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Zero Affixes and Nominal Cases in Daghestanian Languages

Уходят в никуда друзья,
 Всѣ больше холодеет мир –
 Но вечно буду помнить я,
 Как очищал Сандро сортир.
 Течет песок, бегут года,
 Уже не молод я давно,
 Но не забыть мне никогда,
 Как выгребал Сандро грязюку...¹

Kibrik 2003a (see also Kibrik 2003b) offers a detailed and precise description of declension in Daghestanian languages, which continues and summarizes Kibrik's work on Daghestanian over many years (cf., among other titles, Kibrik 1977, 1992, 1998, 1999). From this description, I will single out declension in Archi (Kibrik 2003a: 60ff) for a theoretical discussion; I reproduce below a part of the paradigm of the noun GEL 'cup', as given by Kibrik: it will serve as my main data.

GEL 'cup'

Cases		Numbers	
		singular	plural
Grammatical Cases ²	nominative	gél	gél+um
	ergative	gél+li	gél+um+čaj
	genitive	gél+li+n	gél+um+če+n
	dative	gél+li+s	gél+um+če+s

Locative Cases			
IN Cases	in-essive	gél+l +a	gél+um +č +aj
	il-lative	gél+l +a +k	gél+um +č +ej +k
	in-elative	gél+l +a +š	gél+um +č +ej +š
ON Cases	super-essive	gél+li+t	gél+um+če+t
	super-lative	gél+li+ \bar{t} +k	gél+um+če+ \bar{t} +k
	super-elative	gél+li+ \bar{t} +š	gél+um+če+ \bar{t} +š
UNDER Cases	sub-essive	gél+li+L ³	gél+um+če+L'
	sub-lative	gél+li+L'a+k	gél+um+če+L'a+k
	sub-elative	gél+li+L'a+š	gél+um+če+L'a+š

The table is accompanied by two following remarks:

- “... case markers (zero for nominative, ergative and essive);”
- “... there are ‘empty’ morphemes *-li/-l* in the singular and *-čaj/-če/-č* in the plural oblique cases.”

It is these remarks that will be the object of my discussion, since they seem controversial to me: first, I do not think that the ergative and the essive in Archi are marked by a zero suffix; and second, I do not think that morphemes *-li/-l* and *-čaj/-če/-č* are empty. As a result, the question that I will try to answer in this paper is as follows:

|| What zero case suffixes does Archi really have in nominal paradigms?

I will proceed from the assumption that a zero linguistic sign, in particular a zero affix, can be postulated in a given wordform only if it satisfies some stringent conditions imposed in order to avoid the arbitrary introduction of zero signs for the sole purpose of making a description more convenient or more elegant. More specifically, I will have recourse to the Zero Sign Introduction Principle [= ZSI Principle] (Mel’čuk 2006: 470), which I present here in a slightly simplified form.

|| A zero linguistic sign, in particular a zero affix, **X** in a wordform **w** is allowed if and only if Conditions 1 – 3 are simultaneously satisfied:

1. Expressiveness: **X** must have, in **w**, an obvious signified ‘X’.
2. Exclusiveness: **X** must be the only contender inside **w** capable of carrying the signified ‘X’.⁴
3. Contrastiveness: **X** must semantically contrast, in the corresponding position in **w**, with another non-zero sign **X’** that carries the signified ‘X’ of the same category as ‘X’.

In other words, a zero affix:

- 1) must always do a clearly circumscribed job (= express some content really present in the utterance—i.e., carry a clearly perceptible information payload);
- 2) it must do so in the absence of other contenders (= be exclusive on the job—i.e., constitute the very last resort of our description);
- 3) it must be opposed to non-zero signs, i.e., have a distinctive value (= semantically contrast with at least one overt sign).

Since the ZSI Principle is discussed and justified in detail in Mel’čuk 2006, I will take it for granted here and check Kibrik’s three proposed case zero suffixes against it.

In the nominative the suffix **-Ø_{nom}** satisfies all three conditions of the ZSI Principle and can be admitted as such without further ado. By the way, typologically, a zero marker of the nominative is quite common.

