

# Agreement in Chechen

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## 1. Introduction

These are some preliminary notes on noun-class agreement between verbs and noun phrases. To some extent agreement has been described already (Nichols 1994a, 1994b). The reasons for me to be writing about agreement are the following:

- a. Differences in word-order possibilities have not been noted in the literature as far as I know (see section 3).
- b. Relative clauses show agreement with arguments that are *not* in the absolutive, whereas normally agreement in Chechen occurs between a verb and an absolutive case argument (see section 4.3).
- c. Agreement differences for relative clauses have not been mentioned yet (see section 4.4).
- d. In light of the previous point, what has until now been labeled as "antipassive" might better be analyzed as a situation of parasitic aspect marking (Woolford 2008). See also section 5.

Several examples will be given in this memo. Those examples that are taken from the literature contain a reference. Those that have been elicited don't contain a reference.

## 2. Agreement basics

In this section I summarize the basic facts noted until now about Chechen case agreement. The first thing that can be said is that the Chechen "basic" verbs form a closed set (Beerle XXXX TODO: get paper year etc). A subset of these basic verbs marks the noun class of the object it agrees with by a prefix *v-*, *j-*, *b-* or *d-*.

The intransitive verb agrees in noun-class with the absolutive case subject, as illustrated in (1). The verb *daxa* takes a class prefix, and so can also be *jaxa*, *vaxa* or *baxa*. Here the class marker agrees with the noun class of the absolutive case subject *Deni* 'Deni', which is of *v*-class (reserved for singular male persons).

- 1) *Deni voqqadaadina t'e a vaxara.*  
Deni-ABS grandfather-DAT onto & v-go-PSTR  
*Deni came up to grandfather.*  
Akhmadov 2006:24

The transitive verb's internal argument has the absolutive case, while the external argument can be ergative, absolutive, dative, allative and sometimes genitive. For most of the transitive clause types the verb agrees with the absolutive object in noun class, as illustrated in (2). The verb is prefixed with *b-*, which is the indicator of the class to which the noun *buolx* belongs.

- 2) *Sielxana Muusas buolx bira.*  
yesterday Musa-ERG work-ABS B-do-PSTR  
*Yesterday Musa worked.*

The Chechen verb can be in several different tenses, and some of these tenses are compound ones. The overall tense is expressed by a combination of a participle and an auxiliary, as shown in Table 1. The participle can be in the past, present or future, while the auxiliary can be in the past or present tense.

Table 1 Chechen compound tenses with the verb 'to read'

Participle	Auxiliary	
	present	past
past	<i>dieshna du</i>	<i>dieshna dara</i>
present	<i>dyeshush du</i>	<i>dyeshush dara</i>
future	<i>dyeshur du</i>	<i>dyeshur dara</i>

When the past and the future participle is used in a compound tense, agreement of both the participle as well as the auxiliary is with the absolutive case object of the transitive verb (or with the absolutive case subject of the intransitive verb).

But when the present participle of a transitive verb is being used, then agreement works differently. In that situation the participle agrees in noun class with the absolutive case object, but the auxiliary can agree either with the object or with the subject. When the auxiliary agrees in noun class with the object, then the subject is in the ergative case or the dative one – depending on the verb. This is illustrated in (3) for a dative case subject and in (4) for an ergative case subject.

- 3) *Suuna iza viezash vu.*  
 1S-DAT 3S-ABS V-love-PTC V-PRS  
*I (female) love him.*  
 Nichols 1994a:YYY (TODO: get page number)

- 4) *C'aruo ysh baaguoshbu.*  
 fire-ERG 3P-ABS B-burn-PTC B-PRS  
*The fire is burning them.*

When the auxiliary agrees in noun class with the subject, then the subject is in the absolutive case, as shown in (5) for the verb that otherwise takes a dative case subject and in (6) for a verb that otherwise takes an ergative case subject.

