

Encoding the Progressive Aspect in Megrelian Verbs

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(Presented by Academy Member Vazha Shengelia)

In the fourth slot of the morphosyntactic chain of the Megrelian verb, following the preverb, the particles *thmV-* / *mV-* / *th-* consistently appear in the first Series of present tense group and in several rows of the fourth Series. The aspectual understanding of such forms is only incomplete; that is, neither the present nor the past tense forms are fully understood as perfective when these particles are included. Furthermore, if the imperfect aspect can be conveyed by forms in all three tenses, the forms with *thmV-* / *mV-* / *th-* allomorphs are mainly present or past; such verbs are dynamic in meaning and express the middle phase of any kind of movement/action within a three-phase model, characterized by the continuity of the process without expectation of completion, which allows to consider progressive as a marker of the imperfective as a special case. Therefore, in Megrelian, as in other languages, the progressive implies the “relationship of dynamic situation and time” (O. Dahl). It is not related to durativity, but is compatible with the category of simultaneity. In Megrelian, it is considered that the progressive imperfective is a subcategory (B. Comrie) as well, therefore its frequency is relatively lower, which is also due to the areal restriction: the progressive is a norm in the Senak-Martviluri dialect. © 2025 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Megrelian, aspect, imperfective, progressive, simultaneity

Aspectual opposition in languages is most prominently expressed by the correlation PRF:IMPFV, which relates to the temporal distinction between past and non-past [1:92]. According to B. Comrie, the aspectual gram of the imperfective, which denotes the situation of the predicate conveyed by the verb as temporally unbounded and contrasts with the perfective aspect, which is boundedness [2:16]. B. Comrie subdivides the imperfective into subcategories: the first in the classification is the continuum, which in languages is reflected in both dynamic and static verbs and equally pertains to all

three tense forms. A subcategory of the continuum is the progressive (PROG), which is characteristic only of dynamic verbs [2:25, 33] [3:51-175], implies “ongoing activity” [1:92], and in many languages is a marked grammatical category.

Typologically, the characteristics of PROG have been established:

- (i) „PROG is usually independent or almost independent of time reference – in other words, it is used both of the present, the past and the future (although less frequently of the latter).

- (ii) *PROG is quite infrequently extended to habitual meaning.*
- (iii) *PROG is normally used only of dynamic, i.e., non-stative - situations". [1:95-102].*

Database and Analysis Method

Our publication focuses on the verb forms of the imperfective aspect in Megrelian such as $\varepsilon\text{-tme-}\widehat{\text{tj}}\text{-}\widehat{\text{op-un-s}}$ "he/she takes [resp. to take]", in which the particles $\text{tmeV-} / \text{mV-} / \text{t-}$ appear in the prefixal structure for the present group and certain forms of the fourth Series.

The present analysis is based on Megrelian field data that have been morphologically processed in the FLeX program. The database shows that the particles $\text{tmeV-} / \text{mV-} / \text{t-}$ sporadically appear in the Senaki-Martvili dialect and rarely in the Zugdidi dialect. The vocal component of the particle is unstable, and thus it is represented by phonetically transformed variants: $\text{tmeV-} / \text{tme-} / \text{mV-} / \text{m-} / \text{t-}$. Each occurrence is conditioned by the phonological environment and the phonotactic rules used in Megrelian. The particles consistently occupy slot -4 in the verb's prefixal structure; the morphemes of slot -5 (preverbs) are obligatory for their appearance. The verbs with these particles are dynamic.

Aspect in Mingrelian: Functional analysis of the $\text{tmeV-} / \text{mV-} / \text{t-}$ allomorphs. In Megrelian, the grammatical category of aspect is considered in relation to tense. The PRF:IMPFV aspectual opposition is represented serially in the form of distinct verb models. The perfective aspect is produced through various linguistic means [4:144; 5:166-174; 6; 7]. For the "imperfective aspect," the particles ti- , ma- , and sometimes a combination of both, tima- , are considered in the verbs of the present group [8; 4:143]: $\varepsilon\text{-tme-}\widehat{\text{tj}}\text{-}\widehat{\text{op-un-s}}$ "he/she takes," $\varepsilon\text{-t-n}\widehat{\text{op-u-}\varepsilon\text{-}(n)}$ "he/she used to take."

