The discourse basis of (non-)finiteness in Abaza

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Roadmap

- Finiteness

- Introducing Abaza

- Abaza verbal system

- Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- Conclusions

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Finiteness

- Finiteness vs. non-finiteness relate to the morphological expression of independent resp. dependent status of predication.

Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1999, Bisang 2001, 2007, Nikolaeva 2010

Finiteness

- (Non-)finiteness is a composite rather than primitive notion related to a number of parameters subject to cross-linguistic variation:
  - argument cross-reference;
  - expression of tense-aspect-mood;
  - independent assertion and temporal reference;
  - etc.

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Finiteness

- Both language-internally and cross-linguistically, (non-)finiteness can be viewed as a scale or even a multidimensional space, rather than as a simple binary distinction.

- Verbal forms and constructions can show different constellations of properties associated with (non-)finiteness.

Nikolaeva 2013, Arkadiev 2020

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Nikolaeva 2013, Arkadiev 2020

Finiteness and discourse

- Through its association with independent vs. dependent predications, finiteness also corellates with the status of predications in discourse:
  - finite verbs head main clauses encoding foregrounded events;
  - non-finite verbs head dependent clauses encoding backgrounded events.

Hopper & Thompson 1984: 736-744; Givón 2001: Ch. 18; Wårvik 2004

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Finiteness and discourse

(1)   *At nine o'clock the Queen **arrived**, **walking** slowly through the long corridor*.

(Bram Stoker, Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving, 1906, books.google.com, 14.08.23)

Finiteness and discourse

- At the same time, the correlation between morphological non-finiteness and discourse-backgrounding is not perfect.

- In many languages, foregrounded sequential events in the main narrative line are often encoded as converbs or "medial verbs" rather than finite verbal forms.

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Finiteness and discourse

(2)   ***Coming*** *out,*
        stopping *to check the mailbox,*
        taking *a look at the driveway*
        and ***pausing*** *to adjust his hat,*
        he ***turned***
        and ***walked*** *to his car.*

        (Givón 2001: 340)

Finiteness and discourse

- In this talk
  - we present a case-study from Abaza, an underdescribed polysynthetic Northwest Caucasian language;
  - Abaza verbs apparently show a very robust morphological finite vs. non-finite distinction;
  - still, there are at least two types of verbal forms that show "hybrid" behaviour;
  - on the basis of oral narratives, we show that this correlates with the discourse status of events encoded by such verbal forms.

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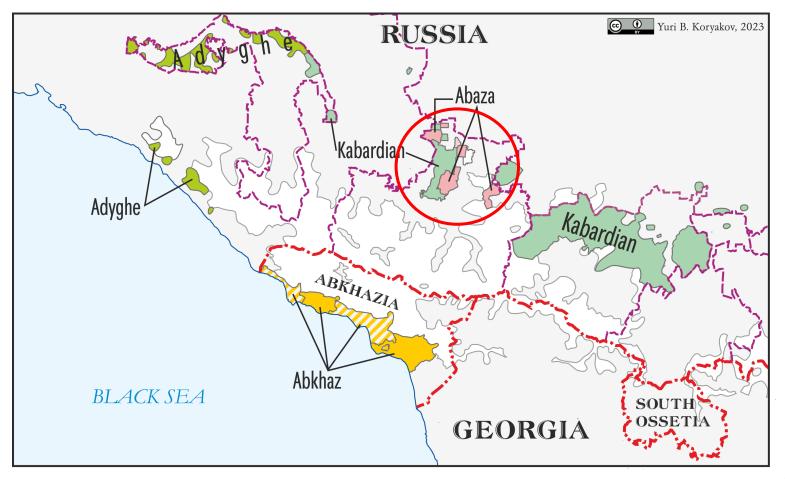
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Introducing Abaza

- Northwest Caucasian language family:
  - Circassian: West Circassian (Adyghe), Kabardian
  - Abkhaz-Abaza: Abkhaz, Abaza
  - Ubykh (extinct since 1992)

