

Marking of peripheral arguments in the verb forms of Sumerian and Abaza

In both Sumerian (isolate, cf. Edzard 2003:92ff.) and NW Caucasian (here illustrated by Abaza, cf. O’Herin 1995:269ff.) it has been claimed that dimensional adpositions can be “incorporated” or “copied” into the verbal complex. In both cases, personal agreement markers precede these elements, forming what looks like an incorporated PP of a pronoun and a postposition. Nevertheless, free postpositional phrases, coindexed with this pronominal element, can occur in the same clause in Sumerian (cf. (1)), but apparently only without that postposition in Abaza (cf. (2)). Additionally, the agreement to peripheral arguments is not obligatory in Sumerian.

What complicates this substantially in Sumerian is, first, that the dimensional marker used in the verbal complex can be different from the one of the coindexed PP in the clause (cf. (3)). This can lead to slight differences in the meaning of the verb. Secondly, some of the dimensional markers in the verbal complex have a different form from their free counterparts (e.g. *-r(a)* or *-e* “DAT”, but *a-* in the verb). Finally, some of the markers in the verb form show allomorphy according to their phonological environment.

The goal of this presentation is to show how the two systems work, what their similarities and differences are, and how one can analyse this data from a synchronic and a diachronic point of view.

(1) (Enmerkar and En-suĝgir-ana, line 246, from ETCSL)

umma Saĝburu uršub urnim-e a-ta
wise.woman S.[ERG] tiger lion-DAT water(n)-ABL

i-m-b-ta-n-e₃

PVE-VENT-3nOBL-ABL-3shA-go.in/out.PFV[3nP]

“The wise woman Saĝburu made a tiger and a lion come out of the water.”

(2) (cf. O’Herin 1995:283, example (43))

*a-ĉk’w₂n awəy (*awə-la) d-a-la-q^wmar-i-t’*
DEF-boy it (*it-INS) 3sP-3sOBL-INS-play-PRS-DYN

“The boy is playing with it.”

(3) (Lament for Urim, line 357, from ETCSL)

uĝ saĝ ĝiga ezen-zu-š a
people head black[ERG] festival(n)-POSS.2s-DIR water[ABS]

la-b-a-n-tu₅~tu₅-ne

NEG-3nOBL-DAT-3shP-wash~IPFV-3pA

“The black-headed people do not bathe during your festivals.”

References:

ETCSL = Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature: Black, Jeremy (ed.) (2003–2006). *The ETCSL project*. Oxford: Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford. <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk> (last retrieved Feb 3rd, 2009).

Edzard, Dietz-Otto, 2003. *Sumerian Grammar*. Leiden: Brill.

O’Herin, Brian, 1995. *Case and Agreement in Abaza*. Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation.