opposite situation is illustrated by (35). Here the event ('die') and its main participant (a woman named Habaw) are clear from the preceding context and the speaker fails to retrieve an adequate expression and uses the placeholder *fi-q'unajefij* 'what-did' instead of the meaningful verb *k'inajefij* 'died':

(35) qa, k:anešna žabar adad k'i wayχt:una ha-te-ra
 PTCL of_course Jabar uncle die-PF time-TMR EMPH-DEM=ADD
fi-q'-u-naje-f-ij sara.
what-do-PF-PART:RES-NMZ-COP:PST PTCL

'Yes, it's true, at the time when uncle Jabar died she also WHAT-DID, you see.'

3.3. Verbal placeholders and complex verbs

It has been noticed that the structure of verbal placeholders often depends on the morphosyntactic type of the language: while synthetic languages usually choose an affixed dummy root to construct these items (cf. Italian *cosare* from a noun placeholder *cosa* 'thing'), analytical languages prefer compounds of a dummy noun with an auxiliary (cf. Armenian *ban anel*, lit. 'thing do'); see Podlesskaya (2006; this volume). Both Udi and Agul provide examples of the latter strategy: as we have already seen, verbal placeholders in these languages are combinations of the nominal placeholder 'what' (in the morphologically unmarked form) with the general verb 'do' bearing the necessary inflectional morphology.

It is probably not accidental that the structure of verbal placeholders *he-b-* 'what-do' in Udi and *fi-q'* 'what-do' in Agul corresponds to the structure of the most productive morphological class of verbs in these languages, viz. complex verbs. Both in Udi and Agul, as well as in other Lezgian languages, the number of morphologically simplex verbal stems is rather small: it is somewhat in between 50 and 60 in the Nizh dialect of Udi and about 130 in the Huppuq' dialect of Agul.⁷ The

⁷ Derivation by means of locative prefixes, seemingly productive at some earlier stage of these languages, is no longer possible in Udi, where only a thorough morphological and comparative analysis reveals about 50 verbs with lexicalized prefixes. In Agul, prefixal derivation on the synchronic stage is still possible, albeit rather restricted; so far, we have collected about 330 prefixed verbs in the Huppuq' dialect, and it is unlikely that this number will increase more than by a dozen of verbs after additional research. For details, see Maisak & Merdanova (2002) and

number of complex verbs, on the contrary, reaches several hundred, and they form an open class. Such complex verbs consist of a “nominal part” (which can be a noun, an adjective, an adverb or an acategorical bound stem) and a “light verb”, represented by one of the semantically general lexemes like ‘do’, ‘be, become’ or ‘say’. Examples of complex verbs in Udi are *äš-b-* ‘work’ (< *äš* ‘work, job’ + *b-* ‘do’), *χoχ-bak-* ‘become broken’ (< *χoχ* ‘broken’ + *bak-* ‘be, become’) and *cam-p-* ‘write’ (< *cam* ‘writing’ + *p-* ‘say’). In Agul, most complex verbs include ‘do’ or ‘be, become’ as light verbs, cf. *un-aq’-* ‘call’ (< *un* ‘sound, noise’ + *aq’-* ‘do’) and *iže-x-* ‘become good, improve’ (< *iže* ‘good’ + *x-* ‘be, become’).

Whether the verbal placeholders *he-b-* ‘what-do’ in Udi and *fi-q’-* ‘what-do’ in Agul should be treated as such complex verbs, with ‘do’ as the light verb, is not obvious. One reason for this is that the class of complex ‘do’-verbs in these languages is not totally homogeneous. The ‘do’-verbs are normally transitive, that is they govern the agent in the Ergative case. For most verbs, the patient noun phrase is the “incorporated” nominal part like *äš* ‘work, job’ in the Udi verb *äš-b-* ‘work’ or *un* ‘sound’ in the Agul lexeme *un-aq’-* ‘call’. However, some complex verbs have an “external” patient; cf. (25) from Udi, where the verb *aruχ-b-* ‘light fire’ governs the noun phrase *arub-o* headed by the same noun *aruχ* ‘fire’ in the Dative case. This can be considered evidence for a higher degree of lexicalization of verbs like *aruχ-b-*, whose nominal part is no longer perceived as a patient noun phrase (see also Harris 2002: ch.4 for a detailed discussion of Udi complex verbs as single lexical items).

