

HELMA VAN DEN BERG: *Dargi folktales. Oral stories from the Caucasus and an introduction to Dargi grammar*. 324 pp. Leiden: Research School CNWS. 2001.

Dargi, also known as Dargwa or Dargin, is a member of the North East Caucasian, or Daghestanian, language-family, in which it is most closely linked to Lak. Both these, along with Avar, Lezgi(an) and Tabasaran (plus Chechen and Ingush from the related North Central Caucasian group) were granted literary status during Soviet times, though Dargi remains sadly unique in having been provided to date with no (bilingual) dictionary. In the last Soviet census of 1989 there were some 365,800 Dargis. The various dialects differ so sharply that three (Kubachi, Megeb and Chirag) are often considered distinct languages. Literary Dargi is based on Akusha, with admixtures from other dialects, especially Urakhi, which allows van den Berg to make the (at first sight) odd assertion: 'There are no native speakers of Standard Dargi'; Russian is the principal means of inter-dialectal communication.

The volume's heart is a selection of 32 folk-texts taken from a 1976 collection of pan-Daghestanian humour. These are presented in the original (Cyrillic-based) script, with changes noted in comparison with other published versions; sentential numbers are added for ease of reference. The texts are then provided with transcription, broken down into sentences with morpheme-glosses, translation and, in footnotes, remarks on any alterations deemed necessary by informants. All the vocabulary from the texts is given in the form of a root-/morpheme-lexicon with such information as perfective vs imperfective stems and relevant case-frames for verbs, and plural formations and deviant oblique stems for nouns. The text-section is preceded by a grammatical sketch, the first to appear in English, which is most useful particularly for the information included on syntax, a crucial area of grammar largely ignored by native Caucasian commentators -- the 1993 3- volume 'Dargi Language', for example, by the late Zapir Abdullaev is divided into 1. Phonetics, 2. Morphology, 3. Word-formation. Naturally, van den Berg's 'Studies in the verbal morphology and syntax of Akusha Dargi' is keenly awaited for further insights in this sphere. Illustrative material in the sketch is garnered from the incorporated texts.

If Daghestanian verbs shew agreement, this is normally in the form of the class-marker appropriate to the intransitive subject (S) or transitive direct object (O; P is preferred in this work). However, Dargi also illustrates person-agreement, but the patterning is rather complex, depending on the agentivity of the P: 1st or 2nd person P determines the suffixal agreement (*r-it-i-ri* 'I hit you(Feminine)', where class-prefix *r-* and person-suffix *-ri* point to the P vs *r-it-i-ra* 'you hit me(Feminine)', though, with appropriately marked external (pro)nouns, this could also mean 'I *-ra* hit her *r-*', for with 3rd person P it is the transitive subject (A) that determines the person-agreement,

vs *r-it-ib-Ø* 'X -Ø hit her r-'). The Present Progressive and Perfect compound tenses allow further variation: if the neutral pattern gives:

dudesh-li dzhuz b-uch'-ul sa.y
 father-Ergative book.Absolute Neuter-read-? is(Masculine)
 'Father read a/the book'

where the initial class-marker agrees with the neuter 'book', whilst the copula has masculine person-agreement, one can bring P into focus by marking the copula appropriately:

dudesh-li dzhuz b-uch'-ul sa-b
 'As for the book, father reads it'

Note, however, this is to be distinguished from the anti-passive, a construction available to some 60% of Dargi's transitive verbs:

dudesh dzhuz-li uch'-ul sa.y
 father.Absolute book-Ergative (Masculine)read-? is(Masculine)
 'Father is engaged/spending time in reading a/the book'

The suffix *-ul* on the lexical verb here is glossed by van den Berg as the (Present) Gerund marker -- *-(li)* is the past equivalent. I have used a question-mark for the reason that I find use of the designation 'gerund' here somewhat awkward. The term in Russian grammar is *deeprichastie*, which the dictionaries translate as 'verbal adverb'. Considering that such forms can serve as object-complement to the verb 'see', as illustrated p. 130 in sentence 14 of text 13, one might think that a term used for a verbal noun (which is what 'gerund' means) might be appropriate, but there is nothing nominal about its employment in example 162 (p. 72), where it serves as a sort of Injunctive (or, in English, past participle) '*Having left* pilaf at home..., I went to the village', and its role in these compound tenses also renders the employment of 'gerund' rather infelicitous. The form corresponds in terms of its general functions to formations which in North West Caucasian are usually described in English as 'Absolutes', and I would recommend introducing such an unloaded term for future descriptions of Dargi (and other Daghestanian languages).

