

Prefixal Particles in Abkhaz

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1. Introduction

Abkhaz, a language in the North-West Caucasian linguistic family, has several prefixal particles which express a variety of nuances for an action or a mood. Though in standard literary Abkhaz these prefixal particles are rare, they are often found in folktale texts. Grammatically, these particles are not necessary to the building of verbal complexes. Since they are placed before the verbal root and resemble the preverbs which specify the direction or location of a verbal action, some investigators regard the particles themselves as preverbs¹. However, the preverbs cannot be dropped. In this regard there is a distinct difference between prefixal particles and preverbs. These particles have seldom been described in detail in the Abkhaz grammars and dictionaries. This may be because it is difficult to define their subtle meanings and most of them are only to be found in the colloquial speech of the folktale texts. However, in order to understand a language such as Abkhaz more deeply, we should know how a grammatical category such as a particle is used in a sentence, and what nuances it gives to a sentence. This paper's aim is to investigate particles in the Abkhaz folktale texts and to describe their meanings.

The sample sentences cited below are from the texts "Сергей Зыхуба (ed.), *Аԥсуа лакуа, Акуа, Алашара*, 1997". Interpretation of the texts was facilitated by my Abkhaz consultant, Mrs. Ana Tsvinaria, a native speaker of the Abzhywa dialect of Abkhaz.

2. The features of the verbal complex

Abkhaz, like the other North-West Caucasian languages, is a 'polysynthetic language'. It can have a considerable verbal complex, resulting from the affixing of markers expressing the class-person and grammatical categories such as negation, the causative, the version,

potentialis, unvolitionalis, tense-aspect, etc. Most of the affixes in the verbal complex are prefixes. Thus, Abkhaz is a language having a system of 'actant slots' which are placed before a root. In this paper, the class-personal prefixes occupying the actant slots will be referred to as 'columns' (hereafter marked as *C*), following Hewitt (1989). Abkhaz does not have a case marking system, but uses an alternative strategy for the distribution of columns indicating the relation of both the subject and the object in the verbal complex. Abkhaz has three basic columns. Column I (hereafter marked as *C1*) represents both an intransitive subject (*S*) and a transitive object (*O*), and is placed in the first actant slot. Column II (hereafter marked as *C2*) represents an indirect object (*O_i*) of both intransitive and transitive verbs, and is placed in the actant slot between *C1* and *C3*. The appearance of *C2* depends on whether or not the verb can take the actant. Column III (hereafter marked as *C3*) represents a transitive subject (*A*), and is placed in the actant slot before a root. Since *S* is thus treated in the same way as *O*, and differently from *A*, Abkhaz is a morphological ergative language. Some examples are provided below.

one-place intransitive:

(1) dǝ-pa-wa-jt'

he/she(*C1*)-jump-DYN-Fin

"he/she (*S*) jumps"

two-place intransitive:

(2) d-lǝ-s-wa-jt'

he/she(*C1*)-her(*C2*)-hit-DYN-Fin

"he/she (*S*) hits her (*O_i*)"

two-place transitive:

(3) dǝ-l-šǝ-wǝ-jt'

him/her(*C1*)-she(*C3*)-kill-DYN-Fin

"she (*A*) kills him/her (*O*)"

three-place transitive:

(4) d-ló-s-ta-wa-jt'

him/her(C1)-to her(C2)-I(C3)-give-DYN-Fin

"I (A) give him/her (O) to her (O_i)"

If a transitive verb has a "preverb" (hereafter marked *PREV*), C3 is placed between the preverb and the verbal root, e.g.

(5) j-pó-s-q'a-ø-jt'

it(C1)-PREV-I(C3)-cut-(Aor.)-Fin

"I (A) cut it (O)"

On the other hand, if a two-place intransitive verb has a "preverb", C2 is placed between C1 and the preverb, e.g.

(6) d-ló-x'a-pš-wa-jt'

he/she(C1)-her(C2)-PREV(at)-look-DYN-Fin

"he/she (S) looks at her (O_i)"

This difference in the positions in which the preverb and the actants appear is one of the important criteria for transitivity in Abkhaz.