Considered from this point of view, verbal placeholders in Udi and Agul display mixed behavior. On the one hand, they seem to govern the agent noun phrase in the Ergative, which may be attributed to the original case frame of the ‘do’-verb; cf. *mi fi-q’aje* ‘she[ERG] what-does (...goes)’ from Agul in (32). However, as example (35) from Agul demonstrates, the placeholder can be used even in place of an intransitive verb, when the absolutive noun phrase denoting the main participant has been already produced: cf. *hate-ra fi-q’unajefij* ‘she[ABS] also what-did (= died)’. So it would be incorrect to claim that Agul *fi-q’-* ‘what-do’ or Udi *he-b-* ‘what-do’ are transitive verbs as such (the assumption that they are intransitive verbs is not true either). Being genuine placeholders, they can stand for a verb of any syntactic and semantic class.

Maisak (2008). Some discussion of the morphological structure of Udi verbs is also provided in Schulze-Fürhoff (1994) and Harris (2002).

As for the use of the Ergative with the verbal placeholder, it can have an alternative explanation. Production of the Ergative noun phrase in sentences like (32) may possibly reflect the speaker's original intention to use some transitive verb describing the participant's action. In this sense, the Ergative is not necessarily governed by the verb 'do' within the verbal placeholder, but is rather chosen as a default means of expressing the agent.⁸

It is also hard to say whether the verbal placeholders in Udi and Agul undergo morphosyntactic reanalysis and lexicalization. Examples like (24) from Udi, where the placeholder *he-b-sa* 'what-does' co-occurs with the (preceding) patient noun phrase *mečr-a* 'nettle-DAT' probably does not reflect the fact that the component *he* 'what' within the complex *he-b-* 'what-do' is no longer perceived as a patient noun phrase (like in case with *aruχ-b-* 'light fire' discussed above). It is clear that in (24) the speaker has in mind some physical activity like cutting, so *he-b-sa* is just used instead of a transitive verb here, and the internal structure of the placeholder does not seem to play any role.

Another manifestation of lexicalization which analytical verbal placeholders display in some languages is the change of inflectional affixes position in respect to the nominal part. Thus, in Armenian the natural position of inflections (prefixes and suffixes) is on the verbal part of the placeholder *ban anel* 'thing do', i.e. on the verb *anel* 'do' — cf. the Conditional *ban k-anem* 'I

⁸ It is interesting that both in Udi and Agul we find some occurrences of a special "intransitive" verbal placeholder, which includes the verb 'be, become', and not 'do'. There are only few such instances, which we illustrate by (i) from Udi — here the placeholder *he-bak-* 'what-be' in the Jussive form is used anticipating the decausative verb 'become crumpled':

- (i) *bart-a me q:onši he-bej-e-q:a-n... samal bočk-in boš*
 let-IM DEM neighbour **what-be-PFT=JUSS=3SG** a_little barrel-GEN inside
člak:-ec-e-q:a-n.
 become_crumpled-LV-PFT=JUSS=3SG

'Let the neighbour WHAT-DO... become a bit crumpled in the barrel!' {Talking about a man who had got into a big barrel inside a moving lorry.}

It is very likely that the speaker planned to use some intransitive verb here (describing the state of a person sitting in a barrel in a moving car), and this might have caused the use of *bak-* 'be, become'. However, we should emphasize that both in Udi and Agul there are only isolated occurrences of such 'what-become' placeholders.

will thing-do’ or the Prohibitive *ban č^h-anes* ‘do not thing-do!’. However, *ban anel* has undergone considerable morphosyntactic contraction, and it is even possible to attach verbal mood and polarity prefixes to the nominal part, and not to the verb, cf. *k-ban anem* ‘I will thing-do’ or the Prohibitive *č^h-ban anes* ‘do not thing-do!’ (examples from Khurshudian 2006). Such behavior probably reflects the fact that former nominal and verbal parts of the analytical placeholder can be now perceived as an indivisible verbal stem *banan-*.

