

The bi-absolutive construction in Chechen

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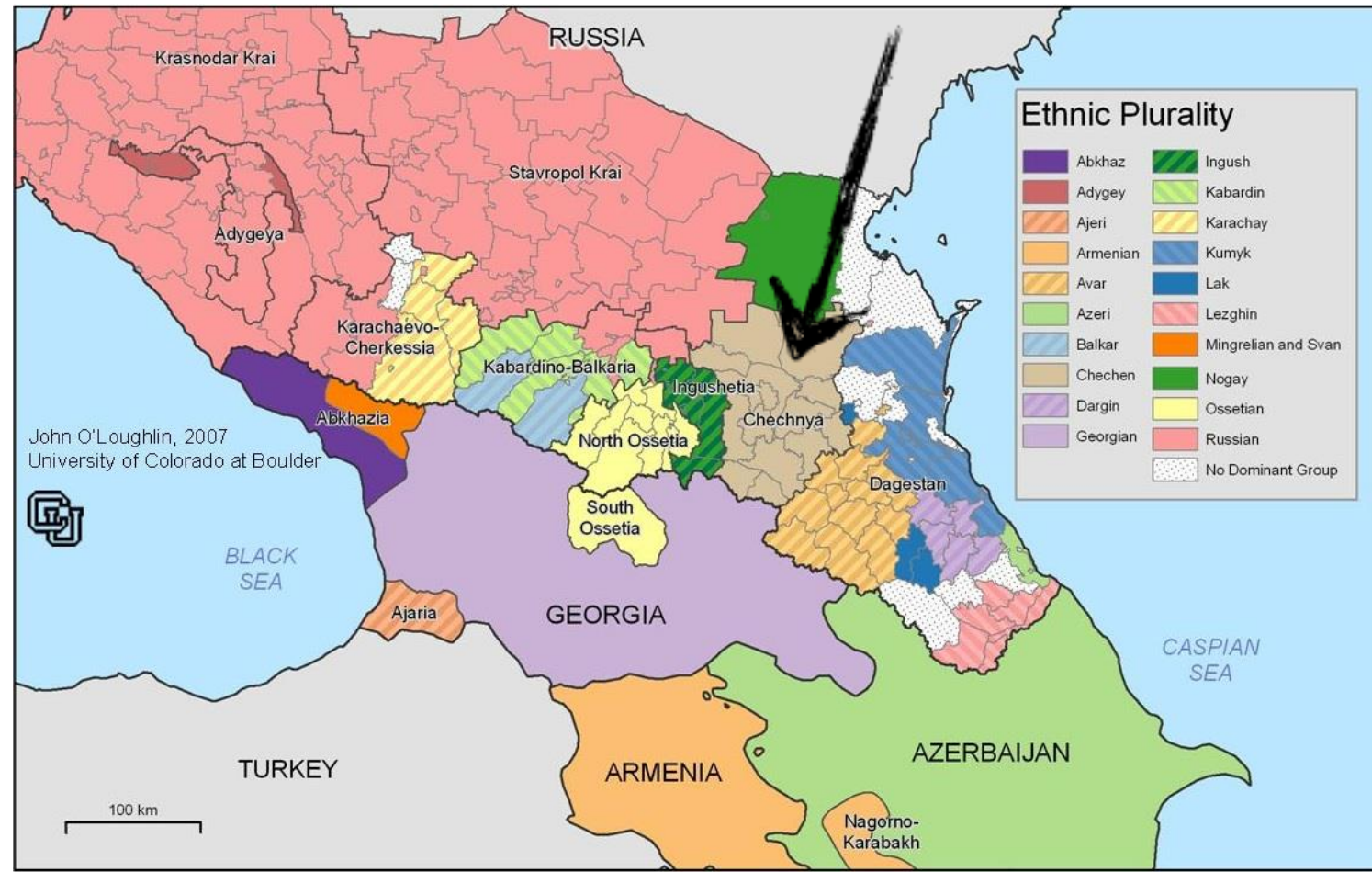


