

The marvels of Tsakhur

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Abstract

Written by a team of Moscow linguists and edited by Aleksandr Kibrik and Jakov Testelec, Aspects of Tsakhur from a Typological Perspective is an excellent and comprehensive grammar. The grammar stands out for the careful attention given to interface phenomena, in particular the morphology-semantics interface of verbal forms, the syntax-semantics interface of clause linkage, and the syntax-semantics-pragmatics interface of information structure. This review article concentrates on several unusual phenomena of Tsakhur structure that are of particular relevance to current linguistic theory.

Keywords: agreement, attribution, case, clause chaining, configurationality, Daghestanian, ergativity, evidentiality, focus, logophor, noun class, pitch accent, quantification, reflexive, Tsakhur, vowel harmony

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1. Introduction

Linguists are accustomed to extensive and detailed grammars of standard languages with an army and a navy, and this is why the publication of an equally detailed grammar of a little known language without a documented history is a significant event in linguistics. The new grammar of Tsakhur, written by a large team of linguists from Moscow State University and edited by Aleksandr Kibrik and Ja. G. Testelec, is definitely an important event for theoretical grammarians, Caucasologists, and field linguists. Tsakhur has been the subject of an earlier description by Wolfgang Schultze (1997), but the present gram-

mar (henceforth abbreviated *ECJa*) expands our knowledge of the language vastly.

Tsakhur belongs to the Nakh-Dagestanian family and is spoken by some 30 to 50 thousand people in Dagestan and Azerbaijan. It has four dialects, Mishlesh (Mišleš), Tsakhur proper, Mikik, and Helmets; the book under review reflects the structure of Mishlesh, which formed the foundation of the new Tsakhur writing system (based on Cyrillic) introduced in the early 1990s. Although some descriptions of Tsakhur are available in Russian (surveyed on pp. 4–5 of *ECJa*), none of them achieves the level of detail and linguistic sophistication found in this excellent book. *ECJa* was produced by a stellar group of linguists, several of whom are well-known for their contributions to general linguistics and the study of languages of the Caucasus: Anastasia Bonx-Osmolovskaja, Marina Čumakina, Nina Dobrušina, Elena Kalinina, Konstantin Kazenin, Aleksandr Kibrik, Sandro Kodzasov, Ekaterina Ljutikova, Timur Majsak, Tat'jana Sosenskaja, Grigorij Strokin, Sergej Tatevosov, Jakov Testelec, and Svetlana Toldova. My only wish is that *ECJa* were available in English because it could then reach a broader audience.

ECJa consists of an introduction and nine chapters: Sound System, Morphology, Verb Forms and Categories, Word Order and Constituency, Morphosyntax, Clause Structure, Sentence Structure, Comparative Constructions, and Discourse Structure. The appendix includes nine narrative texts and a very good Tsakhur-Russian/Russian-Tsakhur dictionary.

2. Phonology

Tsakhur has the following consonantal system, with the omnipresent Dagestani contrast between voiced, voiceless, and ejective stops.¹

(1)	Consonant system					
	b	d	ž	g	G	
	p	t	c	č	k	q
	p'	t'	c'	č'	k'	q
			z	ž	R	
(f)		s	š	x	X	

This already rich system is further enhanced by contrasts in labialization (only with velars and uvulars, again typical of many Dagestani languages; indicated by a subscript circle) and palatalization (with dentals, sibilants, and velars except /ž/; indicated by subscript *j*). In addition, voiceless stops, affricates, and fricatives appear as singletons and as geminates.

1. The sound *f* is found only in recent borrowings from Russian.

Turning to vowels, Dagestanian languages typically have a triangular or quadrangular system (Kibrik & Kodzasov 1990: 315). Tsakhur is unusual in having a triangular system with a high central /i/ rather than a schwa.

- (2) Vowel system
- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| i | i | u |
| | e | o |
| | a | |

The high central vowel is the only one that is not subject to the contrast in length and is used in epenthesis. This suggests that the current system may have developed over the earlier four-vowel system variations which are found in other Lezgian languages.

With respect to pharyngealization, *ECJa* assumes that it is associated with the syllabic vowel and then spreads over the entire word, moving left to right. The evidence for the multiple associations of pharyngeal features is provided by acoustic data (pp. 34–37), the pharyngealized consonants displaying lower pharyngeal gesture (see also Hess 1999). In the dialect described in *ECJa*, front vowels do not have a pharyngealized counterpart, and pharyngealization is blocked in syllables with those vowels.

