

On meanings of the reciprocal suffix *-š-* in Balkar

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Abstract. The paper is based on evidence collected from Balkar speakers during the authors' field trips to Verkhnyaya Balkariya village, Kabardino-Balkarian Republic in August of 2021. The study addresses semantics of the suffix *-š-* in Balkar. This marker has three basic meanings: reciprocal, sociative, and competitive. Reciprocal denotes simultaneous mutual action by two or more participants, each (or most) performing more than one semantic role. Sociative describes collective or distributive plural actions. Competitive interpretations refer to situations when two or more people are trying to surpass each other in some activity. All of the basic meanings can be confined to verbal plurality. The suffix also manifests some scalar properties. For each of the basic meanings we reveal certain restrictions on the semantic class of the base verb. Apart from that, a range of additional meanings sometimes manifest in *-š-*-derivates: durative, iterative, and excessive plurality.

Keywords. semantics; Karachay-Balkar; Turkic languages; reciprocal; sociative; competitive; valency-changing operations; scalarity

1. Introduction. This paper addresses semantics of the suffix *-š-* in Karachay-Balkar: its basic and additional meanings, restrictions on their derivation and the semantic invariant of the suffix.

The data for the work was collected by questioning speakers of Balkar dialect during the expeditions to the village Verkhnyaya Balkariya in Kabardino-Balkarian Republic in August of 2021. The consultants were presented with Russian and Balkar stimuli to elicit Balkar sentences and acceptability judgments accordingly. The participants of the survey are mainly middle-aged and older bilinguals.

The next section contains description of the basic meanings of the suffix, changes of the diathesis that *-š-* causes, and preliminary analysis of the semantic invariant of the marker. After that, we provide a look into the restrictions on meanings of *-š-*-derivates. Finally, we give information about additional meanings that sometimes arise in derivates in question along with the basic interpretations.

2. Basic meanings of the suffix *-š-* in Balkar. In Balkar grammar by Baskakov (1976) the suffix *-š-* is assigned the meaning of “reciprocal-sociative voice”¹; it is also mentioned that the competitive meaning may sometimes arise along with the main one. The suffix in question is also considered in Nedjalkov (2002). Basing primarily on the material from the Karachay-

* The study has been supported by RSF, project #22-18-00285 “Scalarity in the Grammar and Lexicon: a semantic and typological study” at the Lomonosov Moscow State University. Authors: Anastasija Gruzdeva, Scientific and Educational School of Moscow University “Preservation of the World Cultural and Historical Heritage”, Lomonosov Moscow State University; Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences (gruzdevaai@my.msu.ru) & Daria Paramonova, Lomonosov Moscow State University (dashparamonova@yandex.ru).

¹ Reciprocal-sociative polysemy is very typical of Turkic and Mongolic languages (Nedjalkov 2006): such examples are found in Tuvan, Yakut, Tatar, Uzbek and many other Turkic languages, as well as in Khalkha and Buryat (see Nedjalkov et al. 2007 on *-lsa* in Buryat, *-lca* in Khalkha, and *-lda* in Buryat and Khalkha; see Gruzdeva 2022 on *-lsa* in Barguzin Buryat). This polysemy is also attested in Bantu, Tagalog, Palau, etc. (Nedjalkov 2006:17). The productive competitive meaning of *-š-* in Karachay-Balkar, however, is rather unique (Nedjalkov 2006:31).

Balkarian-Russian dictionary (Gočijajeva & Sujunčev 1989), Nedjalkov suggests that suffix *-š-* has four meanings: reciprocal, sociative, competitive and anticausative.

In Balkar of the modern people of Verkhnyaya Balkariya we found three basic meanings of the suffix: reciprocal (1b.1, 1b.3), sociative (1b.2) and competitive (1b.4):

- (1) a. Alim Kerim-ni tūj-dū
 Alim.NOM Kerim-ACC beat-PST
 ‘Alim beat Kerim.’
- b. Alim bla Kerim tūj-üş-dū-le
 Alim.NOM and Kerim.NOM beat-REC-PST-PL
 1. ‘Alim and Kerim quarrelled/wrestled.’
 2. ‘Alim and Kerim beat someone together.’
 3. ‘Alim and Kerim quarrelled/wrestled with someone else.’
 4. ‘Alim and Kerim competed in wrestling:
 a. fighting each other;
 b. each fighting his own opponent.’

