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CIRCASSIAN DOUBLE PAST AND ITS COUNTERPARTS
IN OTHER WEST CAUCASIAN LANGUAGES[*]

0. Introduction: double past – what's the point?

Adyghe: *-ваве*   <   *-ве*   +   *-ве*
Kabardian: *-ва*   <   *-ве*   +   *-ве*

These are prototypical examples of the so-called "double" past. Apart from these languages, such a phenomenon is attested in at least three other mutually unrelated languages: Korean (Altaic) [Sohn 1995], Diola-Fogny (Niger-Congo, Atlantic) [Sapir 1965], Dongolese Nubian (Nilo-Saharan, Eastern Sudanic) [Armbruster 1960].

Such iteration of a past tense affix is a relatively uncommon strategy of pluperfect marking. More precisely, it is an instance of what is sometimes labelled "retrospective shift" marking (the term was first proposed in [Plungian 1998]). A marker of retrospective shift applies to a wordform with temporal or aspectual meaning already marked on it and "shifts" it back on the time axis. Such mechanisms are common in West Africa, Oceania and the Volga region. "Retrospective shift" markers, along with the periphrastic Indo-European pluperfect and less frequent synthetic pluperfects serve as the main techniques of pluperfect marking.

1. Typology of pluperfect

☞   The definition of "pluperfect" [Comrie 1985], [Dahl 1985]: forms whose basic or only meaning is the "precedence with regard to some reference point in the past".

This "logical" interpretation (going back to [Reichenbach 1947]) is not much used; now ([Salkie 1989], [Shoshitajshvili 1998], [Squartini 1999], [Sichinava 2005]) the term tends to be applied as a mere "label" to taxis form values. Moreover, the taxis semantics itself can be optional or even absent (though often that was the original meaning of the marker).

These values are:

➲   "frame past" [Dahl 1985];

➲   experiential;

➲   remote past;

➲   cancelled result;

➲   counterfactual etc.

☞   The entire range of these values can be treated as a coherent "semantic domain", e.g. that of "discontinuous past", as suggested in [Plungian 2001], [Plungian, van der Auwera 2006]: an event placed there loses its connection with the present while acquiring some new meanings, the irreal one among them (cf. also [Fleischman 1989] for similar observations).

Furthermore, discovery of several discourse-motivated functions of pluperfect, such as a violation of the narrative iconicity principle stimulated attempts to explain the "pluperfect polysemy" *sub specie* discourse, see, e.g. [Caenepeel 1995], [Irandoust 1999], [Plungian 2004], [Sichinava in print].

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2. Adyghe data

2.1. The semantics of ʁaʁe-form

As mentioned above, this form "consists" of two perfective preterite markers *-ʁe,* and an *a* arises due to a morphophonemic vowel alternation. With respect to its semantics and narrative functions it represents a typical pluperfect.

➲ **"taxis" meaning**

(1) *se   wəne-m   sə-qə-ze-ḳ_we-ž'ə   zeč̣'e   šxe-ʁe-xa-ʁe*
    I   house-ERG   1SG.ABS-DIR-REL-go-RFC   all   eat-PST-TRM-PST

    'When I returned home, everybody had already dined.'

The use of the "double" past to express this meaning is optional; in the presence of corresponding adverbials the perfective can also be used.
    The two following meanings are a result of a shift to the past temporal frame:
        static and atelic situations   →   "frame past"
        telic situations   →   cancelled result

➲ **frame past**

'The situation took place at some moment in the past; at the moment of speech the situation doesn't take place.'

(2) *zeg_werem   pčedəž'-re   kon'jak   jə-ŝ_we-ʁa-ʁ*
    some.time   morning-DISTR   cognac   3SG-drink-PST-PST

    'He used to drink cognac in the morning. [Now he does not.]'

(3) *bere   ŝaʁew   zeč̣'e   čəf-xe-r   zə-bze-č̣'e   g_wəš'əʔ-ʁa-ʁe-x*
    a.lot.of   ago   all   human-PL-ABS   one-language-INS   speak-PST-PST-PL

    'Long ago all people spoke the same language. [Now they do not.]'

