

The puzzle of the ossetic ezafe

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The focus of this study is nominal modification in Iron Ossetic (< Iranian < Indo-European). Two main strategies for it are the ezafe construction (1) with genitive marking on the modified noun and the regular adjective-noun construction (2).

- (1) Šošlan-ə žɜrond feroχ fater nəχgɜn-ən.
Soslan-GEN old forget flat close-INF
(2) Žɜrond Šošlan feroχ fater nəχgɜn-ən.
old Soslan forget flat close-INF
'Old man Soslan forgot to close the flat's door'

The literature on Ossetic ezafe remains scarce and purely descriptive. According to both [Doguzova 2023] and the intuition of some of our consultants, the construction is lexically restricted and is perceived as archaic. Among the acceptable contexts for ezafe in modern Iron are poetic forms (citations and similar forms, e.g. a famous line *mɜ fədə žɜrond* 'my old father' from Kosta Khetagurov's poem), proverbs, and pejoratives.

Despite the name, the Ossetic ezafe with its lexical restrictions resembles English (3) and French (4) constructions more than the Persian ezafe, which is much less restricted. The question of headedness is open and is to be discussed in the talk.

English and French constructions mentioned are typically analysed as involving movement out of an embedded clause, e.g. (5),(6) (see Kayne 1994). Den Dikken suggests an alternative approach towards the nature of *of/de* in these constructions while still following the idea of NP undergoing movement (Den Dikken 1998).

- (3) that idiot of a doctor
(4) cet imbécile de Jean
'that imbecile of Jean'
(5) that [D/PP [NP idiot□][of [IP a doctor I⁰ [e]□ ...
(6) cet [DP/PP [NP imbécile□] [de [IP Jean I⁰ [e]□ ...

This study is aimed at clarifying both lexical and grammatical restrictions on the usage of ezafe, including possible parts of speech of both words and their availability for conjunction, referential status of a genitive participant, and acceptability of ezafe in positive evaluation contexts. Non-ezafetic inversion of nouns and adjectives was found to be unacceptable in all contexts.

The genitive participant may be represented by a proper name (1). Common nouns, whether definite or not, are prohibited (7). It is not possible to use a numeral-noun construction in this position, either.

- (7) *Čəžž-ə rɜʃuɜd wənž-ə fɜ-sɜw-ə
girl-GEN beautiful street-GEN PV-go-3SG
'A beautiful girl walks down the street'

Two proper names may be conjoined in such a position and speakers differ in whether or not they allow both conjuncts to be genitive-marked (8).

- (8) Šošlan(°-ə) 3m3 Žawər-ə 3rra-t3 =mən n3
 Soslan(-GEN) and Zaur-GEN fool-PL=1SG.DAT NEG
 rajš-t-oj m3= zontəkk
 get-TR-3PL 1SGPOSS umbrella
 'Fools Soslan and Zaur forgot to take my umbrella'

Position of the non-genitive participant may be occupied by lexemes ambiguous between nouns and adjectives (1) as well as by adjectives with phonologically non-null adjectivising suffix -žən (9). As expected, nationality-denoting lexemes are prohibited (10).

- (9) Šošlan-ə žonžən nog3j rajš-t-a fonz
 Soslan-GEN smart again get-TR-3SG five
 'Smart Soslan got an A again'
- (10) *Šošlan-ə iron s3r-ə Z3wžəq3w-ə
 Soslan-GEN ossetic live-3SG Vladikavkaz-INESS
 'Ossetian Soslan lives in Vladikavkaz'

Ezafetic pejorative constructions were evaluated as grammatical even by those consultants who considered ezafe unnatural elsewhere. The speakers whose idiolects demonstrate the highest overall productivity of ezafe found its usage in meliorative constructions acceptable:

- (11) (?)Alan-ə saq
 Alan-GEN good.guy

The overall phrase can express externally-assigned case as edge morphology (12) and can be modified by a demonstrative.

- (12) 3ž n3 'ww3nd-ən Šošlan-ə 3rra-jəl
 1SG NEG believe-1SG Soslan-GEN fool-SUPER
 'I don't believe foolish Soslan'

Half of the informants don't see the two constructions as semantically equivalent. According to their evaluation, the ezafe construction expresses appositive modification, and regular construction is used to express restrictive modification. The formal analysis of the Ossetic ezafe will be presented in the talk.

References

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- [Doguzova 2023] — Догужева З.Х. К проблеме архаичных конструкций изафетной модели в синтаксисе современного осетинского языка // Известия СОИГСИ. 2023. Вып. 50 (89). С.72-82. DOI: 10.46698/VNC.2023.89.50.004
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