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MOTION VERBS IN GEORGIAN CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES*

Georgian motion verbs used in child's narratives are analysed according to Talmy's schema (Manner, Path, Cause). The Path component of motion in Georgian narratives is supplied by a rich system of preverbs. If there is a space-temporal alternative the preference is given to the Path component. A morphological analysis of verbs used in narratives enables inferences to be made about the narrator's mental activity: projection in pictured situations, differentiation of narrator's and actor's positions. Cause is expressed by ergative constructions and verb versions.

Introduction

Georgian verbs, including motion verbs, are grammatical forms expressing different relations by morphological devices. These are spatial and temporal relations, categories of evidence, causality, intentionality, purpose of action, etc. In the construction of narrative texts a child employs many of these morphological devices. But "cognitively younger children cannot conceive of the full range of encodable perspectives, communicatively young children cannot fully assess the listener's viewpoint, linguistically they do not command the full range of formal devices" (Berman & Slobin, 1994, p. 598). Thus the developmental history of each given perspective is to be analyzed.

According to Talmy (1983), the basic motion event consists of an object (the Figure) moving with respect to another object (the Ground). Besides, there are Manner, Path and Cause of motion. Manner of motion in Georgian is expressed by different verb stems. Path of motion in Georgian is expressed mainly by use of preverbs. There is a definite number of preverbs which denote direction and orientation.

Direction: relation between
initial and final points

a – up down

da – down

ga – out off

Orientation: position of
speaker in respect of action

mo – proximal, toward the speaker

mi – distal, away from the speaker

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Se – into
gada – across
tSa – down into depth
ts'a – away

Preverbs of direction may be combined with the proximal orientation preverb *-mo-*, so they are possible combinations. To express Path of motion, Georgian speakers also use adverbs and postpositions, e.g., *-Si* -into, *-ze* -on, *-dan-* from, etc.

Preverbs, like other spatial morphemes, are “insensitive to most properties of the Figure and Ground such as shape, size, angle; instead, they schematise spatial situations in terms of more abstract topological properties” (Choi & Bowerman, 1991). Georgian can be viewed as such a language. The expression of spatial relations is the oldest, the primary and main function of preverbs (Veshapidze, 1967).

Some preverbs express Manner of motion as well: *da-* generally reinforces the motional meaning and gives to motion verbs a habitual sense, *Se-* means a low degree of action, *a-* in some cases means the beginning of action (inchoative verb). As for Cause of motion, there are different possibilities in Georgian to express it lexically and grammatically.

The research

Motion verbs were analyzed in Georgian versions of the “Frog story” (“Frog, where are you?” by Mercer Mayer) in two age groups: preschoolers and school children (9–10 years), 20 in each age group. The number of motion verb stems reflecting Manner in both age groups is rather limited, compared with English and German narrations: 24 in the preschool group, 26 in the school age group. Instead, each of these stems is used with different preverbs, expressing not only direction but Manner of motion as well. In our material, 86% of verbs used by preschoolers and 93% of verbs used by school age children are with preverbs. Thus this wide application of the preverb system enables children to express different components of motion. The developmental tendency is expressed in the growth of verb stem numbers.

Analyses and results

As has been noted, preverbs express direction of action. Specific are the preverbs of orientation: proximal “*mo-*” and distal “*mi-*”. According to the classic authority on Georgian grammar, Akaki Shanidze, orientation is a grammatical category which shows how the speaker considers the action: as oriented towards or away from the speaker (1979, p. 236). In a more recent analysis (Potsxishivili, 1985), the preverb “*mo-*” is defined as expressing action not only towards the speaker but towards the other participants of communication as well. As for the preverb “*mi-*”, it is oriented towards a third person or towards an uncertain address.

In narratives children frequently use orientation preverbs. This suggests to us that the narrator projects himself into pictured situations, e.g., in the situation where the boy fell down from the tree the proximal preverb “*mo-*” is always used:

bitSi xidan tSa-mo-varda

In the situation where the boy and the dog fell down into the water narrators say:

bitSi da dzaGli tSa-varden tsqalSi

(the boy and the dog fell down into water /without proximal preverb/)

(the boy fell down from the tree /towards the speaker/)

It is suggested that narrators project themselves to the surface of the earth which provides a spatial anchoring for the story. This process, because of Georgian language specificity, differs from the one described by Batoréo (1998) on Portuguese narratives.

A very important comment by Potsxishvili (mentioned above) is that the second communication participant to whom the narrator relates the story can also be considered as a participant of events.