➲ **cancelled result**

'An action took place at some moment in the past, result of this action existed; the result was cancelled by another action'.

(4) *s-jane   q_waj   ə-ṣ̂ə-ʁa-ʁ*
    1SG-POSS+mother   cheese   3SG-do-PST-PST

    'Mother had made some cheese [but it got spoiled].'

(5) *pŝaŝe-m   roze   q_waše   qe-ʁe-č̣'e-ʁa-ʁ*
    girl-ERG   rose   bush   DIR-CAUS-grow-PST-PST

    'The girl had grown a rose bush [but naughty children trampled it down].'

For certain verb classes there is a natural way to cancel the result by oppositely directed actions, e.g. verbs of motion:

(6) *pjetje   mə   wəne-m   qe-ḳ_we-ž'ə-ʁa-ʁ*
    Peter   this   house-ERG   DIR-go-RFC-PST-PST

    'Peter had moved <once> to this house, [but he didn't like it and returned to his old apartment].'

➲ **counterfactual conditionals**

This form (together with the conditional marker) is employed in the protasis of counterfactual conditionals, i.e. the situation descried will never come true:

(7) *se   s-janez'*   *pšereha-č'e   šə-ze-sə-mə-ʁe-ŝe-**ʁa-ʁe**-me,*
     I   1SG-POSS+grandmother   cook-INS   LOC-RFL-1SG.ABS-NEG-CAUS-know-PST-PST-COND

    se   je-ʁaŝe-m   pšerehaḳwə   sə-χwə-š'tə.ʁa-ʁ-ep
    I   3SG-life-ERG   cook   1SG.ABS-become-IPF-PST-NEG

    'If I hadn't learned cooking from my grandmother, I wouldn't become a cook. [I have learned and now I'm a cook.]'

    Here is another *a priori* unreal situation:

(8) *čəg-xe-m-re   məẑwe-xe-m-re   gweš'ə?-ŝwə-š'tə.ʁe-xe-me*
     tree-PL-ERG-COORD   stone-PL-ERG-COORD   speak-HBL-IPF-PL-COND

    çəf-xe-r   ja-gwap-ew   a-xe-m   ja-dewə-š'tə.ʁə-x
    human-PL-ABS   3PL-pleasure-ADV   that-PL-ERG   3PL.ABS-listen-IPF-PL

    'If trees and stones could only speak, people would readily listen to them. [But trees and stones do not speak.]'

⮞ **experiential**

    'At the moment of speech the focus is on a certain experience that the subject of the situation has already had.' [Vostrikova 2005]

(9) *se   s-šəpχwə   hantχwəpsə-r   ə-ʁe-ẑwe-**ʁa-ʁ***
     I   1SG-sister   soup-ABS   3SG-CAUS-be.boiling-PST-PST

    'My sister has already cooked soup <once> [So she knows how to do it.].'

    When a language encodes the experiential by means the pluperfect, such a strategy is not the only one and usually belongs to the periphery. Pluperfect and other strategies (e.g. perfect) are involved in two types of oppositions:

    ❶ "relevant" vs. "non-relevant", i.e. 'Have you ever seen a unicorn? [Before this moment]' vs. 'Mary used to play piano when she was a child.': non-relevant contexts prefer the pluperfect;

    ❷ affirmative vs. non-affirmative: in affirmative narrative sentences the pluperfect is highly probable.

    However, Adyghe breaks these regularities; see interrogative and negative sentences below:

(10) *mə   çəfə-r   jə-ʁaŝə-m   qeʁaʁe   je-petə-**ʁa-ʁ**-ep/-ʁ-ep,*
     this   human-ABS   3SG-life-ERG   flower   3SG-smell-PST-PST-NEG

    *jə-ʁaŝə-m   ŝwə   ə-λeʁwə-**ʁa-ʁ**-ep.*
    3SG-life-ERG   good   3SG-see-PST-PST-NEG

    'This man has never smelled a flower, he never loved.'

(11) *we   zegwerem   meŝekwə-m   wə-gwəẑwa-**ʁa-ʁ**-a/ʁ-a?*
     you   some.time   train-ERG   2SG.ABS-miss-PST-PST-Q/PST-Q

    'Have you ever missed a train?'