The description of Tsakhur prosody raises a number of questions for further study (and *ECJa* does acknowledge its preliminary character in this respect). The prosodic properties of nouns and verbs are different. In a nutshell, Tsakhur nouns fall into two prosodic classes, where nouns of class A have a dynamic stress on the final syllable, and nouns of class B show “prominence”, not stress. I could not quite tell what was meant by “prominence”, but this is the English term mentioned in the Russian text. It seems that the phenomenon referred to as prominence is better described as pitch accent, and I will use the latter term below. For example: *čarán* ‘child’ (class A, with stress on the final) – *čalax-an* ‘eagle’ (class B, with high pitch on the final, here indicated by underlining). Even more intriguing is that the domain of application of stress and pitch accent varies with the structural position of the respective noun. There is not enough data to form a solid empirical generalization, but based on the examples on pp. 22–23, it seems that class A nouns MUST bear pitch, and class B nouns MAY bear it when they occupy a structural position outside the verb phrase (ergative and absolutive subject, quantified absolutive object). If pitch assignment does indeed correlate with syntactic constituency, then it is possible that pitch is the property of utterance structure rather than just word classes. Overall, the interaction of stress and pitch in Tsakhur offers an unusual pattern deserving of further study.

Tsakhur verbs also distinguish between stress and pitch accent, and these can co-occur within a single paradigm. Compare the contrast between *órk’ul* ‘jumped’ (perfective, agreement class I, stress) and *opk’ul* ‘jumped’ (perfective, agreement class I, pitch accent).

tive, agreement class III, pitch). Most simple verbs seem to have pitch, not stress. Those verbs that take stress invariably have it on the initial syllable. This pattern probably reflects the diachrony of the language: composite forms consisted of a stressed noun as the first segment and simple verb after it. (*ECJa* proposes a similar account but only for the perfective forms of the verb.) Another piece of evidence in favor of this reanalysis comes from stress-bearing verbs that include proclitic nominals. These nominals, which presumably belong to class A nouns, get reanalyzed as preverbs (pp. 73–77) and preserve the stress.

3. Morphology

Nouns distinguish between a direct stem (as in the absolutive) and an oblique stem, with some nouns also having a separate plural stem. The rules deriving the oblique stem from the direct stem are extremely complex and not entirely clear. It seems that *-i/i* is the default thematic vowel for those nouns whose absolutive stem ends in a consonant or in a homorganic vowel (which is then deleted); the vowel occurs with recently borrowed nouns (e.g., *artist*, *artisti-* ‘actor’, *kilometr*, *kilometri-* ‘kilometer’). The choice between *i* and *ɨ* is determined by vowel harmony. Vowel harmony also requires that nouns whose absolutive stem has *u/o* take thematic *-u* (e.g., *k’uk’*, *k’uk’u-* ‘field’, *pamidor*, *pamidoru-* ‘tomato’). The theme *-a* is used with nouns that have an *a* in the root as well as with some nouns that end in a consonant (e.g., *glaw*, *glawa-* ‘head’, *gaf*, *gafa-* ‘conversation’). Thus, *-i* and *-a* are both possible with nouns whose direct stem ends in a consonant. All other factors being equal, the principles which determine the choice between thematic *-i* and *-a* are not entirely clear; as far as I could tell, the thematic *-a* is more common with monosyllabic nouns.

ECJa notes that the distinction between direct and oblique stems has been gradually disappearing from Tsakhur, which may explain the mind-boggling number of subclasses and the numerous alternations in oblique stems of individual words. Although *ECJa* does not offer a conclusive analysis of oblique stem formation in Tsakhur, it provides ample material for morphologists who choose to develop such an analysis in the Tsakhur-Russian dictionary at the end of the book.

As in most other Dagestani languages, Tsakhur nouns are divided into noun classes. All nouns denoting males belong to class I, names denoting females to class II. Names of animals generally belong to class III (but *aslan* ‘lion’ is class IV); class III also includes a number of inanimates, including most Arabic borrowings. Class IV is comprised mostly of inanimates, including many of the more recent Russian borrowings. Given that inanimates are spread over classes III and IV, a question arises as to what principles determine their class assignment. *ECJa* proposes that referents in class III are construed

as more active than those in class IV (p. 49); for example, *ɣaje* ‘stone’ is in class III and *ɣaje* ‘rock, cliff’ belongs to class IV; *hu^ʃkumat* ‘administration, government’ is class III, and *hu^ʃkumat* ‘state, country’ is in class IV. It is hard to come up with a good measure of activeness, and it is certainly puzzling how this account would handle the assignment of *papriz* ‘pack of cigarettes’ to class III and *papriz* ‘cigarette’ to class IV. Thus, the principles determining assignment to classes III and IV remain unclear. As someone who has worked on class assignment in another Dagestanian language, I certainly have my biases: my own work on Tsez has convinced me that class assignment of inanimates is determined by the form of the noun more than by conceptual characteristics (Polinsky & Jackson 1999; Comrie & Polinsky 1999). However, Tsakhur differs from Tsez in having a much larger group of polysemous lexical items whose different meanings are associated with different noun classes (as in the examples above). This suggests a stronger conceptual basis for class assignment, and the solution to the problem may lie at the intersection of formal cues and semantic criteria.