We do not find examples of this kind in Udi and Agul, although in the latter there exists in principle an opportunity of placing prefixal inflectional markers (negative marker *da-* and reversive marker *qa-*) before the nominal part of a reanalysed complex verb.⁹

4. From placeholders to the simulative construction

It is clear from the previous discussion that both in Udi and Agul placeholders are quite integrated into the grammatical systems. This means, in particular, that placeholders are able to participate in complex syntactic constructions, which may further become fixed. Precisely this kind of development is observed with the simulative plural constructions in Udi.

Following Daniel & Moravcsik (2006), we use the term ‘simulative plural’ as referring to constructions that denote sets of individuals or properties on the basis of their similarity to some focal referent, which gets a special expression within the construction. (36) and (37) illustrate the simulative plural construction in Udi and show that it employs placeholders; (38) is a parallel

⁹ One such verb in the Huppuq’ Agul is *gunt²-x-* ‘gather, assemble (intr.)’ which consists of the verb *x-* ‘become’ and the bound nominal part *gunt²* which is probably related to the word *k²unt²* ‘heap, haycock’ found in other dialects. Although in the default case the prefixes attach to the verb (cf. *qa-xune* ‘became again’), one can find examples like *qa-gunt²-xune* ‘(they) gathered again’ where the reversive prefix is placed before the whole complex *gunt²-x-*. This is not very surprising, as the morpheme *gunt²* is not found as a separate lexical item in Agul, so we are probably dealing here with the reanalysis of *gunt²-x-* as a simplex verbal stem, like we see in the case of Armenian *ban anel*.

example from Agul where this construction is found only occasionally, presumably because of the existence of other means of expressing the same semantics:¹⁰

Udi

- (36) jöni oc:-k:i q:äšäng č:äk=jan-ne, žle he nu=bak-a=ne
 good wash-LV-AOR nice select=1PL=LV:PRS **stone what** NEG=be-SBJ=3SG
 iz boš.

REFL:GEN inside

‘We wash it thoroughly, sort out it, so that stones and the like will not appear inside of it.’

- (37) beš q:oum-χo-n he-t:in sagala kä-j, oša hajzer-i
 our **relative-PL-ERG what-NO-ERG** together eat-AOR then stand_up-AOR
 e=jan-sa.

come=1PL=ST+PRS

‘Our relatives and the like eat together, and then we stand up and go away.’

Agul

- (38) ŋ-a-jde req:ü ča-s har žüre-ji insan-ar, har
 go/come-IPF-PART road-IN we:EXCL-DAT every sort-GEN person-PL every
 žüre-ji **welijat-ar fi-p:ur** ag-u-ne ča-s.

sort-GEN **country-PL what-PL** see-PF-PFT we:EXCL-DAT

‘On our way we saw all sorts of people and also countries and all that.’

Given the rarity of this pattern in Agul, below we concentrate on the Udi simulative construction. In this language, the structure of the simulative construction is as follows: (i) the focal referent is expressed first and then followed with an item based on the stem *he*, (ii) both components of the construction take the syntactically relevant inflection. In (36) we find the simulative referring to the absolutive (here: intransitive subject), which is unmarked, but in (37) both elements are marked for ergative.

