

Marcello Cherchi. 1997. *Modern Georgian morphosyntax. A grammatico-categorical hierarchy-based analysis with special reference to indirect verbs and passives of state*. [Wiesbaden:

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In most recent descriptions of Georgian grammar, verbs are grouped into four classes or conjugations [see Fig. 1 below]; the criteria for classification vary from author to author, but the ones most commonly invoked are (1) lexical aspect [atelic vs. telic, or the morphology of the future-tense form, which is strongly correlated with this distinction]; (2) the phenomenon of case-shift. The last-named term refers to the morphosyntactic properties of transitive and many intransitive verbs, which assign ergative case to their subjects in the so-called Series II paradigms (aorist and optative), and dative case in the Series III paradigms (perfect, pluperfect).

FIG. 1. MODERN GEORGIAN VERB CLASSES.

	<i>case-shifting</i> [assigns ERG in Series II]	<i>non-case-shifting</i> [cannot assign ERG]
TELIC (“dynamic”) <i>future = present + preverb</i>	CLASS 1 [mostly transitive]: <u>v-a-šiv-eb</u> “I make sb/sthg go hungry” <i>future: mo=v-a-šiv-eb</i>	CLASS 2 [intransitive (passive, inchoative, etc.)]: <u>m-šiv-d-eb-a</u> “I become hungry” <i>future: mo=m-šiv-d-eb-a</i>
ATELIC (“static”) <i>future stem ≠ present stem</i>	CLASS 3 [active intransitive]: <u>v-šimšil-ob</u> “I go hungry, go on a hunger strike” <i>future: v-i-šimšil-eb</i>	CLASS 4 (= D) [mostly stative]: <u>m-ši-a</u> “I am hungry” <i>future: m-e-ši-eb-a</i>

The focus of Marcello Cherchi's [MC] monograph — based on a University of Chicago PhD thesis — is the fourth of the above classes, which he labels "Class D". He has chosen as criterion of membership in Class D the morphology of the future tense form: the future stem must be distinct from that of the present tense, and include the version vowel -e- and the thematic suffix ("present/future stem marker") -eb- (e.g. m-yvidz-av-s "I am awake", future m-e-yvidz-eb-a). On this basis MC identifies a set of 105 verbs, plus another 25 which resemble the other members of the class, but which either lack a future-tense paradigm or form their futures with other thematic suffixes. The overwhelming majority of Class D verbs are aspectually stative. Nearly 60% of them are passives of state, usually indicating the spatial disposition of the referent of the nominative-case argument relative to some ground (h-k'id-i-a "sthg is hanging" [e.g. on wall]; a-c'er-i-a "sthg is written on sthg"; m-i-tes-i-a "my sthg [e.g. grain] is sown"); most of the others are so-called inverse or indirect verbs, typically denoting possession by, or the psychological or physical state of, the referent of the dative-case argument (e.g. m-dzin-av-s "I am asleep", mas is a-kv-s "sb-DATIVE has sthg-NOMINATIVE"). Most of the attention devoted by non-Georgian linguists to Class D verbs has been to their syntactic properties. With few exceptions Georgian statives are characterized by *indirect syntax*: the clausal argument assigned dative case, and which controls object agreement in the verb, has the properties of a grammatical subject. Similar phenomena have been noted in familiar European languages (*es hungert mich, me seemeth*); where Georgian differs is in the sheer number, and ubiquity, of such verbs. Although concentrated in Class D, verbs controlling indirect syntax occur in all four classes, and include many of the most frequent verbs, and the earliest acquired by children (Imedadze & Tuite 1992).

Drawing on the two most complete dictionaries of Modern Standard Georgian, and checking his data with a native speaker, MC inventories all commonly known Class D verbs, with annotation of their morphological and semantic characteristics. In the theoretical section of his book, MC attempts to anchor the morphological and syntactic properties of Class D and the other three classes — case-shift and cross-referencing verb morphology — in hierarchies of

features similar to those used in the linguistic analyses of Michael Silverstein and Jerrold Sadock. To this end, MC replaces the language-specific features shown in Fig. 1 with universal semantic ones: +/- agentivity (correlated with case-shift), and +/- availability of a perfective/imperfective aspectual opposition (correlated with the morphology of the future tense). The second of these features seems reasonable, but the first, as MC acknowledges (pp 212-215) runs up against numerous apparent counter-examples, such as the not-uncommon agentive Class 2 verbs, including many deponents, and a fair number of non-agentive Class 1 and 3 verbs.

Whatever the merits of the “hierarchies all-the-way-down” approach might turn out to be, one significant merit of MC’s study is his willingness to confront the difficulties of characterizing an archaic, irregularity-filled class of Georgian verbs. The author also recognizes the principal stumbling-block to his and all previous attempts at classification. Criteria such as those in Fig. 1 presuppose that any given pair of present- and future-tense stems, or present and aorist stems (to determine if case-shift occurs), can be assigned to “the same verb”. Paradigmaticity of this sort is taken for granted in West European literary languages, but scattered cases of suppletion (*go/went, je vais / j’irai*) and the puzzling assemblages of forms in Homeric Greek or Vedic Sanscrit verb tables should remind us that neatly symmetric, gapless arrays of transparently-related forms may be the exception rather than the rule in morphologically-rich languages (see in particular Aronson 1989). Research into the fifteen centuries of attested Georgian language use, and comparative evidence from the non-literary dialects and the related languages Laz-Mingrelian and Svan, reveal a slow process of verbal paradigmaticization which one can liken to the agglomeration of dust clouds and rocky fragments into a system of planets moving in easily-traceable orbits. The Series III forms (present perfect, pluperfect, pluperfect conjunctive) of Class 1 verbs were recruited from Class D passives of state and prefixal Class 2 forms sometime before the oldest Georgian texts; the Series III forms of Class 2 verbs were still in the process of formation in the Old Georgian period. Further back, in Proto-Kartvelian, it appears that the opposition between aspectually-durative Series I