If a verb has a causative marker, it immediately precedes the root. Compare the example given in (5) above and the causative form in (7) below:

(7) jə-s-p-lə-r-q'á-ø-jt'

it(C1)-me(C2)-PREV-she(C3)-CAUS-cut-(Aor.)-Fin

"she made me cut it"

When a relative adverbial clause is formed, the relative adverbial marker is inserted after C1 of the verbal complex, e.g.

- (8) Sará jə-z-dór-wa-jt' Amra d-axə-n-xa-wá a-j'wón.
 I it-I-know-DYN-Fin Amra (f.) she(C1)-where-PREV-live-DYN.Non.Fin the-house
 "I know the house where Amra lives."

When a relative adjective clause is formed, the relative adjective marker (hereafter marked *Rel*) functions as well as the operation of columns. If the relative corefers with the same referent as C1, the relative marker takes *j(ə)-*, while if the relative corefers with the same referent as C2 or C3, the relative marker takes *-z(ə)-*.

- (9) A-šk'ól-axj j-ca-wá á-č'ik'wən də-z-dór-wa-jt'.
 the-school-to Rel(C1)-go-DYN.Non.Fin the-boy him-I-know-DYN-Fin
 "I know the boy who is going to school."
- (10) Wará wə-z-la-c'áz'w-a-wa sará jə-s-xá-št-x'a-jt'. (AAD)
 you (m.) you-Rel(C2)-PREV-talk about-DYN.Non.Fin I it-me-PREV-forget-Perfect-Fin
 "I have forgotten what you talked about."
- (11) á-x'wšw ø-zə-də-z-k'əla-wa á-č'ik'wən
 the-medicine [it]-Rel(POSS)-SV-Rel(C3)-take-DYN.Non.Fin the-boy
 "the boy who takes the medicine"

3. The position of particles in the verbal complex

If a verbal complex has the prefixal particle (hereafter marked *PAR*) in question, it is inserted after C1. Compare the example of a one-place intransitive (12) and that of a three-place transitive which contains C1, C2 and C3 (13):

- (12) a-d'w'k'án də-n-d'w'əl-c'-wa-jt' a-ph'w'əzba [Text 3]
 the-store he/she(C1)-PAR-PREV(outside)-go-DYN-Fin the-girl
 "the girl goes out of the store *at once/gladly*"

- (13) šʷə-ʒʏab d-aa-s-šʷ-mə-r-bá-r, ... [Text 2]
 your-daughter her(C1)-**PAR**-me(C2)-you(C3)-CAUS-see-if
 "if you show me your daughter, ..."

Furthermore, if there is both a prefixal particle and a relative adverbial prefix in a verbal complex, the particle is placed after the relative adverbial prefix, e.g.

- (14) A-jʷnə d-axʲə-nə-jʷna-la-z awáa racʷa-jʷnə j-ajkʷša-nə
 the-house he-where-**PAR**-PREV(into)-enter-Non.Fin.P.I. people many-Hum. they-surround-Abs.
 j-š-tʷá-z [ø]-j-bá-ø-jtʷ. [Text 1]
 they-how-sit-Non.Fin.Past [it]-he-see-(Aor.)-Fin
 "He saw that in the house where he entered *rapidly* many people were sitting around."

- (15) A-dawé də-ši-nə d-axʲ-kʷa-žʲə-z cqʷjá
 the-ogre he-be killed-Abs. he-where/that-**PREV**-be thrown down-Past.Ind.N.F. well
 j-anə-la-j-xʷa-pš, cʷabərgəngə j-lómha-kʷa akʷə
 they-when-**PAR**-him-**PREV**-look at.Aor.N.F. indeed his-ear-PL one
 ø-š-á-ma-mə-z ø-r-bá-ø-jtʷ. [Text 1]
 [it]-how/that-it-have-NEG-Non.Fin.Past [it]-they-see-(Aor.)-Fin
 "As soon as they looked at the ogre who was killed and was thrown down, they noticed that he did not have one of his ears."

If a verbal complex has both a reflexive prefix and a particle, the latter is placed after the former, e.g.

- (16) a-čə-n-t-na-šə-n [Text 1]
 its-self-**PAR**-**PREV**-it-dip-Past.Ind.
 "it dipped itself and ..."

