

Conditional and Other Functions of Forms in /-za(.)_r/ in Abkhaz

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Though only a small area of the tense-forms set out below will be discussed in what follows, it will be useful for those unfamiliar with the Abkhaz verbal system to see at a glance how the finite vs non-finite patterning works¹.

1.

Finite vs Non-finite Indicative tense-forms in Abkhaz

Dynamic Group I Tenses

	'stand up'		'not stand up'	
	Finite	Non-finite	Finite	Non-finite
Pres	s.'gəla.wa.(j)t'	jə.'gəla.wa	s.'gəla.wa.m	'jə.m.gəla.wa
Aor	s.'gəla.ø.jt'	jə.'gəla.ø	sə.m.'gəla.ø.jt'	'jə.m.gəla.ø
Fut I	s.'gəla.p'	jə.'gəla.ra/ə	s.'gəla.rə.m	'jə.m.gəla.ra/ə
Fut II	s.'gəla.ʂ.t'	jə.'gəla.ʂa	s.'gəla.ʂa.m	'jə.m.gəla.ʂa
Perf	s.'gəla.χʌ.jt'	jə.'gəla.χʌ.w	sə.m.'gəla.ts(.t')	'jə.m.gəla.χʌ.w
		= jə.'gəla.χʌ(.ts)//		= 'jə.m.gəla.χʌ(.ts)//
		jə.'gəla.ts		'jə.m.gəla.ts

¹Root-final /-a/ and /-j/ of the Finite suffix often jointly drop, giving here [sgəlt']. The Present serves as a general Future, whilst the Future I suggests action following fulfilment of some condition, e.g.

'a.mra.glə 'ə.tə^wa.za(.)_r, sa(.)_r.'glə 'sə.tə^wa.p'
the.sun.even it.sleep[-STAT].if I.too I.sleep.FUTI-DYN

'If even the sun is sleeping, then I too shall go to sleep'

or, with 1st person subject (and often post-radical /-la/), conveys an exhortation; the Future II often suggests obligation 'that which should happen', the Conditional II being 'that which should have happened'. Besides being a progressive past, the Imperfect is also used for 'would VERB/would have VERBed' (contexts in which the Conditional I and II are also found, with appropriate nuances). The Past Indefinite clearly fits the morphological pattern for Group II tenses, and its Non-Finite forms are semantically equal to those of the Aorist (= Simple Past), but, as the Finite forms need to be followed by another (Finite) past tense, they are functionally equivalent to a Non-Finite. The Dynamic Perfects and Pluperfects containing the element /-ts(-)/ imply repetition of the activity. Abaza prefers the increment /-z.la-/ to /-z(.)_a:-/ to derive Dynamic tenses for Statives (Lomtadidze 1944.143). Lomtadidze views the elements following the fricative in these increments as durative markers, equating the /-la/ in Abaza with the Habitual aspect suffix. But, since this same aspectual marker exists in Abkhaz, whereas the extension contains /-a:/, perhaps we should rather look to the root-extensions, which in both dialects are /-la/ and /-a:/ and which are linked to the marking of directionality of the verbal action, as the source for these elements, Abkhaz selecting the latter, Abaza the former.

Dynamic Group II Tenses

	Finite	Non-finite	Finite	Non-finite
Imperf	s.'gəla.wa.n	jə.'gəl.a.wa.z	s.'gəla.wa.mə.z.t'	'jə.m.gəla.wa.z
Past Indef	s.'gəla.ø.n	jə.'gəla.ø.z	sə.m.'gəla.ø.z.t'	'jə.m.gəla.ø.z
Condit I	s.'gəla.rə.n	jə.'gəla.rə.z	s.'gəla.rə.mə.z.t'	'jə.m.gəla.rə.z
Condit II	s.'gəla.ʂa.n	jə.'gəla.ʂa.z	s.'gəla.ʂa.mə.z.t'	'jə.m.gəla.ʂa.z
Plup	s.'gəla.χ ¹ a.n	jə.'gəla.χ ¹ a.z// jə.'gəla.tsə.z	sə.m.'gəla.tsə.z.t'	'jə.m.gəla.χ ¹ a.(tsə.)z// 'jə.m.gəla.tsə.z

