Complex constructions with verbs of beginning in Adyghe

Abstract. Adyghe verbs of beginning represent a group of matrix verbs that can be used in a number of syntactic configurations, such as constructions without Raising, Control constructions and Raising constructions. In many cases these verbs allow Backward configurations in which the subject is overtly expressed in the embedded clause and the matrix clause contains a co-indexed silent element. The choice between available structures depends on the matrix verb lexeme and word order as well as on a number of more subtle semantic factors. The latter group of factors is generally consistent with the Hopper and Thompson’s Transitivity hypothesis, so that in many cases the more Transitive ergative marking of the subject correlates with Transitive values of relevant semantic factors.

1. Aims and background

This paper focuses on a relatively small class of complex sentences that express the inceptive meaning in Adyghe. As will be shown below, this type of constructions shows a number of typologically unusual patterns that were not described for Adyghe until recently and that might be relevant for the current study of the typology of control structures, and in particular to the typology of Forward and Backward configurations.

The data reported below were gathered in July, 2003 in the frames of an expedition organised by the Russian State University for Humanities (RGGU) to the village Hakurinohabl in the Republic of Adyghe.

The relevance of the findings below is probably best understood if compared against the background of other polyredicate structures in Adyghe. However, those other constructions will generally be ignored for the sake of a more detailed analysis of the structural and semantic properties of the begin-type constructions. Such an arguably artificial narrowing of the scope of discussion is due to the scarce amount of data that were collected during the expedition. In other words, the present paper is conceived of as a very preliminary and empirically-oriented description of the previously unreported patterns in Adyghe that will leave many of the emerging questions unanswered, rather than a full-fledged theoretical analysis of those patterns. I am aware that some of the findings reported here were widened and clarified by several participants of the subsequent expeditions organised by the RGGU in 2004 and 2005, in which I was unable to participate. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the bulk of empirical material reported below might be of some use for further and deeper analyses of the Adyghe polyredicate structures.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2 some general facts of Adyghe are reviewed that are necessary for the understanding of the subsequent parts. Section 3 contains an overview of inceptive verbs discussed in this paper. In Section 4, I discuss the structure of the embedded clauses in Adyghe complex sentences of ‘begin’-type. The contrast between personal and impersonal constructions is introduced and discussed in Section 5. Sections 6 and 7 are concerned with case marking and syntactic position of subjects in intransitive and transitive inceptive constructions correspondingly. Some conclusions of the study are discussed in Section 8.

2. Adyghe: general facts

Adyghe is a Northwest Caucasian language spoken by slightly more than 100.000 speakers in the Republic of Adyghe and several adjacent regions of the Northern Caucasus. There is a good deal of dialectal variation in Adyghe, the inhabitants of the village Hakurinohabl show some properties of the Abadzekh dialect to the varying degrees. However, there are no grounds to believe that there is any difference between this dialect and the Standard Adyghe with respect to those properties that are in the focus of the present analysis.

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2 Following Nedjalkov (2002), I use the term inceptive meaning as a cover term for all meanings that can be paraphrased as “to begin to…”, without any restriction on the aspectual class of the underlying verb.
Adyghe is a polysynthetic language, that is, a language in which – to put it in a somewhat loose terms - every argument of every verb form (finite or non-finite) is co-indexed on that verb and, unlike obligatory agreement markers (or “pronominal arguments” under certain analyses), lexical arguments are optional, cf. the following example where optional material is bracketed and the verb form tadorjot is a well-formed sentence by itself:

(1) (a)’ (axe-m) (a)’ (te) t-a-do-Ø-Ø-Ø-ta-Ø
he.ERG they.ERG he. ERG we(ABS) 1PL-ABS-3PL.IO-Abscomit-3SG.IO-ABSgive-PAST
‘He, gave us to him, together with them.’

Lexical (or pronominal) expression of arguments outside of the verb form is optional in Adyghe, it is determined by discourse factors. Besides, word order is relatively free (with a predominance of head-final patterns), unlike the order of the “agreement” markers that is always fixed. All these properties are typical of the so-called non-configurational languages. According to a well-known hypothesis that was first explicitly put forward in Jelinek (1984), in many heavily head-marking non-configurational languages the “real” arguments of the verb are what otherwise looks like its “agreement” affixes while overt NPs are just adjuncts to the clause. Whether such an analysis is appropriate for Adyghe is a question open for discussion, see Lander (2005) and also a detailed analysis of this problem with respect to the closely related Kabardian in Minor (2005). I will use the term ‘agreement marker’ throughout as a traditional label without implying that this term is analytically adequate.

Both the system of agreement markers and independent NPs (including pronouns) follow the ergative alignment. Every verb form has an obligatory absolutive (S/O) agreement slot that occupies the leftmost position in the structure of the word form. Absolutive 3rd person agreement affix has zero exponent, but there is an optional absolutive 3Pl agreement suffix. This affix is the only agreement suffix in Adyghe and the only agreement marker that is optional, as can be seen in e.g. (14). All transitive verbs (including derived transitives) have a stem-adjacent A-agreement (that is, “ergative”) slot. All other arguments of the verb are introduced with the help of special valency-changing prefixes; agreement markers precede “their” valency changing markers. Thus, e.g. in (1) the 3PL agreement marker precedes “its” comitative marker dE-, which accounts for the meaning ‘together with them’; the Recipient agreement slot is introduced by the oblique marker jE- and than saturated by an agreement 3SG marker. Independent nominals are marked for case if they are specific. Absolutive (S or O) arguments are marked with the absolutive case, all other arguments are marked ergatively, cf. absolutive marking of the 1PL Theme and ergative marking of other arguments in (1). All examples are given in the transcription system developed by the participants of the RGGU expedition to Hakurinohab in 2003. The glosses are largely simplified in all those aspects that do not directly pertain to the topic of the present study. In particular I do not gloss morphemes with zero exponents unless it is relevant for the discussion.

3. Adyghe verbs of ‘beginning’ and their argument structure

3.1. The verbs at issue

The productive way of expressing the meaning of beginning in Adyghe is the use of a complex structure with a matrix phase verb with the meaning ‘to begin’ and a non-finite form of the embedded verb, as in (2-3):³

(2) a’ ‘ axe-pa-Ø 3-pl-xa-nØ  tjo-xe-Ø’a-Ø / a-wobla-Ø
he.ERG meat-water-ABS 3SG.A-eat-MASD-ABS 3SG.A-begin-PAST / 3SG.A-begin-PAST
‘He begins to eat broth.’

(3) s-je-pl-Ø-x  sa-fjez’a-Ø / s-jez’a-Ø
1SG.Abs-OBL-look-CONV 1SG.Abs-begin-PAST / 1SG.Abs-begin-PAST

³ There are other means of expressing the inceptive meaning in Adyghe that are not discussed in this paper, such as e.g. the use of the unproductive ingressive suffix -Z’e that is possible with a handful of motion verbs; cf. (1’) if compared to its non-inceptive counterpart in (2’):

(1’) r-jo-Ø’-Ø’a-Ø 3SG.A-OBL-lead-ingr-PAST
‘He started to lead (him).’

