

A COMPARISON OF EASTERN ARMENIAN AND IRON OSSETIC SPATIAL SYSTEMS

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1. Introduction

Ossetic and Modern Eastern Armenian are both Indo-European languages, and are the only major languages of this family spoken in the Caucasus (except Russian). Modern Eastern Armenian is spoken mainly in Armenia and has about 4 million speakers, the Iron dialect of Ossetic¹ is spoken in the regions of North and South Ossetia and has about 400 000 speakers (Lewis 2009). Speakers of these Indo-European languages have been living in the Caucasus for many centuries and came into close contact with the native speakers of the neighbouring languages. It has often been argued that, as a consequence, various parts of the grammar of Ossetic and Armenian have been influenced by those of other languages, or even by a pre-Indo-European “substratum”.

For Ossetic, external influence is usually considered to come from North-West Caucasian languages (Kabardian), from the Nakh branch of North-East Caucasian languages (Chechen, Ingush), from South Caucasian languages (mostly Georgian, but also Mingrelian and Svan) and, finally, from Turkic languages (Karachay-Balkar). The tradition of locating traces of a “Caucasian substratum” in different areas of Ossetic grammar dates back to the pioneering work by V.I. Abaev. Most of Abaev’s early work on this subject is collected in Abaev (1949).

As for Armenian, it has been argued that external influence on this language has persisted since ancient times, starting from Anatolian language isolates such as Hurrian. In the medieval period, evidence of language contact with Kartvelian, Iranian and Turkic languages is reflected in numerous loanwords.²

Because of such intensive multilateral contacts, these languages are an interesting subject for areal studies. In some aspects, both languages show significant deviation from the common Indo-European model, and some of these innovations can indeed be ascribed to the influence of the neighbouring languages. This mainly concerns nominal inflection: both languages have transformed their rich inflectional paradigms into largely agglutinative ones; in addition, new cases were introduced. For Ossetic, these are the Dative, the Alla-

¹ For convenience sake, we will refer to the two idioms as simply “Armenian” and “Ossetic”, unless specified otherwise. This research has been supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, grant No. 11-06-00512-a, and by the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, research program “Corpus linguistics”.

² For a recent assessment of external influence on Armenian, cf. Donabédian 2000.

tive, the Superessive, the Equative, and the Comitative (Belyaev 2010). Eastern Armenian has only acquired the Locative, preserving the other cases (though their markers were drastically changed) with the exception of the Accusative: the dedicated accusative marker was lost, and in the modern language the direct object is marked either with the Nominative or the Dative, depending on animacy. In both languages, the original Indo-European system of prepositions was replaced almost entirely with mostly denominal postpositions which can be inflected for case; in Armenian, they can also take possessive suffixes.

The remarkable similarity in the history of the two languages has prompted Abaev (1978) to claim that it is the result of external influence from a common "Caucasian substratum". The loss of old Indo-European inflectional paradigms and the development of agglutinative case systems occupies a central place in Abaev's list of grammatical features having Caucasian origin in the two languages. Other grammatical isoglossae include: the replacement of old prepositions with postpositions; the fact that the latter can be inflected for case; lack of gender; suspended affixation (Abaev 1970).

However, the mere presence of such drastic changes is not sufficient to claim their areal nature. To make such claims, other possible reasons must be ruled out first. As stated in Thomason (2003: 688):

"In my view, contact between languages (or dialects) is a source of linguistic change whenever a change occurs that would have been unlikely, or at least less likely, to occur outside a specific contact situation" (Thomason 2003).

In addition to language contact, other possible explanations for the presence of similar features in neighbouring languages include the presence of that feature in the ancestral language, if the languages are genetically related; drift (parallel independent development of the same feature in genetically related languages due to similarities in their grammatical systems), universal constraints on language change, or chance (Heine, Kuteva 2005). Only when we make sure that none of the described factors are likely to have contributed to the presence of similar features in neighbouring languages can we assume external influence as the deciding factor.

