

Timur Maisak

(Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences)

timur.maisak@gmail.com

Predicate topicalization in East Caucasian languages

1. Form and meaning of predicate topicalization constructions

Predicate topicalization constructions consist of two parts:

- the Topic part contains the predicate that refers to some known and previously mentioned situation (as a rule, expressed by a non-finite form of the verb)
- the Comment part contains the finite form of the same predicate (or pro-verb instead of it)

In the most typical case, the Comment part expresses ‘verum focus’, or ‘polarity focus’, i.e. has focus on the truth value of the proposition. In this case, the situation described is contrasted with another situation (or with some component of the same situation) and a continuation in the form of an adversative clause is needed.

Cf. (1) from AGUL, a language of the Lezgian branch of the East Caucasian family: here, the Topic part is in the form of Infinitive.

- (1) {X: – Did he buy the cow, as was expected? Y:}
kušas gi kušune hiini... (amma xulas faqajindawa).
[take.INF] he.ERG take.PERF cow but home bring.PERF.NEG
‘As for buying, he bought a cow... (but he did not bring it home).’

Ana Bastos (2002: 58-67) suggests that the adversative expectation, or ‘*but*’-effect, appears in such constructions because they are not informative enough, violating the Gricean maxim of quantity: ‘Be informative!’. Vicente (2007: 67) points that it is rather the maxim of manner (‘Be short!’) that is involved: “Since one can answer a question... with just yes or no, there must be a reason to utter a full sentence instead, and that reason is that the speaker intends to convey something extra on top of yes or no”. The adversative implicature is not present if some other element of the Comment part is focused, like in (2) with the focus on the agent, or (3) with the emphasis on negation – both from AGUL.

- (2) *ružas mehemedi e ruḡuf kitab.*
[read.INF] Mehemed.ERG COP read.PTCP book
‘As for reading, it is MEHEMED who has read the book.’

- (3) *lik'as gi hič lik'aftawa.*
 [write.INF] he.ERG at_all write.GENER.NEG
 'As for writing, he does not write (to us) at all.'

Similar constructions with predicate fronting, also known as 'predicate clefts', have been described in a number of languages around the world, e.g. in Portuguese, Spanish, Hungarian, Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, many West African languages and some creoles (cf. Kandybowicz 2008: 80-81 for bibliography). Most of them have been studied in the Minimalist framework.

From the point of view of the correlation between heads of the Topic and the Comment parts, there are two main types of topicalization constructions:

- ❖ predicate fronting with verb repetition: the first instance of the verb is a non-finite form at the left periphery of the clause, and the second is a fully inflected form in the standard position

- (i) [TOP ... Verb_{NON-FINITE}] [COMM ... Verb_{FINITE}]

- ❖ predicate fronting with pro-verb in the Comment: there is no repetition/copying of the same verb, but the supporting verb 'do' is used as the finite predicate

- (ii) [TOP ... Verb_{NON-FINITE}] [COMM ... 'do'_{FINITE}]

Cross-linguistically, the fronted part of 'predicate clefts' can receive either topic or focus interpretation. E.g. in Nupe, a Benue-Congo language of Nigeria, the construction with predicate fronting (here, reduplication is a means of predicate nominalization) has contrastive focus interpretation, cf. (4).

- (4) NUPE (Kandybowicz 2008: 79)

Bi-ba Musa à ba nakàn o.
 RED-cut Musa FUT cut meat FOC

'It is CUTTING that Musa will do to the meat (as opposed to say, *cooking*).'

In East Caucasian languages predicate fronting constructions are used for topicalization, and below we describe such constructions in several languages of the family. (Previously, such constructions have not been studied.) We will look at constructions whose Comment part expresses verum focus, paying attention at:

- the ways of the 'topical' predicate encoding (i.e. the type of non-finite form)
- the ways of the finite predicate encoding (same verb vs. pro-verb)

East Caucasian (Nakh-Daghestanian) languages are spoken in Daghestan, Chechnya, Ingushetiya and some regions of Azerbaijan and Georgia. They have rich phonology and morphology; syntactically, they are left-branching, ergative, with SOV as neutral word order. In this study, 10 of more than 30 languages of the family will be treated.

2. Main formal types of predicate topicalization constructions in East Caucasian languages (with cross-linguistic parallels)

Givón (2001: 254) notes that “[w]hen whole events or states are made topical, they are almost always nominalized... That is, they are made to look morpho-syntactically like nominals”. On the whole this is true for East Caucasian languages, where the following main subtypes of predicate topicalization constructions have been identified (in some languages more than one construction can be used):

- Infinitive in the topic (with verb repetition)
- Verbal noun in the topic (with verb repetition or with pro-verb)
- Verbal stem in the topic (with verb repetition or with pro-verb)
- Case-marked verbal noun in the topic (with verb repetition)

At least for the first two subtypes, cross-linguistic parallels can be demonstrated.