- 5) *So iza viezash ju.*  
 1S-ABS 3S-ABS V-love-PTC J-PRS  
*I (female) love him.*  
 Nichols 1994a:XXX (TODO: get page number)

- 6) *C'e ysh baaguoshju.*  
 fire-ERG 3P-ABS B-burn-PTC J-PRS  
*The fire is burning them.*

### 3. Word order variation and limitations

What has not been noted in the literature, as far as I know, is that this two-way distinction is not possible for all transitive verbs. Take for instance example (7). With the present participle the subject *must* be in the absolutive case, and agreement can *only* be with the absolutive case subject.

- 7) *Muusa buolx biesh vu.*  
 Musa-ABS work-ABS B-do-PTC V-PRS  
*Musa is working.*

All 24 word order combinations of the 4 words in example (7) have been presented to native speakers. As a result, only 6 word orders were within the realm of possibilities, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Allowed word orders for example (7)

#	Chechen	Order	Eval
1	<i>Muusa buolx biesh vu</i>	S O V Aux	ok
2	<i>Muusa vu buolx biesh</i>	S Aux O V	ok
3	<i>Buolx biesh Muusa vu</i>	O V S Aux	?
4	<i>Buolx biesh vu Muusa</i>	O V Aux S	?

Now let us pay attention again to the kind of transitive verbs as mentioned in example (4). These transitive verbs are derived from their intransitive basic forms by the addition of the transitivizing suffix *-uo* (for the infinitive). That suffix might be regarded as an overt realization of the head of a light verb phrase *vP*. So intransitive *daaga* 'burn' becomes transitive *daaguo* 'burn something'. And intransitive *liela* 'walk/move' becomes transitive *lieluo* 'deal with'. Native speakers were presented with different variants of the sentences in (4) and (6) in order to find out what combinations of subject case and auxiliary agreement were possible. All situations where there was agreement between the auxiliary and the ergative case subject were categorically rejected by native speakers. Discounting these rejections<sup>1</sup>, the other results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Word order variation for compound present tense

#	Chechen	Eval	Order
1	<i>C'aruo ysh baaguosh bu</i>	ok	S[e] O V Aux
2	<i>C'aruo baaguosh bu ysh</i>	ok	S[e] V Aux O
3	<i>ysh baaguosh bu C'aruo</i>	ok	O V Aux S[e]
4	<i>ysh C'aruo baaguosh bu</i>	ok	O S[e] V Aux
5	<i>C'e ysh baaguosh ju</i>	ok	S[a] O V Aux
6	<i>C'e baaguosh ju ysh</i>	*	S[a] V Aux O
7	<i>ysh baaguosh ju C'e</i>	ok	O V Aux S[a]
8	<i>ysh C'e baaguosh ju</i>	*	O S[a] V Aux

The results show that the ergative subject clauses (where the auxiliary agrees with the absolutive case object) allow for more variation in word order than do the absolutive case subject clauses.

One more investigation was carried out, where the minimal pair shown in (8) and (9) was used. The difference with the preceding examples is the presence of the adverb *erna* 'futile'. The results are shown in Table 4, and can be compared with those of Table 3.

8) Caara    erna    tur        lieluosh   daac.  
 3P-ERG    futile   sword-ABS   carry-PTC   D-NEG  
*They don't carry the sword in vain.*

9) Ysh    erna    tur        lieluosh   baac.  
 3P-ABS   futile   sword-ABS   carry-PTC   B-NEG  
*They don't carry the sword in vain.*

<sup>1</sup> For this investigation *no* combinations were presented to the native speakers where the verb was not immediately followed by the auxiliary. In retrospect such situations should still be presented to the native speakers, since recently I met some examples of word order S V O Aux. It seemed like these were examples of a topicalized subject followed by a focused verb.

