

On the Main Features of the Kabardian Language System

Vazha Shengelia

Academy Member, Arn. Chikobava Institute of Linguistics, Tbilisi, Georgia

The paper discusses the key issues of the phonetic system and grammatical structure of the Kabardian language. The main characteristic of the phonetic system is the scarcity of vowels (only three vowels are distinguished) and the abundance of consonants (there are 47 consonants in the literary language). The vast majority of consonant clusters are descending and contain two components. The noun has the categories of possession, declension, definiteness, and number. It can take four cases: nominative, ergative, instrumental, and equative. There is a decimal system of counting in numerals. Personal, demonstrative and interrogative pronouns take specific cases. About ten categories function in the verb (word modifying and formative). In the attributive syntagm we have both prepositional and postpositional order. The transitive verb forms an ergative construction (the subject in the ergative case, the direct object in the nominative case). The intransitive verb forms a nominative construction (the subject in the nominative case). © 2023 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

vowel, consonant, declension, ergative, conjugation, word formation, preposition, postposition, ergative construction

The Kabardian (or Kabardian-Circassian, Upper Adyghe, East Circassian) language is a member of the Abkhazian-Circassian group of the Ibero-Caucasian language family, in particular, it is included in the Circassian (Adyghe) subgroup of this group.

Kabardians speaking the Kabardian language live in the North Caucasus – in the territory of the Republics of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and Adyghe, in several villages of the Krasnodar and the Stavropol regions, in the city of Mozdok of the Republic of North Ossetia and its surroundings. There are about 800,000 Kabardians in the Caucasus. Kabardians (descendants of the Muhajirs) also live in the countries of the Middle East and the USA.

The Kabardian language has three dialects (Baksan, Besleney and Kuban) and several subdialects (Malka, Small Kabardino, Mozdok...). The Kabardian literary language is based on the Baksan dialect that is spoken by the majority of Kabardians.

1. Kabardian is a newly written language. It is true that in 20th century and at the beginning of 19th century, there were several attempts to create the Kabardian alphabet (based on different alphabets), but they were used only in the researches of specific authors or in some publications.

The first alphabet of the Kabardian language, that was spread to the Kabardian community and made it possible to receive education in the native

language, was created in 1923 on the basis of the Latin alphabet. Since 1935, the Russian alphabet has been used for Kabardian. Since the 20s of 20th century, textbooks of the Kabardian language for various levels of education, dictionaries and literary works have been published. It has been used in the theatre. The Kabardian language has been established in mass media.

2. The first records of the vocabulary of the Kabardian language were made by European travelers and missionaries. These records were published in a collection "Adyghes, Balkars and Karachays in the Reports of European Authors of 18-19th centuries" in Nalchik, 1974. A number of Circassian lexical units, mainly onomastic material (toponyms, anthroponyms, and ethnonyms) are found in these records. The records lack accuracy, because their authors could not properly perceive sounds that are not common for the European languages, besides, the records were made in the Latin alphabet, which, naturally, does not contain letters and signs suitable for specific Circassian sounds.

The first systematic lexical material of the Kabardian language (namely, about 300 words) was recorded by German scientist (naturalist) Johann Gldenstdt, who traveled to Kabardino in 1771 [1]. The significance of this material, despite phonetic inaccuracies and mistakes in translations, is apparent.

Several dozen Kabardian words and phrases were recorded by German orientalist Julius Klaproth at the beginning of 19th century; the records are inaccurate. The four pages of grammatical notes on the Kabardian language attracts attention (some of them are accurate, many of them are inaccurate).

Kabardian educator Shora Noghma created the Kabardian alphabet based on Arabic in 1825, and in 1930 he created it on the basis of the Russian graphics. The first relatively complete grammar of the Kabardian language (1840-1843) and the Kabardian-Russian dictionary was also created by him.

It was produced under the influence of N. Grech's "Grammar of the Russian Language". Sh. Noghma's grammar and dictionary were published only in the 50s of 20th century [2].

L. Lopatinsky made a significant contribution to the study of the Kabardian language. "Short Kabardian Grammar" (1891) and "Russian-Kabardian Dictionary" (1891) were produced by him. His grammar is short, but it discusses all the essential issues of the structure of the Kabardian language. It can be said that, despite some inaccuracies, this grammar is the most serious work among the studies on the Circassian languages created in the 19th century [3].