Overview

- ♦ Chechen: a brief intro
- ♦ The bi-absolute alternation
- ♦ Research question
- ♦ Methods
 - ♦ Spoken / written corpus
 - ♦ Elicitation with visual stimuli
- ♦ Results
- ♦ Implications for corpus studies
 - ♦ non-ubiquitous constructions
 - ♦ under-resourced languages

Chechen, a brief intro

- Spoken by approx. 1,3 million speakers
- Northern Caucasus, Russia
- Official language of Chechen Republic



Nichols 1994, Molochieva 2011, Molochieva & Nichols 2018, Komen et al. 2021

Chechen, a brief intro

- ♦ **Nakh**-Daghestanian family
- ♦ Basic ergative-absolutive case marking, but various other options
- ♦ No person marking on verbs, but gender agreement with absolutive argument
- ♦ Basic SOV word order, but relatively free

The bi-absolutive alternation

- (1) *as* *beepig* *d-u'u*
 1SG(J).ERG bread(D).ABS D-eat.PRS
 'I eat bread.'
- (2) a. *as* *beepig* *d-u'u-sh* *d-u*
 1SG(J).ERG bread(D).ABS D-eat-CVB.SIM D-AUX.PRS
 'I am eating the bread.'
- b. *so* *beepig* *d-u'u-sh* *j-u*
 1SG(J).ABS bread(D).ABS D-eat-CVB.SIM J-AUX.PRS
 'I am eating the bread.'

Non-default case and agreement

- ♦ Chechen has multiple verb classes with non-default case frames, e.g.
- ♦ *k'ant-ana* *quor* *go*
 boy-DAT pear.ABS see.PRS
 'The boy sees the pear.'
- ♦ Gender agreement on only **30%** of verbal lexicon, including auxiliaries

Bi-absolutives across N-D languages

- ♦ Equivalent constructions appear in all N-D languages, but are rare
- ♦ Cross-linguistic variation in terms of restrictions bi-absolutive constructions:
 - ♦ Lexical: which verb class(es)? (ERG-ABS only or also DAT-ABS)
 - ♦ Animacy / humanness of A argument
- ♦ Other dimensions of variation: pragmatics/genre, word order

Research question

What are the conditions / restrictions on the use of the bi-absolute construction in Chechen?

Methods

- ♦ Two corpus studies
 - ♦ Spoken narratives (ca. 1,000 clauses, cf. <https://multicast.aspra.uni-bamberg.de/>)
 - ♦ Written newspaper articles: Nijmegen Parsed Corpus of Modern Chechen (1,888 clauses)
 - ♦ Different annotations / extraction methods
- ♦ Elicitation with visual stimuli
 - ♦ Combination of pictures and videos
 - ♦ Manipulation of:
 - ♦ Verb class
 - ♦ Animacy / humanness of A argument

Spoken corpus

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utterance

Nr Annotation Begin Time Er

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bear.wav

utterance [57] chechen_bear_02

utterance [57] hwynax vaxan volu iza shie chwacca stom boqqush

grammar [324] # hwynax v-axa-n v-olu iza # 0 shie chwacca stom b-oqqu-sh

gloss [324] # forest.LAT v-go-CVBan cop 3SG.ABS # 0_3SG.ERG 3SG.REFL one.by.one fruit.ABS B-take-CVB

graid [324] #rc other v:pred rv_aux pro.h:s #cv f0.h:a refl.h:poss other np:p v:pred

refind [6] 002 001 001

isnr [1] # adv vintr cop pro # 0 shie adv n vtr

ps@A [324]

so@A [14]