Tsakhur is a predominantly agglutinating, morphologically ergative language. The single argument of an intransitive verb and the object argument of a transitive verb are coded by the absolutive case (the unmarked case); the subject of a transitive clause is in the ergative case. As in most other languages of the family, the case system is extremely rich, and the best way to describe it is by adopting the distinction between argument cases and spatial cases. The following argument cases are recognized:

(3) Argument (core) cases

CASE	THEMATIC ROLE	GRAMMATICAL FUNCTION
absolutive (referred to as nominative)	varies	intransitive subject, direct object
ergative	agent	transitive subject
dative	experiencer (with psych-verbs), beneficiary, addressee	insufficient information (may be several grammatical functions)
affective	experiencer (with perception verbs)	insufficient information

In addition, Tsakhur has a comitative and a possessive, a rather uncommon case in Dagestanian (p. 352). In many Dagestanian languages, possessor is en-

coded by one of the local cases or by the genitive; in those languages that have both, there is usually a semantic difference, for example in terms of temporary vs. permanent possession as is the case in the Tsezic group.

The local cases receive a parsimonious description once we recognize the contrast between two parameters: orientation (=the position of the reference point) and direction (with respect to the reference point). The intersection of these parameters yields the following system, with the lative clearly based on the allative (only case endings are shown):

(4) Local cases

ORIENTATION	DIRECTION			
	ESSIVE	ELATIVE	ALLATIVE	LATIVE
super: on the surface of the reference point	<i>-lj</i>	<i>-l-e</i>	<i>-l-qa</i>	<i>-l-qa-ma</i>
cont: in contact with the reference point	<i>-kj</i>	<i>-k-e</i>	<i>-k-qa</i>	<i>k-qa-ma</i>
in: inside the reference point	<i>-ē/-a</i>	<i>-ē/-a-nče</i>	<i>-ē/-a-qa</i>	<i>-ē/-a-qa-ma</i>
ad: near the reference point	<i>-sana</i>	<i>-s-e</i>	<i>-s-qa</i>	<i>-s-qa-ma</i>
underspecified	\emptyset	\emptyset	<i>-qa</i>	<i>-qa-ma</i>

The nominal system, however, pales in comparison with the complexity of the verb system. A generalized verb form has the eight slots shown in (5), and (6) gives an example of a verb that has most slots overtly filled.

(5) Positional morphology of an inflected verb

(-4)	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
“weak” class agreement marker	preverb/ non-declinable part	standard class agreement marker	aspect (optional)	root	stem affix ~ aspectual marker	thematic sonorant (“determinant”) <i>-r/-l/-n</i> (in some verbs only)	potentialis marker

- (6) *gi-w-R-a-l-as*
 PREVERB-CLASS-root-ASPECT-POTENTIAL
 ‘could have begun’

The problem which I found insurmountable, as probably did the authors of *ECJa*, has to do with agreement marker alternations (Tables 14, 15, pp. 64–65) and alternations licensed by preverbs. *ECJa* provides us with a comprehensive description of the alternations, but I could not come up with a more predictive way of accounting for them. Presumably, the knowledge of such variation would allow one to distinguish between those alternations that are due to historical processes (thus, less productive) and productive synchronic alternations. Such a distinction would then constitute a first step towards an analysis of the system.

The main verbal categories include mood (realis, potentialis, irrealis), aspect (perfective/imperfective), tense (present, present progressive, aorist, perfect, pluperfect), and evidentiality. Chapter 3 presents a very good description of the relevant verb forms, including detailed information on their distribution. The attention paid to the semantics of individual forms is very impressive; Chapter 3 and then Section 9.7 of Chapter 9 include a detailed usage-based account of verb forms. In Chapter 9, the emphasis is on the use of verb forms in narrative discourse, with the main distinction drawn between foregrounding and backgrounding. Roughly, individual tense forms correspond to the following narrative strategies: discourse foregrounding is achieved through the use of aorist, perfect, and present (the latter in the function of historical present), while imperfect and pluperfect are commonly used for discourse backgrounding. It is noted that the choice between individual tense forms within each function is rather nebulous; it is unlikely that discourse strategies could be subject to categorical rules rather than tendencies.

4. Attributive

A pervasive feature of Tsakhur grammar is the use of the so-called attributive form which is required for almost all modifiers of the lexical head in a noun phrase. Bare modifiers are practically impossible; a few exceptions have to do with borrowed lexical items or modifiers in property denotations. The attributive is formed by adding the suffix *-nV* to oblique noun stems, nominal case forms, predicatives (the class which includes lexical items typically associated with adjectives), numerals, adverbs, wh-words, noun phrases, or even clauses, as in relativization, (7e). (The full list of nominal modifiers marked by the attributive suffix is given on pp. 377–390.) For example:

- (7) a. *dak_j* *dakki-n*
 father father-ATTR
 ‘belonging to/associated with father’
- b. *do* *do-ju-ko-a-n*
 name name-STEM-COM-ATTR
 ‘well-known’ [lit. ‘with a name’]
- c. *mek’u* *mek’u-n*
 be.young young-ATTR
 ‘young’
- d. *ga-d* *ga-d-in*
 outside-CLASS outside-CLASS-ATTR
 ‘located outside’
- e. *Ru* *ali-w-š-u-na* *balkan*
 [2SG.ERG III-buy-PERF-ATTR] horse.ABS.III
 ‘the horse that you bought’

As in some other Dagestanian languages, the attributive shows concord with the head noun: the head noun in the absolutive requires the direct case of the attributive (*-n* + class agreement), the head noun in all other cases requires that the attributive be in the oblique case, *-ni*. For example, in (8a) the head noun is in the absolutive case, and this is reflected in the direct concord form of the attributive; the use of a non-absolutive case in (8b) forces the oblique concord form of the attributive; the layered structure in (8c) shows the lower attributive in the oblique form and the higher one, modifying the absolutive head noun, in the direct form.