The two Udi examples given above already provide good evidence that this construction originates from the placeholder use of pronouns. As one can see from (36), when the construction describes the absolutive argument, we find the unmarked pronominal form *he* rather

¹⁰ The most widely used means of expressing simulative in Agul is the construction with the word *zat*’ or *še?*, both meaning ‘thing’.

than the nominalized form *hik:ä*, just as in placeholder contexts. Further, as (36) demonstrates, like placeholders, pronouns in this construction display neutralization of the animacy feature. In addition, it should be emphasized that both canonical placeholder constructions and similative plural constructions belong to the colloquial register and in fact, the predisposition to their use varies from speaker to speaker. However, the frequency of use of placeholders and similatives in general seems to show some correlation among speakers.

If the last element of the similative construction is indeed a placeholder, what is its role here? In order to answer this question, it makes sense to look at the possible syntactic structure of the similative construction. Below we demonstrate that in fact it displays a number of properties of a coordinating construction.

First, note that each element of the similative construction shows all syntactically relevant inflections. Given the fact that Udi lacks NP-internal concord, this can be counted as evidence for equal status of both parts of this pattern, which implies coordination. Crucially, those inflection features that are not syntactically relevant need not be spread to all elements of the similative construction, which is evidence for their syntactic autonomy, typical for coordination. In (39), for example, we only find plural marking on the focal nominal:

- (39) *zijan-e tast:a q:onš-ox-o he-t:u.*
 harm=3SG give+PRS neighbour-PL-DAT what-NO-DAT
 ‘He harms to neighbours and the like.’

Asyndetic coordination lacking an overt coordinating device is usually not restricted to any syntactic category. Therefore, if the similative construction is indeed an instance of coordination, we can expect that it will be possible not only with nominals but also with verbs. As (40) shows, this expectation is borne out – here we find a verbal similative construction which has a structure parallel to the nominal one:

- (40) *nex=e-ki, ä, jan mema usen jöni jäšäjnš-e-jan,*
 say:PRS=3SG=COMP VOC we so_many year good live+LV-PFT=1PL
he-b-e-jan.
what-do-PFT=1PL
 ‘He tells (himself): “Hey, we lived and so on for so many years”.’

Given the coordination features observed above, we hypothesize that the similative construction in Udi may originate from listing of several information chunks: when a speaker could not formulate the next conjunct, a placeholder could appear in the list. Since conjuncts in coordinating constructions normally belong to the same semantic class, the grammaticalization

of such listing could result in the meaning of similarity. This hypothesis finds some support in the following two examples:

(41) isä sa amdar-en tija k:ä-nesa oc:lalax-p:-e-ne iz
 now one person-ERG there what:NA-INDEF bury-LV-PFT=3SG REFL:GEN
 tojexlu šej-urχo, q:izil-e, mār šej-e, **he-ne**.
 valuable thing-PL gold=3SG such thing=3SG **what=3SG**
 ‘Say, somebody buried something there – his expensive things, gold, such things
 and the like.’

(42) lašIk:oj-χo=al, **he-t:-u=al** beIš-axun be-e-ne p:aI dänä
 wedding-PL:DAT=ADD **what-NO-DAT=ADD** in_front_of-ABL be-PFT=3SG two thing
 sa talik.
 one plate
 ‘Earlier, in weddings and the like... there were two plates.’

In (41), the speaker lists various things buried, apparently experiencing difficulties with formulation of the whole list, as is shown by the wording ‘such thing’ immediately preceding the placeholder. Note that this sentence contains several conjuncts, which also supports the coordination analysis proposed above. In (42) we observe overt bisyndetic coordination with a placeholder, marked with the additive clitic *=al*, again in the context where the speaker attempts to list events but fails. Both examples can be analyzed simultaneously as containing a placeholder and a similative construction and presumably illustrate an intermediate stage in the development of the similative construction.

