

Witnessed inferentials in Khwarshi: a typologically unusual complex evidential

oral or poster

Khwarshi, a language of the Tsezic branch of the Nakh-Daghestanian family, has a number of devices that serve to give formal expression to evidentiality. In the past tense system, there is a morphological opposition between two simple tense forms: Past Witnessed (suffix *-i*), indicating that the speaker saw the situation described, and Past Unwitnessed (suffix *-un*), indicating that the speaker did not see the situation. The Resultative, consisting of the Perfective converb of the lexical verb and the appropriate finite form of the copula, receives an inferential interpretation in the non-first person, i.e. the speaker infers a prior event on the basis of resulting visual evidence. A related specifically Inferential form uses the auxiliary ‘find’ rather than the copula, as in (1), and will be the main topic for investigation here. Finally, a reportative particle (*-λin*) enables the speaker to identify explicitly material that was told by another person, while a quotative particle (*-λo*) is frequent in stories.

This rich range of devices provides interesting possibilities of interaction among the different systems. We concentrate on one particular interaction, that between the Past Witnessed/Unwitnessed opposition and the Inferential using the auxiliary ‘find’. In the absence of any indication to the contrary, as in example (1), the Inferential is interpreted as indicating that the inference was made by the speaker. However, it is also possible to indicate explicitly that some other individual made the inference, by adding the appropriate noun phrase in the Lative case, as in (2)–(3), where the inference is attributed to Magomed. In the Pluperfect of this Inferential, as one might predict on morphological grounds, the auxiliary can be in either the Past Witnessed or the Past Unwitnessed, as in examples (2) and (3) respectively. Both (2) and (3) are Inferential, with an expressed inferencer, therefore both denote a situation where Magomed inferred, rather than witnessed or heard, that his brother had left the hospital, e.g. Magomed came to visit his brother in the hospital but found his room empty. But they differ in that (2) denotes a situation where the speaker directly witnessed Magomed making this inference, i.e. the speaker was present with Magomed in the hospital when Magomed noticed that his brother’s room was empty, while (3) denotes a situation where the speaker did not witness this. In other words, Khwarshi distinguishes between a Witnessed Inferential and an Unwitnessed Inferential, a kind of combined evidential that it is, to say the least, typologically unusual.

In Khwarshi, it is possible to use the Past Unwitnessed with a first person subject, obtaining an interpretation along the lines of ‘I did X, but was not aware of this, e.g. because I was drunk’. One might therefore predict that the same could be done with the Inferential, giving rise to (4) as an analog of (1). However, (4) is unequivocally rejected by native speakers. While there are various things one might do unawares, drawing inferences is not one of them!

Examples

- (1) žu, c'oxu minuta-ba atγul ilo b-ot'uq'-šehol,
3SG.ABS few minute-PL before 1PL.ABS HPL-come-POSTR
ø-oⁿk'-un ø-us-i.
I-go-PF.CVB I-find-PST.W
'He left a few minutes before we arrived.'
- (2) Muḥamadul us eⁿdu-γul ø-oⁿk'-un ø-us-i balnic-λ'o-zi.
Magomed.LAT sibling inside-VERS I-go-PF.CVB I-find-PST.W hospital.OBL-SUP-ABL
'Magomed found out that (his) brother had left the hospital.' [When Magomed came to visit his brother to the hospital, Magomed found that the room was empty; and the speaker saw it]
- (3) Muḥamadul us eⁿdu-γul ø-oⁿk'-un ø-us-un balnic-λ'o-zi.
Magomed.LAT sibling inside-VERS I-go-PF.CVB I-find-PST.UW hospital.OBL-SUP-ABL
'Magomed found out that (his) brother had left the hospital.' [When Magomed came to visit his brother to the hospital, Magomed found that the room was empty; and the speaker did not see it]
- (4) *žu, c'oxu minuta-ba atγul ilo b-ot'uq'-šehol,
3SG.ABS few minute-PL before 1PL.ABS HPL-come-POSTR
ø-oⁿk'-un ø-us-un.
I-go-PF.CVB I-find-PST.UW
'He left a few minutes before we arrived.'