

Language Documentation & Linguistic Theory 2

Laz relative clauses in a typological and areal perspective

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This paper examines the relativization strategies of Laz, an underdescribed and endangered Kartvelian language spoken in Turkey, and compares them to those found in other languages of the Caucasus, Turkey and Iran. Almost all types of relativization strategies are attested in this area (Creissels 2005).

Laz has participial relatives and relatives involving relative pronouns, but the commonest relativization strategy in this language belongs to a cross-linguistically rare type of prenominal relative clauses headed by a finite verb form in final position and involving an enclitic subordinator *na* also found in complement clauses and adverbial clauses (Lacroix 2008). This subordinator usually attaches to the word immediately preceding the verb of the relative clause, and the position relativized is left empty in the relative clause:

- (1) [[*Bee-k* *bozo-s=na* *me-č-u*] *matsk'indi*] *čxant'-u-n*.
child-ERG girl-DAT=SUB PV-give-AOR.I3S ring shine-THS-I3S
'The ring that the child gave to the girl shines.' (own field data)

The position of the subordinator is however not determined by a rigid rule: it sometimes attaches to a word that does not immediately precede the verb. The functions of subject, object, applicative argument, recipient and oblique can be relativized. The strategy remains the same, whatever the relativized function.

This relativization strategy is not attested in the other Kartvelian languages and departs from the relativization strategies of Turkish in some important respects. Thus, it can be explained neither by inheritance nor by Turkish influence.

Free relative clauses involve no overt trace of the understood head noun, resulting in a construction in which finite verb forms are immediately followed by suffixes which normally attach to nouns in canonical NPs (plural and case markers):

- (2) [[*Si=na* *čk'om-i-pe-k*] *va* *g-o-dzy-es=na*
2S=SUB eat-AOR-PL-ERG NEG II2-TR-satisfy-AOR.I3P=if
'If the ones you ate didn't satisfy you...'' (K'art'ozia 1972: 177.22)

Abbreviations: AOR = aorist; DAT = dative; ERG = ergative; NEG = negation; PL = plural; PV = preverb; S = singular; SUB = subordinator; THS = thematic suffix; TR = transitive; I = Set I cross-referencing affix; II = Set II cross-referencing affix

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