The "Frog story" implies possibilities to analyze temporality, namely, contrasts between the temporal contours of two simultaneous events, in which one event is punctiliar and the other durative. "This temporal distinction is not noted by all narrators: furthermore those narrators who do take note of the distinction tend to be speakers of languages with grammatical aspect" (Berman & Slobin, 1994 p. 613). In Georgian, aspect is a grammaticized and completed aspect expressed by preverbs, but there are no formal bases for differentiation of aspectual and directional functions of preverbs. In our material, the distinction between durative and punctiliar actions is expressed mainly by using different tenses: past for punctiliar actions and present for durative actions. The distinction between these two kinds of actions becomes most evident in situations where the boy is sleeping and the frog escapes and in the situation where the boy fell down and the dog is running chased by bees. When two events do not overlap completely in time, the English narrator says: "The frog got out when he's sleeping (3,9) or "The dog was still running and he (boy) fell off".

The Georgian language does not have the Progressive, and the Imperfective expresses not only incomplete actions but also durative actions that are usual. While describing picture 2a (in Appendix) other aspects are used only in one case:

rotsa bitSs edzina (Impf) haqaqi amodzvra (AOR) (9,10)

when the boy was sleeping the frog got out

Typical is a sequence of actions both expressed by Aorist:

bitSma da dzaGlma daizdzines (AOR) haqaqi amodzvra (AOR)

(the boy and the dog fell asleep, the frog climbed out)

In one picture (8) the distinction between punctiliar and durative actions is presented by 20% of preschoolers and by 70% of school age children. This distinction, as already mentioned, is mainly expressed by use of different tenses: past (Aorist) for punctiliar actions and present for durative:

bitSi tsaiktsa (AOR), bu miprnavs (PRES) (5,2)

(the boy fell, the owl fly/is flying)

bitSi Tsa-mo-agdo bum (AOR) putkrebi misdeven (PRES) dzaGls (10,1)

(the boy is thrown down by the owl, the bees chase/are chasing the dog)

Analyzing this shift of tense instead of use of aspectual contrast, it is suggested that most narrators (in both situations 84% of preschoolers and 50% of school aged children) cannot use the full array of distinctions available in the verbal morphology, namely, aspectual contrasts. But we prefer another interpretation. Generally, in contrast to German narrators who choose to tell the "Frog story" in the present tense, the majority of Georgian

narrators tell the story in the past – aorist tense. This can be caused by two factors. The first is the tradition of telling fairy stories in the past tense, the second of a psycholinguistic character. Direction and orientation preverbs are obligatory for Aorist, but some motion verbs (to go, to fly, to run...) have preverbs in the Present as well (e.g. *mi-rhis* – runs from the speaker, *ga-rhis* – runs away, *mo-prinavs* – fly/is flying towards the speaker, *Se-dis* – enters/is entering, etc.) But the usage of preverbs in the Present is limited and the full array of space preverbs is used only in completed forms: Aorist and Future. For example, we can compare the verb “*prena*” – to fly. In the Present it can be used with two orientation preverbs only: proximal “*mo-*” *moprinavs* and distal “*mi-*” *miprinavs*.

In Aorist this verb is used with a wide range of preverbs:

ga-prinda – flew away

Se-prinda – flew into

gada-prinda – flew across, etc. (plus combined preverbs: *ga-mo-prinda*, *Se-mo-prinda*, *gad-mo-prinda* etc.)

Thus to express space relations better a child is obliged to use a completed Aorist tense. When it is possible to indicate the Path of durative motion by means of present tense a narrator does, e.g.

Putkrebi mi-sdeven

(the bees chase/are chasing) with distal preverb which means that the action is from the speaker. But if the narrator faces an alternative to express either trajectory of motion or temporal distinction, he/she chooses the spatial relation. For example, in picture 2a (see Appendix)

baqaqi a-mo-dzvra kilidan

(the frog climbed out of the jar) – towards the speaker, expressed by Aorist instead of imperfective,

dzaGli gada-vara panZridan (AOR)

(the dog fell out of the window)

bitSi tsa-vara tsqalSi (AOR)

(the boy fell down into the water)

In pictures 4a and 11 the action presented in the pictures is not completed – the boy and the dog are still in the air but the narrators insistently suggest completed aspect using preverbs. And this situation is repeated in the majority of cases.

It is suggested that “the child learns to use the expressive options of his native language to carry out general discourse functions” (Berman & Slobin, 1994, p. 598) and that spatial relations are more evident for the “Georgian type” of narration. Various formal options available in a particular language, when taken together as a system, orient the speaker to particular patterns of information selection. “Lexicon and grammar of a language provide conventionalized ways of conceptualizing scenes for given purposes” (Bowerman, 1996, p. 151).