Introducing Abaza

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- *abáza bəzŝá (абаза бызшва)*, ISO 639-3 abq
- Ca. 38 000 speakers in Russia (Karachaevo-Cherkessia), ca. 10 000 in Turkey
- The least-described language of the Northwest Caucasian family
- Descriptive works exist (e.g. Genko 1955, Tabulova 1976, Lomtatidze et al. 1989, O'Herin 2002), but are insufficient

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Introducing Abaza

- Major typological traits (Hewitt 2005, Arkadiev & Lander 2020):
  - rich consonantism and empoverished vocalism;
  - head-marking and polysynthesis;
  - weak distinction between major lexical classes;
  - ergativity;
  - rich system of spatial marking in the verb;
  - complex system of clause-combining.

Introducing Abaza

- Sources of data:
  - a small corpus of oral narratives (ca. 2 hours) recorded during fieldtrips in 2017-2021;
  - in particular, four recordings of narratives based on the "Pear film" (Chafe ed. 1980);
  - unless indicated otherwise, all examples come from this corpus.

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Abaza verbal system

The Abaza verbal template:

		"preverbs" (Π)								"stem" (Σ)					"endings"				
−12	−11	−10	−9	−8	−7	−6	−5	−4	−3	−2	−1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	+7
absolutive	subordinators, negation	repetitive	potential, involuntative	applicatives	directional preverbs	locative preverbs	indirect object	ergative	negation	causative	sociative	root	directional suffixes	event operators	plural	aspect, tense	negation	past tense, modality	subordinators, force, emphasis

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markers of TAM
and (non-)finiteness

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Abaza verbal system

- Abaza, like closely related Abkhaz (Hewitt 2010), shows an apparently straightforward and consistent morphological distinction between finite and non-finite verbal forms.

- This distinction is based on (primarily suffixal) markers of independent vs. dependent status, but does not normally affect argument cross-reference.

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Abaza verbal system

(3) *awə́j ák̫-ṗ*   *jə-z-ʕa-s-m-áχ̫ə-z* (uo17713sum33)
    DIST   COP-NPST.DCL   3PL.ABS-RSN-CSL-1SG.ERG-NEG-take-RS.NFIN
    'That's why I did not take them here.'

(4) *jarawása*   *jə-r-č'p-ə́w-n*   (bt18716kha7)
    same.way   3SG.N.ABS-3PL.ERG-do-IPF-RS.DCL
    'They used to do it in the same way.'

ABS – absolutive   IPF – imperfective
COP – copula   N – non-human
CSL – cislocative   NFIN – non-finite
DCL – declarative   NPST – non-past
DIST – distal demonsrative   RSN – reason subordinator
ERG – ergative   RS – retrospective shift

Abaza verbal system

- The basic tense forms of dynamic verbs:

basic			retrospectivised		
	finite	non-finite		finite	non-finite
Present	*-əj-ṭ/d*	*-wa*	Imperfect	*-wa-n*	*-wa-z*
Aorist	*-ṭ/d*	∅	R-Aorist	*-n*	*-z*
Future I	*-wa-š-ṭ/d*	*-wa-š*	Subj-ve I	*-wa-šə-n*	*-wa-šə-z*
Future II	*-ṗ/b*	*-ra*	Subj-ve II	*-rə-n*	*-rə-z*

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Extra marking of finite forms vis-à-vis non-finite ones

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Cumulative expression of tense and (non-)finiteness

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Cumulative expression of past tense and (non-)finiteness

Abaza verbal system

- On top of the finite vs. non-finite distinction within the basic tenses, Abaza features a large number of dedicated markers of subordination, including general and specialised converbs.

- Among these, we shall focus on the "adverbial" marker -*ta*, which functions as the most general converb.

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- Among these, we shall focus on the Adverbial marker *-ta*, which functions as the most general converb.