- (8) a. *č’ek’-na* *čož*
 elder-ATTR.DIRECT.I brother.ABS.I
 ‘the elder brother’
- b. *č’ek’-ni* *čož-u-s*
 elder-ATTR.OBL brother-OBLS-DATIVE
 ‘to/for the elder brother’
- c. *č’ek’-ni* *čož-u-n*
 [[elder-ATTR.OBL brother-OBLS]-ATTR.DIRECT.IV
 Xaw
 house.ABS.IV
 ‘the elder brother’s house’

The attributive resembles closely the genitive or also the so-called linker found in other languages, for example in Austronesian. In fact, *ECJa* explicitly compares the attributive and the genitive (p. 380) and argues against the identification of the form in question as genitive. The main reason for maintaining

the attributive-genitive distinction is that the Tsakhur form does not encode argument relations at the clause level, while other Dagestanian languages use their genitive to encode argument possessor (see also Boguslavskaja 1995). I did not find this argumentation too convincing: the exact correspondence between case functions in one language and in other languages is rather doubtful to begin with; all other functions of the attributive are very similar to those of the genitive in other Dagestanian languages, and as far as argument encoding is concerned, the attributive encodes argument relations at the phrasal level (e.g., with relational nouns).

An attributive can occur without further case marking, as in (8), in which case it is a subconstituent within a noun phrase, or with further casemarking, as in the following example:

- (9) *žagoara-n-mi* *a-d-i* *balkan-ā-r*
white-ATTR-ABS.PL inanimate.PL-come-PERF horse-PL-ABS.PL
‘White horses came.’ (lit.: ‘The white ones came, of the horses.’)

All attributives, the case-marked ones in particular, can be discontinuous from the noun they are associated with, which is shown in (9). Using independently motivated diagnostics identifying phrasal heads, *ECJa* shows that an attributive without further casemarking is indeed a dependent of an NP head, whereas a case-marked attributive is a phrasal head itself, and the nominal associated with it, is not. This leads *ECJa* to posit the following structures:

- (10) a. Attributive without further case marking
 [NP [AP *white*] *horse*]
 DEPENDENT HEAD
 b. Attributive with further case marking
 [NP [N' [AP *white*]]] [NP *horse*]
 HEAD HEAD

While the structure in (10a) is unproblematic, the second structure is questionable since it predicts, incorrectly, that the two NPs are sisters and that the non-attributive NP (‘horse’ in (10b)) should also behave as a phrasal head. However this nominal does not show properties of a phrasal head, and one is left to wonder if cases like (10b) could be better accounted for as involving a single constituent. In this constituent, the attributive is the head and the noun associated with it a dependent, something along the lines of ‘the horse’s whiteness’, thus:²

- (11) [NP [NP *horse*] [N' [NP [XP *white*]]]]
 DEPENDENT HEAD

2. For a similar approach, see Zwicky (1993), Bouchard (1998), Dimitrova-Vulchanova (2001).

Like all other Dagestani languages, Tsakhur is head-final; if the structure in (11) is correct, then it would predict the order with the head following the dependent, and this order is attested, for instance, in example (101) on p. 320 of *ECJa* ('boot tops those-ATTRIBUTIVE-CASE'). As to all the cases where the case-marked attributive precedes the noun associated with it (and is discontinuous from it) they seem to involve either movement (wh-question formation, topicalization) or plain scrambling which is rampant in Tsakhur. I could not find enough data in the book to actually argue for movement, but if the account sketched here is correct, Tsakhur phrase structure becomes less exotic and there is no need to appeal to non-configurationality or two radically different structures involving attributives.

In addition to the use of the attributive suffix with modifiers within a noun phrase, the same or homophonous suffix can occur with the main predicate of a clause, often interchangeably with a non-affixed predicate, (12a/b), but sometimes with rather clear semantic contrasts, as in (13a/b):³

- (12) a. *dakk-ē dawar gi-w-k'-u*
 father-ERG sheep.ABS.III III-kill-III-PERF
 'The father killed a sheep.'
- b. *dakk-ē dawar gi-w-k'-u-na*
 father-ERG sheep.ABS.III III-kill-III-PERF-"ATTR"
 'The father killed a sheep.'
- (13) a. *parč žad xinne-n gjac'-i*
 jug.ABS DELIMITER water-ERG IV.fill-PERF
 'Only the jug is filled with water.'
- b. *parč žad xinne-n gjac'-i-n*
 jug.ABS DELIMITER water-ERG IV.fill-PERF-"ATTR"
 'The jug got filled by itself.'

