

The Demonstrative system of Georgian and Megrelian

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The goal of this paper is to provide a detailed description of the demonstrative paradigms in two South Caucasian sister languages, Georgian and Megrelian. While demonstrative forms in these languages exhibit several hallmarks characteristic of demonstratives cross-linguistically, we also show that both languages have rich demonstrative paradigms, including secondary complex demonstratives, dedicated to referring to quantities and qualities, demonstrating similarities and sorting things into kinds.

Georgian and Megrelian are under-resourced languages. Georgian is the literary language of Georgia with a rich grammatical tradition, whereas Megrelian is an unwritten and endangered language. The data presented are drawn from corpora as well as field-work.

Demonstratives encode three-way deixis in Georgian and two-way deixis in Megrelian, along with number and case features. In both languages, demonstratives do not form a homogeneous class; they are divided into so-called primary and secondary complex demonstratives (Shanidze, 1953) (Gogolashvili, 2011). Primary demonstratives can be used as determiners (preceding nouns) as well as pronominally, as is the case in many languages. However, it can be shown that in Georgian and Megrelian, demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative determiners exhibit distinct morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties suggesting that they are categorically distinct.

It has been argued that demonstratives cannot refer to kinds or have a generic reading (Alexiadou, 2007) due to their context-dependent nature (Krámsky, 1972). Yet, König and Umbach (2018) provide a semantic analysis of a previously neglected subclass of demonstratives, termed demonstratives of manner, quality, and degree (MQD). They have shown that this subclass generates ad-hoc kinds, offering insight into the interplay between demonstration and similarity in kind formation. The major aspects of the semantic analyses developed for German (*so, solch*) and English (*so, such*) carry over to other languages. While German and English the MQD demonstratives are not transparently related to the paradigm of demonstrative determiners, in Georgian and Megrelian they are. As shown in (1) and (2), these secondary demonstratives are derived from the genitive stems of the primary demonstratives by adding the so-called QUALITY and QUANTITY markers (roughly translatable as "this kind of" and "this amount of"). Note that, due to the presence of the demonstrative stem, secondary demonstratives preserve their regular deictic features. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, secondary QUANTITY demonstratives constitute a typologically unique class.

(1) Secondary QUALITY demonstratives

a. Georgian

ამ-ის-ნაირ-ი	სიმღერა
am-is-nair-i	simghera
DEM.PROX-GEN-QUAL-NOM	song.NOM
“This type/kind of song”	

b. Megrelian

ათე-ცალ-ი	ობირეშ-ი
ate-tsal-i	obiressh-i

DEM.PROX-QUAL-NOM
“This type/kind of song”

song-NOM

(2) Secondary QUANTITY demonstratives

a. Georgian

ამ-დენ-ი

am-den-i

DEM.PROX.GEN-QUANT-NOM

“This many songs”

სიმღერა

simghera

song.NOM

b. Megrelian

ათე-სხ-ი

Ate-skhi

DEM.PROX-QUANT-NOM

“This many songs”

ობირეშ-ი

obiresshi

song-NOM

The markers of QUALITY come in three guises (-*nairi*, -*gvari*, -*tana* in Georgian and -*neri*, -*ygura*, -*tsal* in Megrelian). Crucially, some of the same QUALITY markers can combine with almost all types of pronouns as well as nouns. In the latter case, they function as derivational morphemes, turning nominals into adjectives. In contrast, QUANTITY markers can combine only with certain types of pronominals but not with nouns.

This data provides some interesting new questions regarding demonstratives: (1) Are the markers of QUANTITY and QUALITY derivational affixes and if so, what does this tell us about the syntactic status of demonstratives? (2) Can demonstratives sort things into kinds and if so, what does it tell us about the semantics of demonstratives? (3) What do kind-rendering demonstratives tell us about the interpretation of the nominal phrase?

Examining and comparing two closely related languages, identifying their sources of similarities or variations should enrich the empirical foundation regarding grammar, function, or use of demonstratives and deictic terms, from a theoretical or empirical standpoint. It can also contribute to modelling of language universals and the field of language typology.

References:

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