Abaza verbal system

- The adverbial suffix -*ta*:
  - forms adverbs from nominals

(5) *bzə́j-ta*   *h-a-cə-n.χ-ə́j-d*   (os17709rab5)
      good-ADV   1PL.ABS-REC.IO-COM-work-PRS-DCL
      'We work together well.'

ABS – absolutive   IO – indirect object
ADV – adverbial   PRS – present tense
COM – comitative applicative   REC – reciprocal
DCL – declarative

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Abaza verbal system

- The adverbial suffix -*ta*:
  - forms converbs from verbs, usually attaching to the bare stem without any TAM affixes:

(6) *č'ḳʷə́n–χʷə́c-ḳ*   *d-ʕa-mʕʷájs-əj-d*
     boy–little-INDF   3SG.H.ABS-CSL-travel-PRS-DCL
     velasipéd-ḳ   *d-á-kʷ- c̣a-ta*   (de21504pear5)
     bicycle-INDF   3SG.H.ABS-3SG.N.IO-LOC-sit-ADV
     'A little boy is approaching riding [lit. sitting on] a bicycle.'

CSL – cislocative
H – human
INDF – indefinite
LOC – locative preverb

Abaza verbal system

- The adverbial suffix -*ta*:
  - remarkably, can also attach to finite verbal forms such as Present, Imperfect, and Future II:

(7) *sará aráj   a-televízor-g'əj   na-s-áχʷ-ṗ-ta*
      1SG   PROX   DEF-tv_set-ADD   TRL-1SG.ERG-take-NPST.DCL-ADV
      j-hʷa-ṭ   s-qə-s-ṗ   (dk18718dag19)
      3SG.ERG-say-DCL   1SG.ABS-LOC-pass-NPST.DCL
      'I'll take this tv-set, he said, and shall cross [the river].'

ADD – additive
NPST – non-past tense
PROX – proximal demonstrative
TRL – translocative

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  - More on such "hybrid" forms below.

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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- The narratives in our corpus employ two basic strategies of encoding successive events of the main story line:
  - the past-tense strategy with the Aorist and Retro-Aorist as the basic TAM-forms;
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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- The past-tense strategy (somewhat simplifying):
  - finite Aorist in chain-final clauses;
  - finite Retro-Aorist in chain-medial clauses.

(8) *zaḳ-zaḳ*   *há-gʼəj*   *ʕa-tá-j-χə-n*
one~DSTR   pear-ADD   CSL-LOC-3SG.M.ERG-take-RS.DCL

á-čʼḳʷən-χʷác-ḳ   *a-ʕʷá-ẑ-gʼəj*
DEF-boy-little-INDF   DEF-two-CLH-ADD

j-rá-j-t-d   (al210503pear21)
3SG.N.ABS-3PL.IO-3SG.M.ERG-give-DCL
'He took pears and gave one to each of the two boys.'

CLH – human classifier   DSTR – distributive
CSL – cislocative   M – masculine

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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- The present-tense strategy:
    - finite Present in chain-final clauses;
    - "hybrid" Adverbial Present in chain-medial clauses.

(9) *χ-ĉá-ḳ*   *ʕa-qá-j-χ-əj-d-ta*
    three-apple-NUM   CSL-LOC-3SG.ERG-take-PRS-DCL-ADV
    a-sabáj-kʷa j-ʕa-rá-j-t-əj-d   (de21504pear10)
    DEF-child-PL   3PL.ABS-CSL-3PL.IO-3SG.M.ERG-give-PRS-DCL
    'He takes three apples <i.e. pears> and gives them to the children.'

LOC – locative preverb
NUM – suffix of numerals

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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- Both types of forms employed in chain-medial clauses, i.e. Retro-Aorist and Adverbial Present, show similar distribution:

  - rarely (Retro-Aorist) or not at all (Adverbial Present) occur in chain-final position;

  - express foregrounded events of the main narrative line;

  - tend to be employed when two or more events are tightly linked to each other, either as cause and result, or as part of a "dynamic scenario" (Schank & Abelson 1977; Kibrik 2013).