According to *ECJa*, the "attributive" form of the finite predicate entails that the event did indeed take place. In addition, it is shown that the use of this predicate form restricts the information structure of the utterance to either sentence focus (in response to 'What happened?') or predicate focus ('What did X do?'); argument focus with the "attributive" predicate is impossible (cf. (13a) where 'the jug' is focus). The sentence focus structure of such utterances is further taken as a sign that they are typicallythetic statements (that is, unstructured descriptions rather than bipartite judgments). To account for these characteristics, *ECJa* proposes that the attributive suffix on finite predicates is indeed

3. In the glosses I am using the label "attributive" (in quotes) for the cases involving co-occurrence with the predicate.

the same one as in subconstituents of noun phrases. As far as I could tell, the main argument in favor of such an account is the similarity in communicative function. Roughly, the attributive subconstituent of a noun phrase encodes “background” information about the main referent, and a clause headed by the attributive form of a finite predicate describes a “background” scene in discourse.

This reasoning seems a bit vague, and there is something perilous in equating two forms on the basis of communicative function while they are structurally quite distinct: the attributive in noun phrases is a modifier, the “attributive” form of the finite predicate is the clausal head. It seems more likely that the two forms are distinct, at least synchronically, given their different structural roles. However, it is quite possible that the verbal form developed from a converb or participle, whose marking by the attributive suffix is consistent with the functions of this suffix observed otherwise. Thus, a possible general function of a linker could conceivably unite them all, at least diachronically. As to the most general synchronic function of the verbal marker *-nV-*, it seems to be that of encoding an event that the speaker can vouch for (as suggested on p. 397), thus some form of evidentiality. If so, Tsakhur can be added to a number of other languages of the area which manifest evidentiality distinctions.

5. Clause structure

Turning to the details of clause structure, Tsakhur is pro-drop, head-final, with relatively free word order at root clause level, and morphologically ergative, with no evidence for split ergativity. As typical of the languages of the family, the predicate agrees with the absolutive element in noun class, and number agreement is often marked by a separate affix. *ECJa* stands out for presenting a very detailed picture of Tsakhur syntax, and close attention is paid to the role that the meaning of lexical classes and subclasses plays in the syntactic structure. I found the discussion of complement-taking verbs in Chapter 7 and the semantic account of quantifiers in Section 9.8 exemplary in that respect. There is a common implicit assumption that detailed semantic descriptions are possible only in a well-known language, usually the researcher’s first; but this grammar is a striking counterexample.

In addition to the ergative construction, Tsakhur also has the so-called affective construction with verbs of perception and psych-verbs, whose experiencer is either in the affective case (14a) or in the dative (14b), and the stimulus is in the absolutive:

- (14) a. *wa-k’le* *jišda miz* *wac’ana diš-de*
 2SG.OBLS-AFF our language.ABS knowing not-INTERR
 ‘You don’t know our language, right?’ (ex. (5), p. 351)

- b. *za-s* ... *wukanna Gaju x̄_oab mašuk'*
 me.OBLS-DAT ... needed twenty five bags
 'I need twenty five bags.' (ex. (6b), p. 352)

The discussion of Dagestanian syntax often involves the issue of whether or not morphological ergativity corresponds to syntactic and/or semantic ergativity. This issue is discussed in detail in Chapters 5 (Section 5.1 analyzes semantic ergativity), 6, and 7. The main argument for semantic ergativity is as follows. The mapping from semantic (thematic) roles to surface cases is transparent and direct. The patient (theme) argument is invariably in the absolutive case, and, depending on whether a two-place predicate is high or low on the transitivity scale, its more active participant is encoded by the ergative case (high transitivity), affective or dative (lower transitivity). The underlying assumption here is that semantic ergativity is more “natural” than other mapping patterns because it maintains the distinction between agent-like and patient-like participants. Based on this assumption, intransitive verbs should also differ in the case marking of their single arguments depending on whether that argument is agent-like (e.g., for verbs *scream*, *jump*) or patient-like (e.g., for verbs *die*, *suffer*). However, Tsakhur makes no distinction between agent-like and patient-like arguments of intransitives, nor does *ECJa* insist on maintaining such a distinction. The argument for semantic ergativity, therefore, only goes so far.

Syntactically, Tsakhur is not ergative, but whether or not it is syntactically accusative, as is the case with many morphologically ergative languages, hinges on the basic issues of Tsakhur clause structure, and primarily on the question of whether or not Tsakhur is configurational or non-configurational. In a non-configurational structure, which is proposed for the ergative, affective, and dative constructions, the sentence structure is flat. This means that all the constituents are sisters and no constituent dominates any other constituent(s). The evidence for non-configurationality comes from adverbial placement and question particle placement (pp. 325–330). An alternative to non-configurationality would be a configurational basic structure with fairly free scrambling. If both arguments and adverbials can scramble, which is the case in Tsakhur, then the free distribution of adverbials is compatible with non-configurationality but doesn't rule out other analyses. Crosslinguistically, adverbials have rather free distribution (Cinque 1998), which makes them a less reliable diagnostic.