Stative Pattern

	'be standing'		'not be standing'	
	Finite	Non-finite	Finite	Non-finite
Pres	s.'gəla.w.p'	jə.'gəla.w	s.'gəla.m	jə.'gəla.m
Past	s.'gəla.n	jə.'gəla.z	s.'gəla.mə.z.t'	jə.'gəla.mə.z
[Perf	--	jə.'gəla.ts	--	'jə.m.gəla.ts]

Derived Stative Pattern

Def Fut	s.'gəla.z.a:.wa.jt'	'jə.gəla.z.a:.wa	s.'gəla.z.a:.wa.m	'jə.gəla.m.z.a:.wa
Fut I	s.'gəla.z.a:.p'	'jə.gəla.z.a:.ra	s.'gəla.z.a:.rə.m	'jə.gəla.m.z.a:.ra
Fut II	s.'gəla.z.a:.ʂ.t'	'jə.gəla.z.a:.ʂa	s.'gəla.z.a:.ʂa.m	'jə.gəla.m.z.a:.ʂa
Condit I	s.'gəla.z.a:.rə.n	'jə.gəla.z.a:.rə.z	s.'gəla.z.a:.rə.mə.z.t'	'jə.gəla.m.z.a:.rə.z

Anyone coming from an Indo-European background might expect that to produce the protasis within a conditional construction the appropriate finite tense/mood-form would be selected in association with a marker of conditionality after such patterns for future reference in the protasis as:

2. English

X comes => *If X comes, I shall leave* (with General Present Indicative used for reference to future time)

3. Russian

там не буду 'I shall not be there' => Если там не буду, подажди меня 'If I am not there, wait for me' (with Future Indicative for future reference)

4. Ancient Greek

τοῦτο μὴ πράξῃ 'Let X not do this' => εἰ τοῦτο μὴ πράξῃ, ἀμαρτήσεται 'If X doesn't do this, X will be wrong' (with Aorist Subjunctive for future reference)

5. Latin

veneris 'you will have come' => si in forum mecum veneris, Ciceronem audies 'If you come to the forum with me, you'll hear Cicero' (with Future Perfect Indicative for future reference)

OR

dices 'you will say' => si id dices, errabis 'If you say that, you'll be wrong' (with Future Indicative for future reference).

The different selection of tenses and moods across the languages is, of course, interesting but not what concerns us here; the point is that in these languages finite verb-forms serve to form protases. But what do we find, if we turn to (real/vivid/immediate) protases in Abkhaz? Consider some examples:

6. [a.]'ajma: tʃ'əts ø.b.'z.a:s.χ^Wa.wa.jt', b.'laɟʃ^Wa
 ART.shoe new it.you-FEM.for.PREV.I.buy.DYN.FIN[-PRES] your-FEM.
 behaviour
 ø.bə.r.'bzəjə.r, bə.m.'tə^Wəwa.r tsas
 it.you-FEM.CAUS.good.if you-FEM.not.cry.if deliberately
 'I'll buy you new shoes, if you improve your behaviour [and] don't cry
 deliberately'

which illustrates protasis-formation with future reference for Dynamic verbs, the relevant converb resulting from associating the verb-root with the formant /-r/. This coupling, the commonest form for protases in Abkhaz, can also be used for general time-reference, as in:

7. wə.p'rə ø.s.ħ^Wa.r.'glə, jə.pər.dza.'wa.m
you-MASC.fly[-IMPER] it.I.say.if.even it.fly.EMPH.DYN.not[-PRES-FIN]
'Even if I say "Fly away!", it doesn't fly away at all'

Rather surprisingly, perhaps, this same patterning is not unknown even when the condition is of the vague (unreal/remote) variety, as in this example with past reference:

8. a.tʃa'da ø.an.'wə.ħ^Wa.wa.z, ja(.)'ra
the.donkey it.when.you-MASC.entreat.DYN.NON-FIN[-IMPERF] it
'j.a.k^Wə.z [a.]'ajdara 'a.bz̥a.k'
which.it.on.NON-FIN[-STAT-PAST] the.load its.half.one
ø.'a:.[a.]mə.w.da.r, a'rəj 'w.a.k^W.j^Wa.wa.zə.w
it.PREV.it.from.you-MASC.lift.if this you-MASC.it.on.fall.DYN.NON-
FIN[-IMPERF].QU
'If you had lifted off it half the load which was on top of it, when the donkey was
imploring you, would you have fallen into this mess?

where one might have expected the compound suffix /-z(.)t(.)g]ə/² that is typical of vague protases to give here /ø.'a:.[a.]mə.w.da.z(.)t(.)g]ə/.

