

Caucasian Linguistics: Recent Advances and Emerging Topics
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Multiple exponence in the Northwest Caucasian languages

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Multiple exponence

- **Multiple exponence (ME)** “is the occurrence of multiple realizations of a single feature, bundle of features, or derivational category within a word” (Harris 2017: 9)

Caballero & Harris 2012, Gardani 2015, Carroll 2021, Fenger 2023, Puškar-Gallien et al. 2025

Multiple exponence

Tsova-Tush (aka Batsbi; Nakh-Daghestanian > Nakh, Georgia;
Harris 2017: 2)

- (1) *y-ox-y-o-y-an^w* *k'ab*
 CM-rip-CM-PRS-CM-EVID dress(y/y).ABS
 'Evidently she is ripping the dress.'

ABS – absolutive, CM – class agreement marker, EVID – evidentiality,
PRS – present tense

Multiple exponence

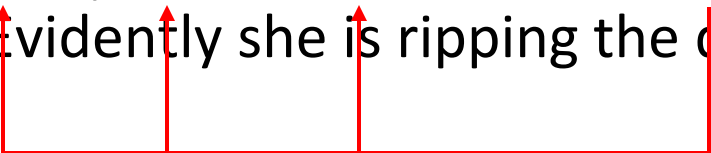
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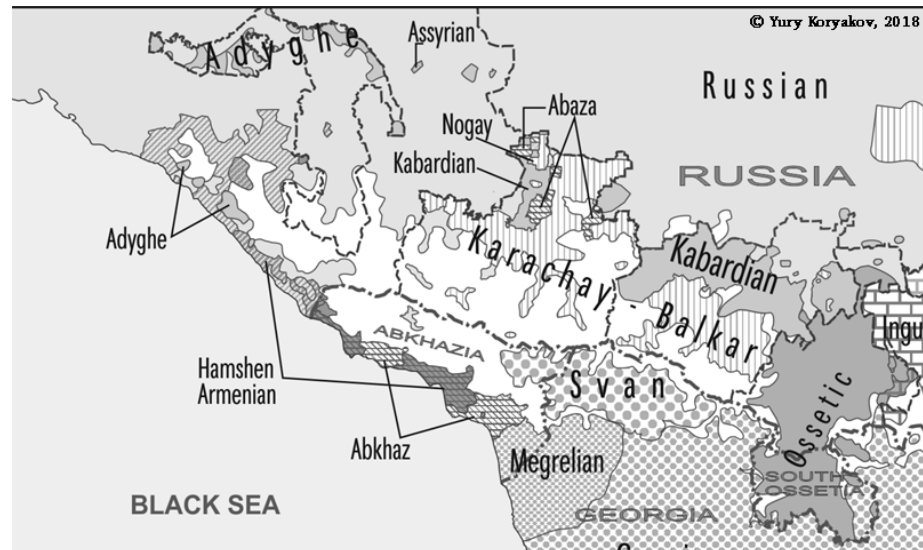


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- The data from the languages of the Caucasus figure prominently in the book.
- ... with one major exception

Northwest Caucasian languages

- Northwest Caucasian:
 - Circassian: West Circassian (Adyghe), Kabardian
 - Abkhaz-Abaza: Abkhaz, Abaza
 - Ubykh (extinct)



Northwest Caucasian languages

- Morphotactics:
 - a mixture of templatic and layered ordering (Korotkova & Lander 2010, Lander 2016, Arkadiev 2023);
 - predominantly adheres to the “one meaning ~ one form” principle;
 - but with some notable exceptions, among which a number of instances of multiple exponence (ME).

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Northwest Caucasian languages

- ME in Northwest Caucasian:
 - virtually absent from the survey in Harris (2017) – in sharp contrast to the data of the other two indigenous families of the Caucasus;
 - present in all languages of the family;
 - in both nominal and verbal domains;
 - examples of almost all types from Harris' typology;
 - affects a variety of inflectional and derivational features;
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Northwest Caucasian languages

- Sources of data:
 - published materials on Abkhaz and Ubykh;
 - own fieldwork data and corpora on West Circassian, Kabardian and Abaza.

Northwest Caucasian languages

- In this talk:
 - selected examples arranged according to the types of ME proposed by Harris (2017);
 - focus on non-trivial cases;
 - a more comprehensive survey is planned but not yet realised.