There is an opposing view that, contrary to the marked perfective forms, the unmarked present stems are themselves sufficient to express the

imperfective aspect, and the particles $\text{tmeV-} / \text{mV-} / \text{t-}$, which appear in the middle phase of the three-phase movement system, convey the semantics of goal achievement or approach to the goal [9:245]. These particles "expressers of the present stem" (Kobalava I.), despite being attached to the verb as preverbs, do not alter the verb's tense nor convert it into the stative aspect [10; 4:140, 143].

The particles $\text{tmeV-} / \text{mV-} / \text{t-}$ appear exclusively with dynamic verbs in Megrelian, differing from the marked forms in their lexical content when incorporated into the verb stem. This indicates that besides serving as markers of aspectual function, the semantic content of their incorporation should also be considered. The aspectual interpretation of $\text{tmeV-}/\text{mV-}/\text{t-}$ attached verbs strictly relates to the imperfective aspect, meaning neither current nor past forms are perceived as perfective when these particles are involved. The imperfective aspect can be expressed with verbs in all three temporal categories (present, past, future), but $\text{tmeV-}/\text{mV-}/\text{t-}$ forms are inherently associated with present or past tense forms. Present forms are connected to the present stem and the imperfective aspect with its corresponding semantics, while past forms are ongoing and linked to the imperfective aspect with a past-oriented semantics, as well as the forms of the fourth Series. present progressive tense

- (1) $\varepsilon\text{-tme-}\widehat{\text{tj}}\text{-}\widehat{\text{op-un-s}}$
PRV-IMPFV-take-TS-S3(PRS)
"Takes"
- (2) $\varepsilon\text{-tme-}\widehat{\text{tj}}\text{-}\widehat{\text{op-un-d-a-s}}$
PRV-IMPFV-take-TS-IMPF-SBJ-S3
"Used to take"

The meaning of verbs (1) and (2) is that it initiates the process of taking, i.e., it is a dynamic process when the essence of the verbal action and the utterance are the same. The connective forms may be used in certain contexts with future tense forms, but $\text{tmeV-} / \text{mV-} / \text{t-}$ variants only express the dynamic nature of the action. For example:

i) midzirudas, simins etmetʃʷopundas. “Let’s take the cargo, and in the future, we will take the cargo.” (indicating a future action to be completed)

ii) simins əkʷ etmetʃʷopundas. “We must take the cargo in the future.” (indicating a future action to be undertaken in the present)

Past progressive tense

(3) ε-tme-tʃʷop-un-d-u

PRV- IMPFV-take-TS -IMPF-S3

“was taking”

(4) ε-tme-tʃʷop-un-d-u-kʷ

PRV-IMPFV-take-TS-IMPF-S3-COND

“that he/she was taking”

The action expressed by the indicative (3) and conditional (4) moods is described with a past progressive tense, which indicates ongoing activity in the past, representing both the dynamic aspect of the action and its occurrence during the past.

Evidential Past progressive tense

(5) ε-t-nə-tʃʷop-u-ε-(n)

PRV- IMPFV -EV1-take-TS-EV1-(S3)

“apparently, he se used to take”

(6) ε-t-nə-tʃʷop-u-ε-d-u

PRV-IMPFV-EV1-take-TS-EV1-IMP-S3

“apparently, he se used to take”

Examples (5) and (6) are the past evidential forms, which, unlike the present, does not provide accurate knowledge about the action represented by the verb in terms of its relation to the time period described. Rather, it emphasizes the on-going action in the past; it precisely represents the process of action happening at a particular point in the past. Specifically, the prefix “t-” represents the process of the action in progress.

The markers tmeV- / mV- / t- are represented similarly in both active and passive constructions. In terms of the construction of passive verbs, it is analogous to active verbs. As A. Chikobava (1948) stated in “On the Static Forms,” [11:108] its function is dynamic, e.g.: gere “sleeps peacefully”, gə-tmə-dirtu “is sleeping”, and gə-tma-rinuans “is being woken up”, etc.