The next example, which is from a tale relating a dispute between a frog and toad, exemplifies vivid protases with present reference built on both Stative and Dynamic verb-forms:

9. 'sə.la.k^W_a ø(.)ø(.)'tə(.)dʒdʒ(.)a:(.)wa 'sə.q'a.za(.)r, ..., s.tʃə.s.k^W'aba.'wa.za(.),r,
my.eye.PL flashing I.be.if my.self.I.bathe.DYN.if

sə.'bʒə a'k'au(.)h^Wa jə.ga.'wa.za(.)r, wəj a.'w[a].a:
 my.voice booming it.echo.DYN.if it ART.person.PL
 ø.a.za.dzəry.'wa.za(.)r, nas wa(.)'ra 'wə.la.k^Wa
 they.it.for.listen.DYN.if then you-MASC your-MASC.eye.PL
 ø.wə.za.χ.t'.dza.'wa.m
 them.you-MASC.POT.PREV.open.EMPH.DYN.not[-PRES-FIN]

'If I [sc. the frog] I am such that my eyes flash wide, if I am washing myself, if
 my voice is booming out, if people are listening to it, then you [sc. the toad] can't
 open your eyes at all!'

Here we see that the protasis-formant is the complex /-za(.)r/, suffixed direct to the root
 for Stative verbs but to the Dynamic suffix itself for Dynamic verbs.

To exemplify a vivid past protasis formed from a Dynamic verb, we have:

10. a.'g^Wər ø.wə.'ba.za(.)r, wə.'kl'atʂ' 'a.pχ^la
 the.needle it.you-MASC.see.if your-MASC.shirt its.front
 'j.a.la.ts'a.ø.nə jə.z.a:.w.m.'ga.ø.j
 it.it.in.put.PAST.ABS it.why.PREV.you-MASC.not.bring.PAST[-NON-FIN].QU
 'If you saw the needle [sc. as you did], why didn't you bring it, having fixed it in
 the front of your shirt?'

with /-za(.)r/ following the root. Since this is the pattern which with a Stative verb
 produces (as seen above in 9) a vivid protasis with present reference, the question arises
 as to how vivid past protases are formed for Statives, and the answer is that /-z(.)t(.)g^lə/,
 the typically vague formant, follows the root, so that out of context such a protasis is 3-
 ways ambiguous, e.g.

11. 'sə.q'a.z(.)t(.)g^lə
 (a) vivid past force ('If I was [e.g. here, then I wasn't there]');
 (b) vague present force ('If I were [e.g. there, then I would not be here]');
 (c) vague past reference ('If I had been [e.g. here, I would have seen the film]')

12. jə.z.'la.w.dər.wa.j wa(.)'ra,
 it.which.by.you-MASC.know.DYN[-NON-FIN-PRES].what? you-MASC
 jə.w.m.a(.)'ħa.(χ^jla.)ts.za(.)r / jə.w.m.a(.)'ħa.χ^jla.(ts.)za(.)r
 it.you-MASC.not.hear.PERF.PERF.if
 ts'ə(.).s.k' a.b'zə, wə.tə^wa.[a.]la.χa.'wa.za(.)r
 bird.a its.sound you-MASC.sleep.it.in.become.DYN.if
 jas.ʃə'zə
 every.morning
 'How do you know it, if you have not (yet) heard the sound of a bird (and)
 turn into a sleepy-head every morning?'

A protasis formed by /-za(.)r/ can stand alone to form a yes-no question, the verb's stressed syllable carrying a high falling pitch followed by a rising one on the final syllable, e.g.