The only structure which shows strict asymmetry between the agent and the patient (theme) is the so-called binominative (more accurately, biabsolutive) construction (15) in which the order of the nominal constituents is fixed, and the analytical form of the predicate has the non-finite part agreeing with the patient argument, and the finite part with the agent.

- (15) $a^{\zeta}l\bar{i}$ *Xaw* $alja^{\zeta}-a$ *wo-r-na*
 Ali.I.ABS [house.IV.ABS IV.build-IPF] be-I-“ATTR”
 ‘Ali is building a house.’ (ex. (120), p. 326)

In this construction, the agent in the absolutive case is claimed to be structurally superior to the patient in the absolutive case. The main argument for the hierarchical structure of the binominative construction comes from the fact that the question particle, which otherwise cliticizes to a wh-word, cannot attach to the patient wh-word and must attach to the auxiliary instead. Thus:⁴

- (16) a. *hašu-ne* *Xaw* $alja^{\zeta}-a$ *wo-r-na*
 who.I.ABS-QP house.IV.ABS IV.build-IPF be-I-“ATTR”
 b. **hašu* *Xaw* $alja^{\zeta}-\bar{a}-ne$ *wo-r-na*
 who.I.ABS house.IV.ABS IV.build-IPF-QP be-I-“ATTR”
 ‘Who is building a house?’ (ex. (125a), p. 326)
- (17) a. **a^{\zeta}l\bar{i}* *hižō-ne* $alja^{\zeta}-a$ *wo-r-na*
 Ali.I.ABS what.IV.ABS-QP IV.build-IPF be-I-“ATTR”
 b. $a^{\zeta}l\bar{i}$ *hižo* $alja^{\zeta}-\bar{a}-ne$ *wo-r-na*
 Ali.I.ABS what.IV.ABS IV.build-IPF-QP be-I-“ATTR”
 ‘What is Ali building?’ (ex. (124), p. 326)

If non-configurationality cannot be maintained, then there is some evidence, based on coreferential deletion under clause linking, and clausemate reflexivization (pp. 640–642, 664–665), that Tsakhur is syntactically accusative.

What I just said about reflexivization, though, requires quite a few caveats. The overall data on reflexivization in Tsakhur are completely astonishing, and the discussion of the reflexive (Sections 9.3, 9.4) is one of the most lucid and thorough in the entire grammar. In addition to a compound reflexive, Tsakhur has a monomorphemic reflexive *wuž* ‘self’ which has a wide variety of functions. *wuž* can have a clausemate antecedent, it can be bound across clauses, or it can have a discourse or contextual antecedent. Its most prototypical function seems to be that of a logophoric pronoun, and it seems to combine the properties of an anaphor and a pronoun. *ECJa* argues that the distribution of *wuž* cannot be accounted for under a uniform binding rule. Rather, the main function of *wuž* is to mark an evoked, highly activated discourse referent which appears in an “unexpected” discourse role (lower or higher than expected from the natural flow of discourse). For instance, in (16), the use of *wuž* allows

4. The evidence seems compatible with the analysis suggested but it is not clear how non-configurationality can be proven untenable in this case. Even a non-configurational structure allows for some layered structure, and all the contrast between (16) and (17) shows is that the non-finite verb and the absolutive patient form a constituent.

the speaker to shift the attention from a more highly activated neighbor to the evoked but less contextually salient Rasul:⁵

- (18) *rasul-ni Gonši-ni jič-ē wuž*
 [NP[NP Rasul_i-ATTR neighbor_j-ATTR] sister-ERG] self.I.ABS_{i/*j}
get-u
 I.beat-PERF
 ‘Rasul’s neighbor’s sister beat him (=Rasul, not neighbor) up.’
 (ex. (229), p. 665)

The working hypothesis advanced in *ECJa* is that the main, primary function of *wuž* is that of an emphatic expression, rather than an anaphor. This emphatic function assimilates *wuž* to logophors and also suggests parallels with the Turkish *kendisi* (Enç 1986, 1989),⁶ some uses of the Japanese *zibun* (Iida 1996), and, closer to Tsakhur, logophors in the Nakh languages Chechen and Ingush (Nichols 2001).

6. Clause linkage

Clause linkage is another area where Tsakhur presents a challenge to traditional grammatical notions. As in other Dagestani languages, Tsakhur makes extensive use of clause chaining, where a series of non-finite clauses, headed by a participle, gerund, or converb, adjoin to a single finite clause. Since finite and non-finite forms display considerable homonymy, the finite clause is often marked explicitly by an epistemic particle which can appear on the predicate or some other constituent. For example (the non-finite forms are shown in bold-face):

- (19) *qīra sawk’imm ī rusni darsībišilqa,*
 then moved.over Russian lessons
man;keb in;aqā qabīmmī gēb silnejšie,
 then here arrived very strongest
lap hašen gužnan gužnan maľ^δallimāra qabī,
 very this strength strength teachers came
anna wasilwewna-nī worna in;ā maľ^δallim
 Anna Vasilievna-EPISTEMIC be.FINITE here teacher
 ‘Then we moved over to instruction in Russian, and then very good teachers arrived here, such good, excellent teachers came, Anna Vasilievna was a teacher here.’ (Text 5, p. 828)

5. From the standpoint of standard binding, ‘Rasul’ in (18) is an unacceptable antecedent because it is deeply embedded in the ergative noun phrase.

