

**The Biabsolutive Construction in Nakh–Daghestanian –  
a new type of object incorporation?  
oral or poster**

Nakh–Daghestanian languages have ergative case marking. Affixes on the verb mark agreement with the absolutive NP in gender and number. In a transitive ergative construction (EC) both lexical verb and auxiliary agree with the patient in the absolutive case (1a).

However, in the biabsolutive construction (BC) there are two NPs in the absolutive case and agreement is between the non–finite lexical verb and the patient and between the auxiliary and the agent respectively (1b). The whole sentence is usually in the imperfective aspect. Biabsolutive constructions are attested in all branches of Nakh–Daghestanian.

The typical functions of the BC are agent topicalization and patient demotion or deindividuation. Often the BC is an answer to a question about what the agent is doing, that is, both verbal complex and patient are in focus (2a). In the EC on the contrary it is mainly the patient that contains the new information (2b).

The BC displays a few constraints which are absent in the EC. One constraint concerns word order: in the BC but not in the EC the patient and the lexical verb form a unit. Therefore neither SVO nor OXV are acceptable in most languages (3a, b). Another constraint concerns the possibility of focusing on the patient by means of question clitics or auxiliaries following the patient. In the EC, the question clitic is added to the patient if the patient is questioned. However, in the BC the question clitic must be attached to the lexical verb (4), such that again both verbal complex and patient are in focus.

The differences between ECs and BCs are traditionally explained in terms of monoclausality (EC) vs. biclausality (BC, see Kazenin 1998, Testelec 1999). In the BC patient and lexical verb form a unit with the formal properties of a subordinated clause. Agent and auxiliary form the matrix clause. But this analysis runs into problems as soon as one looks in detail at all the properties of the BC and compares them with other undoubtedly biclausal sentences. For instance, inserting modifiers between P and lexical verb and scrambling the embedded patient are allowed with at least some complement clauses (5).

Instead, it is proposed that the BC instantiates a special type of object incorporation. In the BC the patient often lacks specific reference and cannot be left out, just as in other languages with object incorporation. Phonologically the patient remains a separate word, but semantically it gets incorporated into the lexical verb with which it is used. This complex in turn

is reanalyzed as a single whole and the inner structure is no longer transparent.

This analysis explains not only the word order restrictions but also some other peculiarities of the BC that are not satisfactorily accounted for under the biclausal approach.

### Examples and References

(1) Archi (Kibrik 1979: 67–69)

a *buwa-mu x:<sup>w</sup>alli b-ar-ši b-i*  
 mother-ERG bread(III) III-make-CVB III-be  
 ‘Mother is baking the bread.’

b *buwa x:<sup>w</sup>alli b-ar-ši d-i*  
 mother(II) bread(III) III-make-CVB II-be  
 ‘Mother is baking the bread.’

(2) Khwarshi

a. What is the boy doing?  
*uže hěše c’ališe goli*  
 boy book read.PRS be.PRS  
 ‘The boy is reading a book.’

b. What is the boy reading?  
*uža hěše c’ališe goli*  
 boy.ERG book read.PRS be.PRS  
 ‘The boy is reading a book.’

(3) Avar

a. *češera-b t’eχ vasas c’al-ule-b b-ugo*  
 black-III book(III) boy(I).ERG read-PTCP.PRS-III III-be.PRS  
 ‘The boy is reading the black book.’

b. \**češera-b t’eχ vas c’al-ule-w w-ugo*  
 black-III book(III) boy(I) read-PTCP.PRS-I I-be.PRS  
 (The boy is reading the black book.)

(4) Godoberi (Kazenin 1996: 230)

*šali inL’as:u quča b-al-at-a-wu ida?*  
 Ali which book(III) III-read-PRS-CVB-Q COP  
 ‘Which book is Ali reading?’

- (5) Hinuq  
*magalu obu-z b-eq'i-yo iyoy b-u-λ'os*  
bread(III) father-DAT III-know-PRS mother.ERG III-make-PTCP  
'Father knows that mother is making bread.'

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