13. a.'tʃa.jʷ ø.jʷ.ta'χə.zá(.)r
the.bread.cheese it.you-PL.want.if
'Do you want cheese-bread/khach'ap'uri?'

14. a'ɾəj ø.ɟʷ.fɑ.r
 this it.you-PL.eat.if
 'You are going to eat this, I hope'

A protasis in /-za(.)r/ with past reference can serve as an expressive equivalent to temporal structures signifying 'when; as soon as', e.g.

- These interrogative and temporal usages can reasonably be interpreted as extensions of the basic conditional function, the temporal perhaps developing from the interrogative, given that in both Mingrelian and Georgian we find parallel extensions of an interrogative structure into a temporal, e.g. (from Q'ipshidze's 1914 Text XXII)

- which can be rendered into Georgian (as it was by Danelia & Tsanova 1991.41) as:

- 7

Mingrelian utilising its yes-no question formation (with suffix /-ɔ/), whereas Georgian prefers its construction for alternative questions (in /tu ara/).

But is it always the case that constructions containing protasis-type structures can be viewed as contextual developments of actual protases? In an example like:

18. 'j.aj(.)Ɂlə.w.p' 'bzəja sə.z.ba.'wa
 it.better.STAT.FIN[-PRES] good me.who.see.DYN[-NON-FIN-PRES]
 a(.)'dʒ^Wə jə.'f^Wəra sə.n.ə.'ta.la.r ... a.'w[a].a: s.χə
 one-HUM his.satchel I.PREV.it.in.go.?if the.person.PL my.head/self
 ø.d.'sə.r.χ^Wa.la.r
 it.them.I.CAUS.help.HAB.?if

'It's better if/that I [sc. a child's misused book] find a place in the satchel of someone who loves me [and] make myself useful to people on a regular basis' one can translate the relevant sequence into English either as a conditional or as a complement. And, indeed, such sequences may have facilitated the passage of protases into complements, and 'converb' may be the most appropriate gloss for the formant in such cases³. Consider also the next example where the protasis/complement is dependent on a postposition:

- 18a. a.'tʃə.k^Wəʒa a.k^W'a'dər.tʃapa ø.'a.k^W.ts'a.nə
 the.horse.dancing the.saddle.ornate it.it.on.place.ABS[-STAT-PRES]
 jə.'sə.w.ta.r [a.]'aj(.)ħa s.[a.]'aj(.)g^Wə(.)r(.)Ɂlə.ə.jt'
 it.me.you-MASC.give.if it.more-than I.it.rejoice-at.PAST.FIN[-AOR]
 'I took more pleasure from it than if you'd given me a prancing horse fully

³A temporal usage of protasis-forms in /-za(.)r/ results from their employment as (subject-)complement to the sequences /ø.a:.'χə.s/ or /ø.na.'χə.s/, which in origin are past absolute verb-forms meaning '(it) having passed over', though synchronically they are probably best treated as temporal postpositions meaning 'since', e.g.

a'r(.)a ħa.'t^Wa.za(.)r ø.a:.'χə.s yə.'sa:t.k' ø.ts'.wa.jt'
 here we.sit(-down).CONV it.hither.over.pass[=since] 2.hour.one it.pass.DYN.FIN[-PRES]
 'It's two hours since we (a) sat down, (b) we have been sitting here'
 where reading (a) implies the Dynamic /ħa.'t^Wa.ə.jt'/ 'we sat down', whereas reading (b) implies the Stative /ħa.'t^Wa.w.p'/ 'we are sitting'.

caparisoned'

where we see a protasis/complement in /-r/ alone referring to an unfulfilled past action (viz. a vague condition). But perhaps one should not seek to derive the complement-function from the protasis-function, as not all protasis-type complements can be so easily linked to a condition. Consider the following:

19. s.tsa.wa.jt' a.'χ^Wətj' 'baħtja.[a.a]χl' 's.a.g.χa.r
I.go.DYN.FIN[-PRES] the.child garden.it.to I.it.lack.become.CONV
ø.q'a.la.'wa.m. 'sə.kl'andʒa 'də.tɕ^Wa.w.p',
it.PREV.become.DYN.not[-FIN-PRES] my.doll she⁴.sleep.STAT.FIN[-
PRES]
də.'tɕ'əχa.r ø.s.ta'χə.m
she.wake-up.CONV it.I.want.not[-STAT-PRES]
'I'm going to kindergarten; it's impossible for me to be late. My doll is asleep; I
don't want her to wake up'