Table 4 Word order variation for compound present tense with adverb

#	Chechen	Eval	Order
1	<i>Caara erna tur lieluosh daac</i>	?	S[e] Adv O V Aux
2	<i>Caara erna lieluosh daac tur</i>	ok	S[e] Adv V Aux O
3	<i>Tur erna lieluosh daac caara</i>	ok	O Adv V Aux S[e]
4	<i>Tur erna caara lieluosh daac</i>	*	O Adv S[e] V Aux
5	<i>Caara tur erna lieluosh daac</i>	ok	S[e] O Adv V Aux
6	<i>Ysh erna tur lieluosh baac</i>	ok	S[a] Adv O V Aux
7	<i>Ysh erna lieluosh baac tur</i>	ok	S[a] Adv V Aux O
8	<i>Tur erna lieluosh baac ysh</i>	ok	O Adv V Aux S[a]
9	<i>Tur erna ysh lieluosh baac</i>	*	O Adv S[a] V Aux

## 4. Relative clauses

Chechen relative clauses are treated extensively elsewhere (Komen 2006). The remainder of this chapter basically repeats the information from that source.

### 4.1. Complex main verb of the relative clause

When a clause such as (10), which uses a compound tense like the present or past continuous, is transformed into a relative clause, then the auxiliary (in this case *vu*) changes into a special participial form (in this case *volu*), as shown in (11).

- 10) *Muusa cigahw laettash vu*  
Musa-OBL there stand-PRS-PTC V-PRS  
*Musa is standing there*

- 11) [*Cigahw laettash volchu*] *Muusana so gira*  
there stand-PRS-PTC V-REL-OBL Musa-ERG 1S-ABS see-RFPS  
*Musa, who was standing over there, saw me.*

Just as the auxiliary has an affirmative and negative form, so the auxiliary's participial can also occur in an affirmative and negative form. Table 5 gives a paradigm of the auxiliary, its negative counterpart, and its participial forms. The declension of the participial auxiliary for case follows the same pattern as the one for adjectives. That is to say there is one form for the absolutive, and one oblique form for all the other cases.

Table 5 Auxiliary participial forms

Class	Affirmative			Negative		
	Auxiliary	Participial		Auxiliary	Participial	
		Absolutive	Oblique		Absolutive	Oblique
<i>v</i>	<i>vu</i>	<i>volu</i>	<i>volchu</i>	<i>vaac</i>	<i>voocu</i>	<i>voocuchu</i>
<i>j</i>	<i>ju</i>	<i>jolu</i>	<i>jolchu</i>	<i>jaac</i>	<i>joocu</i>	<i>joocuchu</i>
<i>d</i>	<i>du</i>	<i>dolu</i>	<i>dolchu</i>	<i>daac</i>	<i>doocu</i>	<i>doocuchu</i>
<i>b</i>	<i>bu</i>	<i>bolu</i>	<i>bolchu</i>	<i>baac</i>	<i>boocu</i>	<i>boocuchu</i>

### 4.2. Agreement for simple tenses

While the participial relative clause always agrees in *case* with the head noun, phi-feature agreement (number, gender, person) is another story.

For relative clauses the noun class agreement is between the main verb (i.e. the participial head) of the relative clause and an argument within the relative clause. Note the agreement in example (12) below.

- 12) [Kiexat dieshna] k'ant vyelush vara  
 letter-ABS D-read-NRPS boy-ABS V-laugh-PRS-PTC V-PST  
*The boy who had written the letter was laughing.*

Here the head noun *k'ant* 'boy' takes class marker *v*, while the noun *kiexat* 'letter' takes class marker *d*. The main verb of the relative clause (the past tense participial *dieshna*) agrees with the noun-class of the absolutive object *kiexat* 'letter' of the relative clause. In general it can be said that the past and present tense participials in a relative clause that are derived from "simple" verbs (i.e. non-auxiliaries), agree in noun-class with an absolutive object within the relative clause.

Agreement in relative clauses involving the participial auxiliary *dolu* sometimes is ambiguous. Take for example clause (11) from the previous section. It is ambiguous whether the participial auxiliary *volchu* agrees in class with the absolutive case trace of *Muusa* in the relative clause, or whether it agrees with the head noun *Muusa*, which is the dative subject of the main clause.