(2’) j-e-Ø’ 3SG.A-DYN(3SG.ABS)-lead
‘He leads.’ (Rogava and Kerasheva 1966: 313)
The four Adyghe verbs with the meaning ‘to begin’ exemplified in (2-3), namely, jeReZ’en, wEblen, fjeZ’en and jeZ’en, are in the focus of the discussion below. As was recently argued by Testelec (2005), these verbs belong to a small class of matrix verbs (‘verbs of obligatory semantic control’) that differ from other verbs of Adyghe in terms of their syntactic behaviour. Other verbs belonging to this class – are e.g. verbs λeZ’en ‘can, be able’ and woxan ‘stop, cease’, but those other verbs will not be discussed below, as indicated in the first part of this paper. The crucial property of the verbs belonging to this class is a constraint that their matrix subject can not be interpreted as referentially distinct from the arguments of the embedded verb, i.e. nothing like English Mother started the maid cleaning the bathroom at ten o’clock is possible in Adyghe, cf. discussion in (Dixon 2000: 42). Thus, for instance (4) is ungrammatical:

(4) *ar g0,obZə-new jeZ’a-R
  he.ABS be.angry-SUP 1SG.A-begin-PAST
  ‘I began (it, so that he began) to be angry.’

The vast majority of verbs taking sentential complements in Adyghe do not show the above constraint, cf. the following example, where the subject of the embedded clause (‘the child’) can be either coreferential or referentially distinct from the subject of the matrix verb (“the hoper”):

(5) me-g0,we sab0jə-m pce-r  q0-λeZ’a-x3-new
  DYN(3SG.ABS)-hope child-ERG door-ABS DIR-LOC-3SG.A-open-SUP
  ‘The child hopes to open the door.’ 
  Hε j hopes that the child opens the door.’ (Beljaeva and Minor 2005: 24)

The fifth and last verb that will be analysed below is the verb HWEn. The basic meaning of this verb is ‘to become, to turn out (that)’. However, the type of use that will concern us below is found in some contexts where this verb acquires the inceptive meaning:

(6) sε sα-qaIWe sε-HWE-R
  I 1SG.ABS-dance 1SG.ABS-become-PAST
  {Left context: I was taught to dance and} ‘I began (learned) to dance.’ ≃ ‘It became so that I now (can) dance.’

The verb HWEn is most distinct from other four verbs under consideration in terms of its semantics. It has been shown that the structural configuration in which this verb is used depends on its various meanings; in its basic meaning ‘to turn out (that)’ HWEn shows the properties that are drastically different from verbs of obligatory semantic control and that are not yet fully understood (Testelec 2005). However, in its inceptive use this verb is much closer to other verbs discussed in this paper. In particular, along with other verbs discussed here, the verb HWEn in its inceptive use can not agree with a participant that is not also a participant of the embedded clause.

3.2. The argument structure of ‘begin’-type verbs

In order to appropriately analyze the structure of complex sentences exemplified in (2) and (3) it is necessary to clarify the argument structure required by the matrix verbs in such constructions. The argument structure of ‘begin’-type verbs is most clear in those constructions where their sentential complement is a so-called masdar, that is, a gerund-like deverbal form that behaves as an ordinary nominal and bears case markers. It appears that out of the five verbs discussed, there are two transitive verbs (jeReZ’en and wEblen, see 7) a two-place intransitive verb fjeZ’en (its argument structure is ABS-OBL, OBL being expressed by an ergative case marker on the noun, see 8); the two remaining verbs (jeZ’en and HWEn) are one-place intransitives (cf. ungrammaticality of 9):

(7) ĉ’lu-em qe{l}ε-λ-λo-r r0-λeZ’a-x / a-woblə-x
  guy-ERG dance-MASD-ABS 3SG.A-begin-PAST / 3SG.A-begin-PAST
  ‘The guy started to dance.’

(8) ar jeZ’a-x / jeZ’a-x
  he.ABS study-MASD-ERG 3SG.IO-begin-PAST / become-PAST
  ‘He started to study.’ ≃ ‘He got to his studies.’

(9) ar jeZ’a-x / jeZ’a-x
  he.ABS study-MASD-ERG / study-MASD-ABS begin-PAST / become-PAST
  Intended meaning: ‘He started to study.’ ≃ ‘He got to his studies.’

4 For the sake of internal consistency of the paper, here and below all the examples that are taken from other published sources are either provided with the glosses by myself or the glosses are modified according to the system adopted here.

5 Cf. also Gerasimov 2005 on possible constraints on the coreference between the arguments of the matrix and the embedded clause).
Adyghe does not allow metaphoric inceptive constructions, as English he started fire, cf. ungrammaticality of the following constructions:

(10) *poq gizma-t maqw-em a-wiebla-r
water flood-ERG I.Poss.AL-problem SG.A-begin-PAST

⇒ ‘The flood started our problems.’

(11) *qi'ale-m maqw-em a-wiebla-r
guy-ERG fire-ABS SG.A-begin-PAST

‘The guy started the fire.’

However, there are cases when the object slot of a two-place phase verb is occupied by an ordinary, i.e. non-deverbal, noun. Such constructions have to be understood elliptically, the nature of the implied predicate being derived from the context, cf. the semantic contrast between (12) and (13). It can be noticed that these constructions – as well as complex sentences, see above – meet the semantic ‘same-subject’ constraint, that is, the subject of the verb ‘begin’ is always understood as coreferential with the subject of the embedded predicate (see, however, Section 5 below for some exceptions and a more accurate discussion of this property).

(12) studentE-m txELE-r a-wiebla-r / rjE-ReZ'a-r
student-ERG book-ABS SG.A-begin-PAST / 3SG.A.begin-PAST

‘The student started (to read) the book.’ (*‘The student started someone else to read the book’).

(13) txak&We-m txELE-r a-wiebla-r / rjE-ReZ'a-r
writer-ERG book-ABS SG.A-begin-PAST / 3SG.A-begin-PAST

‘The writer started (to write) the book.’ (*‘The writer started someone else to write the book’).

In terms of their argument structure, constructions of this kind are identical with those illustrated in (7-8), where the second argument was expressed by the masdar. In fact, constructions with nominal dependents are even more illuminating in this respect, since nominal dependents of ‘begin’-type verbs, unlike masdar forms, might be plural and in this case they trigger expected agreement markers on the verb, namely, optional absolutive agreement for the two transitive verbs (14) and indirect agreement for the intransitive two-place verb jezw'en (15). The one-place intransitive verbs jezw'en and x&om can not be used in constructions similar to (14-15):

(14) a's' urok-m xe-r rjE-ReZ'a-r(-ex)
he.ERG lesson-PL-ERG 3SG.A-begin-PAST(-3PL.ABS)

‘He started (to do his) homework.’