Unfortunately, some earlier works on Ossetic and Armenian do not meet these requirements. For instance, in Abaev (1978) the prevalence of postpositions in both languages is given as one of the consequences of their common 'Caucasian substratum'. But this feature is known to correlate with the SOV word order (Greenberg 1963), and both languages have SOV as their basic word order, which, in turn, is unlikely to have arisen under contact influence, because the same basic word order is found in all ancient Indo-European languages (Lehmann 1974: 30-53), including Old Iranian languages (cf. Skjærvø 2002: 24 on Old Persian). A similar conclusion is reached in Donabédian 2000:

the word order in Classical Armenian already had prerequisites for changing towards a more stable linguistic state. Therefore, most of the claims concerning areal influence on both Ossetic and Armenian have to be verified using more rigid methods of analysis.

The data on Ossetic that we used for the research comes from the mini-corpus of Ossetic texts (about 4.6 million wordforms) of the “Ossetic Grammatical Studies” project (<http://www.ossetic-studies.org>) and from the field material gathered by Oleg Belyaev in North Ossetia in 2008–2010. Some of the examples were kindly given to us by Julia Mazurova. Those examples that do not have a reference are elicited. The Armenian data comes mostly from Eastern Armenian National Corpus (110 million wordforms) available online at www.eanc.net. We annotate the citations from the corpus with the name of the author and the name of the text; the year of publication is only provided when it is included in the metadata provided by the corpus.

2. Spatial systems

2.1. Introduction

By a spatial system of a language we understand the variety of means it uses to express spatial relations. For Ossetic and Armenian, this includes spatial cases, prepositions, postpositives, and preverbs. A spatial relation involves two objects, the Figure (also called Trajector, or Theme) and the Ground (Location, Landmark), the position of the Figure being described with respect to the location of the Ground (Langacker 1987). We regard spatial relations as consisting of two components, localization and orientation. Localization describes the topological zone where the Figure is situated. The list of localizations includes such zones as ON, IN, BEHIND, ABOVE, and so on. Orientation describes whether the Figure is moving and, if so, what the direction of its movement with respect to the Ground is. Possible orientations include Locative (the Figure is still), Ablative (moving from the Ground), Lative (moving to the Ground), and Prolative (moving through/across the Ground).³

The languages of the Caucasus are known for their extremely rich spatial systems. East Caucasian languages have dozens of cases expressing spatial relations, while Georgian has seven entities traditionally described as spatial postpositions, but which in fact could be analyzed as spatial cases (*cas secondaires* in the terminology of Vogt 1971: 67-74). Due to intensive language contacts in the region, spatial systems of different languages sometimes have mutual influence on each other. For instance, Svan and some Georgian dialects in the regions close to the area where North-East Caucasian languages are spoken have ‘double’ spatial case forms: *saxl-ši-it*, house-IN-INSTR ‘from out of the

³ For more details on spatial systems we refer the reader to Creissels 2009.

house' (Boeder 2004: 16); such compound markers, consisting of markers of localization and orientation, are highly typical of the rich systems of the East Caucasian languages.

2. Overview of the spatial systems of Armenian and Ossetic

Our task was to compare the spatial systems of the two languages and find out whether the results allow us to regard them as belonging to one Sprachbund. In our research, we deliberately compare not just the case systems, but the spatial systems as a whole, including postpositions and preverbs, for trace of language contact can be found at different levels of the language. When looking at the situation of language contact, it seems more wise to compare not the morphological peculiarities of the languages, but the semantic zones, because grammatical replication (Heine, Kuteva 2005), one of the most important tools of grammatical borrowing, does not happen at once. This means that morphological elements of one language can be found in an adjacent language as constructions which are still on their way to full grammaticalization.

Both Armenian and Ossetic have agglutinative nominal morphology and inflectible postpositions. Case, number, definiteness and possession⁴ can be expressed in both languages, and both of them lack gender. At first glance, spatial systems of the two languages in question are quite similar. There are nine cases in Ossetic: Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Allative, Ablative, Inessive-Illative, Superessive-Superlative, Equative, and Comitative. Four of the cases have spatial meanings, three of them being mainly spatial cases. In Armenian, there are six cases: Nominative, Genitive, Dative,⁵ Instrumental, Ablative, and Locative, of which all but the Genitive have some spatial function, though for all of them, except the Locative, spatial meanings are secondary.

In Ossetic, the localization 'ON' can be expressed either by a case marker, or by a postposition *šār*; the localization 'IN' can be expressed either by a case marker, or by a postposition *midäg*. In Armenian, the situation with these localizations is the same, the corresponding postpositions being *vra* and *meĵ*. Moreover, in both languages, spatial postpositions inflect for case which can modify their spatial meaning (Armenian *tak* 'under', *tak-ic* 'under-ABL 'from under').

