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Explaining Exuberant Agreement

Several languages of the Nakh-Daghestanian family (including Avar, Tsova-Tush, and Archi) have developed instances of multiple marking of agreement, including agreement closer to the root than expected, or "internal" agreement. An example from Tsova-Tush is shown in (1).

(1)   (a)   **v**-ux-**v**-erc'-**v**-ie   Tsova-Tush
              V-back-V-return-V-PAST
              'turn him back'
       (b)   **y**-ux-**y**-erc'-**y**-ie   (Dešeriev 1967: 239)
              Y-back-Y-return-Y-PAST
              'turn her back'

In (1), V and Y are markers of gender-number agreement; as many as three such markers, together with a person-number suffix are attested. It is known, however, that when agreement markers that are trapped between other morphemes, they are normally lost (Faarlund and Harris 2005). Using examples from Tsova-Tush and other Nakh-Daghestanian languages, this paper addresses the question of why some languages would establish repeated ("exuberant") agreement, such as that in (1), while most do not.

The first agreement marker, from a chronological point of view, was inherited from Proto-Nakh-Daghestanian. Regarding the second, it is shown that the presence vs. absence of agreement in Tsova-Tush can distinguish one lexeme from another, and it is suggested that the loss of trapped agreement under these circumstances would render incomprehensible the former light verbs, which were later reanalyzed as affixes. There is no loss of the third and later identical markers because, once a language has established "internal" agreement and multiple agreement, language learners and users do not consider these types of agreement marked or incongruous, and they may not lose it.

The phenomenon of exuberant agreement is rare, it is argued here, because it requires that several changes and circumstances coincide; it is the coinciding that is rare, not the changes, which taken individually are quite common. Thus, it is a matter of probability that exuberant agreement will arise infrequently.

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