

## Lability in Caucasian languages and its relation to aspectual properties

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Lability in Caucasian languages (particularly Abkhaz-Adyghe and Nakh-Daghestanian languages) is connected to tense and aspectual characteristics of verb forms in two ways. On the one hand, labile verbs have particular aspectual characteristics – as I will show, they are not arbitrary, classes of labile verbs in Caucasian languages tend to have particular aspectual properties. On the other hand, labile verbs interact with grammatical tense/aspect markers – this interaction is sometimes not simple. In my talk I will primarily analyze the first aspect.

In famous works [Nedjalkov 1969], [Haspelmath 1993], [Ljutikova 2002] the authors classify pairs like ‘to break (transitive)’/‘to break (intransitive)’, ‘to boil (transitive)/to boil (intransitive)’ as “inchoative/causative”. Their aspectual properties are not analyzed. The authors use a spontaneity scale, which shows whether the situation prototypically take its place spontaneously or not: the left end of the scale presents prototypically spontaneous and the right end non-spontaneous situations:

spontaneous	non-spontaneous	
freeze – dry – melt – burn – fill – rock – gather – open – break – spill		[Ljutikova 2002]

However, it is easily to see that the situations on the scale differ by their aspectual properties. Verbs like ‘break’ are of the class of “achievements/accomplishments” [Vendler 1967], often they belong to the class of “momentary” verbs. and ‘boil’ is of the process type, as are almost all verbs of the left side. Aspectual classes of labile verbs differ from one areal to another. Which method – depending on aspectual properties or spontaneity – is more effective? I will show that it is the first one.

For Caucasian languages, the most characteristic are “accomplishment”, momentary verbs,: cf. Lezgian labile verbs *xun* ‘to break’, *q'in* ‘to kill’, *q0azunun* ‘to tear’, *aTun* ‘to tear’, Adyghe *zebɣərətəqwən* ‘to spill’, *q\_wəten* ‘to break’, whereas Adyghe verbs like *qwesen* ‘to die away’, *ɬk\_wən* ‘to melt’, *stən* ‘to freeze’ are not labile. The same classes of verbs are usually labile in Adyghe and Agul languages [Gishev 1968], [Daniel et al. 2005], [Letuchiy in press] (cf. [Arkadiev 2005], where the author proves that verbs like ‘to break’ belong to the momentary aspectual class in Adyghe and verbs like ‘to boil’ are telic processes). They either do not have any process phase (as the situation ‘to break’) or this phase is not relevant for the speaker (as in the situations ‘to spill’ and ‘to kill’)

On the other hand, the same fact can be accounted for in terms of spontaneity of the situation: the most characteristic labile verbs denote situation on the right end of the scale.

Note that in [Hopper, Thompson 1980] relation between these two groups of characteristics is noted: prototypically transitive verbs are assumed to be telic (accomplishments, achievements).. In Caucasian languages transitive verbs are usually “prototypically transitive” in terms of [Hopper, Thompson 1980] – the main property for a verb to be transitive is degree of affectedness of the patient (e.g., in Adyghe the verb *on* ‘to hit’ is intransitive and the verb *wEBEn* ‘to kill, to beat’ is transitive; see also [Testelec 1998]). Therefore, the main component of the situation is the final state of the patient, different from the initial one. The verbs of the right end of the scale focus particularly the components of momentary change of state and the final state, because they simply do not have a process phase:

Language strategy: process is not focused, **change of state of the patient and its final state are focused**

Verbs of the right end of the scale: **change of state of the patient and its final state are focused.**

Two factors focus the component of the final state. Therefore, it is not surprising that the verbs of the right end are labile: the focused component (final state) does not differ from the transitive to the intransitive use of the verb: the final state does not presuppose participation of the agent. In European languages, verbs with the same meaning also focus change of state of the patient and

its final state, but in these languages in general the final state of the patient is not generally focused. Because of this, European languages have process labile verbs like French *fondre* ‘melt’, *sécher* ‘dry’ etc.