2.1. Infinitive in the topic

Infinitives in East Caucasian languages normally occur as complements to desiderative, manipulative, modal and phasal verbs (like ‘want’, ‘be able’, ‘begin’, ‘finish’, ‘cause’ etc.), in purposive adjuncts and in periphrastic forms with future or debitive meaning. As a rule, they do not inflect for case and number.

‘Topical’ predicate in the form of Infinitive is found in topicalization constructions of Agul (1), Tabassaran (5), Archi (6), Avar (7) and Bezhta (8). The same verb is used in the Comment part. The particles are not obligatory.

(5) TABASSARAN (Kandyk village)

urɣuz urɣura, ama k'ainži Ɂubzradar.

read.INF read.PRS but in_memory stay.PRS.NEG

‘As for reading, he reads (the book), but does not remember anything.’

(6) ARCHI

olmus = č̣i jat q'onq' os:-os orlin, ammo...

read.INF=PTCL this book sometimes read.PRS but

‘As for reading, I sometimes read this book, but...’

(7) AVAR

c'c'alize = ni dicca co-co c'c'alula, amma...

read.INF=PTCL I.ERG sometimes read.PRS but

‘As for reading, I sometimes read (this book), but...’

(8) BEZHTA

qowal = so do huli hoⁿsola? qōs, amma...

read.INF=PTCL I.ERG that sometimes read.PRS but

‘As for reading, I sometimes read it, but...’

The expression of the topicalized predicate by the infinitive is quite common cross-linguistically and is attested e.g. in Russian (9), Spanish (10), Hungarian (11) or Hebrew (12).

(9) RUSSIAN (Abels 2001)

Читать Иван её читает, но ничего не понимает.
read.INF Ivan it.ACC read.PRS but nothing NEG understand.PRS
'Ivan does read it, but he doesn't understand a thing.'

(10) SPANISH (Vicente 2007: 3)

Leer, Juan leyó un libro.
read.INF Juan read.PST.3SG a book
'As for reading, Juan has read a book.'

(11) HUNGARIAN (Vicente 2007: 168)

Elovasni, nem olvasta el a könyvet.
PV.read.INF not read.3SG PV the book
'As for reading, he didn't read the book.'

(12) HEBREW (Landau 2006)

lirkod, Gil lo yirkod ba-xayim.
to-dance Gil not will-dance in-the-life
'As for dancing, Gil will never dance.'

It is usually assumed that the Infinitive appears in such position as a sort of morphologically "default" form which is not specified for tense-aspect or agreement and presents just the lexical semantics of the verb. It is not obvious whether such explanation is adequate enough for East Caucasian languages, as the infinitive in these languages is not the only example of non-finite form which is unmarked with respect to grammatical categories like tense and aspect.

2.2. Verbal noun ('masdar') in the topic

Predicate in the form of verbal noun (also known as 'masdar' in most East Caucasian studies) is found in topicalization constructions of Rutul (13) and Lezgian (14). There are two variants of topicalization constructions with the verbal noun: one includes the repetition of same verb in the Comment part (Rutul), and another includes the 'do' pro-verb (Lezgian).

Semantically East Caucasian 'masdars' are action nominals (in the sense of Коптjevskaja-Tamm 1993), i.e. they have a general meaning of action or process. They inflect for case and number; in this section we look at those cases when verbal noun occurs in the (unmarked) Absolutive case form.

2.2.1. Construction with verb repetition

(13) RUTUL

jirq'in, ha'li jirq'iri, amma k'ibdi qaa'rx'i'ri.
come.MSD Ali come.PST but early go_away.PST
'As for coming, Ali came, but went away soon.'

2.2.2. Construction with 'do'

(14) LEZGIAN

luhun sa zat'ni avunš-t'ani,
say.MSD one nothing do.AOR.NEG-although
am har sa ccüinin řavurda aq'nna.
he every one thing.GEN perception.IN touch.AOR
'As for saying, although he said nothing, he understood everything.'

Both languages possess infinitives as well, so the choice of the Masdar in the topicalization construction should probably have some other explanation than just the "default" value of the form.

Topicalization constructions with the nominalized verb are found e.g. in Korean (with the nominalization marker *-ki*) and Japanese (with the marker *koto*, cf. Martin 2004: 843-844). Note that in both Korean and Japanese topics are marked by specialized topic particles, resp. *-nun* and *-wa*, which is not the case for East Caucasian languages.