Localizations that we are going to discuss first of all are IN and ON. There are two reasons why we are so interested in them. On the one hand, there is a suspicious similarity in how the two languages treat them (both have a case and

⁴ In Armenian, possession markers are in complementary distribution with the definite article. In Ossetic, possession is expressed by a proclitic, and definiteness can be expressed by a stress shift (Akhvlediani 1963: 50).

⁵ For convenience, it is supposed here that the Genitive and the Dative are two distinct cases; see Dum-Tragut (2009) for the details.

a postposition for each localization). On the other hand, it is quite common for East Caucasian languages to split these localizations further (Ganenkov 2005).

The ON area is often divided into localizations we shall call SUPER and CONT. In languages with such a distinction, markers of SUPER are used when the Figure is not attached to the Ground or the Figure is situated on one of the surfaces of the Ground (only a small part of the Ground is involved). CONT is typically used in the opposite cases (tight contact with the Ground; the whole Ground is involved). One part of this opposition is the distinction between locations on horizontal or vertical surfaces of the Ground (apple on the table *vs.* painting on the wall). In the first case, the contact between the Figure and the Ground is loose, while in the second, the Figure is usually attached to the Ground.

The IN area is also often split into two: IN proper (the Ground is a hollow object) and INTER (the Ground is a dense substance, like water or fog).

2.1. IN area

In Eastern Armenian, the Locative and the postposition *meĵ* can be used when describing the IN area. The Locative case marked with the suffix *-um* is the basic means of expressing inessive meaning. It is used when the Ground is a territory/toponym, a hollow object, a building, and so on. It also has temporal uses and a handful of ‘peripheral meanings’, which include such ‘Grounds’ as fields of activity (football, science), organizations (government, church), speech acts, books/films, situations, languages, and others (see Arkhangeskiy, Semyonova 2011):

- (1) *Moskvay-um apr-ec ‘-ink’ ĉ‘ors tari*
 Moscow-LOC live-AOR-1PL four year
 ‘We have lived **in Moscow** for 4 years’ (Hovhannes Eranyan, *Zinadadar*)
- (2) *Haykakan futbol-um krkin konfliktayin iravičak ē*
 Armenian football-LOC again conflict(ADJ) situation COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘There is again a conflict situation **in Armenian football**’ (*Azg* newspaper, 2003.03.22)

What is peculiar about this case is that not every noun has a Locative form. Animate nouns and most nouns with ‘general’ semantics lack the Locative. There is also a number of nouns ending in *-ut’yun* and *-um* which retain some of the old inflectional markers (their paradigm is not strictly agglutinative in the singular, but perfectly regular in the plural). Their attitude towards the Locative depends on their semantics: e. g., *petut’yun* ‘state’ has no problems with acquiring the Locative marker, while *ktakergut’yun* ‘comedy’ strongly prefers the postposition in the singular. Personal pronouns have Locative forms, but they never mean ‘inside a person’: e. g., *mezanum* ‘we.LOC’ means

‘among us’. The Locative is a recently emerged case whose domain is steadily expanding: according to the aforementioned Eastern Armenian National Corpus (§ 1), the percentage of locative wordforms among all nouns is twice as high at the beginning of the 21st century as it was at the end of the 19th century (5.6% vs. 2.5%). Generally, usage of the postposition *mej* is allowed in almost every context where the Locative can be used. But whenever the Locative is possible and there is no difference in meaning between the two, the case is strongly preferred. The main contexts where the postposition is preferred are the following:

1. The postposition is used with nouns that lack the Locative,
2. The postposition is used in illative contexts (moving into the Ground), whereas the locative has only the essive meaning,
3. The postposition is preferred with liquids (although sometimes the Locative is equally possible) and strongly preferred with solid objects (except in contexts like ‘there are vitamins in fruit’ where the Locative is allowed).

- (3) ... *inč* ‘*pes ord-ə xnjor-i mej*
 ... like worm-DEF apple-GEN in
 ‘...like a worm in an apple’ (Step’an Zoryan, *Patmvack’ner*)

Thus, we find the IN-INTER distinction in the Armenian spatial system, although it is far from strict and definitely not the main one.