In Megrelian, dynamic verbs denote actions, movements, from their beginning to their completion [12]; compare the phases distributed in Vendler's (1967) aspectual classification [13], which includes accomplishments, terminatives, and continuatives, whose representation possibilities vary across languages. In Megrelian, grammatical representatives, which mark the phase of completion, can directly correspond with perfective aspect; the initial phase in this perspective shows the least activity, and during the representation of the action with the marker of the aspect, even in cases of representation through the intention of the active verb, it opposes the understanding of the perfective aspect with the full aspectual form.

Conclusions

The analysis of examples in FLEx shows that the alloforms of the TmV- / mV- / t- markers are elements of the phase of action/movement, representing its progression in the process of its completion, anticipation of its completion, beyond completion, which inherently allows for the interpretation of its progression as an imperfective aspect, as discussed in marker analysis [2].

Progressive is used in Megrelian contexts where the duration/continuation of the process is significant and it reflects the dynamic quality of ongoing actions. Generally, the progressive signifies “the dynamic situation and temporal localization” [1: 92]. Expressed with TmV- / mV- / t- markers, the ongoing activity, which inherently progresses in Megrelian, connects the points in time - the onset and the completion, actively involving the future, but it does not participate in the alteration of time. While time signifies “the divergence of actions and moments of knowing” (A. Shanidze), progressive represents the divergence of two actions. If the marker is a past form, the ongoing activity is simultaneous with the past, happening at the same time, intertwined in time; it explicitly refers to both the past and the future from the perspective of a subsequent episode on the same stem group created

by it. Time marked from the point of knowing will be carried out in the past (future is contextually allowed), but the time is immutable, and thus, it is a specifier of all three times. Consequently, progressive and simultaneity are distinct categories in Megrelian.

To sum up, in Megrelian, PROG signifies only dynamic actions; it is marked grammatically and represented with TmV- / mV- / t- markers; these markers indicate static meanings as well. These morphemes also serve as indicators of the dyna-

micity of static meanings. From a temporal perspective, PROG signifies ongoing or completed actions (future is contextually allowed); it does not connect with durativity but rather with simultaneity. The occurrence frequency of PROG in Megrelian is limited, and its distribution is complementary to IMPFV.

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პროგრესივის გამოხატვა მეგრულ ზმნაში

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მეგრული ზმნის მორფოსინტაქსური ჯგუფის მე-4 სლოტში, ზმნისწინის შემდგომ, სტაბილურად ვლინდება თმV- / მV- / თ- ნაწილაკები პირველი სერიის აწმყოს ჯგუფსა და მეოთხე სერიის რამდენიმე მწკრივში. ამგვარ ფორმათა ასპექტური გაგება მხოლოდ უსრულია, ანუ, არც ახლანდელი და არც წარსულდროიანი ფორმები მისი ჩართვის შემთხვევაში არ გაიგება სრულასპექტიანად. ამასთან, თუ უსრული ასპექტი შეიძლება გადმოიცეს სამივე დროის ფორმით, თმV- / მV- / თ- ალმორფიანი ფორმები, ძირითადად, ახლანდელია ან წარსული; ასეთი ზმნები მნიშვნელობით დინამიკურია და გამოხატავს ნებისმიერი სახის მოძრაობის / მოქმედების სამფაზოვან მოდელში შუა, მიმდინარეობის ფაზას, რომლისთვისაც დამახასიათებელია პროცესის უწყვეტობა, დასრულების მოლოდინის გარეშე, რაც თავისთავად იძლევა დაშვებას მისი პროგრესივის, როგორც იმპერფექტივის განსაკუთრებული შემთხვევის, მარკერად განხილვის შესახებ. მაშასადამე, პროგრესივი მეგრულში, სხვა ენათა მსგავსად, გულისხმობს „დინამიკური სიტუაციისა და დროის დამოკიდებულებას“ (ო. დალი), მას არა აქვს კავშირი დიურატიულობასთან, მაგრამ თავსებადია თანადროულობის კატეგორიასთან. ითვლება, რომ პროგრესივი იმპერფექტივის სუბკატეგორიაა (ბ. კომრი), ეს ასეა მეგრულშიც,

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