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Types of ME from Harris (2017)

1. Periodic ME
2. Alternating ME
3. Reinforcement ME
4. Accidental ME

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Periodic ME

Harris (2017: 55-56):

- **Periodic ME** “occurs when a bound morpheme must be accompanied by an exponent of feature F, while the stem must also be accompanied by an exponent of F.

(2) stem-M-affix-M

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carrier morpheme

Periodic ME

Abkhaz reflexive forms (Chirikba 2003: 38, transcription and glossing adapted):

- (3) /-čə-/ -š'-wa-jt
3SG.F-RFL-3SG.F.ERG-kill-IPF-DCL
'she is killing herself'

• Cf. the cognate construction in Abaza without ME (Arkadiev & Durneva 2023: 242):

- (4) čə-l-žž-əj-t
RFL-3SG.F.ERG-wash-PRS-DCL
'She is washing herself.'

DCL – declarative, ERG – ergative, F – feminine, IPF – imperfective, RFL - reflexive

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PRS – present tense, RFL - reflexive

Periodic ME

- The Abkhaz and Abaza reflexive forms clearly originate from incorporation of an independent reflexive element (probably a body-part noun) with a possessor prefix doubling the features of the ergative agent:

Abaza (Arkadiev & Durneva 2023: 246)

(5) *s-qa* *sə-r-q^wanč'-əj-ɬ*
1SG.PR-head 1SG.ERG-CAUS-guilty-PRS-DCL
'I accuse myself.'

CAUS – causative, PR – possessor

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- Cases like the Abkhaz reflexive are related to, but still distinct from, situations when identical personal prefixes express reflexivity in a non-redundant fashion.

Abaza (Arkadiev & Durneva 2023: 251)

- (6) a. *jə-w-zə-w-χ^wʕ-əj-t̚*
3SG.N.ABS-2SG.M.IO-BEN-2SG.M.ERG-buy-PRS-DCL
'You (man) buy it for yourself.'
- b. *jə-l-zə-w-χ^wʕ-əj-t̚*
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Periodic ME

- Otherwise, in contrast to the Nakh-Daghestanian languages, periodic ME is infrequent in NWC.

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Types of ME from Harris (2017)

1. Periodic ME
2. Alternating ME is overall rare and is unattested in NWC
3. Reinforcement ME
4. Accidental ME

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Reinforcement ME

Harris (2017: 61-62):

- **Reinforcement ME** “characteristically involves exponents that are identical in feature representation but not identical in form.”
 - “They may be derivational or inflectional.”
 - “[M]orphemes in a relationship of reinforcement ME occur characteristically in adjacent positions”

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Reinforcement ME

Abaza (and Bzyp Abkhaz) ME of negation in declarative and polar interrogative forms (cf. Lomtadze et al. 1989: 111–2).

'come', 3SG.H.ABS	non-finite	declarative
Present	<i>d-ʕa-mə-j-wa</i>	<i>d-g'-ʕa-j-wa-m</i>
Imperfect	<i>d-ʕa-mə-j-wa-z</i>	<i>d-g'-ʕa-mə-j-wa-z-ɬ</i>
Aorist	<i>d-ʕa-mə-j</i>	<i>d-g'-ʕa-mə-j-ɬ</i>
Future I	<i>d-ʕa-mə-j-wa-š</i>	<i>d-g'-ʕa-j-wa-šə-m</i>

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The default ambifixal negative marker *-m-*

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The empathic negative prefix *g'-*

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Non-adjacent morphs

Reinforcement ME

Standard Abkhaz (Chirikba 2003: 44): no ME.

'carry', 3PL.ERG>3SG.H.ABS	non-finite	declarative
Present	<i>jə-rə-m-ga-wa</i>	<i>də-r-ga-wa-m</i>
Imperfect	<i>jə-rə-m-ga-wa-z</i>	<i>də-r-ga-wa-mə-z-ɬ</i>
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- Possible reinforcement by the intensifier suffix *-za* (Gvanceladze 2010: 45-46)

Reinforcement ME

- The prefix *g'(ə)-* in declarative and polar interrogative negative forms is originally an emphatic additive element (Gvanceladze 2010, Pazov 2019), cf. its (archaic) use in non-negated coordinated verbs:

(7) *a-š'qa* *d-g'əj-qalə-n* Abaza
DEF-mountain 3SG.H.ABS-ADD-go.up-PST
d-g'əj-ʒa-tal-χ-d
3SG.H.ABS-ADD-CSL-go.down-RE-DCL
'He both climbed the mountain and descended back.'
(Pazov 2019: 221)

ADD – additive, CSL – cislocative, H – human, RE – reflexive

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- A clear case of reinforcement in accordance with the so-called **Jespersen's cycle** (Jespersen 1917, van Gelderen 2008), often leading to double negation in the languages of the world (cf. Dryer 2013).
- Did not however affect all verbal forms in Abaza, non-declarative and non-finite forms retaining the more archaic pattern.