It should be noted, however, that despite showing coordination features and the presumable coordinating origin, the similative construction cannot be equated to simple coordination. Indeed, the absence of a coordinator in most examples given in this section points to the fact that this construction already represents a somewhat fixed pattern, for nominal coordination in Udi normally does include an overt coordinator. Besides that, the similative construction has well-established semantics which cannot be inferred from the meaning of its conjuncts even if we analyze the pronoun occurring in it as a placeholder (for it does not seem to refer to any difficulties on the side of a speaker anymore). All this is suggestive of the fact that the pattern under discussion is already grammaticalized as a fixed construction and the (former) placeholder in a sense serves here as a grammatical marker of similativity. In this perspective, it is not surprising that occasionally the similative construction takes *phrase marking* contrasting with its coordination features, as illustrated in (43). Here the additive clitic (used in the emphatic/scalar

rather than in the coordination function) is attached to the final element of the construction only (i.e. to the placeholder):

- (43) **äräq:i he-jal eIχ-t:un-d-i, beš bisi oIχalbal-χ-on.**
vodka what=ADD take=1PL=LV-AOR our old hunter-PL-ERG
 ‘They also took vodka and the like, our old hunters.’

We conclude that the similitive construction cannot be analyzed as a kind of placeholder use of pronouns, although it developed from it.

5. Conclusion and further research

In this paper we have described placeholders in two Northeast Caucasian languages, namely Udi and Agul. Both of these languages turned out to show the development of placeholders from interrogative pronouns and the subsequent rise of verbal placeholders based on the same pronominal roots. In addition, Udi displays further evolution, whereby placeholders became a part of the grammaticalized similitive construction. In what follows, we will discuss some issues relating to these data which require further investigation.

First, a hypothesis can be proposed concerning the way interrogatives developed into placeholders. We believe that the “preparatory substitute” function of placeholders stems directly from the special use of interrogative utterances in spontaneous speech, when they are employed not strictly speaking for asking, but for taking time to recall what should be said next. This is especially characteristic of narrative discourse, and in our Udi and Agul text corpora we find many such uses, cf. (44) from Agul as an illustration:

- (44) **αχp:a ad-i-ne sa haramči χup:aq-as, sa dallu mi-št:i gada.**
 then come-PF-PFT one sinner behind-ELAT one mad DEM-ADV:GEN boy
mi-št:i gada ad-i-guna, me gada-ji fi q’-a-j-e?
 DEM-ADV:GEN boy come-PF-TEMP DEM boy-ERG **what do-IPF-CONV-COP**
 ‘Then comes a sinner right after, such a deranged guy. Such guy came, and this

guy WHAT DOES ?’

The question here is not meant to get any information from those who listen to the narrator — rather she addresses the question to herself, trying to remember and put into words the events to be described. In fact, the borderline between “self-addressed questions” and the genuine placeholder use is not very strict, and sometimes we deal with ambiguous and/or intermediate

cases where it is impossible to distinguish between a peculiar interrogative use and a purely placeholder use of an interrogative element: cf. (29) or (33) above.

In this connection the behavior of the Udi interrogative pronoun (and placeholder) *he* in “pseudo-questions” is also of some interest. While *he* is used both as a nominal placeholder and as part of the verbal placeholder *he-b-* ‘what-do’ in its base form, in our corpus we find a few examples when it occurs in the (suppletive) Absolutive case form *hik:ä*, cf. such an example from the tale about the king and two brothers:

- (45) pač:č:ǰ-en **hik:ä** **b-sa-ne...** me kala vič-a χοχ-b-es
king-ERG **what:NA** **do-PRS=3SG** DEM big brother-DAT break-LV-INF
te-ne bak-sa.
NEG=3SG be-PRS

‘Now the king WHAT-DOES... he cannot persuade (lit. cannot break) the elder

brother.’

It is doubtful that this use of *hik:ä b-sa* ‘what does’ can be treated as an instance of the verbal placeholder, as in the latter case the choice of the Absolutive *hik:ä* appears to be unjustified, and the form *he-b-sa* should be expected. On the one hand, this is certainly not an interrogative use proper, as in this case a special third singular clitic *-a* would be used,¹¹ like in (46), and not *-ne*, which we see in (45):

- (46) me čur-en... kä¹² b-es=**a** bak-on?
DEM cow-ERG what:NA do-INF=**3SG:Q** be-POT

‘What this cow can do?’