Here we clearly see that the verb-form in /-r/ is in complementiser-function, serving as a fully-fledged argument to the main verb, where in both cases it is taken up by the initial zero-morph. Note that the construction for 'Complement-X is possible' couples a complementiser so marked with the verb 'happen', and compare with this a protasis (i.e. non-argument) followed by the same lexical verb:

20. jə.ħa.m.'fa.r[,]⁵ 'jə.q'a.la.wa.j
X.we.not.eat.CONV which.PREV.happen.DYN[-NON-FIN-PRES].what?
'What happens, if we don't it (it/them)?'

An alternative expression for 'Complement-X is possible' would be:

21. jə.'s.a.j^W.ħ^Wa.r ø.'a.lə.m.ɕa.wa.j
it.me.to.you-Pl.say.CONV it.it.PREV.not.be-able.DYN[-NON-FIN-PRES].QU

⁴Usually inanimate arguments would require a 3rd person non-human affix in the verb, but here a child is speaking and personifies her beloved doll.

⁵The text from which this example is taken has no comma splitting protasis from apodosis.

'Is it not possible for you to tell me?'

Obligation is indicated by coupling a protasis-type complement with one of the language's copular roots, e.g.

22. k^wʔtə k^wʔtəʔkʰ. Ø.a.'ts'a.r(.)ts (a.'zə) a.dʒək^wraj Ø.'a.s.ta.r.[a.]a.w.p'
 duck egg.a it.it.lay.PURP it.for the.maize it.it.I.give.CONV.it.be.
 STAT-FIN[-PRES]

'In order for Duck to lay an egg I have to give it maize'

In the past the main copular verb takes a slightly different form, but the construction remains the same:

23. 'sə.da 'psə(.)χ^Wa ø.'rə.ma.mə.z(.)t',
me.without means it.they.have.not.STAT-FIN-PAST
jə.pχⁱadza.'la.r [a.]'a(.)k^Wə.n⁶
they.calculate.HAB.CONV it.be.FIN[-STAT-PAST]

'They couldn't do without me (sc. maths' book); humans had always to calculate'

Forms in /-zɑ(.)r/ similarly behave as one would by now predict:

24. w(.)a 'ħa.q'a.za(.)r.[a.]a.w.p' vs wəj ø.ɑ:.'dər.wa.za(.)r
 there we.be.CONV.it.be.STAT.FIN[-PRES] that it.we.know.DYN.CONV
 [a.]'a(.)k^W'ə.n
 it.be.FIN[-STAT-PAST]

'We should be there' vs 'We should have known that'

The verb that combines the copular root just illustrated with that meaning 'become' takes the same type of complement, e.g.

25. 'a.tsʰa.tɕʷi.rə r.'t͡ɕə.ø.kʷə.k'.dza.ø.nə
the.bridge.narrow their.self.it.on.hold.EMPH.PAST[-NON-FIN-AOR].ABS

⁶In T'ap'anta Abaza we find that one of the equivalents to the Abkhaz protasis formant in /-r/ is the compound suffix /-rək^{w(·)}ən(əz)/, which Lomtadze (1944:171) very reasonably suggests must be connected to the past tense of the copula, whereas in standard Abkhaz this element helps to build the expression of past obligation.

j.a.: [a]j. 'və.sə.r

[a.] 'a(.)k^w.χa.ø.jt'

they.PREV.each-other.beside.pass.CONV it.be.become.PAST.FIN[-AOR]

'It became necessary for them to pass beside each other, holding themselves tightly on the narrow bridge'

Another context in which one finds this type of complement is with a main verb meaning 'permit', a possible sense of the root that normally means 'do'; an example for it would be the 3-word sequence to fill the gap left in example 9 above, viz.