There are other grammatical devices in Georgian to express temporal relations such as sequence of events. Using the Evidential (nonwitnessed modality of the verb) the speaker supposes that a certain action happened in the past though he/she did not see the action itself and infers it from visible consequences. In my opinion, the use of the Evidential form in narratives shows that the narrator identifies his/her position with that of an actor of the story, e.g. in picture 9b:

im kvis ukan turme iremi qopila (EVID of verb “to be”) (4,8)
 (behind that stone the deer seemed to be)
ar qopila (EVID) *toti* (5,1)
 (the branch was not there apparently)

But when the narrator distinguishes two positions: his/her and the actor's, he/she explains the situation and boy's behavior using Aorist:

mokida (AOR) *xeli*, *egona* (AOR) *xeebi* (9)
 (he got hold of it, he thought it was a tree)
rkebi egona (AOR) *totebi* (5,2)
 (the antlers seemed him to be the branches)

Thus the usage of different formal grammatical devices indicates different mental positions of the narrators.

As for Cause of motion, there are different lexical and morphological means to express it in Georgian. In English, narrative causation tends to be lexicalized within the stem of the transitive verb. Generally, intransitive construction expresses spontaneous motions, while transitive expresses motions caused by an agent. In the majority of cases in our material, in both age groups, the children express the cause of actions by the lexical meaning of two transitive verbs: “to throw” and “to carry” with different preverbs. But there are cases when intransitive verbs are turned into transitive:

tša-i-ktsa
 (fell down himself)
tša-a-ktsia
 (there is somebody who made him fall down)
 with preradical -a-

Analogously, in English narratives “periphrastic causatives” are used e.g., “the dog made him fall” (4,4). English children often use overextension of an intransitive verb to a causative context, such as “fall him down”. Berman and Slobin (1994) named this way of expressing causation of motion a “highly productive means for expressing causality ... which is not used by older children and adults (p.155). Georgian children do not need such an “overextension” because the Georgian language implies such a possibility. The transitive verb in Georgian obligatorily forms the ergative construction which is connected with a high level of agentivity.

Georgian also has a system of versions. This category marks the relationship of designation (for someone's benefit) and while analyzing causation of motion the existence of this device should be taken into account.

There is another specific way to express causation in Georgian which is obtained by “medial contact” or “causative”. It shows that the interaction between the subject's and direct object's actions is mediated by the indirect object, by some person, e.g. “*a-tser-in-ehs tselils*” – he makes him write a letter. We have two such cases, both in school age:

iremi mo-a-rhen-in-ehs dzaGls (9,1)
 (the deer makes the dog run)

In another case, the narrator overgeneralized this grammatical form and adds to the normative transitive verb “*ga-a-ktsia*” (make run away) the marker of medial contact – suffix

-un-: “*ga-a-kts-un-a*” trying to underline the caused nonvolitional character of the dog’s motion.

By those devices we can distinguish differences in the levels of agentivity and volitionality. They are manifested best in the analysis of the “deer event”. There are various interpretations of local control of the accident:

1. Cause view with deer as topic – 50% of preschoolers, 80% of school age children:
rkebze da-i-sva (Subj.VERS) *bitSi* (9,8)
 made the boy sit on its back
irem-ma (ERG) *a-i-qvana* (Subj.VERS) *da tsa-i-gvana* (Subj. VERS) *bitSi*
 (the deer took and carried the boy away – in many cases)

In all these cases the deer is in the ergative case and preradical “-i-“ – marker of Subj.ver-
 sion – shows that the action is performed for subject’s benefit and volitionally.

2. Boy as topic – 30% of preschoolers, 10% in school age:
biSi zed a-zis (SUPPERES. VERSION) (9,1)
 (the boy is sitting on the deer’s back)
tavze Se-a-dGda bitSi (SUPPERES. VERSION) (9,4)
 the boy climbed up on the deer’s head

Here the event is seen from the perspective of the boy as a volitional agent of motion. The boy’s active role is emphasized by use of the suppesive version which expresses that the action is done above someone or something. Both are noted at school age; preschoolers express the active role of the boy lexically.

3. Low degree of activity is conveyed by passive forms:
bitSi tSa-mo-e-kida (dynamic Passive)
 (the boy hung himself, involitionally)
iremi tsur-d-eba (static Passive)
 (the deer is sliding down involitionally)

Conclusion

- A. The Path (space) component of motion in Georgian narratives is supplied by a rich system of preverbs. This component is displayed quite early and adequately and the preference is given to the Path component if there is a space-temporal alternative.
- B. Morphological analysis of Georgian verbs used in narratives permits a differentiation of the positions of narrator and actor of the story (Evidential versus Aorist, proximal preverbs versus distal, etc.)
- C. Cause of motion in Georgian can be expressed by different lexical and morphological devices. In children’s narrations it is presented mainly by transitive constructions and the system of verb versions.