Thus, we can treat the use of *hik:ä* ‘what[ABS]’ in (45) as another instance of “self-addressed question”, which is already lacking one of the typical morphosyntactic trappings of questions, namely a special person marker.

In either case, the evolution of interrogatives described here confirms the principles governing the evolution of discourse particles. In particular, we observe (i) pragmaticization typical of such development and, further, (ii) semantic bleaching manifested in weakening of the semantic specification of pronouns and representing one of the most important properties of

¹¹ This is a special personal clitic which occurs in questions; it is found in Udi only in the third singular. In all other cases, the default personal clitics are used.

¹² *kä* is a common colloquial reduced form of *hik:ä*.

grammaticalization in general. Still, note that the subsequent rise of the similitive construction may contradict such laws, because in this construction placeholders lose their orientation to discourse and acquire pure grammatical meaning. This could be thought of as an instance of de pragmaticization.

The final issue that deserves consideration concerns the relation between the grammatical properties of placeholders and the grammatical profile of a language. Indeed, it has been acknowledged in discourse studies that formal means used in repair strategies are highly dependent on the morphological and syntactic characteristics of the language (cf. Fox et al. 1996, among others). It seems that our study presents a piece of evidence supporting this claim. In relation to this, first note how remarkable are the similarities between Udi and Agul in what concerns placeholders. Importantly, these similarities cannot be attributed simply to the fact that these languages have a common ancestor: their placeholders are presumably based on different lexical roots and cannot be reconstructed to any common ancestor of theirs. Nor can these similarities be attributed to contact between the two languages: despite the fact that Udi and Agul are genetically related, they are spoken on different sides of the Great Caucasian range and apparently did not have extensive contacts with each other. However, we may suggest tentatively that the link between the genetic and areal closeness of Udi and Agul and the similarities between them is more indirect. Thus, it can be proposed that this closeness motivated structural parallels between Udi and Agul and it is because of these parallels that the two languages developed similar placeholders. To be sure, it could be interesting to establish what structural parallels are relevant for placeholders more precisely. In this respect we can only mention a few rather general features such as highly developed agglutination reflected in the absence of defective paradigms (cf. Merdanova & Daniel 2001 on Agul plural), and the widespread derivation of complex verbs, both factors allowing placeholders to acquire complex morphology and integrate into the grammatical structure. In addition, we suggest that the fact that these languages are left-branching may help to explain why their placeholders can easily combine with modifiers and fill different syntactic positions: in left-branching languages syntactic dependents can appear before the processing difficulties in the head's nomination occur.

Still, all these hypotheses require checking the material of many more languages than those which were investigated here, both related and non-related, leaving a plethora of open ends for additional research.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	person
ABL	ablative case
ADD	additive particle
AOR	aorist
APUD	localization 'near'
COMP	complementizer
CONV	converb
COP	copula
DAT	dative case
DEM	demonstrative pronoun
ELAT	elative case
ERG	ergative case
EXCL	exclusive pronoun
FUT	future
GEN	genitive case
IN	localization 'inside'
INDEF	indefinite pronoun
INF	infinitive
INTER	localization 'in a substance'
IPF	imperfective stem
LAT	lative case
LV	light verb
MSD	masdar
NEG	negation
NMZ	nominalization marker
NA	nominalization marker (absolute case)
NO	nominalization marker (oblique case)
O	oblique marker
PART	participle
PF	perfective stem
PFT	perfect
PL	plural
POST	localization 'behind'
POT	potential future
PRS	present tense
PTCL	particle

Q	question marker
REFL	reflexive
RES	resultative
SBJ	subjunctive
SG	singular
ST	detached part of verbal stem
SUPER	localization 'on'
TEMP	temporal converb
TMR	temporal case
VOC	vocative particle

In the glossing line, the colon is used to indicate cumulative expression; the “+” sign marks non-segmentable morphological processes; clitics are separated by the “=” sign. The glosses for incomplete words are included into square brackets.

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