(15) KOREAN (Sohn 1994: 148)

- a. *pika o-ki-nun onta*
rain come-NMZ-TOP come.PRS
b. *pika o-ki-nun hanta*
rain come-NMZ-TOP do.PRS
'It is raining (as for raining).'

2.3. Verbal stem in the topic

The form used in the topical part can be just the bare verb stem, whose use is limited to this construction. Two known cases are rather different, however.

2.3.1. Construction with verb repetition

In some Dargwa dialects, the form used in the Topic part is aspectually marked verb stem (cf. *buč'*- 'read.IPF' vs. *belč'*- 'read.PF'). The aspect marking corresponds to one of the finite verb in the Comment. Although many other verb forms are derived from these aspectual stems, in their bare form they are not attested in other contexts. The use of particle = *q'al* is optional.

(16) DARGWA (Khuduts village)

a. *buč'* = *q'al* *buč'unni* *cab*,
read.IPF=PTCL read.IPF.CONV COP
cik'al *hankalgunneku*.

nothing remember.IPF.CONV+COP.NEG

'As for reading, he reads (the book), but does not remember anything.'

b. *rasulli* *belč'* *kniga* *belč'un*, *cik'al* *ƣerɁib*.
Rasul.ERG read.PF book read.AOR nothing NEG+understand.AOR
'As for reading, Rasul read the book, but did not understand anything.'

2.3.2. Construction with 'do'

In Agul, the form used in the Topic part is the bare perfective stem. The corresponding imperfective stem (cf. *ava-* 'say.IPF' vs. *upu-* 'say.PF') cannot be used in such function, even if the aspect value of the finite form is imperfective.

(17) AGUL (Huppuq' village)

a. *upu* *gi* *bat'ar* *gafar* *q'une*, *amma...*
say.PF he.ERG beautiful word.PL do.PERF but

'As for saying, he said very beautiful words, but... (did not do anything)'

b. *upu* *gi* *bat'ar* *gafar* *q'aa*, *amma...*
say.PF he.ERG beautiful word.PL do.PRS but

'As for saying, he says very beautiful words, but... (does not do anything)'

Action nominal (masdar) is also derived from the perfective stem, but has its own marker *-b*, cf. *upu* [say.PF] ~ *upu-b* [say.PF-MSD] '(the action of) saying'. It is not impossible that for some reason the perfective stem is used in this construction instead of the Masdar; then this is the same type of construction as in Lezgian (14).

2.4. Case-marked verbal noun in the topic

Verbal noun in the Dative case is found in topicalization constructions of Lezgian (18) and Udi (19). In these cases, the same verb is used in the Comment part.

(18) LEZGIAN

k'al *q:ačun-iz* *q:ačuna*, *no* *k'oliz* *qɁanš*.
cow take.MSD-DAT take.AOR but home.DAT bring.AOR.NEG

'As for buying a cow, he bought, but didn't bring it home.'

(19) UDI

haq:sun-a *haq:enej* *čura* *genan*, *ama...*
take.MSD-DAT take.PERF.3SG cow.DAT Gena.ERG but

'As for buying, Gena bought a cow, but...'

In Azerbaijani (Turkic language) with which both Udi and Lezgian have been in close contact for centuries, a similar model for predicate topicalization is used; the verb occurs in the Dative form of verbal noun/infinitive in *-maq*.

(20) AZERBAIJANI

Gəl-məy-in-ə **gəldi,** *amma...*
 come-VN-POSS.3SG-DAT come.PST but
 ‘As for coming, he came, but... (went away soon).’

The same is found in closely related Turkish, cf. the ‘dismissal’ adverbial form in *-mAsInA*:

(21) TURKISH (Göksel & Kerslake 2005: 410)

Konuş-ma-sın-a **konuş-acağ** *ım* *da...*
 talk-VN-POSS.3SG-DAT talk-FUT 1SG but
 ‘Yes, I’m going to talk to her, but... (let’s see if she’ll listen.)’

Given that the Azerbaijani influence on Lezgian and (especially) Udi is considerable, the use of Dative can be a direct calque from this language. Otherwise, the Dative can be explained historically by the original use of some Dative-taking verb or postposition like ‘if we look at’ or ‘as for’ (with subsequent ellipsis of this verb or postposition). Cf. also the use of the Dative with the abstract noun denoting quality in the topicalization construction of Rutul:

(22) RUTUL

bit’ra-wa’l-is, *χal* **bit’rad** *ji?i,* *amma lap* *k’a?* *i.*
 beautiful-ABST-DAT house beautiful COP but very small COP
 ‘As for being beautiful, the house is beautiful, but very small.’