26. 'a.ləmt' ø.'sə.k^w.t'at'a.r ø.sə.m.'w.[w]a.za(.)r

the.filth it.me.on.drip.CONV it.I.not.do/permit.DYN.if

'if I don't allow myself to get covered in filth'

where we have a protasis-type complement immediately preceding (and functioning as direct object to) an actual protasis.

Complementation in Abkhaz is a rather complex affair, and I have already published a detailed study of it (Hewitt 2005), where a wider range of examples shewing the protasis-type patterning with different time-references can be found. But there is a semantic feature shared by sentences where complements are of the protasis-type, and this is that the complements do not portray concrete events but necessarily (sc. by virtue of the meaning of the verbs whose complement-arguments they form) leave open the question of whether the verbal action is ever realised. And, of course, this is the very essence of conditions, and it may be that, once established in the language, the various types of protases were seconded into filling the complement-slot in contexts where the semantics were appropriate. The fact that even typically vague protases can function as complements perhaps supports just such a straight extension of protasis to complement, e.g.

27. jə.'wəs d.a.'tʃə.z(.)t(.)gʲə / a.'wəs ø.jə.'w.[w]a.z(.)t(.)gʲə

his.work he.it.in[-STAT].CONV the.work it.he.do.DYN.CONV

[a.]'a(.)k^wχa.p' / [a.]'a(.)k^wχa.rə.n

it.be.become.FUTI-FIN itj.be.become.FUTI.FIN[-CONDITI]

'He probably was/will have been (i) engaged in his business (ii) working'

where the notion 'probably', marked by the double copula seen in example 25 but this time standing in either the Future or Conditional I, is linked to an imperfective action in the past, indicated by a complement carrying the suffix of vague protases. But perhaps at an earlier stage in the language's development, if we ignore the problematic compound-suffix for vague protases, we might suggest that the language generalised a basic marker of *irrealis* which began life as the suffix /-ra/ə/, with fluctuating vowel. Long ago Lomtadze (1948) noted the tempting commonality of marking between (i) protases, whose basic indicator she saw as /-r/ alone, (ii) the verbal noun (or masdar) in /-ra/, e.g.

28. a.ba.'ra / 'a.q'a.z(.)a:.ra

ART.see.MASD ART.be.?.MASD

'seeing/being'

and (iii) the non-finite Future I of Dynamic verbs, as illustrated in the table with which we began. As an example of the non-finite Future I in context, consider:

29. jə(.)z(.)'ba(.)n wa(.)'ra jta.[a.a]χl.'la wə.zə.na.'mə.sk'l'a.ra/ə

why-is-it? you-MASC track.it.to.by you-MASC.why.PREV.not.move.

NON-FIN-FUTI

'Why is it why = that you won't move back?'

If there was an original morpheme correlating with the semantic feature *irrealis*, there could have been a split such that /-ra/ became grammaticalised as the masdar-formant, the single rhotic /-r/ as the protasis-formant, leaving /-ra/ə/ to mark the non-finite Future I. As is well-known, in Abkhaz's sister-language Circassian there is a close bond between masdar and Future I, both ending in /-n/; Circassian's protasis-formant /-ma/ stands apart, correlating with /-ba/ in the third sister, Ubykh. The question is whether at one time the Abkhaz non-finite Future I might simply have served in its own right to form a protasis

with future reference, the grammaticalisation of the rhotic developing only later; recall that in N.W. Caucasian languages almost all subordinate 'clauses' are marked by non-finite rather than finite verb-forms, the presence of the latter being traditionally seen as the defining characteristic of a clause. Whatever the derivation of the protasis-form, if the rhotic alone came to be interpreted as the prime marker of conditionality, then this raises a question about the nature of the stem to which this rhotic was attached — in other words, if today the suffix /-za(.).r/ is felt to be a protasis-formant in its own right, what might the component /-za/ have been originally?

Lomtatidze touched on this in 1954 (269-70). She related the /-za/ to the non-finite ending of those tenses whose finite equivalents end in /-n/, arguing that, as loss of the open vowel is not unknown in Abkhaz, the original non-finite ending might have been just this long form. If this accurately captures the historical development, then we can say that /-r/, representing the basic protasis-formant, could attach to: (i) the non-finite Aorist, (ii) the non-finite Imperfect, (iii) the non-finite Pluperfect, and (iv) the non-finite Past Indefinite, and for Stative verbs (v) the non-finite Past, e.g.