If a prefixal particle is used in a relative adjective clause, it is placed after the relative adjective marker which functions as C1, e.g.

(17) j-áa-h-aw-[w]a

[Text 2]

Rel(C1)-PAR-we-receive-DYN.Non.Fin

"all that we receive"

Compare example (17) above and example (18) below, wherein the relative adjective marker functions as C2:

(18) də-n-z-ah-ta-wá,

waxá də-ps-wá-jt'

[Text 2]

her(C1)-PAR-Rel(C2)-we-give-DYN.non.Fin tonight he-die-DYN-Fin

"the person to whom we will give her (in marriage) will die tonight"

4. The usages and meanings of prefixal particles in Abkhaz folktale texts

The prefixal particles used in Abkhaz folktale texts are as follows: *n* "at once", "gladly", "in good humor", *l* "quickly", "at once", *aa* "at once", "quickly", *j* "instantly", "at once", *j^wa* "quickly", *na* "quickly", and "instantly". As mentioned above, these particles are not always grammatically necessary to the building of a sentence. Therefore, though it is difficult to describe their meaning, their primary purpose would appear to be to lend greater intensity to an action. Furthermore, they can be used to indicate that an action has started quickly or has been rapidly completed, but they do not represent a perfective tense-aspect as a grammatical category (expressed by a perfective suffix *-x^la*). When the particles in question are used in folktale texts, the forms of the verbal complex in which they are used usually have Absolutives (which resemble English participles) which are marked by *-nə*, Past Indefinite in *-n*, and a finite form of Aorist in *-ø-jt'* or non-finite form of Aorist in *-ø*. These particles are remarkably similar in meaning and often interchangeable, e.g.: *d-lə-j^wna-la-jt'* or *d-nə-j^wna-la-jt'* (he/she-PAR-PREV-enter-Fin) "he/she entered *at once*". The following are examples:

(19) A-šarpaz a-čəmazaj^w də-n-tá-ha-nə də-c^wa-ø-jt'. (AAD)

early morning the-sick person he/she-PAR-PREV(in)-fall-Abs. he/she-sleep-(Aor.)-Fin

"In the early morning the sick person fell asleep *soundly*."(20) A-x^wč'ə á-mba d-na-[a]-k'ə-sə-n š'tax'q'á də-j^wə-ø-jt'.

the-boy the-goal he-PAR-it-PREV-touch-Past.Ind. back he-run-(Aor.)-Fin

"As soon as the boy touched the goal, he ran back."

- (21) Nas áfər^hwa j-č'ə-na-j-xa-n, anój j-zə-d-góla-z
 then quickly his-SV-PREV-he-start-Past.Ind. that they-Rel-PREV(by)-stand-Non.Fin.P.I.
 a-j^wn dəw d-lə-j^wna-la-ø-jt'. [Text 1]
 the-house big he-PAR-PREV-enter-(Aor.)-Fin

"Then he quickly set out and (*at once*) entered that big house by which they stood."

- (22) Jə-bzəja-wp', s-áb, jó-w-h^wa-z ø-s-a-há-ø-jt', — j-h^wá-n,
 it-good-stat.pres. my-father Rel-you-say-Non.Fin.P.I. [it]-me-to-hear-(Aor.)-Fin he-say-Past.Ind.
 də-j^w-čəž^w-la-n j-čə d-á-s-nə d-cá-ø-jt'. [Text 2]
 he-PAR-PREV-mount a horse-Past.Ind. his-horse he-it-hit-Abs he-go-(Aor.)-Fin

"It is good, my father, I see what you said, — said he, and he (*quickly*) mounted his horse, and having struck it (with the whip), he went away."

- (23) Jə-bzəja-wp', s-áb, jó-w-h^wa-z ø-s-a-há-jt', — j-h^wá-n,
 wəj-g^lə, j-čə d-á[a]-a-s-nə d-cá-ø-jt'. [Text 2]
 this-also his-horse he-PAR-it-hit-Abs he-go-(Aor.)-Fin

"It is good, my father, I see what you said, — said he and having struck it (*quickly*) (with the whip), he went away."