### 4.3. Agreement for compound tenses

As was already stated in section 4.2, the participial heading the relative clause agrees in grammatical case with the head noun. But as to gender agreement the picture is not so simple. What I will do here is summarize the agreement data and draw a general picture of it.

When there is one single verb (simple verb or auxiliary) heading the relative clause, it agrees in noun class with an absolutive argument in that clause. It does not matter whether that argument is visible in the relative clause or whether it only has left a gap. These agreement situations are summarized in Table 6. In all situations there is agreement with an absolutive case argument.

Table 6 Agreement of participial from a simple verb

#	What is relativized?	Vb/Tense	Participial auxiliary agrees in noun-class with:						
			Argument in RC		Gap in RC		Head noun in MC		See
			Case	Function	Case	Function	Case	Function	
1	Subject of intransitive	aux	-	-	abs	subject	gen	about	16)
2	Subject of transitive	simple	abs	object					17)12)
3	Possessor of locative	aux	abs	subject	-	-	-	-	18)
4	Object of postposition	aux	abs	object	-	-	-	-	19)
5	Subject of "have" clause	aux	abs	subject	-	-	-	-	20)
6	Object of "have" clause	aux	-	-	abs	direct object	abs	subject	21)
7	Object of comparison	aux	abs	subject	-	-	-	-	22)

When a relative clause is headed by a compound verb (a simple verb together with the participial auxiliary), then the agreement is more complex. The participial relative from a compound verb sometimes agrees in class (which is the equivalent of phi features) with the gap left in the relative clause (or the head noun – they are the same), in other cases the participial auxiliary agrees in class with an absolutive case constituent in the relative clause. A summary of the agreement is shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Agreement of participial auxiliary from compound verb

#	What is relativized?	Vb/Tense	Participial auxiliary agrees in noun-class with:						See
			Argument in RC		Gap in RC		Head noun in MC		
			Case	Function	Case	Function	Case	Function	
1	Subject of transitive	cmpd/pst	-	-	erg	subject	abs	subject	17)
2	Subject of transitive	cmpd/pst	-	-	dat	subject	all	causee	13)
3	Direct object	cmpd/prs	-	-	dat	direct object	abs	subject	24)
4	Indirect object	cmpd/pst	-	-	dat	indirect object	abs	subject	25)
5	Possessor of subject	cmpd/pst	-	-	gen	possessor	abs	subject	26)
6	Possessor of subject	cmpd/pst	-	-	gen	possessor	abs	object	27)
7	Goal in intransitive clause	cmpd/prs	-	-	dat	recipient	abs	object	15)
8	Goal in intransitive clause	cmpd/prs	abs	subject	-	-	-	-	14)
9	Goal in intransitive clause	cmpd/fut	abs	subject	-	-	-	-	28)
10	Possessor of locative	cmpd/pst	-	-	gen	possessor	abs	subject	29)

In many situations there is agreement with an absolutive case argument, but not in all. In line 2 of the table example (13) is a situation where the auxiliary's relativizer cannot agree with an argument in the absolutive case, because there is no absolutive case argument of the *v* noun class – neither in the relative clause, nor in the matrix clause. The only *v*-class arguments are *Muusaga* in the matrix clause, and the gap left by the relativized noun (or the resumptive replacing it), which is in the dative case (the dative subject of the sensory verb *gan* 'to see').

- 13) [Sielxana(shiena)<sub>i</sub> saermik gina volchu] Muusaga<sub>i</sub> xi  
yesterday 3S.RFL-DAT dragon-ABS see-NRPS V-REL-OBL Musa-ALL water-ABS  
maliitira Rebiqas.  
let.drink-RFPS Rebecca-ERG  
*Rebecca let Musa<sub>i</sub>, who<sub>i</sub> yesterday saw a/the dragon, drink water.*

#### 4.4. Agreement puzzle

Of interest here is the minimal pair formed by examples (14) and (15), which are also referred to in lines 8 and 7 of Table 7. The gender agreement differences here differ from those found for what has been called the "antipassive" (Nichols 1994b:104-105).