2.2. Residual pluperfect *-š'təʁaʁe*

Besides the form described above, there is another one, *-š'təʁaʁe* with rather clear semantics. It is used only in the apodosis of counterfactual conditionals and never autonomously:

(12) *xek_wəẑə-m wə-z-jə-he-re-m   žəne ʔ_wenṭaʁe g_were-m*
ruin-ERG   2SG.ABS-REL-3SG-enter-DYN-ERG ghost wry   some-ERG

wə-ʔeč'e-fe-n-jə   wə-ze-bl-jə-ʔ_wenṭə-č'ə-š'tə.ʁa-ʁe
2SG.ABS-INADV-lead-POT-COH   2SG.ABS-REC-LOC-3SG-distort-DIR-IPF-PST

'If you had entered the wastes, you would have come across some wry ghost and he would have distorted you.' [Rogava, Kerasheva 1966: 197]

Morphologically it is formed in the same way as *-ʁaʁe*: *-stə.ʁe* is a classical imperfect, with the durative and the iterative as its basic meanings. The morphosyntactic features of this form verify this statement. Thus, for example, derivational affixes can never intervene in the complex *-stə.ʁe*, as in imperfect, whereas they do intervene right before the second *-ʁe* (cf. also (1)):

(13) *…karlson   varjenje-r   zeč'e ə-š'xə-ž'ə-š'tə.ʁe-xa-ʁ*
Karlsson   jam-ABS   all   3SG-eat-RFC-IPF-TRM-PST
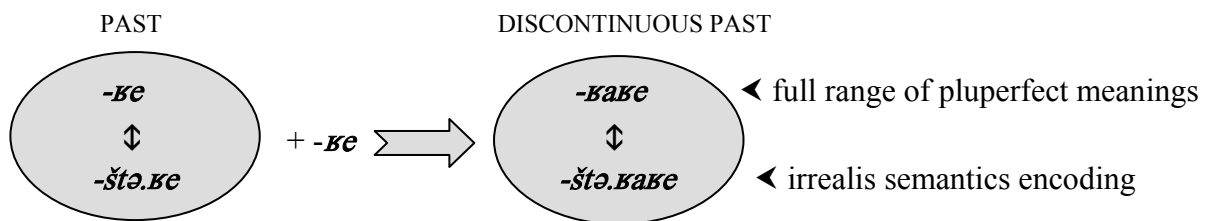
'… then Karlsson would have already eaten all the jam.'

So, in fact, this is an imperfective pair to *-ʁaʁe*. In a way it is a retrospectivized imperfect.

2.3. Summary

There exist two pluperfect forms in Adyghe, both "doubled" in some sense. Their formal organization is as follows:

past tense marker (*-ʁe* / *-štə.ʁe*) + perfective preterite *-ʁe*

The second instance of perfective past marker functions as a "retrospective shift" marker, applying to a verb stem with already expressed tense and / or aspect. It doesn't form new morphemes, since the resulting complexes can be broken by certain derivation affixes (1), (13).

PAST   DISCONTINUOUS PAST

-ʁe   *-ʁaʁe* ◄ full range of pluperfect meanings
↕   + *-ʁe* ⟹   ↕
-štə.ʁe   *-štə.ʁaʁe* ◄ irrealis semantics encoding

NB: A similar semantic distribution of pluperfects can be observed in Proto-Slavonic and later in Slavic languages [Sichinava 2005].

3. Kabardian

As showed in the beginning, Kabardian double past is formed similarly to its Adyghe counterpart, though with a higher degree of morphological fusion, and looks like *-ʁa* on the surface. When employed as perfect, it looks like *-a*, cf.:

(14) *wesmen   wəne s-i-ʁe-ş-a-ŝ*
Osman   house 1SG.ABS-3SG-CAUS-build-PF-DECL

'Osman made me build a house'.

[Yakovlev 1948] points out at two forms containing this complex:

❶ "remote past" *-ʁaŝ*, where *-ŝ* stands for declarative (marked indicative);

❷ "remote pluperfect" *-ʁat*, where *-t* stands for "retrospective shift" marker with imperfective nuance (it can apply to almost every verb stem having predictable effect – "shift" on the time axis).