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Appendix

Mercer Meyer:
 “Frog, where are you?”



1



2a



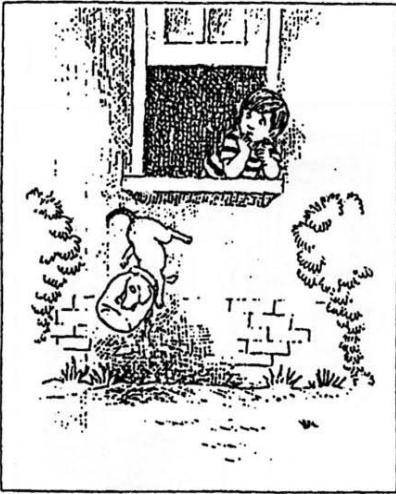
2b



3a



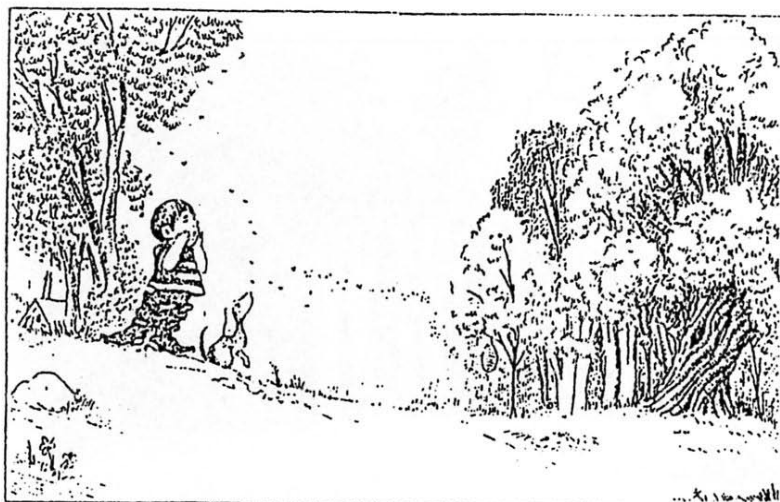
3b



4a



4b



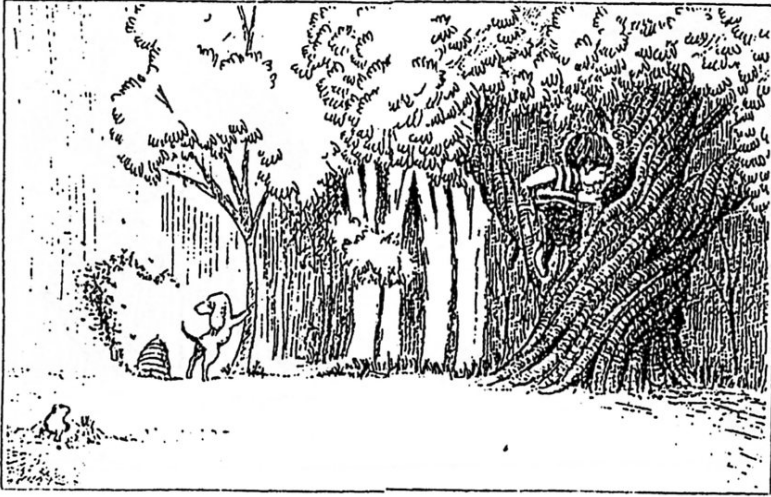
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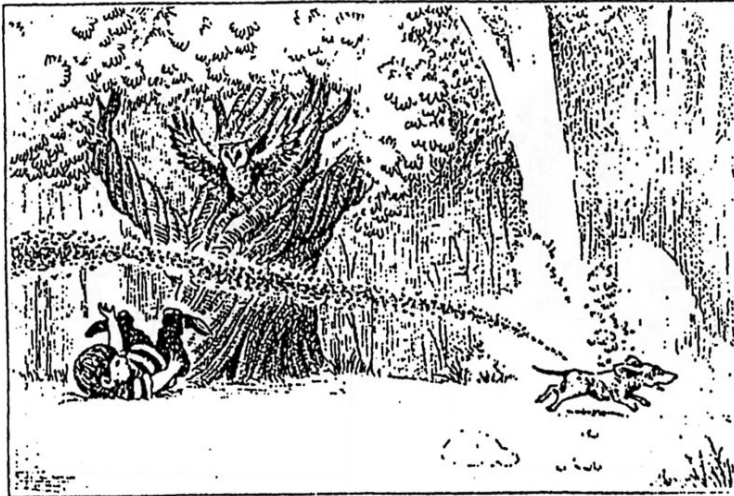
6a



6b



7



8



9a



9b



10a



10b



11



12a



12b



13a



13b



14a



14b