- 14) [Shiena<sub>i</sub> i baaxam qoochushbolu] stag<sub>i</sub> ooxa vyyr vu  
3S.RFL-DAT that possession-ABS reach-PTC b-REL person-ABS 1P.EXC-ERG v-kill-FUT V-PRS  
*We will kill the person who inherits the possessions.*
- 15) [Shiena<sub>i</sub> i baaxam qoochush volu] stag<sub>i</sub> ooxa vyyr vu  
3S.RFL-DAT that possession-ABS reach-PTC v-REL person-ABS 1P.EXC-ERG v-kill-FUT V-PRS  
*We will kill the person who inherits the possessions.*

This minimal pair should be compared with the examples (4) and (6) from section 2. There is one coincidence: in both cases the auxiliary agreement is either with the subject or with the object. But there is a notable difference too: in the first minimal pair the case of the subject changes between absolutive and ergative. Here the absolutive case subject *i baaxam* 'those possessions' retains its case. The auxiliary's relativizer *bolu* in (14) agrees with the absolutive case subject *baaxam*, whereas the

auxiliary's relativizer *volu* in (15) agrees in noun class with the dative case goal *shiena* (or alternatively: with the absolutive case *stag* 'person' in the matrix clause).

## 5. Aspect or antipassive

Inspired by Ellen Woolford's presentation at Deal-II, I began to wonder whether it could be that the agreement puzzles shown in section 2 and in section 4.4 has more to do with a difference in aspect or with something else?

Chechen is very closely related with Ingush, and both are more distant related to the Batsby language. That language shows an interesting phenomena regarding case (Holisky 1994:194):

3.2.1.3 Variation in the case of the intransitive subject. If the intransitive subject is third person, it will invariably be in the nominative case, as just described. If it is first or second person, however, with some verbs it will be ergative, with others nominative, and with many others, there will be variation between ergative and nominative. The case choice depends on both the semantics of the verb and the speaker's belief about the situation in which it occurs. (See for details Holisky 1987.)

This situation may be totally unrelated to the case and agreement puzzles in Chechen (the Batsby situation is not copied in Chechen or Ingush). More to the point may be what is concluded about the very closely related Ingush language (Nichols 1994b:105). This statement should be seen in conjunction with examples (4) and (6), where the latter would be regarded as the "antipassive" form.

2.5.2.3 ... The semantic contrast involves an *aspectual* difference and a pragmatic difference. The ergative form implies an action with a potential or inherent culmination. The antipassive form makes no reference to inherent culmination and denotes an ongoing or typical action; its nominative subject tends to be topicalized.

I think more research is needed to find out what the differences exactly are. But at this moment I'm not sure how to conduct such research.

## 6. Examples

This section contains several example sentences. For abbreviations used see section 8.

- 16) [*t*<sub>i</sub> *Ishtta dolchu*] *cu* *ghullaqan<sub>i</sub>* *ojla* *a juora* *Peet'amata*.  
 thus D-REL-OBL that-OBL matter-GEN thought-ABS & J-make-IMPF Petamat-ERG  
*Petamat thought about that matter that was thus.*  
 Baduev 1991:31

- 17) [*t*<sub>i</sub> *Cynga xi maliitina jolu*] *Rebiqa* *ch'oogha macjelira*.  
 3S-ALL water-ABS let.drink-NRPS J-REL Rebecca-ABS very hunger-J-RFPS  
*Rebecca<sub>i</sub>, [who<sub>i</sub> had made him<sub>j</sub> drink water], became very hungry.*

- 18) [*Sovghat t<sub>i</sub> karahw dolu*] *stag<sub>i</sub>* *quzahw laettash* *vu*  
 present-ABS hand-LOC D-REL man-ABS here stand-PRS-PTC V-PRS  
*The man, who has the present, is standing here.*