N. Yakovlev [4] and G. Turchaninov should be distinguished among the scholars of 20th century because of their contribution to studying the Kabardian language.

Among Kabardian researchers, the representative of the Tbilisi School of Ibero-Caucasian Linguistics Prof. M. Kumakhov's merit should be mentioned. It can be said that he took the study of Circassian languages to a new height. His monographs are the desk books of Caucasologists. We should also mention the dictionaries and studies by A. Shagirov, A. Shardanov, B. Balkarov, Kh. Urusov, J. Kokovi, P. Baghrov, Kh. Taov and others [5].

Among the foreign researchers, we should mention J. Dumzil [6], A. Kuipers [7], K. Paris, J. Colarusso, K. Vamling.

The beginning of the scientific study of the Circassian languages in Georgia is related to the name of S. Janashia, who presented the description of the main characteristics of these languages based on the material found on the site, and analyzed the key issues of the Georgian-Circassian language relations in 1929.

Prominent linguist Prof. G. Rogava is the author of the fundamental researches on the issues of the system and history of the Circassian languages [8]. He also created the university courses of these languages.

M. Chukhua has studied the Georgian-Circassian language relations very productively.

The author of the present paper has also studied the issues of the system and history of the Circassian languages.

3. The phonological system and grammatical structure of the Kabardian language is quite noteworthy from the point of view of theoretical linguistics as well.

The scarcity of vowels and the abundance of consonants is an essential characteristic of Kabardian. Literary Kabardian has 3 vowels and 47 consonants. In the system of vowels, it is relevant to characterize them according to their openness: **a** is the most open vowel, **ə** is the least open, and **ǎ** is considered to be a medium open vowel. By combining with semivowels, these vowels form ascending and descending diphthongs. The ascending diphthongs (**ja, jā, jə, wa, wǎ, wə**) are natural.

The Caucasian abruptive consonants are found in the Kabardian consonant system, thanks to which the ternary system of explosives is created: five - full (**b p p, d t t, ʒ c c, ʒ c c, g° k° k°**), two – defective (**-q q, -q° q°**); Two laryngeal consonants (**ʔ ʔ**) are considered in the system of explosives. In this system, labialized consonants are represented in the ranks of faucals, pharyngeals and laryngeals.

In the spirants, there are both bi-consonantal (**z s, ʒ š, ɣ x', ɣ x, ɣ° x°**) and tri-consonantal (**v f f, z' s' ʒ, l' l' l'**) clusters; There can be found even singles (**x°, h**).

The Kabardian literary language does not have any faucal non-labialized explosives (**g k k**). They are transposed into affricates. The literary language does not have hard consonants either (in the Beslen dialect these consonants are presented).

There are a few consonant clusters. A large part of them is two-component consonant groups, and a small part is three-component ones. The consonant clusters that are typical for the language are descending [9: 121].

4. The Kabardian language, like other Ibero-Caucasian languages, is characterized by the

semasiological category of person and thing: **x'āt** "who", **sət** "what". The latter can also be used in relation to a child.

5. The noun has four categories – the categories of possession, declension, definiteness, and number.

The category of possession is produced by prefixes that are connected to proper person pronouns in case of I and II person. In accordance with Kabardian orthography, unlike Adyghe, the possessive prefixes are written separately: **si wənǎ** "my house", **wi wənǎ** "your house", **i wənǎ** "his/her house", **di wənǎ** "our house", **fi wənǎ** "your house", **ja wənǎ** "their house". In oral speech, the possessive prefix and the proper stem of the noun are pronounced together.

Kabardian has four grammatical cases: nominative, ergative, instrumental, and equative. In the definite declension, the suffix **-r** produces the nominative case of the noun, while the ergative case is produced by the suffix **-m**. The instrumental case is based on the form of the ergative case while the equative case is based on the form of the nominative case. In the indefinite declension, the nominative and ergative cases are indistinguishable – they are represented by a zero case marker.

6. Predicate adjectives produce the forms of gradation descriptively – comparative, superlative and diminutive.

Adjectives change their forms like nouns when declined, and when combined with a noun, they are presented in postposition. A relative adjective is placed before a noun and does not change when declined.