(1a) demonstrates a base example for the predicate *tūj* ‘beat’, and (1b) shows the result of *-š-* derivation which gives rise to several possible interpretations. The resulting sentence itself is polysemic, its reading in any particular situation is defined by linguistic and extralinguistic contexts. Let us take a closer look at each of the possible meanings.

2.1. RECIPROCAL. Reciprocal prototypically denotes a simultaneous mutual action of two (or more) participants each (or most) performing more than one semantic role. For instance, in (1b.1) each of Alim and Kerim wrestled the other participant while also being wrestled by him. Thus, each one took part in the situation as both agent and patient.

(1b.3) describes a different reciprocal scenario: Alim and Kerim were on the same side wrestling against another person. In this case the third participant is not realized explicitly in the phonological form of the sentence but exists somewhere in the context.

Direct object is the most prototypical position for verbal reciprocalization in Balkar² but another possibility is indirect object:

- (2) a. Kerim Aminat-xa qara-di
 Kerim.NOM Aminat-DAT look-PST
 ‘Kerim looked at Aminat.’
- b. Kerim bla Aminat qara-š-di-la
 Kerim.NOM and Aminat.NOM look-REC-PST-PL
 1. ‘Kerim and Aminat looked/stared (at someone).’

² However, this is not the case for bitransitive verbs. In predicates that have both direct and indirect objects in their diathesis only the latter is available for reciprocalization:

- (i) a. Alim Kerim-ni tūken-ŋe ziber-di
 Alim.NOM Kerim-ACC store-DAT send-PST
 ‘Alim sent Kerim to the store.’
- b. Alim bla Kerim tūken-ŋe ziber-iš-di-le
 Alim.NOM and Kerim.NOM store-DAT send-REC-PST-PL
 1. * ‘Alim and Kerim sent each other to the store.’
 2. ‘Alim and Kerim sent someone to the store (in turns).’

2. ‘Kerim and Aminat had a staring contest.’³
3. ‘Kerim and Aminat looked at each other.’

In (2a) we give a base example with a predicate whose diathesis consists of a subject and an indirect object, and in (2b.3) this clause underwent a reciprocal derivation leading to elimination of the dative argument from the surface structure—the same way the accusative argument was eliminated in (1b.1). This mechanism is described in Bruening (2006): the RecipV head is a variety of the Voice head that selects a VP with an unsaturated individual argument and brings in reciprocal semantics assuming that the phrase in Spec,RecipVP is the agent and the internal argument (which is not projected within the VP in this case) at the same time.

2.2. COMPETITIVE. Competitive denotes an action of two or more people competing in activity named by the base verb, trying to surpass each other. (3.1) and (4.1) are examples of such competitive interpretations of *-š*-clauses:

- (3) *sabij-le sekir-iš-di-le*
 child-PL.NOM jump-REC-PRS-3-PL
 1. ‘The children are competing in jumping.’
 2. ‘The children are jumping (simultaneously).’
 3. ‘The children jump one after another.’
- (4) *Xabib bla Kerim alma-lar-i-n aš-i-š-di-la*
 Habib.NOM and Kerim.NOM apple-PL-3-ACC eat-REC-PST-PL
 1. ‘Habib and Kerim competed in eating apples.’
 2. ‘Habib and Kerim ate apples together.’
 3. ‘Habib and Kerim ate apples in turns.’

Competitive *-š*-derivates have scalar semantics: the base verb gets assigned a scale characterizing the action named by the verb (syntactically, the suffix *-š*- introduces a phonologically empty adverb that modifies the base verb), and a certain projection on this scale corresponds to performance of each of competing participants. The scale depends on the context and semantics of the base verb, e. g. for the complex situation in (3.1) the scale of height or distance could be relevant (i. e. who jumps higher or farther) and in case of (4.1) the subevents may be distributed over the scale of speed or quantity (i. e. who eats the apples faster or who eats more apples). It is not the only evidence of scalar properties of the suffix, see 4. However, such properties need not always manifest itself, cf. Russian conjunction/particle *i* and Balkar particle *da* are also scalar in some contexts but simply additive in others (Rosseyaykin 2022a,b), see more examples of such elements in Forker (2016) and Gast & Auwera (2013).

2.3. SOCIATIVE. Balkar sociative can be subdivided into three types:

- prototypical sociative: simultaneous collective action of two or more subjects;
- distributive⁴: a collective action of two or more subjects performed in turns;
- object-oriented sociative: an action performed on two or more objects.

