Multiple relativization in Northwest Caucasian
(with special reference to Adyghe)[*]

Yury Lander

(Institute of Oriental Studies RAS, Moscow)

All of the surviving Northwest Caucasian languages possess an interesting construction where the target of relativization obtains multiple expressions within a relative clause, provided that it has several syntactic roles. In general, the role of the non-absolutive target is indexed in these languages by means of relative prefixes, which replace personal prefixes. Consequently, a single relative clause may include several relative prefixes, as in (1) and (2):

(1)   z-jate   jə-kartine   ze-s-tə-ʁe-r
        REL-POSS+father POSS-picture   REL-1SG-give-PST-ABS
        'the (one) whom$_i$ I presented with a portrait of his$_i$ (lit. whose) father'

(2)   çəf-x-ew   mə   weredə-r   qə-zə-ʔ$_w$ə-n-ew   zə-f-a-txə-ʁe-r
        person-PL-ADV   this   song-ABS   DIR-REL-say-POT-ADV   REL-BEN-3PL-write-PST-ABS
        'people for whom he wrote this song in order for them (lit. whom) to sing it'

This phenomenon noted already by Dumezil (1932: 245) and later described partly by Hewitt (1979a; 1979b) is challenging for many theories of relativization which are based on the assumption that relativization deals with the syntactic positions rather than with semantic arguments.

In this paper some data is presented on multiple relativization in Abzakh Adyghe. The point we argue for is that not all of the presumable instances of multiple relativization represent multiple relativization per se, as there are constraints that seem suitable for examples like (1) but not for constructions like (2).

In Adyghe **multiple relativization proper** illustrated in (1) follows some special constraints. Thus, for many speakers it is prohibited if one of the target's roles is absolutive. In fact, relativization of the absolutive argument is unmarked in Circassian (Adyghe and Kabardian), hence this constraint simply prohibits the coreference of a non-absolutive target with the 3rd person absolutive argument; cf. (3):

(3)   z-jate   ə-λeʁ$_w$ə-ʁe-r
        REL-POSS+father 3SG-see-PST-ABS
        'the (one) whose$_i$ father saw him$_{i/*j}$'

Further, multiple marking of the roles of the target is optional in Adyghe. In particular, in cases where the target has several roles within a clause, the following rule seems to apply: Given the hierarchy ACTOR > INDIRECT OBJECT/CAUSEE > NON-DERIVED INDIRECT OBJECT > OBLIQUE OBJECT (introduced with a valence-changing prefix) > POSSESSOR > OBJECT OF A POSTPOSITION, relative marking of an argument lower in the hierarchy implies relative marking of a coreferent argument higher in the hierarchy but not vice versa. Cf.:

(4)   a.   z-jə-ʁ$_w$əneʁ$_w$ə   pŝaŝe-r   ŝ$_w$ə   zə-λeʁ$_w$ə-ʁe-r
              REL-POSS-neighbour   girl-ABS   good   REL-see-PST-ABS
              'the (one) who$_i$ fell in love with his$_i$ (lit. whose) neighbour'
        b.   jə-ʁ$_w$əneʁ$_w$ə   pŝaŝe-r   ŝ$_w$ə   zə-λeʁ$_w$ə-ʁe-r
              POSS-neighbour   girl-ABS   good   REL-see-PST-ABS
              'the (one) who$_i$ fell in love with his$_{i/j}$ neighbour'
        c.   z-jə-ʁ$_w$əneʁ$_w$ə   pŝaŝe-r   ŝ$_w$ə   ə-λeʁ$_w$ə-ʁe-r
              REL-POSS-neighbour   girl-ABS   good   3SG-see-PST-ABS
              'the (one) whose$_i$ neighbour he$_{*i/j}$ fell in love with'

This hierarchy can be related either to Keenan and Comrie's (1977) well-known NP Accessibility Hierarchy or to certain principles of binding.

While being at first glance similar, **pseudo-multiple relativization** observed in case of relativization into embedded clauses (2) shows rather different properties. First, although such relativization requires some

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reflection of relativization in the grammatically higher position (that is in the matrix clause), this requirement concerns even those cases where a coreferent argument need not be presented there:

(5)   a.   se s-e-š'əne   a   çəf-me   sə-q-a-wəbətə-n-č'e
            I 1SG.ABS-DYN-be_afraid that person-ERG:PL 1SG.ABS-DIR-3PL-catch-POT-INS
            'I am afraid that those people will catch me.'
       b.   sə-qe-zə-wəbətə-n-č'e   se   sə-*(z-š'ə-)š'əne-xe-re-m
            1SG.ABS-DIR-REL-catch-POT-INS   I   1SG.ABS-*(REL-LOC-)be_afraid-PL-DYN-ERG
            'the (ones) whom I am afraid that they will catch'

Second, relativization within the embedded clause always allows the coreference of an absolutive argument (in one clause) with a non-absolutive in another clause; cf.:

(6)   çəf-ew   qerabʁe χ_wə-n   zə-mə-λeč'ə-n-ew   t-λəte-re-r
          person-ADV cowardly happen-POT   REL-NEG-can-POT-ADV   1PL-consider-DYN-ABS
          'the person such that we think (lit. consider him) that he cannot be cowardly'

This suggests that in Adyghe relativization into embedded clause displaying multiple reflections of relativization does not instantiate multiple relativization proper, and perhaps simply represents the embedding of one relative construction into another. Such conclusion is supported also by several ordering criteria.

Notably most of the criteria distinguishing between multiple relativization proper and pseudo-multiple relativization are not applicable to Abkhaz, since it does not display the constraints discussed above, but we may speculate that this is related to some additional features of Abkhaz relatives. Therefore the distinction proposed here may be relevant for other members of the Northwest Caucasian family as well.

Abbreviations

ABS – absolutive, ADV – adverbial marker, BEN – benefactive, DIR – directional prefix, DYN – dynamic marker, ERG – ergative, INS – instrumental, LOC – locative preverb, NEG – negation, PL – plural, POSS – possessive prefix, POT – potential/masdar, PST – past, REL – relative marker, SG – singular. Numbers denote persons.

References

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