(present/future, imperfect) and aspectually-punctual Series II (aorist, optative, permansive) was limited to telic verbs, the ancestors of Classes 1 and 2; atelic verbs formed one or the other series, but not both. From these humble beginnings, the atelics have been gradually completing their paradigms through the incorporation of forms of various pedigrees: morphologically Class 1 forms into Class 3, and Class 2 forms into Class 4/D (whence the futures in e- -eb-). Since Class D, as MC demonstrates, is no longer productive, new stative verbs employ the morphology of Class 2 (e.g. m-e-myer-eb-a “I feel like singing”), or, less commonly, Class 1 (indirect transitives such as m-a-int’eres-eb-s “sthg/sb interests me”).

MC’s careful and detailed synchronic study of stative verbs in Modern Standard Georgian will hopefully be followed up by an equally detailed diachronic investigation. Putting MC’s data in the context of the *longue durée* of Georgian morphosyntax, and permitting myself a few speculative pirouettes on thin ice, I will sketch out what appear to me to be particularly significant changes in the organization of the Georgian verbal system, of which change (iii) may still be in its early phase:

STAGE I. Proto-Georgian. The principal distinction is between TELIC and ATELIC verbs (the ancestors of Classes 1 + 2 vs. Classes 3 + D). This is correlated, among other things, with the availability of durative/punctual aspectual opposition (Series I vs. II), limited to telic verbs.

Change (i). Paradigm recruitment by Class 3 verbs (from Class 1), and Class D verbs (from Class 2). [Mentioned above].

Change (ii). Shift from S3sg -s > -a in Class 2 & D present/future. Since at least the 9th century, the 3rd sing. subject suffix -s has been undergoing replacement by -a in the present- and future-tense forms of non-case-shifting verbs. The change began in Class D stative-passive verbs (and in the present perfects of Class 1 verbs, which share the same morphology), reaching Class 2 verbs by the 17th-18th centuries (Baramidze 1964). The change has not reached completion, leaving a residue of conservative forms and alternants such as m-c’ad-s / m-c’ad-i-a “I wish (sthg)”.

STAGE II. Modern Georgian. As a consequence of changes such as the two above, the distinction most prominently marked by the morphology of the verb classes is +/- CASE-SHIFTING (Classes 1 + 3 vs. Classes 2 + D). This represents more or less the state of affairs in the modern literary language.

Change (iii). paradigm recruitment by Class 1 indirect transitives (from Class 2), and Class 2 comitatives (from Class 3). The coalescence of paradigms is still underway for certain peripheral verb types in Modern Georgian. One such group comprises indirect transitives such as m-a-elm-eb-s “sthg [e.g. staring at my computer screen] makes me cross-eyed”. Asked to supply an aorist or present-perfect for this verb, informants in Tbilisi spontaneously offered Class 2 (passive) forms such as da-v-elm-d-i X-isagan “I became cross-eyed from/because of X”, rather than the theoretically possible transitive form. Also undergoing paradigm shift are Class 2 bi- or tri-valent comitatives, such as v-e-tamašeb-a “I play (e.g. football) with sb”, the present perfect of which has been recruited from Class 3: m-i-tamaš-n-i-a mastan (Tuite 1996). With time, the transitive present and inchoative-passive aorist on the one hand, and the prefixal-passive present and active-intransitive perfect on the other, may coalesce into new paradigms, as forms of the “same verb” in Georgian speakers’ Sprachgefühl.

STAGE III. Future Georgian? Ironically enough, the changes just described betoken a return to prominence of the TELIC vs. ATELIC distinction, although this aspectual feature may be marked in a stepwise rather than binary fashion. A particularly high degree of telicity is associated with the formal subgroup of suffixal (inchoative-passive) Class 2 verbs, the distinctive function of which is to denote changes of state. Somewhat less telic as a group are Class 1 verbs, followed by Class 3 and prefixal Class 2 (this latter group including relatively atelic comitatives and deponents, e.g. i-k’bin-eb-a “sthg [e.g. dog] bites, has the habit of biting”).

Seen against the backdrop of these long-term shifts from the formal distinction of telic and atelic verbs, to more prominent marking of the distinction between case-shifting and non-case-shifting verbs, and then back once more toward the formal reflection of telicity, MC’s descriptive

and classificatory work has achieved impressive results, all the more so since he restricted himself to the synchronic analysis of the Modern Georgian literary language, a creation of the mid-19th century which has yet to be completely standardized. His book is recommended both to specialists in Kartvelian studies, and to those interested in language typology, who will find it a useful guide to one of the largest assemblages of stative and indirect verbs known to linguistics.

Misprints and mistranslations are relatively infrequent, and only occur in the lengthy appendix (where all 130 Class D verbs are listed, with illustrative examples from Georgian writers). The book is handsomely bound, and the page layout is pleasing to the eye.

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