³ This interpretation combines reciprocal and competitive semantics coming down to ‘Kerim and Aminat stared at each other competing (who blinks first).’

⁴ It would also be reasonable to treat distributive as a separate forth meaning of the suffix but in this paper we chose not to dig deep into this question.

In summary, all of the meanings come down to event plurality with events differing in arguments and sometimes also points in time (in case of distributive) or degrees (in case of competitive).⁵

3. Restrictions. Our data allows us to make some generalizations describing the rules that define the relationship between the (im)possibility of a particular meaning and the semantic class of the base verb. In particular, three characteristics are important for predicting the possible interpretations of the derivate: stativity/dynamicity (assuming that non-stative verbs are dynamic), agentivity, and transitivity.

-š-derivates from STATIVE verbs do not normally have competitive readings (11b.2):

- (11) a. Alim Kerim-den qorq-du
 Alim.NOM Kerim-ABL get.scared-PST
 ‘Alim got scared of Kerim.’
- b. Xabib bla Kerim qorq-uš-du-la
 Habib.NOM and Kerim.NOM get.scared-REC-PST-PL
1. ‘Habib and Kerim got scared together.’
 2. * ‘Habib and Kerim competed in getting scared.’
 3. * ‘Habib and Kerim got scared of each other.’

The competitive meaning, however, can be made possible even for derivates from stative verbs by a pragmatically real context, see (17.3).

Distributive also has a restriction on stativity for some speakers. For instance, for (12) collective sociative interpretation is possible but not the distributive one:

- (12) adam-la zuqla-š-a-di-la
 man-PL.NOM sleep-REC-IPFV-3PL
1. ‘The people are falling asleep (simultaneously).’
 2. * ‘The people are falling asleep in turns.’

Only derivates from AGENTIVE verbs usually allow reciprocal and competitive interpretations: for instance, it is only possible to form sociative -š-derivates (13.1) from the patientive verb *atil* ‘burst’ and not competitive ones (13.2) (it is also true of most patientive verbs):

- (13) šar-la atil-iš-a-di-la
 balloon-PL.NOM burst-REC-IPVF-3-PL
1. ‘Balloons burst one by one.’
 2. * ‘Balloons competed in bursting.’

For the reciprocal interpretation to be possible the base verb must be not only agentive but also TRANSITIVE, and the direct object of the base verb must be prototypically animate. For instance, in (1b) the primary interpretation of the -š-derivate from such a verb is reciprocal (1b.1). Indirect objects can sometimes be available for reciprocalization too (see (2b.3)), but not oblique objects, like the ablative argument in (11.3), or adjuncts: for example, (14.4) shows that reciprocalization of dative adjunct is impossible, and (14.5) shows the same for ablative adjunct:

⁵ Alternatively, it could be postulated that -š- can modify different kinds of implicit arguments, which gives rise to different interpretations. For example, modifying subject or object NPs can derive subject- and object-oriented sociative (accordingly) whereas modifying events can derive competitive. The question of an appropriate analysis for this polysemy requires further investigation.

- (14) zašciq-la cab-iš-di-la
 boy-PL run-REC-PST-PL
 1. ‘The boys competed in running.’
 2. ‘The boys ran (together).’
 3. ‘The boys ran one after another.’
 4. * ‘The boys ran to each other.’
 5. * ‘The boys ran away from each other.’

Agentive transitive verbs form sociative derivatives much more rarely than competitive and reciprocal ones. For example, interpretations (1b.2) и (2b.1) are only available for several speakers.

To sum up, a verb has to be dynamic to form distributive derivatives; it normally has to be also agentive for its derivative to have reciprocal and competitive interpretations. There are no strict limitations on sociative derivation but it happens more often to intransitive verbs.

4. Additional meanings. Sometimes secondary meanings arise in -š-derivates along with the core ones. Three additional meanings were detected with help of our consultants: durative, iterative and excessive plurality. These semantic overtones appear to have connection with semantic features of the initial verb.

4.1. DURATIVE. Some -š-derivates, mostly the ones formed from agentive verbs of activity like ‘jump’ and ‘swim’ (15) and especially from patientive verbs with the resulting state like ‘sleep’ (16), turn out to have an additional durative connotation: they describe a very long and continuous action (15). In some of these cases occasional intensive connotation turned up too: for instance, the situation of soundly sleeping children in (16). These extra meanings are of scalar nature: the durative and intensive interpretations refer to a high degree on the duration and intensity scales modifying the action in question.