fte@A he went to the forest and was picking fruits one by one

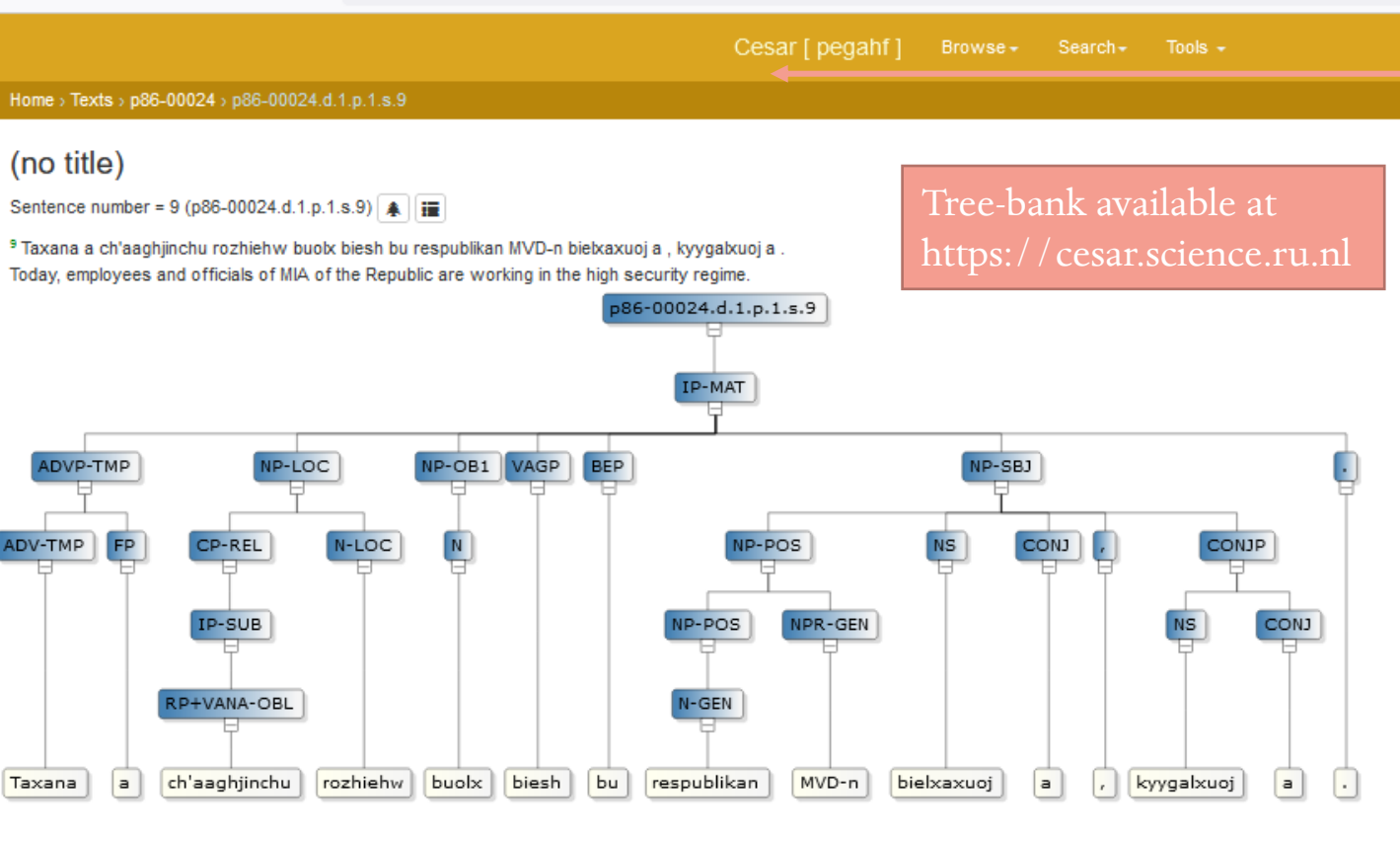
Results – spoken corpus

- ♦ Only 4 instances
 - ♦ All verbs with basic ERG-ABS case frame
 - ♦ All with human/ animate A
- ♦ Low frequency due to narrative genre:
 - ♦ Chains of non-finite constructions, without auxiliary, often without overt argument(s)
 - ♦ Bi-absolutive construction appears only in dialogues (as part of story)
- ♦ Word order variation:
- ♦ *beerash* *d-u* *gondahw* *kiertash* *keg-j-ie-sh*
 children(D).ABS D-AUX.PRS around.ADV fences(J).ABS keg-J-make-CVB.SIM
 ‘The children are breaking the fences there.’