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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- cause and result: past-tense strategy

(10) *háqʷə-ḳ*   *d-a-qa-pá-n*
    stone-INDF   3SG.H.ABS-3SG.N.IO-LOC-jump-RS.DCL
    a-martán-gʼəj   *j-vilosipéd-gʼəj*   *jar-gʼə́j*
    DEF-basket-ADD   3SG.M.PR-bicycle-ADD   he-ADD
    a-qə́-ŝt-d   (al210503pear13)
    3SG.N.IO-LOC-fall-DCL
    'He stumbled on a stone and the basket, his bicycle and he himself fell down.'

PR – possessor

Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- cause and result: present-tense strategy

(11) *a-háqʷ*   *d-a-pə́.š'ḳla-s-əj-d-ta*
    DEF-stone   3SG.H.ABS-3SG.N.IO-LOC-hit-PRS-DCL-ADV

    d-a-q.kš-ə́j-d-ta
    3SG.H.ABS-3SG.N.IO-turn_over-PRS-DCL-ADV

    j-karzínka   *j-tá-z*   *š.abgá.z*
    3SG.M.PR-basket   REL.ABS-be_in-RS.NFIN   whole

    a-ha–dáḳʷ-kʷa-g'əj   j-ḳa-pl-ə́j-d   (de21504pear7)
    DEF-pear–few-PL-ADD   3PL.ABS-LOC-spill-PRS-DCL

    'He stumbles on a stone, turns over, and his basket and
    all the pears that were there fall out.'

NFIN – non-finite
RS – retrospective shift

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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- dynamic scenario: past-tense strategy:

(12) *a-ḳlát*   *ʕa-j-áχʷə-d*
  DEF-basket CSL-3SG.M.ERG-take-DCL
  j-vilasiped   *j-á-kʷ-jə-r-gələ-n*
  3SG.M.PR-bicycle 3SG.N.ABS-3SG.N.IO-LOC-3SG.M.ERG-CAUS-
          stand-RS.DCL
  d-á-kʷ-c̣a-n
  3SG.H.ABS-3SG.N.IO-LOC-sit-RS.DCL
  də-ẑá.kʷ-lə.χ-d   (fm21503pear10)
  3SG.H.ABS-LOC-go_back-DCL
  'He took the basket, put it on his bicycle, mounted it and drove away.'

CAUS - causative

Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- dynamic scenario: present-tense strategy:

(13) *də-j-zə́-ŝ̂ŝ̂-χ-əj-d-ta*
   3SG.H.ABS-3SG.M.IO-BEN-whistle-RE-PRS-DCL-ADV

   d-ʕa-c̣a-j-rə́-s-χ-əj-d-ta
   3SG.H.ABS-CSL-LOC-3SG.M.ERG-CAUS-stop-RE-PRS-DCL-ADV

   "a-qə́lpa–dáḳʷ   n-áχʷ-χ"   *j-hʷ-ə́j-d-ta*
   DEF-hat–little   TRL-take-RE/IMP   3SG.M.ERG-say-PRS-DCL-ADV

   j-qə́lpa–č'ḳʷən   ʕa-jə́-j-t-χ-əj-d   (de21504pear9)
   3SG.M.PR-hat–little CSL-3SG.M.IO-3SG.M.ERG-give-RE-PRS-DCL
   'He whistles to him, stops him, says "Take the hat", and returns him his hat.'