30. (i) s.tsa.ø.r
I.go.PAST[-NON-FIN-AOR].if
- (ii) s.tsa.'wa.za.r
I.go.DYN.NON-FIN[-IMPERF].if
- (iii) s.tsa.'χʲa.(ts.)za.r⁷
I.go.PERF.PERF.NON-FIN[-PLUP].if
- (iv) s.'tsa.ø.za.r
I.go.PAST[-NON-FIN-PAST-INDEF].if
- (v) 'sə.q'a.za.r
I.be.NON-FIN[-STAT-PAST].if

⁷The form /s.'tsa.ts.za.r/ is rejected.

If the commonest type of protasis, illustrated in (i), started out as a contextually determined function of the non-finite Future I, then it is accidental that that formant appears to be suffixed to the non-finite Aorist. But if we do have to think of an Aorist form being used to refer to the future, then we can find a parallel in such regular Georgian conditions as:

31. ჩემი თვალით თუ არ ვნახე, არ დავიჯერებ
 tʃɛm(,)i tval.it tu ar v.θ.nax.ɛ⁸, ar da.v.θ.i.dʒɛr.ɛb
 my eye.INST if not I.X.see.AOR not PREV.I.X.SV.believe.TS[-FUT]
 'If I don't see it with my own eye(s), I won't believe it' (Aragvisp'ireli)

Otherwise, what seems to be (or, at least, have been) happening here is that the addition of the protasis-formant to a given non-finite form moves the tense-reference one step forward on a scale of tenses: Pluperfect to Perfect, Imperfect to Present, Stative Past to Stative Present. There is a fortuitous parallel for the use of the Imperfect for present reference (abeit in vague conditions) in both Old Armenian and Ancient Greek, viz.

32. e e sireiḅ zis,apa owrax leal 'r ˘er, e e
 et^he sireik^h zis apa urax leal e:r dzer et^he
 if you-PL-were-loving me then joyous been it-was of-you that
 es aḡ hayr er am
 ew aṛ hajr ert^ham
 I to father I-go [Old Armenian⁹]

=

33. εἰ ἡγαπατέ με, ἐχάρητε ἄν ὅτι
 if you-PL-were-loving me you-PL-were-rejoicing *irrealis* that
 πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα
 I-go to the father [Ancient Greek]

⁸ Also possible is the Future Indicative /v.θ.nax.av/ 'I shall see X'.

⁹ Both the Armenian and the Greek equivalents are taken from Meillet (1981.140).

'If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father' (John 14.28)

To return to Abkhaz, the exception is the protasis formed on the non-finite Past Indefinite, for here we stay in the past, but this might be due to the rather odd semantics of the Past Indefinite, whose finite form, as observed in Footnote 1, is insufficient in itself to make a sentence, requiring that another past-tense verb follow it. Now this gradation of time-reference would be perfectly understandable, if the protasis-formant originally retained the postulated link to futurity, for the Perfect could be interpreted as being in the future vis-à-vis the Pluperfect, the Present (Continuous) vis-à-vis the Imperfect, and the Stative Present vis-à-vis the Stative Past. Might this speculative proposition account both for why /-r/ was selected to be the protasis-formant and for why the tense-references are as demonstrated above?

There are some further converbs in Abkhaz developed from the non-finite Future I (assuming the dialectal variant in /-rɑ/ or protases (assuming the standard variant in /-r/), namely: the Purposive in /-r.ts/ (dialectal /-rɑ.tsə/) or in /-rɑ.zə/; the Resultative in /-r.tʷ/ (dialectal /-rɑ.tʷə/); and, one might add, the Future Absolute in /-rɑ.nə/ — on the first three see Lomtadze (1948) and also Hewitt (2005). All are used in contexts where again the reference is to potential and thus future events, such that the element /-r(ɑ)/ is, given what we know about it now, entirely natural. A few examples follow.

The Purposive converb in /-r.ts/ appears in example 22. And there are occasions where it is interchangeable with a protasis-type complement, e.g.