Now, the “zero” ergative. The presumed zero suffix of the ergative satisfies Conditions 1 and 3: it carries the signified ‘ERGATIVE’ and contrasts with all non-zero suffixes of other cases. The fact that the paradigm has another zero suffix—of the nominative—does not interfere with the status of the presumed ergative zero suffix; several zero affixes in one paradigm are not forbidden: cf., for instance, an obvious case of Rus. *soldat*+**Ø_{sg.nom}** ‘soldier’

~ *soldat*+ \emptyset _{pl.gen} ‘of.soldiers’. The problem is with Condition 2: the nominative form *gel* and the ergative form *gelli* are clearly distinguished by the suffix **-li**, which Kibrik treats as an empty morph, a marker of the oblique stem. But this is exactly what is absolutely forbidden by the Commandment—the ZSI Principle: Thou shalt not ascribe a signified to a zero marker in the presence of an overt marker that can be naturally loaded with this signified. As a result, I have to take exception to Kibrik’s description: I will say that the ergative is expressed by the suffix **-li** (and its morphonological variants) in the singular and by the suffix **-čaj** (and its variants) in the plural. Thus, these suffixes are by no means empty morphs: they are ergative case markers. However, in the wordforms such as *gellin*, *gellis*, ..., *gelumčen*, *gelumčes*, etc. they become ‘emptied’ in the context of a subsequent case suffix. These wordforms are **parasitic formations** (Matthews 1972: 86, Mel’čuk 1991, 1993-2000, vol. 4: 46-47, and 2006: 144-145): forms constructed by adding affixes to other full forms. More specifically, the problematic forms are **secondary and tertiary cases**—case forms built on an already full-fledged case form.⁵

Under the proposed description, the Archi ergative has two peculiarities.

- The ergative suffix is selected and introduced into the wordform automatically with any other oblique case suffix, and thus it does not bring its signified into the wordform:

GENITIVE	⇔ {ERG}, {GEN};
DATIVE	⇔ {ERG}, {DAT};
COMITATIVE	⇔ {ERG}, {COMITATIVE}; etc.

The suffix of the ergative is meaningful in a wordform only when it is selected for its own signified—that is, when it expresses the ergative: *ERGATIVE*’ ⇔ {ERG}. Otherwise, its meaning is no more present in the meaning of the wordform *gellin* than the meaning of *bucket* is present in the meaning of the idiom *kick the bucket* ‘die’.

- The ergative marker is formally different from all other case markers: it has two sets of allomorphs selected as a function of the number (**-li** and its allomorphs in the singular, **-čaj** and its allomorphs in the plural), while the other case markers are the same in the singular and the plural.

Such a special character of the ergative fits neatly into its typological profile: the ergative case tends have special morphological properties with respect to other case suffixes (have more morphologically conditioned allomorphs, feature more complex morphophonemics, etc.).

Finally, it is the turn of the essives, i.e., the locative cases of position. Does an essive have a zero suffix, which would linearly follow the location suffix and contrast with the lative and elative suffixes? Rather not, since such a suffix would have no signified to carry. The meaning of an essive is said to be ‘be.localized.in [location X]’ and thus to be opposed to the meanings of the corresponding lative and elative: ‘travel.into [location X]’ and ‘travel.out.of [location X]’. However, this reasoning is semantically faulty. An essive simply

does not have the meaning ‘be at rest’ or something similar to express separately, which would oppose it to the corresponding lative and elative; the meanings of the lative and the elative simply include the meaning of the essive:

the essive	: ‘ is.in [X]’
the lative	: ‘travel so that the endpoint is.in [X]’
the elative	: ‘travel so that the starting point is.in [X]’

The semantic relation between an essive, on the one hand, and a lative/an elative, on the other, is like that between *book* and *interesting/French book*; *book* does not have a zero marker for ‘boring’ or ‘non-French’. In an essive form, there is no meaningful absence, which is crucial for a zero sign.⁶ This allows me to conclude that there is no zero suffix in Archi essives.

Thus, we have to conclude that Archi has only one zero case suffix: that of the nominative. But there is another zero suffix in the nominal paradigm: that of the singular, $-\emptyset_{sg}$, opposed to **-um** (and all other suffixes) of the plural. This zero suffix meets all the conditions of the ZSI Principle and thus can be safely admitted into the suffix inventory of Archi.

To conclude this short study, let me cite the partial paradigm of the noun GEL with all zero suffixes explicitly indicated.