(15) se urok-xe-m s-a-fjeZ'a-r
I lesson-PL-ERG 1SG.ABS-3PL.IO-begin-PAST

‘I start (= get to) my homework.’

As was mentioned above, the presence of overtly expressed nominal arguments of the verb is not obligatory in Adyghe. However, all the agreement slots of a verb have to be filled. This is also true for the ‘begin’-type verbs in all their uses: the five verbs in question have invariable sets of agreement slots in all their uses. In particular, if these verbs agree with their subject (the ‘beginner’) when used as matrix verbs in complex sentences, this agreement takes place in the ergative (A) slot for transitive verbs wEblen and jeReZ'en, and in the absolutive (O/S) slot of intransitive verbs jezw'en, jezw'en, jxeZ'en:

(16) se we w2-s-še-new jezw'en
I thou 2SG.ABS-1SG.A-lead-SUP 1SG.A-begin-PAST

‘I began to lead you.’

(17) se we w2-s-še-new so-fjeZ'a-r
I thou 2SG.ABS-1SG.A-lead-SUP 1SG.ABS-begin-PAST

‘The train starts off.’

Presumably, the meaning of motion was the original meaning of this verb, out of which its phase meaning must have developed (cf. Heine and Kuteva 2002: 74 and 156 on verbs of motion as the source of grammaticalisation of inceptive markers). Two out of four other verbs discussed here are etymologically related to jezw'en, cf. fjeZ'en < Benefactive marker fE + jezw'en and jeReZ'en < Causative marker Re + jezw'en. The argument structure of the latter two verbs is thus predictable based on their internal structure, since Benefactive marker introduces an indirect object slot and Causative marker derives two-place transitives from one-place intransitives.

* In fact, the verb jezw'en can be used in one-place intransitive constructions with non-deverbal nouns. In this case it means ‘to make a move, to start off’:

(3') meS'e okwa-t xjeZ'en
train-ABS 3SG.ABS-start

‘The train starts off.’
‘I began to lead you.’

The remaining agreement slot of the two-place ‘begin’ verbs (woblun, jwecz’en and fjicz’en) when these are used as matrix verbs is filled by a zero 3SG marker (whether this is a default agreement or agreement with the embedded sentential argument is not discussed here). Hence, matrix phase verbs of ‘begin’ type can only bear one “meaningful” agreement marker.

4. Embedded verbs in ‘begin’ constructions

The remaining parts of this paper are devoted to those complex structures where the ‘begin’ verbs are used as matrix verbs. In order to analyze these configurations it has to be shown that they are indeed complex bi-clausal structures, that is, that they are not grammaticalised monoclausal constructions with ‘begin’-verbs functioning as auxiliaries. This point can be easily illustrated by the behaviour of adverbials that can be found in both the embedded and the matrix clause with the corresponding shift in meaning (a similar contrast is observed for negation):

(18)  
axe-me  ēwE-r  t&we  a-Rele-new  ra-ReZ’a-Re-R  
they-ERG  fence-ABS  twice  3PL.A-paint-SUP  3PL.A-begin-PAST-PAST  
Lit. ‘They started [to paint the fence two times]’ (two events of painting).

(19)  
axe-me  ēwE-r  a-Rele-new  t&we  ra-ReZ’a-Re-R  
they-ERG  fence-ABS  3PL.A-paint-SUP  twice  3PL.A-begin-PAST-PAST  
Lit. ‘They started [to paint the fence] two times’ (two commencements).

Examples (18-19) are taken from Testelec (2005), see also further arguments in favour of the bi-clausal status of ‘begin’-type constructions in this source.

The embedded verb in the complex structures at issue can appear in various forms, the distribution of possible embedded forms for various matrix verbs is represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Possible embedded forms for various matrix ‘begin’-type verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>jwecz’en</th>
<th>woblun</th>
<th>fjicz’en</th>
<th>fjicz’en</th>
<th>jwun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-new (“supine”)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ew (“converb”)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“pure stem”</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masdar</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is crucial that Table 1 represents those combinations only that are interpreted as inceptive. Thus, for instance, the verb jwun can be used with the so-called supine, but such a construction would be interpreted as debitive; thus, the corresponding cell bears “no” and combinations of this kind are not discussed below.

All the four morphological forms of embedded verbs represented in Table 1 are non-finite forms, i.e. they can not be used in independent clauses. However, the –ew converts, the supine (which is ultimately an –ew convorb of the “second future” tense) and the so-called “pure stem” (this traditional denomination refers to the lack of Tense-Aspect-Modality suffixes) must always bear the full set of agreement markers in accordance with the semantics of the embedded clause, as in the following example:

(20)  
se  we  wo-s-č-e-new  jcs-eRazz’é  
I  thou  2SG.ABS-1SG.A-lead-SUP  1SG.A-begin  
‘I begin to lead you.’

In (20) the meaning of the embedded clause is ‘I lead you’, hence 2SG.ABS and 1SG.A agreement markers on the embedded verb. Similarly, all the embedded clauses except those headed by a masdar may have (pro)nominal objects of their own that are expressed in the same way as they would be expressed in an independent clause, cf. the following construction where an intransitive oblique-object verb jwecz’n ‘to beat’ is embedded:

(21)  
ar  ējle-m  D-je-we-new  fjicz’a-ń  
‘I start looking at you (and you like it).’

7 The verb fjicz’en is sporadically registered with two meaningful agreement markers. In such cases its ćr- preverb is interpreted as a benefactive marker (see also footnote 6):
(4')  
se  we  s&-we-pi-ć-e  s&-p-fjicz’e  
I  thou  1SG.ABS-2SG.IO-lead-SUP  1SG.ABS-2SG.IO-BEN-begin  
≡ ‘I start looking at you (and you like it).’
As for masdar, its use is somewhat different from other three types of sentential complements. First, the speakers usually reject constructions in which masdar has a direct (absolutive) object of its own, see (22). It is more natural to express the underlying direct object as the masdar’s “possessor”, as in (23):

\[(22) \quad *se \ 3^\text{PL} \ qeIWe-n-Em \ / \ ? ? sE-qeIWe-n-Em \ sE-feZ'a-R \]
I(ABS) dance-MASD-ERG / 1SG.ABS-dance-MASD-ERG 1SG.ABS-begin-PAST

\[\text{‘I began to dance.’} \ (\text{= \ Lit. ‘I began dancing the dance.’})\]

Second, in many cases masdar is preferably used without agreement markers of its own, see (24):

\[(24) \quad se \ 0^\text{C} \ qeIWe-n-\text{om} \ / \ s\text{=}qeIWe-n-\text{om} \ s\text{=}feZ'a-R \]
I(ABS) dance-MASD-ERG / 1SG.ABS-dance-MASD-ERG 1SG.ABS-begin-PAST

\[\text{‘I began to dance.’}\]