Written corpus

Searching for BCs using the web application:

1. Extracting all clauses matching a transitive structure and the progressive aspect
2. Manually identify BCs, based on case-frame



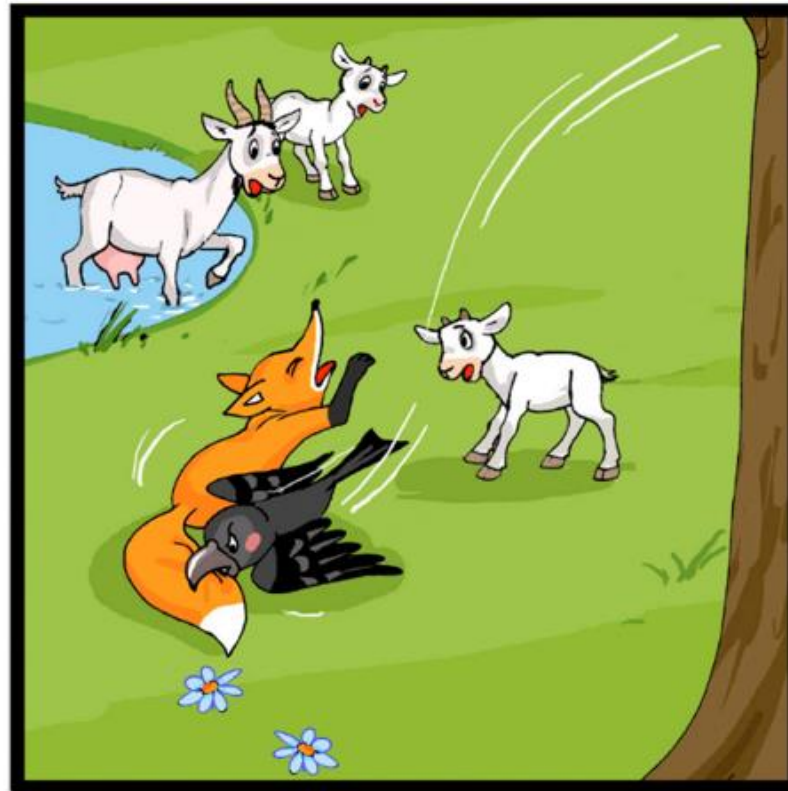
Koomen, to appear

Results – written corpus

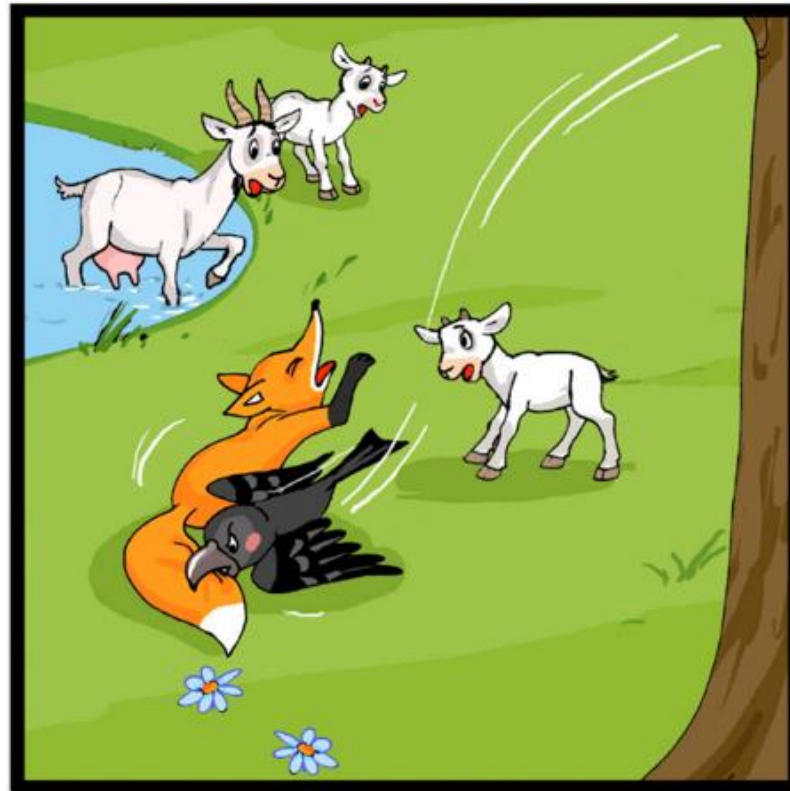
- ♦ 18 instances
 - ♦ All verbs with basic ERG-ABS case frame
 - ♦ All with human As (including institutions)
- ♦ But also: progressive constructions with human A and **ERG-ABS** construction:

