Circassian double past and its counterparts in other West Caucasian languages

The so-called double past represents a rather rare phenomenon, attested, for example, in Korean [Sohn 1995], Diola-Fogny [Sapir 1965], Dongolese Nubian [Armbruster 1960] and in two Circassian languages (North Caucasian family), Adyghe and Kabardian (these data come from my own field materials). These affixes, or, more precisely, affixal complexes, demonstarate semantic features of a prototypical pluperfect [Squartini 1999], [Sichinava 2005] with a set of meanings which vary from language to language, but on the whole is considerably clear: anterior in the past (which is often regarded as the main and historically initial meaning of this range), remote past, experiential, anti-resultative, irrealis conditional. These markers also have some special discourse functions, e.g., marking of backgrounded or unexpected information. Taken together these functions form a single semantic zone named 'discontinuous past' (Plungian 2001, Plungian & van der Auwera in print), where actual temporal reference of the event and its aspectual characteristics are of no or little relevance. Thus, such iteration of the past tense affix iconically reflects the discontinuous past semantics.

In Adyghe the marker in question looks like *-ʁe*, and used by itself marks simple past-time reference (usually combined with perfective aspect). The 'discontinuous past' semantics (in Adyghe the following meanings are expressed: remote past, antiresultative ('cancelled' result), experiential, irrealis conditional) emerges only when two such suffixes are applied to the verb form, one of them serving as a 'retrospective shift' marker which puts the situation denoted by the verb back in the past. Most commonly this affixal complex looks like *-ʁa-ʁe* (due to a morphophonemic vowel alternation), but it doesn't represent a single unitary morpheme since other suffixes may intervene between the two occurrences of *-ʁe*.

In Kabardian we find again a complex past marker *-ʁ-a* (originally formed by iteration of the perfective past *-ʁe*, phonologically realized as **-a and clearly cognate to the Adyghe marker**), showing a greater degree of phonological and morphological fusion but having just the same set of meanings as its Adyghe counterpart.

Other West Caucasian languages possess some markers, which probably share a common diachronic source [Dumézil 1932] with those of Adyghe and Kabardian (and their cognation? is unquestionable). In Abkhaz, Abaza and Ubykh they look like *-χa*, *-ʁa* and *-qa* respectively (see [Dumézil 1931], [Genko 1955], [Hewitt 1979, 1989]), which are very similar to one another in both semantics and morphosyntax. They do not allow iteration, as do markers observed in the Circassian languages (or, at least, there is no evidence to consider them an instance of such a fusion as in Kabardian), and are never employed independently, but only in combination with other markers expressing tense, aspect and finiteness, on which depends the semantics of the complex: affixes of one group imply range of perfect meanings, and of another – pluperfect. In general they denote anterior in the past, proximative ('X almost happened') and are used in apodoses of past irrealis conditionals. Moreover, a characteristic of Ubykh pluperfect is its introductive function: it is used in the beginning of a narrative in order to put all subsequent events to 'discontinuous past'.

The iteration of a past tense marker is rather non-trivial and unusual in itself, and there exist at least two languages with such markers, which show in an iconic manner the 'emphatic' nature of 'discontinuous past'. Furthermore, in the whole linguistic group cognate markers unequivocally describe this semantic zone, though the particular semantic nuances of the surveyed markers vary across languages. Thus, the evidence from West Caucasian languages is of great value for the typology of 'discontinuous past' from both functional and morphological perspectives.

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