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Reinforcement ME

- A more intricate case: ME of nominal plural in Abaza (Tabulova 1976: 47–48) and Abkhaz (Chirikba 2003: 25):
 - the default plural suffix $-k^w a$;
 - the human plural suffix $-\hat{c}a / -\hat{c}^w a$;
 - the young animal suffix $-ra$.

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Reinforcement ME

- The default suffix can attach to the other two suffixes:

- (8) a. *j-ajš'-âa-k^wa* 'his brothers' Abaza
b. *a-h^wa-ra-k^wa* 'the lambs'

Reinforcement ME

- In fact, the plural suffixes differ in their morphosyntactic scope:
 - the lexically restricted suffixes attach directly to the nominal stem;
 - the default suffix $-k^w a$ is a kind of edge inflection that occurs to the right of postnominal adjectival modifiers at the very end of the nominal complex.

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Reinforcement ME

Abaza (textual examples)

(9) [taba-dəw]-*k^wa*
pan-big-PL
'big pans'

(12) a. *a-[bəžadərəʕ^w-ča-dəw]-k^wa*
DEF-linguist-HPL-big-PL
'the great linguists'

b. *a-[ʒa-ra-maʒ'an-χ^wəc]-k^wa*
DEF-goat.kid-AnPL-naughty-small-PL
'the small naughty goat's kids'

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Reinforcement ME

- NWC languages feature a number of patterns of apparently multiple marking of derivational functions.
- Although Caballero & Harris (2012: 165) and Harris (2017: 8) explicitly include derivational categories into the domain of ME, such cases may be more problematic than those concerning inflectional features.

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- Cf. also Gardani 2015

Reinforcement ME

- **Abaza**: ME of repetitive (Panova 2018: 6-7; 2019):

- (11) a. *d-ata-ʕa.j-χ-t̚*
3SG.H.ABS-**REP**-come-**RE**-DCL
'S/he came again.' repetitive
- b. *ʔʔd-ata-ʕa.j-t̚*
3SG.H.ABS-REP-come-DCL
intended: 'S/he came again.'
- c. *d-ʕa.j-χ-t̚*
3SG.H.ABS-come-RE-DCL
'S/he came back.' refractive

RE – refractive, REP – repetitive

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'S/he came back.' refractive

RE – refractive, REP – repetitive

Reinforcement ME

- **Abaza**: ME of repetitive (Panova 2018: 6-7; 2019):

- (11) a. *d-ata-ʕa.j-χ-ṭ*
3SG.H.ABS-**REP**-come-**RE**-DCL
'S/he came again.' repetitive
- b. ^{??}*d-ata-ʕa.j-ṭ*
3SG.H.ABS-**REP**-come-DCL
intended: 'S/he came again.'
- c. *d-ʕa.j-χ-ṭ*
3SG.H.ABS-come-**RE**-DCL
'S/he came back.' refactive

RE – refactive, REP – repetitive

Reinforcement ME

- The **refactive** (Stoynova 2013) is cross-linguistic derivational category expressing such meanings as reditive ('back'), restitutive, repetitive and some others.
- Available in all Northwest Caucasian languages.
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Reinforcement ME

- The Abaza refractive can express the repetitive meaning alone, but is usually reinforced by the repetitive prefix *ata-* in this function:

(12) a. *a-ŝ j-p.čə-χ-t*
DEF-door 3SG.N.ABS-break-RE-DCL

b. *a-ŝ j-ata-p.čə-χ-t*
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‘The door broke again.’ (Panova 2019: 197)

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- In [Abkhaz](#), the cognate prefix and suffix can express the repetitive either alone or in combination (Spruit 1986: 136):

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- Panova (2019): the expression of repetitive in Abaza involves co-occurrence of a “light” and a “heavy” ‘again’-markers (Wälchli 2006), which by itself is fairly common cross-linguistically.
- What makes the Abaza and Abkhaz situation special is the fact that the “heavy” refractive marker is also an affix and not a free-standing word.

