

PA8.2 – The development of clitics in Georgian

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

- Clitics are instances of a weak 0:1 form-meaning mismatch. Georgian clitics, which are understudied, are show-case examples.
- Georgian clitics reveal remarkable grammaticalization paths and show dislocation patterns and other mismatches like the doubling of features.

(1) *perkhta kalamani oden ikhilav-t=q'e* Georgian
foot=PL sandal only see-2PL=OBJ.PL
'only sandal on the feet, as you can see'

(2) *gamardjoba=t! kargi=t!* Georgian
hello=2PL/POL okay=2PL/POL
Hello! Okay!

- In (1), the clitic =q'e doubles the plural marking.
- In (2), a verbal affix encoding number is attached as a clitic to non-verbal hosts, thus challenging the unidirectionality hypothesis of grammaticalization theory.

Research questions

- How do clitics in Georgian develop and how is clitic placement and attachment diachronically motivated?
- How are clitics distributed as opposed to full forms?
- Does the development of Georgian clitics confirm or rather challenge grammaticalization theory?

Empirical Investigation

- Which properties do Georgian clitics show and are they persistent across corpora and dialects?
- How do these properties reflect stages in the grammaticalization of clitics?

II. Methodology and hypotheses

Methodology:

- Apply formal syntactic diagnostics to test clitic behavior.
- Examine data from historical corpora of Old and Modern Georgian; compare dialectal forms that retain conservative or partially grammaticalized clitic systems.

Hypotheses:

- Many clitics in Georgian originate from independent particles or full XPs.
- 2P clitics in Georgian are sensitive to information structure.
- Georgian clitics tend to develop additional functions such as politeness, emphasis, or bias, and often shift from verbal to non-verbal hosts. More such cases are expected diachronically.

III. Expected results and discussion

- Clitic placement in Georgian shows early signs of decoupling from verb attachment, thus challenging the unidirectionality hypothesis.
- Phenomena like *suffixaufnahme*, *tmesis*, clitic climbing etc. develop diachronically and thus allow a reassessment of central tenets of grammaticalization theory.
- Second-position clitics systematically target the left edge of the clause, correlating with topical elements or structurally prominent hosts.
- In Georgian's flexible word order, the interpretation of the clitics depends not on the clitic's host itself, but on the position of that host within the clause (e.g., SOV vs. SVO), suggesting that clitic meaning is sensitive to linear structure and clause-level information flow.

IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- P8.1 studied pro-drop while P8.2 is concerned with clitics. P8.1 confirmed the view that the factors licensing object pro-drop and clitics are similar, if not identical in the languages under examination.
- In ancient IE languages like Ancient Greek and Vedic Sanskrit both types of deficient categories are attested side by side. As this situation is stable, it cannot be considered transitional.
- From this surprising observation we derive the following research question:
- How exactly are clitics and null elements distributed? How does this distribution change over time? Can we identify other developments in (morpho-)syntax this change is related to?
- This investigation is carried out in P8.3.