- ♦ *hoora='a* *qoomuo* *d-azdie-sh* *de* *d-u* *iza,*
 every=CL nation(D).**ERG** D-celebrate-CVB.SIM day(D).**ABS** D-AUX.PRS DEM
massaara='a *shajn-shajna aamaliew*
 all.ERG=CL its.own.way
 ‘Every nation celebrates this day in its own way.’

Elicitation with visual stimuli



Elicitation with visual stimuli



Event type	Progressive	Non progressive	Total
Human Agent A	21	5	26
ABS/ABS	20	0	20
ERG/ABS	1	5	6
Animal Agent A	7	2	9
ABS/ABS	6	0	6
ABS/LAT	1	0	1
ERG/ABS	0	2	2
Inanimate Agent A	8	7	15
ABS/ABS	2	0	2
DAT/ABS	0	1	1
ERG/ABS	6	6	12
Human Exp A	3	1	4
ABS/ABS	2	0	2
ABS/ALL	1	0	1
DAT/ABS	0	1	1
Total	39	15	54

Results elicitation

Table 1: Overview of the elicitation data

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Animate agent As:

Frequently progressive and mostly ABS/ABS:

> human As: 20 out of 21 (95%)

> animal As: 6 out of 7 (86%)

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Human experiencer As:

Little data,
but ABS/ABS is possible

Table 1: Overview of the elicitation data

General observations (i)

- ♦ Bi-absolutive alternation is not absolute
 - ♦ preferred but not categorical with human/animal A
 - ♦ dis-preferred but possible with inanimate A
- ♦ Experiencer (dative) verbs allow bi-absolutive, but are infrequent/harder to elicit
- ♦ Effect of stimulus type / genre
 - ♦ Animal pictures induce narrative style → more complex constructions, cf. spoken corpus

General observations (ii)

- ♦ Word order variation attested in only in spoken corpus and elicitation:
- ♦ *beerash* *d-u* *gondahw* *kiertash* *keg-j-ie-sh*
 children(D).ABS D-AUX.PRS around.ADV fences(J).ABS keg-J-make-CVB.SIM
 ‘The children are breaking the fences there.’
- ♦ *k'ant* *v-u* *dechka* *kag-d-ie-sh*
 boy(V).ABS V-AUX.PRS wood(D).ABS kag-D-make-CVB.SIM
 ‘The boy is breaking the stick.’
- ♦ Potentially a means of focus marking, especially in response to questions

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Discussion: methodological issues

- ♦ Challenge: research on non-ubiquitous constructions not possible in smaller corpora
 - ♦ For most languages small corpora are the norm (if available at all)!
 - ♦ Additional methods are needed to assess probabilistic and multivariate constraints
- ♦ Current study: first attempt at semi-systematic elicitation
 - ♦ Better stimuli and methods are needed

Thank you!

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