GEL ‘cup’

Cases		Numbers	
		singular	plural
Grammatical Cases	nominative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} + \emptyset_{nom}	gél+um+ \emptyset_{nom}
	ergative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li	gél+um+čaj
	genitive	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li+n	gél+um+če+n
	dative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li+s	gél+um+če+s

Locative Cases			
IN Cases	in-essive	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +l +a	gél+um +č +aj
	il-lative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +l +a +k	gél+um +č +ej +k
	in-elative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +l +a +š	gél+um +č +ej +š
ON Cases	super-essive	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li+t	gél+um+če+t
	super-lative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li+ \bar{t} +k	gél+um+če+ \bar{t} +k
	super-elative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li+ \bar{t} +š	gél+um+če+ \bar{t} +š
UNDER Cases	sub-essive	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li+L´	gél+um+če+L´
	sub-lative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li+L´a+k	gél+um+če+L´a+k
	sub-elative	gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li+L´a+š	gél+um+če+L´a+š

For greater clarity, here are three case wordforms of GEL glossed morph-by-morph:

gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +li +s
cup SG ERG DAT
[dative: a secondary case]
‘[belong] to the cup’

gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +l +a
cup SG ERG IN-ESS
[in-essive: a secondary case]
‘[be] in the cup’

gél+ \emptyset_{sg} +l +a +k
cup SG ERG IN-ESS LAT
[il-lative: a tertiary case]
‘[pour] into the cup’

Conclusion

I think there are two lessons to be drawn from the above discussion.

1. The Archi-style ergative form includes an ergative case suffix, rather than an oblique-stem suffix. This ergative suffix becomes empty in all secondary case forms, i.e., when preceding other case suffixes.

2. An essive does not have a semantic component that could contrast with the central semantic components of the corresponding lative and elative: ‘travel.to’ and ‘travel.out.of’. The lative and the elative simply include the meaning of the essive.

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Notes

¹ This little poem epitomizes some of my memories of a stay together with Sandro Kodzasov in a Kamtchatka rural school, in the fishing village of Vyvenka—during a linguistic expedition, brilliantly organized by A. Kibrik. The verse refers to putting the school’s primitive outhouse into working conditions for our own use. It was in Vyvenka that I came to appreciate, respect and love Sandro, a.k.a. бог Сандёр, который добёр, бодёр и мудёр. I wish him another century of good health, excellent hearing, and successful tonology.

² For a better understanding of Archi (and, more generally, Daghestanian) case forms by a non-specialist the following explanations seem to be in order. It should be emphasized that these remarks concern only the cases in Archi and a few related languages; they do not claim general validity.

1. The cases are subdivided into **grammatical**, or **syntactic**, cases, which simply mark syntactic roles of nominals, and **locative**, or **semantic**, cases, which do more—they also express the spatial location of the nominal’s referent and the orientation of its movement with respect to another object.

2. The grammeme of a locative case that denotes movement consists of two subgrammemes: that of location (‘in’, ‘on’, ‘under’, ‘behind’, etc.) and that of orientation (‘travel.into’ and ‘travel.out.of’); each subgrammeme has its own marker. A locative case that denotes location is called an **essive**; the name is prefixed with the denotation of specific location. Thus, the **sub-essive** means ‘being.under [N]’. A locative case that denotes movement to or out of a location is called, respectively, a **lative** or an **elative**. Thus, the sub-lative means ‘moving to be under [N]’, and the sub-elative means ‘moving out of being under [N]’.

3. When a locative case is used in its literal meaning—to denote a spatial location or a movement, its ‘constituents’ (that is, location and orientation) appear together as a compositional combination of signs. However, a locative case can be, and more often than not is, used ‘figuratively:’

- It can be syntactically governed as a whole (Kibrik 2003b: 236): thus, *wiχ* ‘believe N’ governs N_{superess} , *sak̄as* ‘look at N’— N_{superlat} , and *L inc̄’ar* ‘be.afraid of N’— N_{subelat} .

• A locative case can have a figurative meaning: thus, the inessive can denote a cause (as in ‘because of the rain’), the superessive—localization in time (as in ‘on Monday’), and the superelative—a period after which something happens (as in ‘in two weeks’). In many Daghestanian languages, lative and elative cases are used to express a locative meaning only restrictedly; normally, they appear with a figurative meaning.

This requires the treatment of locative cases within a single category of case, rather than as a combination of elements of two inflectional categories (localization + orientation). In a ‘figurative’ use the ending of a locative case denoting movement represents a **morphological idiom**.

³ /Lʼ/ stands for a glottalized lateral affricate.

⁴ This condition (“Don’t introduce a zero sign if there is an explicit formal difference between the two expressions considered”) was formulated, in a very clear manner, in Nida 1948 (1958: 256). It was later vigorously elaborated in Haas 1957: 35: “Two obvious carriers of a semantic distinction ... [should not be] ... ousted by the introduction of two ghosts—presence of zero and absence of zero;” Haas is talking here of a viewpoint according to which the English forms *go* and *went* are allomorphs of the same morpheme and are distinguished by a zero marker of the past tense in *went*, ‘contrasting’ with absence of a tense marker in *go*. Haas called a fictitious zero used instead of a perceptible distinction a ‘quid pro quo’ zero. Cf. also Janda & Manandise 1984: 231: “*Ceteris paribus*, accounts that do without zeroes are always to be preferred over ones that include them;” a zero sign should be introduced only if there is no other linguistic means available to take care of the observed chunk of meaning waiting to be expressed.