6. Enç (1989) is cited on p. 669.

Coordination and subordination differ with respect to island constraints, center embedding, gapping, and binding (Hankamer 1979, Goodall 1987, van Oirsouw 1987, Johannessen 1998). Tsakhur clause linkage brings about a striking conclusion: one and the same structure, including structures headed by a certain conjunction, may show either all the properties of a coordinate structure or all the properties of a subordinate structure, depending on the degree of coherence between the propositions expressed by individual clauses.⁷ The generalization seems to be as follows: the tighter the coherence between the propositions, the more likely the embedded structure. For instance, cause/effect or temporal sequencing give rise to embedded structures, while their absence facilitates the use of a coordinate structure. This result meshes with other recent findings showing that the constraints imposed by linguistic form (syntactic constraints in particular) are sensitive to the mappings from conceptual structure (Culicover & Jackendoff 1997, 1999; Kehler 2001). In this particular case, we may be dealing with an instance of establishing coherence at the conceptual structure level and mapping it, via a semantic representation, into the more appropriate syntactic structure.

7. Focus

The careful analysis of the interface of syntax and semantics in the discussion of clause linkage is not an isolated instance. *ECJa* stands out for the attention paid to interface phenomena, for example, the interface of morphology and semantics in the analysis of verbal forms, or the interface of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in the analysis of information structural categories, particularly focus.

As far as I could tell, focus is generally understood as the term that replaces a *wh*-variable in a well-formed response to a *wh*-question, although in some instances its interpretation is vaguer, as “new information”. Simplifying matters slightly, a focused constituent in Tsakhur forms a predication with the auxiliary *wo-* ‘be’, which marks the right edge of the focus constituent. For example:

- (20) a. $a^s\bar{l}i$ $a-ri$ $wo-r$
 Ali.I.ABS [FOCUS I-come.PERF be-I]
 ‘Ali came.’ (ex. (1), p. 583)

7. It is important to distinguish the phenomenon of principled choice between coordination and subordination from the mixed category “co-subordination” where a structure combines some properties of coordination and some properties of subordination regardless of its semantic content (Foley & Van Valin 1984). Some useful discussion of the difference between co-subordination and the approach described here is given on p. 346 of *ECJa*.

- b. $a^{\text{f}}\bar{l}\bar{i}$ *wo-r a-ri*
 [FOCUS Ali.I.ABS be-I] I-come.PERF
 ‘ALI came.’ (ex. (2), p. 583)

The auxiliary cannot be doubled, thus (21) is ungrammatical, and the verb ‘come’ has to appear in a non-finite form.

- (21) $*a^{\text{f}}\bar{l}\bar{i}$ *wo-r a-ri wo-r*
 Ali.I.ABS be-I I-come.PERF be-I

On the assumption that a single clause cannot express more than one structural focus, the ungrammaticality of (21) further supports the generalization that a focused constituent followed by *wo-* constitutes the syntactic predicate phrase, as is typical of cleft constructions. Unlike better-known cleft constructions, the Tsakhur version seems to allow rather free word order: along with (20b), we find (22).

- (22) *qari rasul-o-r*
 I.come.PERF Rasul.I-be-I
 ‘RASUL came.’ (ex. (45), p. 600)

The range of constituents that can be focused in such a way is amazingly broad, and includes subconstituents of noun phrases (23) and constituents of adjunct clauses (24), for example:

- (23) *rasul jizdi dostuni wo-r balkan-u-k_oa]*
 Rasul.ABS.I [NP [NP my friend.OBL] be-I horse-OBL-COM]
qari
 arrive.PERF
 ‘Rasul arrived on MY FRIEND’S horse.’ (lit.: ‘It is my friend whose horse Rasul arrived on.’)
- (24) *rasul fāt’imat-o-r a-r-īnGa^f a-rk’in*
 Rasul.ABS.I Fatima.II-be-II II-come-when I-leave.PERF
 ‘When FATIMA came, Rasul left.’ (lit.: ‘It was Fatima that, when arrived, Rasul left’) (ex. (40b), p. 598)

Unfortunately, there is no complete paradigm for focus constructions, so it is hard to tell what is going on. In particular, there is not much evidence concerning the focusing of constituents in complement clauses. The examples involving sentential complements (pp. 596–597) are all infinitivals, thus they may all represent reduced complements (Clause Union). Despite these shortcomings, the description of focus provides future researchers with valuable empirical material.

