The verb ‘to do’ in Upper Şirvan Tat: 
Towards the Genesis of a New Inflectional Paradigm through Suppletion

(Murad Suleymanov, École pratique des hautes études)

Suppletion is a morphological process in which word-forms of the same lexeme have phonologically distinct stems, as in Russian reb ‘om(o)k ‘child’ vs. det ‘i ‘children’ or French je vais ‘I go’ vs. nous allons ‘we go’ (Hippisley et al. 2004). This presentation aims at presenting the composition of the paradigm of the verb which means ‘to do’ in Tat, developed as a result of suppletion between the verbs soxtan ‘to make, to produce’ and nohran ‘to put, to place, to set’. All data consist of extracts from a corpus of spontaneous speech collected during fieldwork conducted by the author as well as from elicitation.

Caucasian Tat is a group of related SW Iranian dialects or even languages, closely related to Classical Persian and spoken mainly in the Republic of Azerbaijan. They are not to be confused with Tati, a cluster of NW Iranian languages spoken in Iranian Azerbaijan. Tat is divided into two main dialect groups with little to no mutual intelligibility: the written and relatively well-studied Judaeo-Tat (JT) and the non-written and understudied Muslim Tat (MT). For centuries, Tat has been in contact with Azeri and East Caucasian languages.

In all Tat varieties, the verb kärđän (cf. Persian kardan), which historically meant ‘to do’, possesses only the obscene sense of ‘to penetrate sexually’, and its use is heavily restricted (Authier 2012: 27). Instead, JT and most MT dialects use the verb saxtän or soxtan (cf. Persian sàxtan) whose original sense was ‘to make, to produce’. This verb conveys meaning of ‘to do’, including in complex predicates. MT of Xizi has adapted the verb narän with the original meaning of ‘to put, to place, to set’ (cf. Persian nehđādan, of the Proto-IE root *dheh₂, which has also given the Latin facio and the English do) for the same purpose.

In MT of the region of Upper Şirvan, the verb soxtan ‘to do’ complements its paradigm with that of the verb nohran ‘to put’ (cognate of the above-mentioned narän) for some modal categories, namely the negative subjunctive (1), the prohibitive (2) and the eventual (3). Moreover, the historical ‘present stem’ of nohran in Upper Şirvan MT, n-, is only used today in the sense ‘do’:

(1) na-dun-ustum ċi soz-um, či nā-n-um
   NEG-know-PST1 what (SBJV)do-1 what NEG-(SBJV)put-1
   ‘I did not know what to do and what not to do.’

(2) sō rišni=rā fāräqät mā-n-ind (cf. ≠ fāräqät soz-ind)
   night light=OBL quiet PROH-put-2PL
   ‘Do not turn off the light at night.’

(3) äyär ŭ=rā bār-und, mān či mi-n-um?
   if s/he=OBL (SBJV)carry_away-3PL I what EVT-put-1
   ‘If they take him away, what will I do?’

The use of the stem n- in the subjunctive (1) and the imperative (2) is restricted to negative forms. For the eventual (3), both affirmative and negative forms with n- exist. Furthermore, all three contexts are compatible with the corresponding negative forms of soxtan (na-soz-um, mā-soz-ind and mi-soz-um respectively), accepted during elicitation, though less common in spontaneous speech.

1 However, its derivatives (dükärđän ‘to pour’, vükärđän ‘to build’) are not regarded as taboo due to the fusion of the historical particles with the verbal stem, leading to them being interpreted as separate lexemes.
As for the verb nohran ‘to put’, the semantic domain of its ‘present stem’ has been overtaken by the semantically related non-defective verb hištän ‘to leave, to release’ (4–5). Meanwhile the ‘past stem’ paradigms for nohran and hištän remain distinct, and the two verbs are used interchangeably without any semantic difference (6), as their meanings for the sense of ‘to put’ have converged under the influence of Azeri (where both meanings are expressed by qoy-):

(4) mi-hil-i (*mi-n-i) mun-i bā kinor
EVT-leave-2 (SBJV)stay-3 LOC edge
‘You will put/leave it to stay on the side.’

(5) bi-hil (*bi-n) bā zir nolinčä
IMP-put(2) LOC bottom cushion
‘Put/leave it under the cushion.’

(6) kitob=ä hiš-tum / noh-rum bə sär ustol
book=OBL put-PST1 put-PST1 LOC head table
‘I left/put the book on the table.’

The presentation will thus describe the distribution of these three verbs and show how they have combined to form their inflectional paradigms. The desemantization of nohran (‘to put’ > ‘to do’) and the replacement of soxtan by nohran in some moods provide evidence for the reorganization of the inflectional paradigm of the verb meaning ‘to do’ by suppletion. This pattern follows the basic features that characterize suppletion cross-linguistically: frequent item, inherent inflection (i.e. not conditioned by syntactic relations between constituents, see Booij 1996) and relative coherence regarding the general morphological system of the language (Hippisley & et al. 2004). On the other hand, the main specificity is that in Upper Şirvan MT, the suppletion seems optional. The coexistence of two stems in some uses testifies to the process not having completed yet. While the use of narän ‘to put’ in the sense of ‘to do’ has been attested for Tat (e.g. in Xızı MT), the situation of Upper Şirvan MT is unique in that the current system constitutes a transitional step which provides precious clues for the reconstitution of this phenomenon in Tat in general.

Abbreviations

EVT = eventual, IMP = imperative, LOC = locative, NEG = negation, OBL = oblique, PROH = prohibitive, PST = past, SBJV = subjunctive

References