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Types of ME from Harris (2017)

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3. Reinforcement ME
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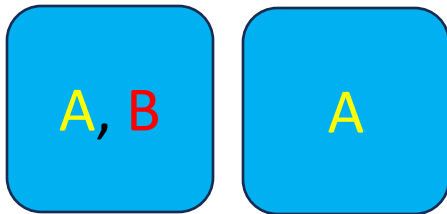
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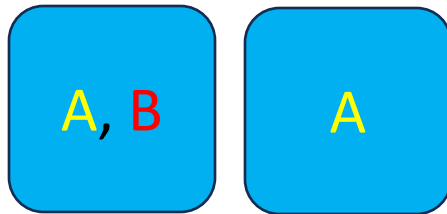


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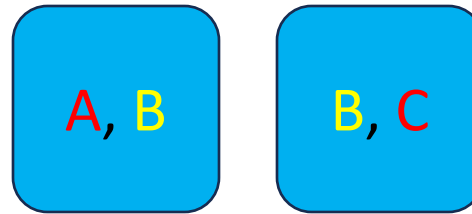
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overlapping



Accidental ME

West Circassian: ME of nominal plural (cf. a discussion in Arkadiev 2014a,b and Harris 2017: 237-8):

'girl'	Sg	Pl
Abs	<i>pšaše-r</i>	<i>pšaše-xe-r</i>
Obl	<i>pšaše-m</i>	<i>pšaše-xe-m</i>

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Ubykh: ME of number of the **absolutive** argument in the verb (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 161–162; Smeets 1997; Fenwick 2011: 135–136).

- Involves numerous elements:
 - absolutive cross-reference prefixes;
 - plural suffixes *-a* and *-n(e)*;
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Accidental ME

Ubykh stative verbs (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 86) in the present tense:

'be good'	Sg Abs	Pl Abs
1	<i>sə-če</i>	<i>š'ə-če-n</i>
2	<i>wə-če</i>	<i>š^wə-če-n</i>
3	<i>(a)-če</i>	<i>a-če-n</i>

Accidental ME

Ubykh dynamic intransitive verbs (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 86)
in the present tense:

'go'	Sg Abs	Pl Abs
1	<i>s-k'e-n</i>	<i>š'-k'-a-n</i>
2	<i>w-k'e-n</i>	<i>ŝ^w-k'-a-n</i>
3	<i>(a)-k'e-n</i>	<i>a-k'-a-n</i>

Accidental ME

Ubykh dynamic transitive verbs (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 88) in the present tense, 3 plural ergative subject:

'see'	Sg Abs	Pl Abs
1	<i>s-a-bje-n</i>	<i>š'-a-bj-a-n</i>
2	<i>w-a-bje-n</i>	<i>š^w-a-bj-a-n</i>
3	<i>a-bje-n</i>	<i>a-bj-a-n</i>

Accidental ME

Ubykh dynamic transitive verbs (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 148)
in different tenses, 1Sg ergative subject:

'see'	2Sg Abs	2Pl Abs
Present	<i>wə-z-bje-n</i>	<i>ŝ^wə-z-bj-a-n</i>
Imperfect	<i>wə-z-bje-n-ejɬ</i>	<i>ŝ^wə-z-bj-a-n-ejɭ</i>
Future I	<i>wə-z-bje-w</i>	<i>ŝ^wə-z-bje-n-ew</i>
Preterite	<i>wə-z-bje-ɬe</i>	<i>ŝ^wə-z-bje-ɬe-n</i>
Pluperfect	<i>wə-z-bje-ɬe-jɬ</i>	<i>ŝ^wə-z-bje-ɬe-jɭ</i>
Future-in-the-Past	<i>wə-z-bje-wə-jɬ</i>	<i>ŝ^wə-z-bje-n-ewə-jɭ</i>

Accidental ME

Ubykh causatives from intransitive verbs (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 176), Erg = Causer, Abs = Causee:

- (14) a. *wə-sə-m-də-ḱ'e-n*
2SG.ABS-1SG.ERG-NEG-CAUS.SG-go-PRS
'I don't make you go.'
- b. *ŝ^wə-sə-m-ɸa-ḱ'-a-n*
2PL.ABS-1SG.ERG-NEG-CAUS.PL-go-PL-PRS
'I don't make you all go.'