5. Personal and impersonal constructions

As was indicated in 3.1 above that Adyghe ‘begin’ verbs discussed here belong to the group of verbs of ‘obligatory semantic control’, which means that the subject of the matrix ‘begin’ verb (the argument that is co-referenced on this verb) can not be interpreted as referentially distinct from the “subject” of the embedded verb. However, it appears that there are some circumstances in which the “upstairs” verb does not have a subject of its own and bears a semantically void (default) 3SG agreement marker in the corresponding slot. Constructions of this kind will be labelled ‘impersonal’ (see 25) as opposed to much more frequent ‘personal’ constructions where the matrix verb agrees with the subject of ‘begin’ (that is, ‘beginner’, see 26):

\[(25) \quad we \ se \ s\text{=}p-S'e \ \overset{\partial}{\overset{\gamma}{\text{g}}}_\text{A}-\text{become-PAST} \]
thou I 1SG.ABS-2SG.A-lead 2SG.ABS-become-PAST

\[\text{‘It happened that you started to lead me (from time to time).’}\]

\[(26) \quad we \ se \ s\text{=}p-S'e \ w\text{=}\gamma_{\text{g}}-\text{\text{-\text{p}}-\text{-\text{p}}} \]
thou I 1SG.ABS-2SG.A-lead 2SG.ABS-become-PAST

\[\text{‘You began to lead me (from time to time)’} \approx \text{‘You decided to lead me from time to time’}\]

Let’s discuss the two types of constructions by turn in 5.1 and 5.2, and then compare their structures in 5.3.

5.1. Personal constructions: the choice of subject

It was preliminarily stated above that the Adyghe matrix verbs of ‘begin’ type meet the so-called ‘same-subject’ constraint, that is, their subject must be coreferential with the subject of the embedded verb. Evidently, the exact understanding of this constraint depends on how the “subject” is defined. There has been some debate in the literature as to whether the behaviour of “begin”-type verbs should be viewed as one of the tests for syntactic accusativity / ergativity, that is, for accusative / ergative alignment of subjecthood. According to an extreme point of view, the “choice” of a “downstairs” argument for coreference with an “upstairs” argument in ‘begin’ type constructions is a universal semantic, and not a syntactic property, cf.:

Thus, in sentences like I began to paint the wall and I began to laugh, the subject of begin is identical to the A or S NP of the complement clause; but this does not constitute evidence for English having an accusative-type syntax. This property follows from the semantics of begin, and is shown by every language that has a distinct verb begin (Dixon 1979: 115).

This point of view is definitely a simplification for which many counterexamples have been attested, cf. the following discussion of a pattern in Archi: “the verb ‘begin’ has a nominal argument in the Nominative case that must be coreferential with one of the arguments of the embedded infinitival complement”, either A, O or S (Kibrik 2003: 359; emphasis mine – S.S., see also further examples from other Daghestanian languages, ibid.: 493ff.). Without going deep into details of the criteria of subjecthood in Adyghe, it would suffice to point out that most syntactic process of Adyghe work on the accusative basis and that the S/A arguments show most properties of subjecthood (Testelec, p.c.), on the one hand, and that in general the matrix verb
does indeed “choose” the S/A argument of the embedded verb for co-indexation, cf. the following example:

(27) čem-2-pl ĉ’a-ē-2-m 3-a-2-n-x-ew rja-ncęw-3-pl.a-he-3-pl.abs-conv 3sg.a-begin-past / *3pl.a-begin-past
   ‘The boy began to milk the cows.’ (Intended meaning of the starred variant ≈ ‘The cows began to be milked by the boy’).

As for the personal inceptive constructions with experiential verbs, in most of them it is the ergative Experiencer (and not the absolutive Stimulus) of the embedded verb that serves as the subject of the matrix verb, see (28). This is consistent with other properties of subjecthood that are associated with Experiencers in Adyghe (Testelec, p.c.).

(28) sè-ē ĕ-3-xe-2-m-x-ew-s-x-ew 3sg.a-abs-begin 1sg.abs-begin / *3sg.a-abs-begin
   you 2PL.abs-PREV-1SG.A-hear-SUP 1SG.ABS-begin / *2PL.ABS-begin
   ‘I begin to hear you.’

However, there are at least two closely related exceptions from this rule, namely, the verbs qeq eqšeq ‘to seem, appear’ and qeqeq eqšeq ‘to appear to, to loom’. As other experiential verbs, these two verbs require an Ergative-Absolutive case frame with the Experiencer in the ergative case, as in (29):

(29) č’a-ē-2-m ē-3-xe-r qeq eqšeq 3pl.a-abs 3pl.abs-seem-past
   guy-ERG they-abs seem-3PL.ABS 3PL.A-abs-begin
   ‘They appear to the guy.’

When embedded into an inceptive construction, these verbs allow both personal and impersonal configurations. Curiously, in the personal construction it the Stimulus that behaves as the subject of the matrix verb and triggers agreement on it:

(30) sè-ē 3sg.a-abs-begin 1sg.abs-begin / *3sg.a-abs-begin
   se 3sg.abs-beg-3pl.abs-conv 1sg.abs-begin
   w2-3pl.abs-dir-1sg.abs-seem-sup 2sg.abs-begin
   ‘You begin to appear to me.’

5.2. Impersonal constructions with ‘begin’ verbs

There are two types of contexts that allow impersonal inceptive constructions, namely, constructions where the embedded verb is a verb of perception (irregardless of the inceptive matrix verb) and constructions with the frame verb ĭśa (irregardless of the embedded verb).

5.2.1. Impersonal and personal constructions with embedded verbs of perception

All verbs of perception, when embedded under a ‘begin’-type verb, allow an impersonal construction, cf. an impersonal construction with the verb qeq eqšeq ‘to seem’ (31) that is possible along with the personal construction exemplified in (30) above:

(31) qeq eqšeq 3sg.abs-begin 1sg.abs-begin / *3sg.abs-begin
   sè-ē ā-3-xe-r 3sg.abs-begin 1 they-abs dir-1sg.abs-seem-fut2-3pl.abs-conv
   ‘They begin to appear to me.’ (Literally: ‘It began that they appear to me’).

In some cases there is a subtle semantic contrast between a personal and an impersonal construction with verbs of perception. In such cases a personal construction reflects a higher degree of the involvement of the experiencer, cf. the contrast between (31) and (32):

(32) sè-ē ā-3-xe-r 3sg.abs-begin 1 they-abs dir-1sg.abs-seem-fut2-3pl.abs-conv
   w2-3pl.abs-dir-1sg.abs-seem-sup 2sg.abs-begin
   ‘I begin to hear the songs.’

