

Morphological complexity of Archi verbs.

Archi, a Daghestanian language traditionally assigned to Lezgian group, has an amazingly rich system of inflectional morphology. The mere size of verbal paradigm strains credibility: grammar description calculates that a verb has in principle 1,502,839 forms (Kibrik et al, 1977). Archi verb has “basic” tense/aspect/mood forms and related gerunds, participles and masdars total 12,405. Archi verb agrees with the Nominative of the clause in gender and number (there are four genders and two numbers in Archi). Besides, masdars can take the nominal case endings. These two factors multiply the paradigm up to 188,463. The commentative can be formed from all personal forms, and from the admirative, and itself has an impressive array of forms; it is also the base for further participles. The additional forms (excluding gender and number distinctions) are 107,078. When gender/number and case distinctions are included that number rises to 1,314,376 forms. When added to 188,463 this gives 1,502,839 forms in total.

The size of the paradigm is only one aspect of complexity that the speaker of Archi has to contend with. Another is the irregularity of the Archi verb. All the forms mentioned above are produced from four stems. For most of the verbs at least three stems must be learned separately, and in addition the form of the Imperative is often irregular. The position of the gender marker must also be learned: the gender marker can be a prefix or an infix interacting with an aspectual infix in a non-trivial way. The combination of these factors led Kibrik to divide the verbs into 35 conjugation classes (Kibrik et al, 1977).

This complexity makes the task of mastering the language seem impossible. However, it is important to remember that Archi verbs make a closed class: there are only 170 (simple) verbs that inflect, the rest of the vocabulary consists of complex verbs where the second part is a simple verb. The first part of a complex verb can be a case form of a noun, an adjective, borrowed uninflected word of an unclear word class etc. The most productive simple verbs that participate in making complex verbs are the verbs *kes* ‘become’, *as* ‘make’ and *bos* ‘say’. The most interesting case is the complex verbs that have *bos* as their second part as there is a tendency for some of these verbs to behave like simple ones.

The paper gives a brief overview of Archi simple verbs and shows the relations between simple and complex verbs, with a particular attention to one class of verbs that belong to the “grey zone” between simple and complex verbs. I also make an attempt (using the corpus collected in the field) on statistical estimation on what part of the verbal paradigm is used most frequently, and speculate on how much has to be stored in speaker’s memory.