34. jə.s.ta'χə.n 'jə.q'a.s.ts'a.kʷa.wa
 it.I.want.FIN[-STAT-PAST] which.PREV.I.do.PL.DYN[-NON-FIN-PRES]
 ə.q'a.l.'ts'a.r(.)ts, l.'χ.a.la də.'tʂ'əχa.r, l.'χ.a.la
 them.PREV.she.do.PURP her.head.it.by she.wake-up.CONV her.head.it.by
 də.'tʷa.r
 she.sit-down.CONV
 'I wanted her (sc. my doll) to do the things I do: wake up by herself, sit down

by herself' [followed by a whole list of actions marked by /-r/]
 where the element /-ts/ can be omitted from the first complement or added to the
 succeeding ones.

35. a.'tsa 'h^wənap a.pa.'tɕ^wa.j ja(.)'ra.j ø.a.pər'χaga.m.χa.r(.)t^w,
 the.maize-store mouse its.son.PL.& him.& they.it.hindrance.not.become.
 RES

- ([a.]aj(.))psə jə.q'a.'ts'a
 it.like it.PREV.do[-IMPER]
 'See to it that Mouse and his sons leave the maize-store alone'
 36. sa(.)r.g^lə [a.]'ajdara 's.a.ts'a.psə.r(.)ts / 's.a.ts'a.ps.ra(.)nə
 I.too the.load I.it.under.die.PURP I.it.under.die.FUT-ABS
 'sə.q'a.z(.)a:(.)rə.n
 I.be.apparently.FIN[-STAT-PAST]
 'I too was apparently destined to perish under the load'
 37. s.tsa.r(.)ts / s.tsa.ra(.)'zə / w(.)a 'sə.q'a.za(.)r(.)ts / 'sə.q'a.za(.)ra(.)zə
 I.go.PURP I.go.PURP there I.be.PURP I.be.PURP
 'sə.q'a.w.p'
 I.be.STAT.FIN[-PRES]
 'I intend to go/be there'

The final context in which protases in /-(za(.))r/ occur is in indefinite sequences,
 when the coördinating suffix /-g^lə/ is obligatory as final component, and, of course,
 indefinites also are characterised by the feature of *irrealis*, and so the presence of the
 protasis-marker in this context is fully understandable, e.g.

38. ja'g^la jə.'tɕə.j.j^wa.r.g^lə, jə.j.'zə.q'a.ts'a.wa.m
 INDEF his.self.he.exert.if.even it.he.POT.PREV.do.DYN.not[-FIN-PRES]
 'However much he tries, he can't do it'

39. ja'gja ø.z.'wə.r.gjə, jə.s.'m.ɑ(.)wə.ø.jt'

INDEF it.I.do.if.even it/them.I.not.acquire.PAST.FIN[AOR]

'Whatever I did, I didn't get it/them'

where we see a protasis in /-r/ alone used with past reference. And when indefinite structures refer to the past, an alternative construction makes use of /-nda(z)/, the optative suffix, plus /-gjə/, e.g.

40. ja'gja ø.wə.'wə.r.gjə / ø.wə.'wə.nda(z).gjə,

INDEF it.you-MASC.do.if.even it.you-MASC.do.OPT.even

wə.s.'mə.ʃtə.ø.jt'

you-MASC.I.not.send.PAST.FIN[-AOR]

'Whatever you did, I did not let you go'

But, then, as an expression of a wish, the optative mood is simply another realisation of the *irrealis* feature.

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Abbreviations

ABS Absolute	INST Instrumental
AOR Aorist	INTR Intransitive
ART Article	MASC Masculine
CAUS Causative	MASD Masdar
CONDIT Conditional	NON-FIN Non-finite
CONV Converb	PERF Perfect
DAT Dative	PL Plural
DEF Definite	PLUP Pluperfect
DYN Dynamic	POT Potential
EMPH Emphatic	PRES Present
FEM Feminine	PREV Preverb
FIN Finite	PURP Purposive
FUT Future	QU Question
HAB Habitual	RES Resultative
HUM Human	STAT Stative
IMPER Imperative	SV Subjective Version
IMPERF Imperfect	TS Thematic Suffix
INDEF Indefinite	VV Version Vowel