In Ossetic, the corresponding means are the Inessive case marked with the suffix *-ə* and the postposition *midăg*, originally a noun or adjective meaning ‘interior’ but rarely used as such today (Abaev 1973: 115). The Inessive is preferred in almost every context,⁶ both Essive and Lative, both IN (strictly spatial or peripheral meanings) and INTER:

- (4) *qărx’əpp-ə kartof iš*
 soup-INESS potato EXST
 ‘There are potatoes **in the soup**’

- (5) *čīnăž-ə iš făltărăn-t-ă*
 book-INESS EXST exercise-PL-NOM
 ‘There are exercises **in the book**’

The postposition *midăg* seems to be equivalent in meaning to the inessive case. But *midăg* could be said to only play a marginal role in the Ossetic spatial

⁶ The only lexemes lacking inessive forms are the 1st and 2nd person pronouns.

system, if not for the fact that it is obligatory or strongly preferred with some lexemes. It is the only possible way of expressing inessive or illative meaning for the aforementioned pronouns and it tends to be used with animate nouns. It can also replace the Inessive in most cases, but not in INTER contexts. The postposition, like the inessive case, allows for both essive and lative contexts, but essives are preferred. Like most postpositions, *midăg* can attach spatial case markers. There is an allative form *midă-mă* (with final *-g-* of the stem dropped) and an ablative form *midăg-ăj* that are used in lative and elative contexts, respectively. Contexts *midăg* is typically encountered in are not prototypical: nouns most frequently used with it include different kinds of clothes, ‘soul’, and, to a lesser extent, ‘life’, ‘world’, body parts, ‘context’. Comparing the two languages, we see the following similarities:

1. Both languages distinguish between IN and INTER in some way,
2. In both languages, the case is used with toponyms, while the postposition tends to be used with animate nouns and personal pronouns,
3. The postpositions are more likely to be used in peripheral contexts than in strictly spatial ones.

The similarities (2) and (3) cannot prove the claim of ‘common substratum’ because they can be explained by universal tendencies. (3) is the result of the tendency to use simpler means for expressing more prototypical or frequent meanings than for expressing peripheral meanings. (2) is also natural: according to Creissels (2009), geographical names, on the one hand, often have ‘lighter’ spatial marking than other nouns, while animate nouns, on the other hand, sometimes have special forms of spatial cases or adpositions. Thus, the only really interesting similarity is the distinction between IN and INTER. But, from our point of view, the facts are not very convincing.

Firstly, the Ossetic Inessive feels fine in other contexts than INTER, so that we cannot call the situation in IO a full-fledged IN-INTER distinction.

Secondly, the domain of the Armenian Locative is constantly growing. Corpus data show that, for instance, at the beginning of the 20th century, the postposition was used with meanings like ‘there is a story in the book’, and no noun ending in *-ut’yun* had the Locative form. Today, on the contrary, in the first case the Locative is the only option, and many words in *-ut’yun* have acquired the Locative form. The expansion of the Locative is heterogeneous across semantic (and structural, as with the *-ut’yun* nouns) classes of nouns.

This is illustrated in Table 1. For each group of lexemes in the first column, the values in the cells of the corresponding row show percentages of occurrences in the Locative (first value) or in the construction with *meĵ* (second value) for the given lexemes in the given years. It can be seen that different se-

semantic/structural classes have joined the class of lexemes which have the Locative at different times: while, for instance, the class of territories and toponyms clearly had the Locative as the default choice already in the 19th century, it was not until the middle of the 20th century that some lexemes in *-ut'yun* began to prefer the Locative. This means that the IN-INTER distinction can prove to be just a side effect of the gradual expansion of the Locative, and can disappear soon when the semantic class of nouns meaning dense or filled objects joins the class of nouns which have the Locative form.

Table 1. Usage of the Locative and *mej* by periods

lexemes	...–1900	1901–30	1931–60	1961–90	1990–...
k'agak' <i>city</i>	17.32% /	17.98% /	17.25% /	20.44% /	22.14% /
erkir <i>country</i>	1.65%	0.18%	0.45%	0.16%	0.99%
Hayastan <i>Armenia</i>					
girk' <i>book</i>	2.57% /	6.6% /	9.11% /	11.35% /	11.83% /
amsagir <i>journal</i>	2.78%	0.39%	0.99%	0.58%	0.53%
vėp <i>novel</i>					
get <i>river</i>	0.74% /	3.17% /	2.65% /	2.68% /	7.13% /
lič <i>lake</i>	2.14%	0.9%	1.3%	0.43%	0.9%
all lexemes ending in <i>-ut'yun</i>	0.05% / 3.38%	0.25% / 1.1%	1.4% / 2.51%	1.69% / 2.56%	1.83% / 1.54%