The speaker’s comment obtained for the last structure was: “This sentence as if pertains to the sounds themselves”. This sentence would be expected if e.g. the Experiencer is immobile and the singing people are approaching him so that he gradually begins to hear the songs. Compare now (33):

(33) sè-ē ā-3-xe-r 3sg.abs-begin 1 they-abs dir-1sg.abs-seem-fut2-3pl.abs-conv
   w2-3pl.abs-dir-1sg.abs-seem-sup 2sg.abs-begin
   ‘I begin to hear the songs.’

Speakers reported that they feel some oddity in this construction, but readily agreed that it is accepted in e.g. such a situation: A physician is adjusting an aerophone to a poorly hearing person and asks the latter to say when he starts to hear something; the patient as if concentrates on listening and finally hears the sounds of a song.

Impersonal constructions are particularly important for the discussion below since they clearly demonstrate that the subject of the embedded verb in Adyghe complex constructions may be overtly present in the embedded clause. In other words, the constituency structure for (32) could be
represented in (33); arguably, the subject position of the matrix clause is occupied here by a zero expletive form.

(34) [se wered-xe-r zexe-s-xe-n-x-ew] r-je-naaž’e
    Literally, something like: ‘It began (that) [I hear the songs]’.

The correctness of bracketing in (34) can be shown by the fact that the embedded experiential clause can not be discontinuous, cf. ungrammaticality of the impersonal construction under an unusual word order pattern:

(35) *se r-je-naaž’e wered-xe-r zexe-s-xe-n-x-ew

Such a word order pattern can only be possible with the personal construction, where the subject (Experiencer) is overtly expressed in the matrix clause:

(36) se jës-ebraž’e [Δ_i wered-xe-r zexe-s-xe-n-x-ew]

The main conclusion so far is that the subject of embedded clause in Adyghe can either i) be overtly expressed in the embedded clause itself or ii) appear in the matrix clause being represented by a silent element in the embedded clause which is conventionally symbolized by Δ above8.

With this in mind we have to acknowledge that with respect to personal inceptive constructions with the unmarked word order pattern it is not yet clear whether the overtly present “copy” of the subject belongs to the matrix or to the embedded clause, in other words, whether the structure of (33) is (37) or (38). This question is the central issue discussed in sections 6 and 7.

(37) se [Δ_i wered-xe-r zexe-s-xe-n-x-ew] je-s-ebraž’e

5.2.2. Impersonal and personal constructions with the matrix verb χwOn

As was mentioned in section 3, the verb χwOn is drastically different from other verbs discussed here; in particular, this polysemous verb allows an impersonal construction irregardless of the semantics of the embedded verb, unlike other matrix verbs. The speakers report a semantic contrast between personal (40 and 42) and impersonal (39 and 41) constructions with χwOn. The picture is further complicated by the fact that there is a semantic contrast between those constructions where the embedded verb is expressed by a “pure stem” (39 and 40) and constructions with embedded “supine” (41 and 42), which gives an overall repertoire of four configurations with subtle semantic contrasts:

(39) we se së-p-s’e [Δ\_i wered-xe-r]
    1SG.ABS-2SG.A-lead 3SG.ABS-become-PAST

≈ (The things have happened in such a way that) ‘you (began to) lead me (sometimes).’

(40) we se së-p-s’e wë-χwOn-\(\Delta\_i\)
    1SG.ABS-2SG.A-lead 2SG.ABS-become-PAST

‘You began (= acquired the custom) to lead me (from time to time).’

(41) se we wë-s-s’e-new me-χwOn
    2SG.ABS-1SG.A-lead-SUP DYN(3SG.ABS)-become

‘I had to (begin to) lead you. (*I begin to lead you).’

(42) se we wë-s-s’e-new se-χwOn
    2SG.ABS-1SG.A-lead-SUP 1SG.ABS-become

≈ ‘(I begin to want to lead you and) I begin to lead you.’

The contrast between personal and impersonal constructions with χwOn is reminiscent of the contrast that is usually reported for two type of structures in which the phase verbs can be used cross-linguistically, namely, the Subject-to-Subject Raising configurations and the Control configurations. Indeed, the Adyghe personal constructions with χwOn are used when there is a volitional Actor who intentionally instigates the event (cf. 40 and 42), which is typical of cControl structures, and the impersonal constructions are used otherwise (cf. 39 and 41), that is, in those cases where the Raising structures are expected based on the semantics of the sentence (see Perlmutter 1970 and Ross 1972, for the distinction of the two types of “begin”-type configurations).

---

8 These two options are in complementary distribution, that is, the shared argument of the two clauses can not be overtly expressed in both of them, neither by full NPs nor by pronouns

(5') *ar, [wered qo\(\Delta\_i\)-e-new Aslan] fë2’a-\(\Delta\_i\)
    he.ABS song sing-SUP A. begin-PAST

‘Aslan began to sing the song’, lit. ‘He, began Aslan, to sing the song’.

(6') *Aslan [wered qo\(\Delta\_i\)-e-new Aslan] fë2’a-\(\Delta\_i\)
    Aslan song sing-SUP A. begin-PAST

‘Aslan began to sing the song’, lit. ‘Aslan, began Aslan, to sing the song’.
What is unusual in Adyghe is that *neither* of the structures discussed here is consistent with the Control analysis. In order to clearly demonstrate this point it is necessary to discuss the problem of case marking of subjects in personal inchoative constructions and thus to understand what is the structural position of the overtly expressed “copy” of the subject. These crucial questions will be discussed in the two following sections, separately for intransitive (section 6) and transitive (section 7) verbs.

6. The subject in intransitive ‘begin’ constructions

6.1. A general overview

The structures where both the matrix and the embedded verb in the complex inceptive sentences of Adyghe are intransitive are not informative for the discussion of the case marking of their subjects: of course, the subject in these structures is assigned absolutive case, as in (43):

(43) $\text{axe-r}  s-a-\text{s}^e\text{-new}  \text{fjeZja-rc-x}$

they-ABS  I  1SG.ABS-3PL.A-teach-SUP begin-PAST-3PL.ABS

“They began to teach.”

However, if a transitive verb is embedded under an intransitive matrix verb ($\text{fjeZ'en}$, $\text{jeZ'en}$ and $\text{HWEn}$), the structure with the unmarked word order requires that the subject be marked ergatively (44), and not absolutively (45):

(44) $\text{axe-me}  /  \text{axe-r}  \text{se}  s-a-\text{s}^e\text{-new}  \text{fjeZja-rc-x}$

they-ERG  I  1SG.ABS-ABS-3PL.A-lead-SUP begin-PAST-3PL.ABS

“They began to lead me.”