However, these two forms function as synonyms; each may substituted with the retrospectivized perfect *-at*. The following meanings are expressed:

⊃ **cancelled result**

(15) *wjə   deλχwə-r   qə-p-ŝewəpŝe-č̣-we   qə-ḳwə-ʁa-ŝ*
     your   brother-ABS   DIR-2SG-visit-INS-ADV   DIR-go-PF.PF-DECL

'Your brother came to visit you [but now he has already left].'

The related "frame past" meaning is expressed by the means of imperfective past and never by pluperfects; quite expectedly, these two meanings are complementary distributed among verbs according to their actional characteristics.

⊃ **"non-relevant" experiential**

Unlike Adyghe, Kabardian turns out to be sensitive to "relevant" vs. "non-relevant" experiential distinction and uses pluperfect only for marking the "non-relevant" experiential:

(16) a. *adəge-bze-r   ze-z-ʁe-ŝe-ŝ*
        Kabardian-language-ABS   RFL-1SG-CAUS-know-DECL

        'I have learned Kabardian [and now I can speak].'

     b. *adəge-bze-r   ze-z-ʁe-ŝe-ʁa-ŝ/a-t*
        Kabardian-language-ABS   RFL-1SG-CAUS-know-PF.PF-DECL/PF-RETRO

        'I learned Kabardian [but it was long ago, I don't remember a word].'

(17) a. *pež-ŝ   se   čerkesija-m   sə-ŝə-a-ŝ*
        truth-DECL I   Cherkessia-ERG 1SG.ABS-LOC-be-DECL

        'Yes, I have been to Cherkessia [I got back recently].'

     b. *pež-ŝ   se   čerkesija-m   sə-ŝə-e-ʁa-ŝ/a-t*
        truth-DECL I   Cherkessia-ERG 1SG.ABS-LOC-be-PF.PF-DECL

        'Yes, I visited Cherkessia [long ago].'

⊃ **apodosis of counterfactual conditionals**

(18) *dəʁese   wə-qe-ḳw-e-me   mesə-m*
     yesterday 2SG.ABS-DIR-go-PF-COND   forest-ERG

     də-ḳwə-ʁa-ŝ/a-t
     1SG.ABS-go-PF.PF-DECL/PF-RETRO

'If you had come yesterday, we would have gone to the forest [but you hadn't come].'

As can be seen, Kabardian tends to use pluperfects only in contexts close to irrealis, such as the cancelled result or counterfactual, whereas in contexts closer to reality perfect is used. This can be explained by nature of pluperfect and by conceptualizion of remote events as non-existent and unreal.

4. West Caucasian perspective

Other West Caucasian languages possess elements clearly cognate [Dumézil 1932] to Circassian -ʁe:

Abkhaz [Hewitt 1979, 1989]   -χ^j(a)
Abaza [Genko 1964]   -ʁ(a)
Ubykh [Dumézil 1931]   -q(a)

In contrast to their Circassian counterparts these markers do not iterate – or at least there is no evidence for Kabardian-like iteration. They are employed in forming both perfect and pluperfect depending on the morphological context:

autonomous or combined with present   →   perfect
combined with past tense markers   →   pluperfect

4.1. Abkhaz (+ Abaza)

Perfect uses: *χ^j(a)* + *-eṭ*, where *-eṭ* stands for finite present-aorist of dynamic verbs:

(19) *yə-z-ba-kwa-χ^je-yṭ*
3SG-1SG-see-ITER-PF-FIN1
'I have already seen it several times.' [Hewitt 1989: 183]

It also has an experientive meaning typical of perfect:

(20) *london   bə-ca-χ^jo-w-ma   znəḳər*
London   2SG-go-PF-NF-Q   some.time
'Have you ever been to London?' [Hewitt 1989: 181][1]

Pluperfect uses: *χ^j(a)* + *-n*, where *-n* stands for past marker of stative verbs

⊃ **relative tense**

(21) *wara   wə-y   aanja-g^jə   wə-gara   qa-ħ-ça-χ^ja-n*
you   2SG-be.born   before-even 2SG-cradle   DIR-1SG-make-PF-FIN2
'Even before you were born, we had made a cradle for you.' [Hewitt 1989: 175]

⊃ **proximative**

'X almost happened'.