- (15) adam-la züz-üş-e-di-le
 man-PL.NOM swim-REC-IPFV-3-PL
 ‘The men are swimming (for a long time).’
 (16) sabij-le zuqla-š-a-di-la
 child-PL.NOM sleep-REC-IPFV-3-PL
 ‘The children are sleeping (for a long time, soundly).’

In past tense durative meaning undergoes some modifications: the emphatic adverb usually ‘finally’ appears in the translation emphasizing the culmination of the action preceded by a long process or expectation period before entering a new state. For example, (17.1) describes a result of a long process:

- (17) sabij-le zuqla-š-di-la
 child-PL.NOM sleep-REC-PST-PL
 1. ‘The children have finally fallen asleep.’
 2. ‘The children slept (together).’
 3. ‘The children competed in sleeping (who sleeps the longest, for example).’

This is the only meaning that may violate the subject plurality restriction on -š-derivates as we have seen in (6) and (7). In these examples durative becomes a primary meaning since they do not seem to contain any other connotations or meanings apart from durative, which is untypical. However, such sentences are only considered grammatical by a small number of native speakers.

4.2. ITERATIVE. -š-clauses sometimes contain emphasis on repetition. Such sentences describe actions that were performed multiple times (18.1), (19.1). In other words, such verbs occupy a high position on the multiplicity scale:

- (18) sabij-le sekir-iš-e-di-le
 child-PL.NOM jump-REC-IPFV-3-PL
 1. ‘The children are jumping (repeatedly).’
 2. ‘The children are jumping (together).’
 3. ‘The children are competing in jumping.’
- (19) ustaz-la kül-üş-e-di-le
 teacher-PL.NOM laugh-REC-IPFV-3-PL
 1. ‘The teachers are laughing (laughter subsides and then resumes again).’
 2. ‘The teachers are laughing (together).’
 3. ‘The children are competing in laughing (who laughs the loudest, for example).’

Iterative meaning can also occur in resultative contexts and describe the action performed repeatedly in the past (20). Comparing (20a) and (20b) we can see the difference between the initial verb and the -š-derivate: the former can only describe the result of a single action (the children jumped, and they did not perform this action again).

- (20) a. sabij-le sekir-di-le
 child-PL.NOM jump-PST-PL
 ‘The children jumped (once).’
- b. sabij-le sekir-iš-di-le
 child-PL.NOM jump-REC-PST-PL
 1. ‘The children jumped (repeatedly).’
 2. ‘The children jumped (together).’
 3. ‘The children competed in jumping.’

(21) is a relative clause with iterative meaning. The example was generated by one of the consultants and was approved by the others:

- (21) adam-la zikil-iš-xan zer
 man-PL.NOM fall-REC-PFCT place
 ‘The place where people fall all the time.’

The main idea of this expression is that people have fallen multiple times while passing this place. Thus, the same iterative meaning remains in such contexts as well.

4.3. EXCESSIVE PLURALITY. This meaning is mentioned by some native speakers for examples containing verbs that do not allow iterative additional semantics, like ‘die’ (22) or ‘burst’ (23). In idioms of these speakers such verbs cannot be used in a situation including only two participants (24).

- (22) köb miñ adam öl-üş-dü-le
 many thousand man.NOM die-REC-PST-PL
 ‘Many thousands of people died.’
- (23) šar-la atil-iš-di-la
 balloon-PL.NOM burst-REC-PST-PL
 ‘The balloons burst (a lot of balloons).’

- (24) ? Kerim bla Madina öl-üş-dü-le
 Kerim.NOM and Madina.NOM die-REC-PST-PL
 ‘Kerim and Madina died.’

This means that for some speakers sociative -š-derivates imply a high degree of plurality. This requirement can be satisfied by either iterative or large-scale involvement connotations. In case of verbs like ‘die’ only the latter is possible since you can only die once.

5. Conclusion. The inventory of the main meanings of the Balkar suffix -š- includes reciprocal, sociative and competitive meanings. The possibility of each interpretation for every particular derivate depends on the semantic characteristics of the base verb, viz. its agentivity, stativity and transitivity. Alongside with the three basic meanings -š-derivates sometimes manifest additional meanings: durative, iterative and excessive plurality. Invariant semantics of the suffix is verbal plurality, often of scalar nature.

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