8. Semantics and pragmatics

ECJa includes several detailed descriptions of lexical categories, and the description of particles (Sections 2.9, 9.2, 9.6) is particularly impressive. Identifying and establishing an exhaustive list of particles is a complicated task, and *ECJa* goes well beyond that. For each particle, there is a detailed account of its distribution (“domain” in the terminology used in *ECJa*), its lexical semantics, and, for sentential particles, of the pragmatic function that they play in a sentence and in discourse. For example, Section 9.6 provides a detailed account of the uses and interpretations of the particles *jī* and *nī*. Each particle can be used in a wide range of contexts which are carefully classified and distinguished from one another. Despite this variety, each particle receives a uniform interpretation which subsumes all its distributions. It is argued that the particle *jī* marks factive propositions that are currently valid, whereas the main function of *nī* is to mark background (“retrospective”) factive propositions. Similarly, in Section 9.2, the discourse particle that coincides with a noun class marker is first shown to have a large variety of interpretations (‘also’, ‘still’, ‘indeed’, ‘even’, ‘really’) which are then reduced to a single function: the particle indicates that the proposition in question is connected to the preceding discourse but adds some “unexpected” information which does not follow from what has just been said. In my opinion, the description of sentential particles is particularly useful for future studies of other languages because it establishes the range of diagnostic contexts needed to identify the meaning and functions of such expressions.

The fine-grained semantic and pragmatic analysis is also extended to quantified and indefinite expressions. Quantifiers are based on interrogative pronouns and are organized in three series: Wh-*mi*, Wh-*žad*, and Wh-*xed*. At first blush, the *-mi* series is identified with prototypical existential quantification, the *-žad* series corresponds to negative polarity items,⁸ and the *-xed* series is more mixed, expressing non-specific and free choice quantification. The overall semantics of quantifiers is best captured using a semantic map as given in Figure 1 that summarizes the discussion in Section 9.8.

9. Texts

In addition to the detailed grammatical description, *ECJa* includes nine texts illustrating different genres, from narrative to poetry. My favorite is the story

8. In Section 2.9.3.3.2, *žad* is identified as a restrictive particle, possibly a delimiter with a focusing function. Crosslinguistically, the formation of negative polarity items from wh-words and a focus marker is rather common (Lahiri 1998; Tsimplī & Roussou 1996; Haspelmath 1997; Giannakidou 1998). It is also common for other Nakh-Dagestani languages, for example Archi (Kibrik et al. 1977), Tsez (Comrie & Polinsky, to appear), Chechen and Ingush (Jeff Good, pers. comm.).

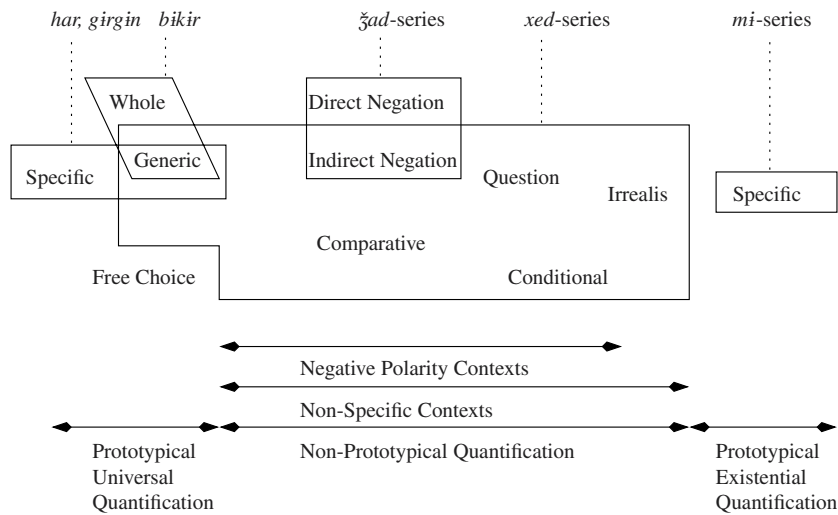


Figure 1. *Universal and indefinite expressions in Tsakhur: Semantic map (ECJa, p. 745).*

about the notorious thief Ibrahim Pasha who goes into a shoe store, gets the saleswoman to bring him a couple of pairs to try, and while she is getting them, steals all her sales money. When the poor woman is tried for theft in court, Ibrahim Pasha goes into court and tells everyone present that she is innocent. He then takes everyone to the shoe store for a re-enactment of the theft. As they are watching the re-enactment, he disappears with now twice-stolen money. The judge, the marshals, the woman herself stay “as if water had been poured all over them”. When all is said and done by grammarians, there is still plenty of fun work left for students of folklore and metaphor.

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Abbreviations: ABS absolutive, AFF affective, ATTR attributive, CLASS class marker, COM comitative, DAT dative, ERG ergative, IPF imperfective, INTERR interrogative, OBL oblique, OBLS oblique stem, PERF perfective, QP question particle. Roman numerals in the glosses indicate noun class.

The transcription symbols used in the examples follow the system adopted in the volume under review. Glosses are occasionally simplified for expository purposes.

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