Verbal noun in the Genitive is found in the topicalization construction in Icaric Dargwa. Here, the Genitive is governed by the postpositional phrase *HA⁵q’icrib wik’ax:ati* ‘if you want to ask about...’ which can be optionally used in the construction, but usually is omitted. The particle *q’alli* is also optional.

(23) DARGWA (Icaric village)

buč’-ni-la *q’alli* **buč’ata** *cacajnaq:illa,* *behelra...*
 read.IPF-MSD-GEN PTCL read.PRS.1 sometimes however
 ‘As for reading, I read (the book), but...’

3. Several topicalization constructions in a language

LEZGIAN:

Absolutive verbal noun + ‘do’ (14), Dative verbal noun + verb repetition (18)

RUTUL:

Absolutive verbal noun + verb repetition (13), Dative of the topic (22)

Apart from the strategies listed above, the predicate expressed by the complex verb can be topicalized by putting the coverb in the Topical part, while the light verb occurs in its usual position:

- (28) **gunt'** *gi* **aq'une** *pul...*
 <gather> he.ERG do.PERF money
 'As for gathering, he gathered the money... (but did not give it to us).'
- (29) **un** *gis* *wuri* **xaa...**
 sound he.DAT everything become.PRS
 'As for hearing, he hears everything... (but says nothing).'

3.5. Special case 2: Stative verbs

Stative verbs in Agul are the copula *e*, a number of locative predicates like *aa* 'be inside', *qaa* 'be behind; have', *aldea* 'be above, on top', *amea* 'stay, remain inside' etc., and some mental and experience verbs. Being morphologically defective, they do not have the perfective stem, nor the Infinitive form, and they are simplex, not complex verbs; hence, most topicalization strategies do not apply to them.

When used in the topicalization construction, stative verbs occur in the Topic part in the "pseudo-infinitive" form¹ (not used elsewhere) or in the converb form.

- (30) **qaxas** *giq* *pul* **qaa,** *amma...*
 [have.INF] he.POST money have.PRS but
 'He does have money, but... (doesn't want to give us some).'
- (31) **qaj** *giq* *pul* **qaa,** *amma...*
 [have.CONV] he.POST money have.PRS but
 'He does have money, but... (doesn't want to give us some).'

3.6. Special case 3: Non-verbal predicates

The use of (atonic) copula is obligatory in non-verbal predicates. In case of topicalization, the nominal occurs in the Topic part, and the copula in the Comment gets contrastive accent; no repetition is involved.

- (32) *me* *χal* *bat'árf* *e.*
 this house beautiful COP
 'This house is very beautiful.'
- (33) **bat'árf** *me* *é,* *amma* *küčef* *dawa.*
 beautiful this COP but warm COP.NEG
 '(As for being beautiful,) It is beautiful, but it is not warm.'

¹ The use of "pseudo-infinitives" in topicalization constructions has been reported for Hungarian and Yiddish, cf. Vicente 2007: 74-75, 190-192.

4. Parameters of variation for predicate topicalization constructions

- Verbal form used in the Topic
- Verb used in the Comment (same verb vs. pro-verb)
- Categories that the verb in the Topic can express (aspect, tense, voice, negation...)
- The ability of arguments and adjuncts to occur in the Topic ('pied-piping')
- Lexical restrictions on occurrence in the topicalization construction (cf. special groups of verbs like copulas, statives etc.)
- Behavior of non-verbal predicates in the topicalization construction
- Use of particles, their function and obligatoriness

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Solmaz Merdanova for detailed discussion of the Agul data, as well as to many colleagues and native speakers who provided me with examples from various languages: Ayten Babaliyeva (Azerbaijani, Lezgian), Vladislav Dabakov (Udi), Michael Daniel and Bulbul Musaeva (Archi), Dmitry Ganenkov (Khuduts Dargwa, Tabassaran), Zaira Khalilova (Bezhta), Patimat Magomedova (Avar), Svetlana Makhmudova (Rutul), Rasul Mutalov (Icari Dargwa).

Abbreviations

1, 2 – person; ABST – abstract noun; ACC – accusative; CONV – converb; COP – copula; DAT – dative; ERG – ergative; FUT – future; GEN – genitive; GENER – generic present; IN – in-essive; INF – infinitive; IPF – imperfective; MSD – masdar; NEG – negation; NMZ – nominalization; PERF – perfect; PF – perfective; PL – plural; POSS – possessive; POST – post-essive; PRS – present; PST – past; PTCL – particle; PTCP – participle; PV – preverb; SG – singular; TOP – topic marker; VN – verbal noun

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