7. In Kabardian, just like in many other languages, three main groups of numerals are distinguished: ordinals, cardinals, and fractions.

Cardinal numbers from one to ten are represented by simple stems in Kabardian. From 11 to 19 we have complex stems: "ten" + affix element + proper numeral.

The counting system in Kabardian, unlike Adyghe, is decimal ("two-ten", "three-ten", "four-

ten", etc.). For 50, both **tx'əḡ** ("five-ten") and **ś'anəx'ǎ** "One hundred a half" are used.

An ordinal number is produced from a cardinal number with the help of a prefix and a suffix, while a fractional number is produced only by a suffix.

8. Personal, demonstrative and interrogative pronouns are distinguished by both semantics and a peculiar type of declension.

Kabardian I and II person singular and plural pronouns are open monosyllabic stems, while III person pronoun is not found in the language. Its function is performed by three series of demonstrative pronouns, which are opposed to each other based on the distance from I person.

The nominative and the ergative cases of personal pronouns are stems without suffixes (zero-suffixed). Interrogative pronouns **x'āt** "who" and **sət** "what" do not differentiate the nominative and the ergative in the indefinite declension, while in the definite declension, they have forms that are similar to nouns.

The ergative of demonstrative pronouns in the singular is produced by the suffix **-bə**, in the ergative case of the plural number, the ergative case form of the singular number is used as the stem, to which the plural marker **-x'ǎ** and the ergative marker **-m** are added.

9. Kabardian has intransitive and transitive, static and dynamic verbs (stativity and dynamism have special formatives).

A verb can be uni-personal or multi-personal. There are bi-personal, tri-personal, quad-personal and quint-personal verbs. Uni-personal verbs are intransitive, bi-personal and tri-personal verbs can be both transitive and intransitive (with one or two indirect objects in the latter case), quad-personal and quint-personal verbs are transitive (with two and three indirect objects, respectively).

A transitive verb is usually static, while an intransitive verb can be both static and dynamic.

Negative forms are produced by a prefix in infinitive forms, while they are formed by a suffix in finite forms.

Special suffixes are used to produce question forms.

The main tenses are: present, future, past imperfect, past perfect and past in the past.

The verb is rich in word-forming categories; these are causative, version, comitative, communicative, sharing, potential, involuntariness. Most of them have prefixes as formatives. Only in case of potential we have both prefix and suffix formation. Prefixed potential is produced only from negative forms of transitive verbs; In this case, the transitive verb becomes intransitive. Suffixed potential occurs equally with both positive and negative forms.

To produce a masdar, the suffix **-n** is added to the stem of a verb.

10. There are both prepositional and postpositional order in an attributive syntagm. A modifier is prepositional if it is represented by an ordinal number or a demonstrative pronoun. An adjective or a cardinal number is postpositional. The second component of a syntagm changes depending on declension.

In Kabardian, the governed modifier is in the polyfunctional ergative case (with the function of the possessive case) and does not change when declined. The case markers are added to a head word.

In a predicate syntagm, a transitive verb forms an ergative construction, and an intransitive verb produces a nominative one. In the first occurrence, the subject is in the ergative case, and the direct object is in the nominative. In the second occurrence, the subject in the nominative case is related to the verb, while the indirect object (objects) are in the polyfunctional ergative (with the function of the possessive case).

This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, grant NO. FR-18.3659.

ენათმეცნიერება

ყაზარდოული ენის სისტემის ძირითად თავისებურებათა შესახებ

ვ. შენგელია

აკადემიის წევრი, არნ. ჩიქობავას სახელობის ენათმეცნიერების ინსტიტუტი, თბილისი, საქართველო