From the examples given above (and those provided below as well) it will be seen that in many cases these particles are used in the forms of the Past Indefinite and Absolutives. Since Abkhaz lacks a coordinate conjunction, the Past Indefinite and Absolutives provide clause linkage. For this reason, in order to express the various nuances of an action in clause-chaining, the particles are mainly used in the Past Indefinite and Absolutives.

We find that two different particles can be used in one sentence, e.g.

- (24) Jə-bzjəa-wp', — j-h^wá-n, áh^wa ø-áa-š^tə-j-xə-n
 it-good-stat.pres. he-say-Past.Ind. [the]-sword [it]-PAR-PREV-he-pick up-Past.Ind.

«á-č'k'jwən» a-h^wəntkár jə-j^wnó d-nə-j^wná-l-t' (< d-nə-j^wná-la-ø-jt'). [Text 1]

the-boy the-king his-house he-PAR-PREV-enter-(Aor.)-Fin

It is good, — the «boy» said, and he picked up the sword *at once* and *quickly* entered the king's house."

(25) Nas arój «á-č'k'jwən» j-ž'əba j-aa-tə-j-xə-n a-dawó j-lómha

then this the-boy his-pocket it-PAR-PREV-he-take out-Past.Ind. the-ogre his-ear

ø-na-ga-nó r-áp^xja j-nó-k^w-j-c'a-ø-jt'. [Text 1]

[it]-PREV(thither)-take-Abs them-in front of it-PAR-PREV(on)-he-put-(Aor.)-Fin

"Then *as soon as* this «boy» removed an ear of the ogre from his pocket, he took it thither and put it in front of them."

(26) A-h^wəh^w j-aa-j-z a-laxánk'a j-a-nó-z a-žó

the-dove Rel-PREV-come-NonFin.PI. the-washtub Rel-it-be on- Stat.Past.N.F the-water

a-čó-n-t-na-šə-n a-mc'^wšž^wj^wa-k^wa ø-an-á[a]-a-rəš^wš^wa,

its-self-PAR-PREV-it-dip-Past.Ind. the-wing-PL [them]-when-PAR-it-wave.Non.Fin.Aor.

á-rpəzba pšžá-k', á-rpəzba zamána-k' d-aa-təc'-ø-t'. [Text 1]

a-young man beautiful-a a-young man fine-a he-PREV-go out-(Aor.)-Fin

"The dove which had come here dipped itself into the water on the washtub, and *as soon as* it waved its wings, it turned into a beautiful and fine young man."

(27) A-dawó wa jə-psə ø-aa-j-xəc'ə-n,

the-ogre there his-soul [it]-PAR-him-cross-Past.Ind. (= he breathed his last)

ág^warah^wa də-l-k'á-ha-ø-jt'. [Text 1]

in a heap he-PAR-PREV-fall-(Aor.)-Fin

"*The moment* the ogre breathed his last there, he fell in a heap."

(28) Arój a-dawó də-z-šž-c'^wq'ja-z «á-č'k'jwən» də-l-d^wəl-c'ə-n

this the-ogre him-Rel(C3)-kill-indeed-Non.Fin.P. the-boy he-PAR-PREV(outside)-go-Past.Ind.

j-čó a-x^wəc-k^wa ø-a[a]-aj-dó-jə-k'ššala-n, ... [Text 1]

his-horse its-hair-PL [them]-PAR-one onother-PREV-he-bump-Past.Ind.

"As soon as the «boy» who had indeed killed this ogre went out, he rubbed his horse's hair, ..."

- (29) «A-č'k'j^wən» də-l-čəž^w-pa-n a-daw-k^wá xara-nt'^wə
 the-boy he-PAR-PREV(out of horse)-jump-Past.Ind. the-ogre-PL far-from
 d-an-rə-x^wá-pš, rə-la-k^wa ø-x-t'-nə [jə]-j-bá-n,
 he-when-them-PREV-look at.Non.Fin.Aor their-eye-PL [they]-PREV-open-Abs [it]-he-see-Past.Ind.
 d-lə-š'j^ta-sə-n a-xáh^w ø-mc'a'-rs-nə də-j^w-ø-t'. [Text 1]
 he-PAR-PREV-touch the ground-Past.Ind. the-stone [it]-PREV-snatch-Abs he-run-(Aor.)-Fin
 "When the «boy» *quickly* jumped down off the horse and looked at the ogres from afar,
 he saw that their eyes were open. And *at once* he lay down on the ground, snatched the
 stone and started to run."