Dargi does have two verbal nouns, an Infinitive and a Masdar, and their interplay looks a promising area for syntactic investigation. Also the use of the Past Absolute of the verb 'say' (*?-i-li*) as a speech-particle seems to have parallels with other Caucasian speech-particles: it is found with the Past Absolute of the lexical verb in sentence 8 of text 1 (p. 82) as complement of the verb 'rejoice' (N.B. the speech-particle is omitted when this very example is cited as example 134 on p. 68 in the grammatical sketch); it is associated with the Infinitive in sentence 13 of text 1 as a purpose-expression, though elsewhere the Infinitive alone, or suffixed with the Absolute ending *-li*, or in conjunction with *bahandan* (also found in the sense of

'because of') is used in this function; and its is naturally used to accompany direct quotations.

The sequence *sa.y-ra* can represent the (Masculine) copula 'is' + conjunction 'and' or a reflexive with conjunction 'self and': in sentences 1 and 5 of text 20, and in sentence 7 of the second part of text 27, the sequence is treated as an example of the former, but do not the contexts rather point to the latter?

This is a tasty appetiser to the author's forthcoming further work on Dargi.

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Corrigenda

p.7 1.18up: introduction TO; p.11 1.6up: only AN object; p.12 1.10: there WAS apparently an; p.13 1.3up: *udzi+*; p.15 1.10 & p.52 1.8: *tantUM*; p.22 14 *et passim*: Kopeck; p.23 1.4: *busurman-t-a-*; p.24 1.10: *-la,*; p.27 1.15up: 'THAT (near the hearer)'; p.28 1.9: italicise *se-lra*; p.30 1.9: *k'.el*; 1.16: eight BIG lards; 1.24: thirtieth; p.31 1.12: *ila* 'Thither; p.34 1.19: condolences; p.43 ex.49: **arq'-ul-ra-w**; p.48 1.15up & p.148 1.7up: 'let HIM steal; p.52 1.3up: '(s)he WILL MAKE...I SHALL MAKE; p.54 1.8up: *embarRass*; p.54 1.7up: italicise *l*; 1.2up: *rebound*; p.59 ex.92a: *il-i-ni*; p.60 Ft.21: fact that; p.61 1.11: to BE marked; p.62 1.10: *textS*; p.63 ex.110: (Because of you); p.72 1.6: THIS man OF HONOUR; p.111 1.6up: *MAY* fire; p.115 1.11: lose; p.123: gloss is missing from the last line of text; 1.1up: *woolLen*; p.155 1.5: buried in the field the fish which she had bought at the market; p.165 1.5 & p.173 1.1up: Kurban's; p.170 ll.19 & 21: *catastrophE*; p.173 1.1: Jar; p.174 1.4up: his SHEEP; p.184 1.15up: *-un-si*; p.202 1.9: some time WALKING; p.204 1.10: say "zzz"; p.205 1.8: went OFF FOR A WALK; 1.18: pilaf nor; p.213 1.5: him (said); p.216 1.6up: 'IF you are neither; p.220 1.15: in order not to have; p.224 1.19: *criticiSe*; p.231 1.13: villagers SET OFF into; p.233 1.11: *THRONE-OBL-SUP*; p.235 1.14: there that; 1.22: waves so; p.240 1.13: *embarRassed*; 1.16: MAKE you return; p.255 1.3: you MEAN to say BY that; 1.10: eyes as I did with my tooth; p.263 1.10: regardless IF whether.