⁵ Thus, I do not accept the statement that in Archi all the oblique cases—the genitive, the dative, etc., including the ergative!—are formed from the **oblique stem** of the noun, the suffixes **-li** and **-čaj** being markers of this oblique stem (Kibrik 1992: 81-82, 1997: 27-28, 2003a, b; cf. also Comrie 2001). Note that, even if I disagree with this viewpoint as applied to Archi, it works perfectly for many Daghestanian languages in which the existence of a special oblique stem in the declension of the noun cannot be doubted. For instance, in Tsakhur the ergative is expressed by an overt suffix added to an oblique stem, just like all other Tsakhur oblique case suffixes are; the oblique stem cannot be used as such, without a case suffix (see Kibrik 1999: 56ff). Thus, the noun JAQ ‘road’ (/a/ is a pharyngealized /a/) has the nominative form *jaq*, while all its oblique case forms are built on the oblique stem *jaq̄+ĭ*:

ERG *jaq̄+ĭ+n*, GEN *jaq̄+ĭ+na*, DAT *jaq̄+ĭ+s*, COM *jaq̄+ĭ+k^wa*, etc.

The stem *jaq̄+ĭ* cannot be used as a full-fledged wordform.

Thus, my above reasoning applies only to Archi and other languages (e.g., Lezgian) having the same formal structure of case forms, but not to languages of Tsakhur type (e.g., Lak).

⁶ An essive (‘being.there’) is, as one can see, semantically simpler than a lative (‘traveling.into being.there’) or an elative (‘traveling.out.of being.there’). However, one finds in different languages pairs of derivationally related lexical items where the designation of an essive is formally more complex than that of a lative. Thus, Russian has the adverbs VNUTR ‘traveling.into being.in.there’ vs. VNUTRI ‘being.in.there’, NAVEX ‘traveling.into being.up.there’ vs. NAVEX+U ‘being up.there’ and VNIZ

‘traveling.into being.down.there’ vs. VNIZ+U ‘being down.there’. (These pairs have diachronically resulted from fusing of prepositional phrases with different cases of the noun: the zero marked accusative vs. the **-i/-u** marked locative.) A similar situation exists in six pairs of Norwegian adverbs:

BORT ~ BORT+E ‘away’	NED ~ NED+E ‘down’	UT ~ UT+E ‘out’
HJEM ~ HJEMM+E ‘home’	OPP ~ OPP+E ‘up’	VEKK ~ VEKK+E ‘away’

The first member of each pair is a lative, and the second one, an essive: *Vi gikk hjem* ‘We went home’. ~ *Vi er hjemme* ‘We are home’. (Thanks to L. Johnsen for the Norwegian data.)

In a sharp contrast to this, in Chukchee, the essive-type postpositions are, in addition to being semantically simpler, also formally simpler than the lative/elative-type ones (see Murav’-ëva 1994):

<i>γətγ+ək qača +Ø</i>	<i>γətγ+ək qača +jpə</i>	<i>γətγ+ək qača +γtə</i>
lake LOC place.close.to NOM	lake LOC place.close.to DAT	lake LOC place.close.to ABL
‘being close to [the] lake’	‘[traveling.into] a place.close.to [the] lake’	‘[traveling.out.of] a place.close.to [the] lake’

Quite similar facts are known in Hungarian:

<i>ház +on túl +Ø</i>	<i>ház +on túl +ra</i>	<i>ház +on túl +ról</i>
house SUPERESS beyond NOM	house SUPERESS beyond SUPERLAT	house SUPERESS beyond SUPERELAT
‘being beyond [the] house’	‘[traveling.into] beyond [the] house’	‘[traveling.out.of] beyond [the] house’

And, interestingly, the postpositions in Archi also behave the same way (Kibrik 2003b: 231):

<i>adam+til+če+n q‘on+Ø</i>	<i>adam+til+če+n q‘an+a+k</i>	<i>adam+til+če+n q‘an+a+š</i>
person PL ERG GEN among+NOM	person PL ERG GEN among+ILLAT	person PL ERG GEN among+INELAT
‘being among people’	‘[traveling.into] among people’	‘[traveling.out.of] among people’

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