2.2. ON area

In Armenian, the meaning 'on' can be expressed by the Dative case (which also has plenty of other uses, marking, for instance, the human direct object) or by the postposition *vra*. Unlike with the IN area, both means allow for essive and lative contexts. They are often interchangeable and can be used in a wide range of spatial contexts, including support from below, attachment ('painting on the wall'), encirclement with contact ('ring on the finger'), hanging, and so on. The Dative can be used when the Ground is an edge of a territory (*antařezr-i-n* forest.edge-DAT-DEF 'at the edge of the forest'). The main difference between the case and the postposition is that *vra* tends to be used with bigger objects and in non-standard situations:

- (6) *Nunik-ə... par-um ēr seġan-i vra*
 Nunik-DEF dance-IPFV COP.PST.3SG table-GEN on
 'Nunik was dancing **on the table**' (Harut'yun Mkrtč'yan, *Mi hayi patmut'yun*)
- (7) *Seġan-i-n panir ka*
 table-DAT-DEF cheese EXST.PRS.3SG
 'There is some cheese **on the table**' (Saroyan Vilyam, *Hayrik, du xent'es*, 1991)

In (6), the situation seems to be more unusual than in (7), therefore the postposition was chosen. Another distinction is that while one is more likely to use *vra* when describing support from below ('snow on the mountain'), with encirclement with contact ('ring on the finger') it will more likely be the Dative that is chosen. Other contexts where *vra* is preferred include layers ('on the tablecloths'), sufficiently large inscriptions ('something was written on the wall'), and water surface. Usage of both Dative and *vra* does not depend on whether the Figure is located higher than the Ground (one can use both speaking of a fly "sitting" on the ceiling). There can be other slight differences, but we did not manage to find a single trace of what we were looking for, that is, the SUPER-CONT distinction.

Ossetic has a dedicated case for this localization, the Superessive (*-əl*), and a postposition *šār*. Interestingly enough, this postposition itself has a Superessive form, *šār-əl*, with a similar meaning. Like in Armenian, the Ossetic Superessive has a broad range of spatial meanings: all meanings from the Bowerman-Pederson hierarchy (Bowerman, Pederson 1992) are possible in essive, lative and sometimes prolativ (cf. example 14) contexts:

(8) *kʷəz xʷəšʷ:-ə p'ol-əl*
 dog sleep-PRS.3SG floor-SUPER
 'The dog is sleeping **on the floor**'

(9) *nəv awəbd u k'ul-əl*
 picture hung be.PRS.3SG wall-SUPER
 'The picture is **on the wall**'

The Superessive can also have non-spatial meanings, for instance, it marks the stimulus of such verbs as 'to hope' and 'to laugh', and the patient of such verbs as 'to bite' and 'to seize'.

In most cases when the postposition can be used, the case can be used as well, while the converse does not hold. Here are the differences:

1. The postposition *šār/šārəl* can be used only when there is support from below (the Ground is located lower than the Figure). For example, in (9) the Superessive *k'ul-əl* cannot be replaced by the postpositional phrase **k'ul-ə šær*.
2. The postposition *šār/šārəl* cannot be used with objects which only have the upper surface (like floor or ground). Thus in (8), *p'ol-əl* cannot be replaced by **p'ol-ə šær*.
3. The inflected form *šārəl* is used for the upper part of the surface, as in (10).
4. The inflected form *šārəl* is preferred for layers and water surface.

- (10) *k'ăzăx-ə šăr-əl q'əna š-bad*
 rock-GEN head-SUPER moss PV-sit[PST.INTR.3SG]
 'The upper side of the rock is covered with moss'

Here, we have something resembling the SUPER-CONT distinction: the postposition requires the Figure to have support from below, which is typical for SUPER markers. But again, we cannot call it a full-scale distinction because of many factors: the Superessive is allowed in most cases; the Superessive or *šărəl* is preferred when the surfaces of the Figure and the Ground are in contact (the SUPER marker would be normally preferred in this case), etc.