Here is an example where two verbs with a similar meaning have different particles :

- (30) A-nc^wá j-ah-póχ^ja-jə-r-š^wa-z, k'^wt'ə-k' ø-h-áw-r-g'ə,
 God Rel-us-PREV-he-CAUS-come into-Non.Fin.Past.Ind. hen-one [it]-we-receive-if-even
 j-ajq'ara-nə j-l-ajj^w-áh-ša-wa-jt', k'ap'ék' ø-h-áw-r-g'ə
 it-equally-adv. it-PAR-PREV-we-divide-DYN-Fin kopeck [it]-we-receive-if-even
 ajq'ara-nə j-a[a]-ajq'^w-ha-rč'č'á-r-a-wp'. [Text 2]
 equally-adv. it-PAR-PREV-we-divide-must-be-Stat.pres.
 "Whatever God gave us — even if we receive one hen —, we shall divide it equally,
 even if we receive a kopeck, we must divide it equally."

We can also provide an example of different particles with the same roots:

- (31) anáχ^j-aráχ^j d-aa-nəq'^wa-n, d-lə-k^wpš-j^wə-k^wpšə-n,
 thither-hither he-PAR-walk-Past.Ind. he-PAR-watch-PAR-watch-Past.Ind.
 awáa-g^j ø-j-bá-ø-jt' ... [Text 2]
 people-also [them]-he-see-(Aor.)-Fin

"he walked thither and hither, looked around, and he also saw people ..."

5. Conclusion

The prefixal particles *n*, *l*, *aa*, *jʷ*, *jʷa*, *na*, which are often found in the Abkhaz folktale texts, are not preverbs but a unique grammatical category. Grammatically, Abkhaz can do without these particles when building a sentence, therefore, in standard literary Abkhaz they are rarely found. They are inserted after C1 or the relative adverbial prefix in the verbal complex, and they are mainly used in the forms of Past Indefinite and Absolutives. The basic purpose of the particles used in these forms is to connect more than two clauses closely by intensifying an action. From this basic purpose several individual meanings then stem, e.g. quickness of an action, rapid completion of an action, a mood of contentment as the result of an action, etc. However, most of the examples in the folktale texts indicate that an action has been performed quickly.

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Note

1. According to Chirikba (2003:43), preverbs which do not make up a part of the verbal stem can be called 'free preverbs', cf. *d-aa-xoścə-ø-jt* '(s)he thought a bit' vs. *d-xoścə-ø-jt* '(s)he thought' (stem *xośc(ə)* 'to think'). On the other hand, the preverbs which are a part of the stem (*a-p+q'a-rá* 'to cut', the stem *p+q'a*) can be called 'stem (or bound) preverbs'. We do not use the term 'free preverbs' for the prefixal elements which do not make up a part of the verbal stem. This is because, though preverbs and prefixal particles have the same origin, they are not functionally equivalent.

Abbreviations

A = Agent

Abs = absolutive

Aor. = aorist

C1 = the first column

C2 = the second column

C3 = the third column

CAUS = causative

DYN = dynamic (verb)

Fin = finite

Hum. = Human

Ind = indefinite

NEG = negative

Non.Fin / N.F. = non-finite

O = direct object

O₁ = indirect object

OV = objective version

PAR = particle

Past.Ind. / P.I. = past indefinite

perf. / PERF = perfect

POSS = possessive

PL = plural

pres. = present

PREV = preverb

Rel = relative prefix

Stat. = stative

SV = subjective Version

AAD = (Abkhaz-Abkhaz Dictionary): Шыакрыл К. С., Концъариа В. Х. *Алсуа бызигъа*

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Texts

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- [Text 3] = Н. К. Ашуба, А. Ш. Ажиба, *Ал̄суа бызшэа тэым бызшэак еип̄ш*. Акуа. Алашара, 1997.