- 19) *Cigahw [daarix dina duuxar [t<sub>i</sub> t'iehw] dolu] zuda<sub>i</sub> jara*  
 There silk-MAT D-make-NRPS clothing.D on D-REL woman.J J-was  
*There was a woman who had clothes made from silk.*

- 20) [*t<sub>i</sub> shi t'aam bolchu*] *uolxazaruo jish lyequra*  
 two wing-ABS B-REL-OBL bird-ERG song-ABS sing-IMPF  
*The bird that has two wings sang a song.*

- 21) [*uolxazaran t<sub>i</sub> bolu*] *shi t'aam xaza bara*  
 bird-GEN B-REL two wing-ABS beautiful B-PST  
*The two wings that the bird had were beautiful.*

- 22) [[shiel leqa] majra volu] zuda<sub>i</sub> gira suuna  
 3S.RFL-CMP tall husband-ABS V-REL woman-ABS see-RFPS 1S-DAT  
*I saw the woman<sub>i</sub>, whose<sub>i</sub> husband is taller than her<sub>i</sub>.*
- 23) [[shiel leqa] majra volchu] zudchynga<sub>i</sub> xi maliitira as  
 3S.RFL-CMP tall husband-ABS V-REL woman-ABS water-ABS let.drink-RFPS 1S-ERG  
*I let the woman<sub>i</sub>, whose<sub>i</sub> husband is taller than her<sub>i</sub>, drink water.*
- 24) [Dudas t<sub>i</sub> lieluosh dolu] ghullaqash<sub>i</sub> wiedalna xi'iniera  
 DUDA-ERG deal-PRS-PTC D-REL matter-PL-ABS authority-DAT find-REM  
*The authorities had found out the things Duda was dealing with.*  
 Baduev 1991:25
- 25) [Kilaaba t<sub>i</sub> dika laatta dwaadella volu] stag hinca cigahw  
 Caleb-ERG good land-ABS away-D-give-NRPS V-REL person-ABS now there  
 vaaxa uohwaxi'ira.  
 V-live-INF down-sit-RFPS  
*The person<sub>i</sub> [to whom<sub>i</sub> Caleb gave good land], has now settled down to live there.*
- 26) [[t<sub>i</sub> Majra] vella jolu] zuda<sub>i</sub> maarie jaxara  
 (wife's) husband-ABS V-die-NRPS J-REL woman-ABS marriage-ALL J-go-PST  
*The woman, whose husband had died, married.*
- 27) [[shien<sub>i</sub> Majra] vella jolu] zuda<sub>i</sub> gira suuna sielxana  
 3S.RFL-GEN husband-ABS V-die-NRPS J-REL woman-ABS see-RFPS 1S-DAT yesterday  
*Yesterday I saw the woman<sub>i</sub>, whose<sub>i</sub> husband had died.*
- 28) [Baaxam t<sub>i</sub> qoochun bolu] stag<sub>i</sub> ooxa vyyr vu  
 possession-ABS reach-FUT D-REL person-ABS 1P.EXC-ERG V-kill-FUT V-PRS  
*We will kill the person who inherits the possessions.*
- 29) [Sovghat[t<sub>i</sub> karahw] disina volu] stag<sub>i</sub> quzahw laettash vu  
 present-ABS hand-LOC D-stay-NRPS V-REL man-ABS here stand-PRS-PTC V-PRS  
*The man<sub>i</sub> in whose hand the gift stayed, is standing here.*

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## 8. Abbreviations

ABS	Absolute case
DAT	Dative case
ERG	Ergative case
GEN	Genitive case

IMPF	Imperfective past tense
J,B,D,V	Class marking prefixes
NML	Nominalizer
OBL	Oblique case (any non-absolutive one)
PL	plural
PRS	present tense
PSTN	past tense using suffix <i>-ina</i>
PSTR	past tense using suffix <i>-ira</i>
PTC	present tense participle
REL	relativizer