(22) *yaxa   sə-ps-χ^ja-n*
last.night   1SG-die-PF-FIN2
'I almost died last night.' [Hewitt 1989: 175]

Though this meaning is logically natural and expected [Plungian 2001], pluperfects encode it rather rarely.

⊃ **apodosis of counterfactual conditionals**

(23) *wara   wə-qa-m-zar   s-ḳa-ħa-χ^ja-n*
you   2SG-be-NEG-COND   1SG-LOC-fall-PF-FIN2
'Had you not been here, I was as good as flat on my face.' [Hewitt 1989: 175]

Abaza:

·   as perfect -*ʁ(a)* is used autonomously;

·   as pluperfect -*ʁ(a)* is used in combination with the finite aorist of dynamic verbs -*d/-t*.

Unfortunately, its semantics remains opaque because of the lack of language data.

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[1] The non-finite marker is employed in questions.

4.2. Ubykh

Ubykh is just like Abkhaz with respect to forming its perfect and pluperfect:

- as perfect-*q(a)* is used autonomously;
- pluperfect-*ɣ(a)* is used in combination with *-êt* – an element which forms imperfect (and probably traces back to copula).

The language is extinct since 1992, but the text corpora reveal an interesting characteristic of it. The Ubykh pluperfect is used in an "introductive" function:

☞ The pluperfect is used at the beginning of a text to put all the narrative in the sphere of non-relevance [Sichinava in print].

Apparently it was widespread in Ubykh. The sentences below are typical beginning of narratives (cf. 'Once upon a time …'):

(24) *adiɣe-ɣa   šoč-ɣa   yedänä a-nəŝᵥə-nə   a-pčəqə-nə*
Cherkessia-LOC Shochua-LOC very   DET-beautiful-ATTR DET-proper-ATTR

ṭiṭi-n   wä-θ'-qə-nə   zä-p̣xädiku   le-θ-q-êyt
human-ATTR DIR-be-PF-ATTR one-girl   LOC-be-PF-PST

'In Cherkessia, in Shochua there was a very beautiful girl, proper, of noble origin.' [Dumézil 1931: 123]

(25) *w-aɣe-jep̣xä-n   ẑᵥä-kuc'-ônə   a-pq-q-êt*
DET-3PL-sister-ATTR   roe-marrow-INS   3SG(3PL)-feed-PF-PST

'Their sister used to feed them with roe marrow.' [Dumézil 1931: 115]

NB: Only the beginning of narratives contain pluperfect; all other sentences in the texts are either in perfect or in imperfect.

5. Conclusions

❖ The Circassian "double" past is substantially similar to other phenomena of this type; the second copy of a past marker serves as a "retrospective shift" marker.

❖ The "double" past is a curious formal feature that iconically reflects the "emphatic" nature of pluperfect. It fits precisely into the general system of pluperfect marking and functioning in the languages of the world.

❖ The iterated element has its cognates in other West Caucasian languages; these morphemes are also used to build pluperfects. These systems have interesting peculiarities of their own.

❖ On the whole, West Caucasian data make some contribution to the typology of pluperfect, and, in a broader perspective, of verbal systems in general.

Abbreviations

1,2,3 - person, ABS - absolutive, ATTR - attributive form, CAUS - causative, COH - coherence, COND - condition, COORD - coordination, DECL - declarative, DET - determinator, DIR - directive, DISTR - distibutive, DYN - dynamic stem, ERG - ergative, FIN1, FIN2 - finiteness, HBL - habilitive, INADV - inadvertive, INS - instrumental, IPF - imperfect, ITER - iterative, LOC - locative, NEG - negation, NF - non-finiteness, PF - perfect(ive), PL - plural, POSS - possessor, POT - potential, PST - past tense, Q - question, REC - reciprocal, REL - relativizator, RETRO "retrospective shift" marker, RFC - refactive, RFL - reflexive, SG - singular, TRM - terminative.

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