Accidental ME

Ubykh suppletive verbs (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 38-48; Fenwick 2011: 135):

(15) a. *sə-g'ə-wə-n*

1SG.ABS-LOC-enter.SG-PRS

‘I go in.’

b. *š'ə-g'ə-k'-a-n*

1PL.ABS-LOC-enter.PL-PL-PRS

‘We go in.’ (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 42)

LOC – locative preverb

Accidental ME

- A single verb form can contain multiple loci of number marking (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 173, 165):

- (16) a. *š'ə-w-**ve**-q^we.**χe**-qe-**n***
1**PL**.ABS-2SG.ERG-CAUS.**PL**-stop.**PL**-PST-**PL**
'You (sg) made us stop.'
- b. *š'-k'-**a**-ne-**jλe**-me*
1**PL**.ABS-go-**PL**-DYN-RETRO.**PL**-NEG
'We were not doing.'

DYN – dymanic marker, RETRO – retrospective marker

Accidental ME

- In fact, absolutive number marking in Ubykh is not completely redundant:
 - nouns do not distinguish number in the absolutive;
 - 3rd person absolutive prefixes in most cases do not distinguish number, either:

- (17) a. *a-ĉ^w* *a-j-k'e-n*
DEF-ox 3.ABS-CSL-go-PRS
'The ox is coming.' (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 162)
- b. *a-ĉ^w* *a-j-k'-a-n*
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Accidental ME

- The system is further complicated by the tendency, especially in the speech of Tevfik Eсенç, the last speaker of Ubykh, to use the plural suffixes whenever the verb contained a 2nd plural affix in any argument position, not just the absolutive (Dumézil & Eсенç 1975: 162; Smeets 1997; Fenwick 2011: 101-102).

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- ME of number in Ubykh verbs technically falls under the label of “accidental” ME according to Harris (2017: 64) but is in fact a highly systematic and pervasive feature of Ubykh morphology – even if unique to the family.
- NB subject to considerable variation observed in the extant records of the language (Smeets 1997):
 - across locations and speakers;
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Other cases of ME

- In the nominal domain:
 - ME of person and number of the possessor in co-compounds;
 - ME of plural in Ubykh possessed nouns in the oblique case;
 - Optional ME of oblique case in Kabardian demonstratives.
- In the verbal domain:
 - periodic ME of imperfective aspect in continuative forms in Abaza;
 - ME of negation in Abaza and Abkhaz prohibitive forms;
 - optional ME of potential modality in Circassian.
- Some borderline cases:
 - reinforcement of reflexive and reciprocal forms by the reflexive marker;
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 - in both nouns and verbs;
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Type of ME	nominals	verbs
periodic	(possessor marking in co-compounds)	person marking in reflexives (Abkhaz)
reinforcement	plural in Abaza-Abkhaz	negation in Abaza repetitive in Abaza
accidental	(oblique) plural in West Circassian	absolute number in Ubykh

Summary and discussion

- ME in Northwest Caucasian languages shows considerable variation:
 - between branches: clear cases of ME in verbal morphology seem to be rare in Circassian languages in contrast to Abkhaz, Abaza and Ubykh;
 - between closely-related varieties (Abkhaz vs. Abaza, West Circassian vs. Kabardian etc.);
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- While some examples of ME found in Northwest Caucasian languages may seem “trivial” from a cross-linguistic perspective, others are not:
 - a novel source of periodic ME (incorporated reflexive nominals);
 - reinforcement ME in non-adjacent slots;
 - ME of rare categories (e.g. repetitive);
 - ME of the nominal plural in Abaza and Abkhaz looks like a case of reinforcement but in fact has morphosyntactic underpinnings pointing towards a different analysis;
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- While some examples of ME found in Northwest Caucasian languages may seem “trivial” from a cross-linguistic perspective, others are not:
 - a novel source of periodic ME (incorporated reflexive nominals);
 - reinforcement ME in non-adjacent slots;
 - ME of rare categories (e.g. repetitive);
 - ME of the nominal plural in Abaza and Abkhaz looks like a case of reinforcement but in fact has morphosyntactic underpinnings pointing towards a different analysis;
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tha š^w-j-e-be-psew!

god 2PL.ABS-3SG.ERG-DYN-CAUS-live

šə-zʃ^wada-χa-ʔ!

2PL.ABS-healthy-INC-DCL

Thank you for your attention!

Merci pour votre attention!

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