Comparing the two languages in this respect, we once again fail to see any sufficiently important similarities. The only ones that are present are very general: broad range of spatial meanings of the case, same means for essive and lative contexts, frequent interchangeability of the case and the postposition. The languages differ significantly in what determines the choice of the case or the postposition, as well as in minor details (for example, neither the case nor the postposition in Armenian can have prolative meaning, while in Ossetic both can).

2.3. Prolative

The prolative orientation is marked differently in the two languages. In Armenian, the basic means of expressing prolative meaning is the Instrumental case of a noun or of a postposition. Both postpositions we are concerned with, *mej* and *vra*, have Instrumental forms, *mijov* and *vrayov*, as well as other postpositions: *takov* (*tak* 'under'), *motov* (*mot* 'near'), *arjėwov* (*arjėw* 'in front of'). What is interesting about *vrayov* is that, unlike the uninflected form of the postposition, it does not imply physical contact between the Figure and the Ground. It is used when the Ground is a relatively flat and non-directed object (wall, table; usually not used with territories), substance (sand), or water reservoir. The Figure is moving on the Ground or above (as in the examples below), parallel to its surface, or across the Ground, maybe metaphorically, like in example (12):

- (11) *Zardak'ar sar-i vray-ov amp-er en eln-um*
 Zardakar mountain-GEN on-INS cloud-PL COP.PRS.3SG come-IPFV
 'Clouds are moving **above the Zardakar mountain**'
 (Hrant Mat'ewosyan, *Patmvack'ner*)

- (12) *Bug get-i vray-ov ka miayn mek kamurj*
 Bug river-GEN on-INS EXST.PRS.3SG only one bridge
 'There is only one bridge **over the Bug river**' (*Avangard* newspaper, 1941.08.09)

But apart from the Instrumental, there is another interesting case of Prolative encoding in Armenian: when the Figure enters a closed space through the door or the window, the Ablative case is used:

- (13) *I verĵo oroš-el en mtn-el lusamut-ic*
 in.the.end decide-PF COP.PRS.3PL enter-INF window-ABL
 ‘In the end, they decided to enter [the house] **through the window**’⁷

In Ossetic, there is an interesting way of encoding the Prolative with the combination of the plural marker and the Inessive marker (-*t-ə*). Such an unusual prolative marker can only be attached to postpositions: *šärtə* (*šār* ‘on’), *bəntə* (*bən* ‘under’), *surtə* (*sur* ‘near’), *răžtə* (*raž* ‘near, in front of’). But in most cases, unlike in Armenian, prolative orientation does not differ in marking from the essive:

- (14) *mašină bədər-t-əl a-səd-iš*
 car field-PL-SUP PV-go-PST.INTR.3SG
 ‘A car ran **across the fields**’

2.4. Ablative

Both languages have Ablative cases which behave quite similarly in their spatial uses. The only difference is the sporadic use of the Ablative in prolative contexts in Armenian (example 13), which is impossible in Ossetic. All spatial postpositions of both languages have Ablative forms.

Despite the similarities, we definitely cannot speak of a common Caucasian influence here, since these cases are known to have existed for a very long period: the Armenian Ablative goes back to the Classical Armenian Ablative, and as for the Ossetic Ablative, it is most likely to have originated from the Proto-Iranian Ablative which merged with the Instrumental in Pre-Ossetic (Cheung 2008).

2.5. Lative

In Armenian, the basic means of expressing the ‘unprofiled’ lative orientation is the Nominative case. In some contexts, however, the Dative should be used. For example, the X argument in constructions such as ‘to approach X’, ‘to reach X’, ‘to glue/tie/attach Y to X’, ‘to look at X’, is marked with the Dative. If the localization of the destination point is also specified, then in most cases one can (or even must) use the same means one would use in the essive context, i. e. the Dative or postposition *vra* in the case of ON localization, the post-

⁷ We thank D. Creissels (p.c.) who pointed out this function of the Ablative to us.

position *meĵ* (but not the Locative) in the case of IN localization, and other postpositions in other cases.

In Ossetic, the lative orientation is one of the primary meanings of the Allative case (marked with *-mǎ*). In most illative and superlative contexts, like in Armenian, the corresponding essive markers should be used. However, marking lative orientation is not the only spatial function of the Allative, the other being marking apudessives (the Figure is located somewhere near the Ground):

- (15) *nǎ=dwar-mǎ* *štə*, *sədǎr* *bǎllǎx=nəl*
 POSS.1PL=door-ALL be.PRS.3PL something trouble=1PL.ENCL.SUPER

ǎr-səd!