(45) $\text{axe-r}  psE-m  s-a\text{-\text{fjeZja-rc-x}  s-a-S'e-new}$

they-ABS  water-ERG  1SG.ABS-swim-SUP  1SG.ABS-3PL.A-lead-SUP

(\text{fjeZja-rc-x}  /  \text{fjeZja-rc-x}  \text{fjeZja-rc-x}  /  \text{fjeZja-rc-x}  \text{fjeZja-rc-x})$

begin-PAST-3PL.ABS  /  become-PAST-3PL.ABS

≡ ‘It began / appeared that they taught me to swim.’

In other words, the verbs $\text{fjeZ'en}$, $\text{jeZ'en}$ and $\text{HWEn}$ are “transparent” for the case assignment: the subject is assigned the case by the embedded transitive verb and, at least on the surface of it, the ergatively marked argument triggers absolutive agreement on the matrix verb! The explanation of this pattern that suggests itself is that in structures like (44) the overtly expressed subject belongs to the embedded, and not to the matrix clause. This finding is supported by the constructions with the extraposition of the subject from its expected position in the embedded clause:

(46) $\text{axe-r}  /  *\text{axe-m}  \text{fjeZja-rc-x}  \text{se}  s-a-\text{s}^e\text{-new}$

they-ABS  /  they-ERG  begin-PAST-3PL.ABS  I  1SG.ABS-3PL.A-lead-SUP

“They began to lead me.”

These facts show that the constituency structure for (44) and (46) could be represented in (47) and (48) correspondingly:

(47) $\Delta_i  [\text{axe-me}  \text{se}  s-a-\text{s}^e\text{-new}]  \text{fjeZja-rc-x}$

(48) $\text{axe-r}  \text{fjeZja-rc-x}  [\Delta_i  \text{se}  s-a-\text{s}^e\text{-new}]$

Discontinuous clauses are ungrammatical in Adyghe so that the overt subject must be also assigned absolutive case by the matrix verb under other possible word order patterns where it is not found in the embedded clause:

(49) $\text{OK-ar}  /  *\text{aS'}  \text{fjeZ'a-x}  [\Delta_i  \text{c'il-e-r}  \text{a-wq'}\text{-\text{a}-new}]$

he.ERG  /  he.ABS  begin-PAST  guy-ABS  3SG.ERG-kill-SUP

‘He began to kill the guy.’

(50) $[\Delta_i  \text{z-xe-r}  \text{a-wq'}\text{-\text{a}-new}]  \text{fjeZ'o  *aS'}  /  \text{OK-ar}$

old-PL.ABS  3SG.A-kill-SUP  begin  he.ERG  /  he.ABS

‘He began to kill the old (people).’

In examples (47-50) I used a conventional symbol $\Delta$ in order to represent the zero expression of the subject in the clause where it is not expressed overtly. The most intriguing point here is that in (44) the overtly marked subject belongs to the embedded, and not to the matrix clause. This finding is supported by the constructions with the extraposition of the subject from its expected position in the embedded clause.
It is now germane to discuss the nature of the silent element in the matrix clause which was so far represented by a conventional symbol $\Delta$. It appears that the three intransitive verbs ‘begin’ are not homogeneous in this respect. The verbs $\text{fjeZ'en}$ and $\text{jeZ'en}$ will be discussed in the following Section 6.2, and the verb $\gamma_{\alpha \omega}$, in Section 6.3.

6.2. The verbs $\text{fjeZ'en}$ and $\text{jeZ'en}$

There is some evidence that verbs $\text{fjeZ'en}$ and $\text{jeZ'en}$ assign a semantic role to their subjects, which is typical of Control structures and incompatible with the syntax of Raising. This can be shown by the grammaticality of imperative sentences with these matrix verbs (51) as well as by the grammaticality of structures where these complex inceptive configurations are embedded under another matrix verb with the meaning of intention (52):

(51)  
\[
\text{pisne p-txe-new} \quad \text{jeZ'!} \\
\text{letter 2SG.A-write-SUP} \quad \text{begin} \\
\text{‘Start writing a letter!’}
\]

(52)  
\[
\text{axe-r} \quad \text{faje-x} \\
\text{they-ABS} \quad \text{want-3PL.ABS} \quad \text{begin-FUT2-3PL.ABS-CONV} \quad \text{letter-ABS} \quad \text{3SG.A-write-SUP} \\
\text{‘The want to begin to write a letter’, ‘They want to begin (something) so that somebody else (would) write a letter’.}
\]

It appears that in structures like (47) there is silent (PRO-like) copy of the subject in the matrix clause that triggers agreement on the matrix verb and that is co-indexed with the overt NP in the embedded clause. The unusualness of structures like (47) is that here the referential expression $\text{axe-me}$ ‘they’ is bound by a structurally superordinate zero copy, and not vice versa, as in more usual Control configurations of the familiar English-like type, as in (53), cf. ungrammaticality of a word-by-word English translation of the Adyghe structure in (54):

(53)  
\[
\text{They,} \text{began [\Delta to lead me].}
\]

(54)  
\[
\text{*\Delta Began [they, to lead me].}
\]

Constructions where a full NP is co-indexed with a structurally superordinate NP are explicitly ruled out by Condition C in the early versions of the Government and Binding theory. However, recently there has been a growing bulk of research showing that in many languages there are Control verbs that delete the matrix subject under identity with an embedded subject. Such patterns are currently widely known under the label of Backward Control (for the discussion of this phenomenon see e.g. Polinsky 2001; Polinsky and Potsdam 2002). A typical example of a Backward Control structure was reported by Maria Polinsky for e.g. Tsez where it is found with two aspectual verbs (-oqa ‘begin’ and -iča ‘continue’). These two Tsez verbs allow both Backward Control (55) and Raising structure (56):

(55)  
\[
\Delta_i [\text{kid-bā} \quad \text{ziya} \quad \text{b-išr-a}] \quad \text{y-oq-si} \\
\text{girl.II.ABS} \quad \text{girl.II-ERG} \quad \text{cow.III.ABS} \quad \text{III.-feed-INF} \quad \text{II-begin-PAST.EVID} \\
\text{‘The girl began to feed the cow.’ (Polinsky and Potsdam 2002: 258, ex. 34).}
\]

(56)  
\[
\text{kid} \quad [\text{ti} \quad \text{ziya} \quad \text{b-išr-a}] \quad \text{y-oq-si} \\
\text{girl.II.ABS} \quad \text{cow.III.ABS} \quad \text{III.-feed-INF} \quad \text{II-begin-PAST.EVID} \\
\text{‘The girl began to feed the cow.’ (Polinsky and Potsdam 2002: 249, ex. 9).}
\]

The crucial properties of Backward Control structures in Tsez include the following: “1) both the aspectual verb (...) and the infinitive take the referent of the subject as their argument; 2) the aspectual verb assigns its subject the semantic role agent; 3) the subject of the aspectual verb and the subject of the infinitive are identical; 4) the subject of the aspectual verb cannot be expressed by a lexical NP and must be expressed by a null pronominal” (Polinsky 2001).