ყაზარდოული (სხვაგვარად – ყაზარდოულ-ჩერქეზული) ენა იბერიულ-კავკასიურ ენათა ოჯახის აფხაზურ-ჩერქეზული ჯგუფის წევრია, კერძოდ, ის შედის ამ ჯგუფის ჩერქეზულ (ადილურ) ქვეჯგუფში, რომელშიც მასთან ერთად ადიღურიც მოიაზრება. ყაზარდოულის ფონეტიკური სისტემა და გრამატიკული სტრუქტურა საინტერესოა როგორც თავისთავად, ისე თეორიული ენათმეცნიერების თვალსაზრისით. ფონეტიკაში ყურადღებას იქცევს სამწევრა ვოკალიზმი და რთული კონსონანტიზმი, რომელშიც წარმოდგენილია როგორც სხვა იბერიულ-კავკასიური ენებისათვის დამახასიათებელი ხშულთა სამეულებრივი სისტემა (მჟღერი, ფშვინვიერი და აბრუპტიული თანხმოვნებით), ისე სპეციფიკური ფონემები – ლატერალები და სპირანტთა სამეულეები. თანხმოვანთა კომპლექსების მეტი წილი ორკომპონენტანია და დეცესიური მიმდევრობისა. მნიშვნელოვანია არსებითი სახელების დაყოფა ვინ და რა ჯგუფის სახელებად. სახელებს მოეპოვება კუთვნილების, ბრუნვის, განსაზღვრულობისა და რიცხვის კატეგორიები. კუთვნილების კატეგორიის ნიშნები პრეფიქსებია. გამოიყოფა ოთხი ბრუნვა – სახელობითი, პოლიფუნქციური ერგატივი, მოქმედებითი და გარდაქცევითი. თავისებურია პირის, ჩვენებით და კითხვით ნაცვალსახელთა ბრუნვა. თვლის სისტემა ყაზარდოულში ათობითია (ადიღურისაგან განსხვავებით), რიგობით და წილობით რიცხვით სახელებს პრეფიქს-სუფიქსები აწარმოებს. ყაზარდოულში გარჩეულია გარდაუვალი და გარდამავალი, სტატიკური და დინამიკური ზმნები (დინამიკურობას და სტატიკურობას სპეციალური მაწარმოებლები აქვს). ზმნა შეიძლება იყოს მონოპერსონალური და პოლიპერსონალური – ორპირიანი, სამპირიანი, ოთხპირიანი და ხუთპირიანი. ზმნა მდიდარია სიტყვაწარმოებითი კატეგორიებით – შვიდი კატეგორია ფუნქციონირებს (მათ შორის – კაუზატივისა და ქცევის კატეგორიები). ატრიბუტულ სინტაგმაში გვაქვს როგორც პრეპოზიციური, ისე პოსტპოზიციური წყობა. მსაზღვრელი პრეპოზიციურია, თუ ის რიგობითი რიცხვითი სახელია ან ჩვენებითი ნაცვალსახელი. პოსტპოზიციამში გვხვდება ზედსართავი სახელი და რაოდენობითი რიცხვითი სახელი. ბრუნვისა და რიცხვის ნიშნებს დაირთავს სინტაგმის მეორე კომპონენტი. პრედიკატულ სინტაგმაში გარდამავალი ზმნა ქმნის ერგატიულ კონსტრუქციას (სუბიექტი ერგატიულ ბრუნვაშია, პირდაპირი ობიექტი – სახელობითში), გარდაუვალი – ნომინატიურს (სახელობით ბრუნვაში დასმული სუბიექტით).

REFERENCES

1. Güldenstädt I. (1964) Güldenstädt's trip to Georgia, vol. II, Tbilisi (in Georgian).
2. Nogma Sh. (1956, 1959) *Philologicheskie trudy*, vol. I and II, Nalchik (in Russian).
3. Lopatinsky L. (1891) *Kratkaia grammatika kabardinskogo iazyka*, Tbilisi (in Russian).
4. Yakovlev N. (1948) *Grammatika kabardino-cherkeskogo literaturnogo iazyka*, Moscow-Leningrad (in Russian).
5. Kumakhov M. et al. (2006) *Kabardinskii iazyk*, vol. I, Nalchik (in Russian).
6. Dumézil G. (1932) *Comparative studies of North-West Caucasian Languages*, Paris (in French).
7. Kuipers A. (1968) *Phoneme and morpheme in Kabardian (Eastern Adyghe)*, The Hague.
8. Rogava G. (1980) *The Category of organic and material belonging in the Adyghe Language*, Tbilisi (in Georgian).
9. Kumakhov M. (1981) *Sravnitel'no-istoricheskaia fonetika adigskikh (cherkeskikh) iazykov. M.* (in Russian).

Received November, 2022