Importance of aspectual characteristics is proven also by more specific properties of labile verbs – for instance, by relations with derivational markers. In Adyghe, which has a large class of labile verbs: *qwäten* ‘break’, *zebɣərətəqwən* ‘spill’ – some of labile verbs like *qenen* ‘leave/stay’, *zebɣərətəqwən* ‘spill’ can combine with the causative marker *Re-*. In this case the unmarked form focuses the endpoint of the situation whereas the marked causative form emphasises the process phase, for example, manner of action (this causes the meaning ‘on purpose’, which characterizes actions of the agent:

- (1)    se       wəne-m       sə-qe-na-ɸ  
       I        HOUSE-ERG    1SG.S-INV-STAY-PAST  
       ‘I stayed home’.
- (2)    sabəj-əm        ʒeg<sub>w</sub>akə-xe-r wəne-m        qə-r-jə-na-ɸ  
       CHILD-ERG    TOY-PL-ABS                    HOUSE-ERG        INV-3SG.A-LEAVE-PAST  
       ‘The child left his/her toys at home’ (not on purpose);
- (3)    sabəj-əm        ʒeg<sub>w</sub>akə-xe-r wəne-m        qə-rjə-ɸe-na-ɸ  
       CHILD-ERG    TOY-PL-ABS        HOUSE-ERG        INV-LOC-3SG.A-CAUS-STAY-PAST  
       ‘The child left his/her toys at home’ (on purpose);

On the other hand, labile verbs like *qwäten* ‘break’, *zepjəçən* ‘break’, *zeʔetχən* ‘tear’ do not combine with the causative marker at all. These are momentary verbs which do not have any process phase but have a final state. Not surprisingly, these verbs denote situations which does not obligatorily have a prototypical volitional agent (someone can tear something unintentionally). On the other hand, we see that they are verbs of the right end of the spontaneity scale. But the aspectual properties can more directly explain the fact that in Adyghe they are labile: agentivity is primarily relevant when the process phase and, therefore, the manner of actions of the subject is emphasized. In Nakh-Daghestanian languages the patient and, correspondingly, its final state are primarily important for transitive verbs – therefore, *qwEten*-type Adyghe verbs have aspectual properties which lets the verb become labile: they do not have any process phase.

“Aspectual” account help us to explain such cases as Agul “to bear/to be born”, which are not analyzed in [Haspelmath 1993]. The intransitive use ‘to be born’ does not designate a spontaneous situation – a child cannot be born without any agent. Therefore, this type of lability cannot be explained by degree of spontaneity. In fact the situation “be born” does not have a process stage, relevant for the speaker – therefore, only the final state of the patient is relevant.

Some Caucasian verbs have process labile verbs, which are usually verbs of motion – these verbs seem to be a special class, according to lability. This fact can also be explained in terms of aspectual properties: in situations like ‘lead’ the actor causes the motion of the patient, moving together with it. Therefore, the causation takes place in the whole process phase.

The data of other languages also demonstrates relevance of aspectual properties for lability. For example, neither Indo-European nor Caucasian languages tend to have labile stative verbs of the type ‘create; be created’ – though some exclusions like French *pendre* ‘hang’ occur. On the other hand, African languages of different families and groups (Kabiyle, Songhay, Bamana etc.) have classes of such verbs, which are not described in [Haspelmath 1993]. In these cases properties of the patient are irrelevant (for example, both the situations ‘hang (intransitive)’ and ‘roll’ does not have a prototypical patient). More important is that in Caucasian languages the intransitive and the transitive use of a labile verb must be of **the same aspectual class** and in African language they do not have to.

Therefore, the main conclusion is that in Caucasian languages lability is characteristic for situations of Vendler’s types “accomplishment” and “achievement”, particularly, for «momentary» verbs which do not have a process phase – they, therefore, emphasize the final state of the patient. This fact agrees with main properties of transitivity in such languages.

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