To first approximation, the Adyghe structures with verbs $\text{fjeZ'en}$ and $\text{jeZ'en}$ are similar to the Tsez Backward Control configurations just described. The crucial difference is that the speakers of Adyghe tend to reject structures with the subject overtly expressed in the matrix clause under the usual word order pattern (44-45); in other words, Adyghe appears to be more sensitive to word order than to semantic factors in the choice between the two available structures. In fact, this finding poses a certain problem for the Backward Control analysis of structures in (44). Indeed, it is expected that verbs of Control would impose selectional restrictions on their arguments; control structures are known to require animate and intentional subjects. Thus, in Tsez, the Backward Control structure can not be used with non-volitional subjects and with adverbs like ‘unintentionally’; such contexts require a Raising configuration (Polinsky & Potsdam 2002). However, in Adyghe these semantic restrictions are not necessarily met, and structures that are treated here under the label of

\footnote{It must be remembered that with embedded verbs of perception Adyghe allows yet another possibility, namely, the structure without Raising and with a zero expletive subject in the matrix clause.}
Backward Control are sometimes found in those contexts where the action in question is not volitionally instigated by the subject and even with inanimate subjects:

(57) \[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{sun-\textsc{erg}} & \text{illuminate-\textsc{conv}} & \text{begin-\textsc{past}}
\end{array}
\]

‘The sun began to shine’, lit.: ‘to illuminate (it)’.

(58) \[
\begin{array}{llllll}
\text{it-\textsc{erg}} & 1\text{sg.\textsc{pos.inal\,-heart}} & \text{prev-3sg.a\,-expel\,-\textsc{sup}} & 3\text{sg.a\,-\textsc{abs\,-begin}}
\end{array}
\]

Lit.: ‘It begins to expel my heart’ = ‘It begins to distress me.’

6.3. The verb \(\chi_{o,a}\)

The third intransitive inceptive matrix verb scrutinized here, namely, the verb \(\chi_{o,a}\), is different from those just discussed in many respects: as was shown above, this verb can be used in impersonal constructions. Besides, the verb \(\chi_{o,a}\) does not assign a semantic role of the Agent (Initiator of the event), which can be demonstrated by the ungrammaticality of its use in the imperative (59) and as the complement of a further superordinate matrix predicate with the meaning of intention (60):

(59) \[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{pisme} & \text{p-\textsc{tx}\,-\textsc{new}} & \chi_{o,a}
\end{array}
\]


(60) \[
\begin{array}{llllll}
\text{he.a\,-english\,-abs} & 1\text{sg.a\,-\textsc{abs\,-teach\,-\textsc{sup}}} & 3\text{sg.a\,-\textsc{abs\,-\textsc{sup}}} & \text{become\,-\textsc{sup}} & \text{want}
\end{array}
\]

Lit.: ‘He wants to turn out to teach me English.’ (Adopted from Testelec 2005).

The unusual properties of this verb have been recently discussed by Testelec (2005) who makes a number of important claims, mostly with respect to non-inceptive uses of this verb. The hypothesis of Testelec is that this verb allows the structure of Backward (or Downward) Raising: a construction that is similar to the usual Raising pattern with the difference being that here the overt copy of the raised subject is still expressed in the embedded, not the matrix clause. Testelec adduces a number of rather subtle arguments showing that there is a copy of the subject that interferes with its syntactic context in the upper clause although it is always silent and does not trigger agreement on the matrix verb. However, these findings pertain to non-inceptive uses of \(\chi_{o,a}\); as for the inceptive uses of this verb, it is not yet quite clear what is the structure of those constructions that are labelled here as personal and impersonal in particular whether Raising does take place and if yes, whether the overt copy is always expressed in the embedded clause. However, without going deep into endeavours to propose a conclusive formal analysis of the behaviour of the verb \(\chi_{o,a}\) it would be germane to notice that the contrast between personal and impersonal constructions, as represented in examples (39-42) seems to be quite iconically motivated in terms of the relation between their form and function. Indeed, the subject of the predication embedded under the verb \(\chi_{o,a}\) is co-indexed on that verb in case it is conceptualised as an instigator of the event (see 40 and 42) and not as a weak-willed plaything of abstract natural forces (see 39 and 41).

6.4. Intransitive matrix verbs: a synopsis

It appears that some of the Adyghe constructions discussed in this section show crucial properties of the phenomenon that is currently referred to as Backward Control, namely, in these constructions the overtly expressed subject belongs to the embedded clause and the matrix verb agrees with the silent subject of the matrix clause that is co-indexed with the embedded subject. As far as I can judge, this structure was never report for Adyghe before the expeditions organised by the RGGU in 2003 and henceforth.

There are some properties of the constructions at issue that are still somewhat problematic for the Backward Control analysis. Even leaving aside the problem of the polysemous and polystructural verb \(\chi_{o,a}\), one has to face the fact that the other two verbs discussed — and these are the candidates for the Backward Control configuration — do not show strict selectional restrictions that are typical of verbs of Control. Besides, judging from its behaviour in contexts without sentential dependents, one of the potential Backward Control verbs (\(\text{je}\z’\text{en}\)) seems to be one-place verb which is not typical for verbs participating in control structures. How these phenomena should be interpreted and what is a conclusive formal analysis of the structures at issue is a question that remains open for further
It might be suggested that until a final analytic decision is made it is better to stick to a more neutral non-interpretative term “Backward concord”, as used in e.g. Kozinsky et al. (1988: 701, fn. 11) when analysing the Chukchee data. My reluctance to give a conclusive formal decision is partially based on the scarcity of the available data and partially on the belief that any final analytical solution might be useful as a shortcut key to a set of empirical facts but not as an end in itself. In this respect it might be appropriate to notice that, however problematic for syntactic formalisms, the Backward Concord configurations observed so far seem very natural from an operational human-oriented point of view. The two basic behavioural strategies that emerge based on the analysis of the reviewed syntactic facts are: 1. co-index the subject on the matrix verb in case it is conceptualised as responsible for bringing about the event (the choice between personal and impersonal constructions) and 2. assign case to the subject according to the requirements of the verb that is linearly nearer than the other “concurring” verb.

7. The subject in transitive ‘begin’ constructions

We are now in a position to proceed to complex structures with transitive matrix verbs of ‘begin’ type. The case marking of the subject of such constructions can not be a relevant cue for the discussion of their structure if the embedded verb is also transitive: of course, the subject is marked ergatively:

(61) axe-me se s-a-s’e-new a-wobla-n
they-ERG I 1SG.ABS-3PL.A-lead-SUP 3PL.A-begin-PAST
‘They began to lead me.’

The situation is much more complex if the embedded verb is intransitive, that is, if there is a mismatch in transitivity between the embedded and the matrix verb. It appears that the two transitive matrix verbs discussed (wobla-n and jerez’en) do not behave uniformly in these contexts. Let’s us discuss constructions with these two verbs in order.