PV-come[PST.INTR.3SG]

‘They are **at our doors**, it seems that we have some trouble!’

(*Max dug* 12, 2002, p. 79)

With postpositions, the apudessive meaning of the Allative case is prevalent. Sometimes semantics of an inflected postposition is not entirely transparent: *šār* ‘on’, *šǎrmǎ* ‘above’. In Armenian, the apudessive meaning is expressed separately from the lative, namely by the postposition *mot*.

Another fact connected to the lative orientation which is worth mentioning is that in Ossetic there is a postposition *ǎrdǎm* with directive meaning (‘towards’, ‘in the direction of’). What is interesting about it is that it behaves differently from most other postpositions and, due to some reasons – mostly phonological ones – could be better analyzed as an emergent case.⁸ Lative-directive distinction is a feature frequently encountered in North East Caucasian languages and also found in Georgian where the item *k’en*, traditionally labelled as postposition, may also be analyzed as an emergent case (Creissels 2009, Harris 2009). Armenian, in contrast, has a preposition *depi* ‘towards’ which does not show any differences from other adpositions and is in fact quite a peripheral element of the spatial system.

Once again, we do not see any striking similarities which would allow us to speak of common influence. The only evident parallel between the two languages is the ability of essive markers to also express lative meaning, which is fairly widespread cross-linguistically.

3. Conclusion

We compared the spatial systems – namely, the most important spatial cases and postpositions – of two Indo-European languages of the Caucasus, Iron Ossetic and Eastern Armenian. Despite some superficial similarities, such as a

⁸ See Belyaev (2010) for more details.

choice between a case and a postposition for the IN and ON areas, spatial postpositions inflected for case, and parallels between spatial cases of Ossetic and spatial uses of cases in Armenian, we found that their spatial systems are in fact quite different, and the similarities can hardly be ascribed to common areal influence or substratum.

The case vs. postposition usage rules for the ON area proved to be quite different in the two languages. While in Ossetic the SUPER and CONT localizations, important for some Caucasian languages, are marginally distinguished, in Armenian the choice is made on the basis of completely different rules. As for the IN area, the similarity in distinguishing IN and INTER is probably due to chance: it is quite vague in Armenian and almost unnoticeable in Ossetic; besides, Armenian uses the postposition for INTER, whereas Ossetic uses the case. All other similarities in the choice between case vs. postposition are best described as a result of universal tendencies (the case is preferred in prototypical contexts, the postposition tends to be used in peripheral contexts; animate nouns prefer the postposition rather than the case).⁹

The fact that the means for expressing relative orientation are pretty similar, as we saw, cannot be the result of areal influence. The means for expressing lative orientation also do not demonstrate any areal influence, while prolative orientation is expressed in the two languages in completely different ways.

Thus, none of the major parts of the two languages' spatial systems gives us enough evidence to deem it the result of common areal influence or substratum. While there is ample evidence that at least some traits of the Ossetic case system may be explained by external influence, mainly due to contact with Georgian and other Kartvelian languages (Belyaev 2010), and language contact with Turkic or Iranian languages may have reinforced the tendencies already observed in Classical Armenian that lead to the development of the current agglutinative case system (Donabédian 2000, Seménova 2010), there is no reason to believe that the changes in question are due to influence from the same group of languages or from a "common substratum".

⁹ For example, Birjuk and Usačëva (in press) demonstrate that in Beserman, an Uralic language where a similar choice between case and postposition exists, the primary motivation for the choice of postposition is pragmatic emphasis on the Ground. The tendency for postpositions to be used in more "marked" contexts may well be universal, while its exact manifestations differ from language to language.

Abbreviations

ABL – ablative case; ADJ – adjective; ALL – allative case; AOR – aorist; COP – copula; DAT – Dative case; DEF – definite article; ENCL – enclitic pronoun; EXST – existential predicate; GEN – Genitive case; INF – infinitive; IN – Inessive-Illative case; INS – Instrumental case; INTR – intransitive verbal inflection; IPFV – imperfective aspect; LOC – Locative case; PF – perfective aspect; PL – plural number; POSS – possessive pronoun; PRS – present tense; PV – preverb; SG – singular number; SUPER – Superessive-Superlative case

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