BEN – benefactive applicative   RE – refactive
IMP – imperative

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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- Moreover, similar behaviour is observed in our corpus with the other "hybrid" forms containing the Adverbial suffix attached to a finite form:

  - all such forms are employed in what can be called "quasi-coordination" constructions consisting of clauses denoting events which are equally prominent and at the same time tightly linked within a larger unit of discourse;

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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- Future II, e.g. in speaker's committments:

(14) *sará   aráj   a-televízor-g'əj   na-s-áχʷ-ṗ-ta*
    1SG   PROX   DEF-tv_set-ADD   TRL-1SG.ERG-take-NPST.DCL-ADV

    j-hʷa-ṭ   *s-qə-s-ṗ*   (dk18718dag19)
    3SG.ERG-say-DCL   1SG.ABS-LOC-pass-NPST.DCL
    'I'll take this tv-set, he said, and shall cross [the river].'

Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- Imperfect describing sequential habitual events:

(15) *ʔaχʷtán–zaȝə́-ḳ   hə́-ma-ztən*
    dress–one-INDF   1PL.IO-have-COND

    hará   j-h-ŝá-h-c̣-əw-n-ta
    we   3SG.N.ABS-1PL.IO-LOC-1PL.ERG-put_on-IPF-PST-ADV

    á-rqa   h-c-əw-n   (sc17713fie14)
    DEF-field   1PL.ABS-go-IPF-PST
    'We would put on the only dress we had and would go to the field [to work].'

Abaza verbal forms in narratives

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Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- By contrast, the unequivocally non-finite Adverbial forms with the suffix *-ta* attached to the bare stem almost always express situations which are backgrounded in discourse.

- Cf. the distribution in the four "Pear stories":

	finite+Adv	non-finite Adv
sequential	34	2
simultaneous	7	35

Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- Cf. the contrast between an Adverbial clause (simultaneous, backgrounded) and a Retro-Aorist clause (sequential, foregrounded):

(16) *sar-gʼə́j   sə-m-q̇ʷá.χ-wa-ta*
      1SG-ADD   1SG.ABS-NEG-spend_time-IPF-ADV

      sarátav   s-tə́-c̣ə-n
      Saratov   1SG.ABS-LOC-pass-RS.DCL

      maχač'kalá   s-ca-ṭ   (dk18718dag5)
      Makhachkala   1SG.ABS-go-DCL

      'Without spending time, I left Saratov and went to Makhachkala'

Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- The "hybrid"/"finite" Adverbial forms express a separate assertion, whereas their non-finite counterparts form part of a larger assertion.

- This is corroborated by elicited data showing that only the non-finite Adverbial forms fall under the scope of modal matrix predicates.

Abaza verbal forms in narratives

(17) [*ahmad   zawər   aχčʼa   ʕa-jə-kʷə-j-χ-əj-ṭ-ta*]
Ahmad   Zaur   money   CSL-3SG.IO-LOC-3SG.ERG-take-PRS-DCL-ADV

[*fatəjma   j-lə-j-t-ra*]
Fatima   3SG.N.ABS-3SG.F.IO-3SG.M.ERG-give-MSD
j-taqə-ṗ   (elicited, 2021)
3SG.M.IO-want-NPST.DCL
'Ahmad takes money from Zaur and wants to give it to Fatima'
*'Ahmad wants to take money from Zaur and give it to Fatima'

F – feminine   MSD – masdar

Abaza verbal forms in narratives

(18) [*ahmad   zawər   aχč'a   ʕa-jə-kʷə-j-χ-ta*
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Roadmap

- Finiteness

- Introducing Abaza

- Abaza verbal system

- Abaza verbal forms in narratives

- Conclusions

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    - the Retro-Aorist form with the suffix -*n* used in past-tense narratives is morphologically finite, but rarely occurs independently, usually marking chain-medial clauses;
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Conclusions

- This behaviour is iconic insofar as all types of "hybrid" forms predominantly encode events that are simultaneously foregrounded and integrated into larger discourse units:
  - discourse foregrounding → finiteness;
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Conclusions

- The Abaza data shows that
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ŝə-zʕʷáda-χa-ṭ

2PL.ABS-healthy-INC-DCL

Thank you for you attention!

Ευχαριστούμε για την προσοχή σας!

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