7.1. wobla-n + intransitive embedded verb

The usual pattern of case marking in such contexts is ergative:

(62) _off axe-me / _off axe-r k‘o-n-x-ew a-wobla-n
they.ERG / they.ABS weep-FUT2-3PL.ABS-CONV 3PL.A-begin-PAST
‘They began to weep.’

In other words, the usual configuration for this phase verb is a Forward Control structure where the subject is overtly present in the matrix clause and controls a silent copy in the embedded clause, as schematically represented in (63):

(63) axe-me [3SG.ABS] k‘o-n-x-ew a-wobla-n

However, there were two types of contexts, in which the absolutive marking was reported as possible with the matrix verb wobla-n. The first type of context in which many speakers allow, although finding it a somewhat unusual choice, the absolutive marking of subject, is the constructions expressing the meaning of inception of a serial event, as in (64); cf. with a non-serial ingressive construction with the same verb, where the absolutive marking of the subject is consistently rejected, as in (65):

(64) _off 1SG.ABS child-ERG child-Abs run-SUP 3SG.A-begin-PAST
‘This spring the child began to run (= learned to run, acquired the skill of running).’

(65) _off axe-m / _off axe-r k‘o-n-x-ew a-wobla-n
boy-ERG / boy.ABS run-FUT2-3PL.ABS-CONV 3PL.A-begin-PAST
‘They started running at two o’clock.’

The observed case marking pattern together with the results of word order tests similar to those reported for intransitive matrix verbs above indicate that when the verb wobla-n is used in a construction with the absolutely marked subject, this overt copy of subject belongs to the embedded clause and that here again we are dealing with a Backward Control (or Backward Concord) configuration. Thus, the structure of the second variant in (64) can be schematically represented as follows:

Curiously, in his analysis of similar phenomena in Lak, Kibrik refuses to propose a final formal analysis of the patterns observed, sticking to a rather matter-of-fact enumeration of their overt properties and indicating advantages and drawbacks of available analytical possibilities (Kibrik 2003: 472).
The second type of context that allows the use of a Backward Concord configuration is the case when the subject is inanimate; in these cases most speakers even prefer the absolutive marking of the subject under the unmarked word order pattern:

(67) icken-m / icken-r  q-e-epk-e-ew  icken-s
wind-ERG / wind-ABS  DIR-3SG.A-blow-CONV  3SG.A-begin-PAST

‘The wind started to blow’. (Registered in the following context: ‘This year the wind has for some reason started to blow not earlier than in October’, that is, ‘the windy season began not earlier than in October’.)

7.2. icken + intransitive embedded verb

The predominant judgment of speakers with respect to constructions where an intransitive verb is embedded under a matrix verb icken is that both absolutive and ergative marking is acceptable:

(68) icken / icken    q-e-epk-e-ew  sEmep-he-
he.ABS / he.ERG  gradually  be.ill-SUP  3SG.A-begin-PAST

‘He gradually began falling sick.’

Of course, the usual word order tests show that if marked absolutively, the subject belongs to the embedded clause. Thus, for instance, in the following example the absolutive marking is not possible, since it would have created a discontinuous embedded clause:

(69) icken / *icken    q-e-epk-e-ew  ra-Rek-’a-
they-ERG / *they-ABS  3PL.A-begin-PAST  [dance-FUT2-3PL.ABS-CONV]

‘They started to dance.’

As in several cases above, the structure of the two alternative constructions can be represented by the following bracketing schemata:

(70) icken    [icken / q-e-epk-e-ew]  ra-Rek-’a-
they-ERG  dance-FUT2-3PL.ABS-CONV  3PL.A-begin-PAST

‘They started to dance.’

(71) icken    [icken / q-e-epk-e-ew]  ra-Rek-’a-
[they-ABS  dance-FUT2-3PL.ABS-CONV]  3PL.A-begin-PAST

‘They started to dance.’

In other words, here, too, the absolutive marking of the subject is found in Backward Concord configuration. Now the question that arises is what determines the choice between a Forward and Backward configuration? As was mentioned above, it is not always easy to answer this question, since in most cases speakers find both structures possible. However, there are semantic contexts for which intriguing and revealing comments have been registered; these comments show that absolutive marking of the subject is associated with lower animacy and volitionality of its referent. Thus, for instance, with the embedded verb icken, literally ‘to stand up’, the ergative marking was definitely preferred for the animate subject:

(72) icken / *icken    q-e-epk-e-ew  ra-Rek-’a-
child-ERG / child-ABS  stand-SUP  3SG.A-begin-PAST

‘The child / he began to stand up’ (e.g. at a certain age).

The absolutive marking was preferred for an inanimate subject, in which case the verb acquires a slightly different meaning:

(73) icken / *icken  q-e-epk-e-ew  ra-Rek-’a-
tree-ABS  stand-SUP  3SG.A-begin-PAST

Lit.: ‘It / the tree began to stand up’ = ‘It / the tree took root.’

Sometimes there is an impression that it is the general intentionality of the action, rather than necessarily the volitional instigation of the action on the part of the subject, that favours the choice of the ergative marking, that is, of a Forward configuration. The following example can be illustrative in this respect.

(74) icken / *icken  q-e-epk-e-ew  ra-Rek-’a-
car-ABS / car-ERG  roll-down-SUP  3SG.A-begin-PAST

‘The car started rolling down the hill.’

When this sentence was translated in isolation, both the ergative and the absolutive marking of the subject were reported as possible. However, the absolutive marking was preferred when speakers

11 The subject must be marked ergative if the embedded verb is expressed by a masdar. The discussion in the main text is only relevant for those cases when the embedded verb is expressed by either a present tense converb or a second future tense converb (supine).
were provided with the following wider context: “The car was left on a hill. The driver forgot to use the handbrake so that when he made a few steps he saw that the car started rolling down the hill”. What is particularly interesting is that the ergative case marking was preferred for the alternative wider context: “The man got into the car, started the engine and the car began to slowly roll down the hill”. Evidently, in both cases the car is inanimate and can not be assigned the role of Agent. However, it looks as if the very fact that the action is controlled by an intentional human Agent favours the ergative case assignment. The subtle semantic contrasts of this kind are far from being fully understood yet and have to be unearthed in more detail in further research.

7.3. Transitive matrix verbs: a synopsis

At a certain angle, the structure of complex sentences with transitive matrix verbs is a mirror-image of the patterns found in the constructions with intransitive matrix verbs. In general, there are two alternative constructions that differ in the position of the overt copy of the subject and thus in the case marking on the subject. Unlike constructions with intransitive matrix verb, it is the structure with the absolutive marking of the subject that calls for a Backward Concord analysis. In many cases the contrast between forward and backward configurations seems to be a matter of a choice between two available models of syntactic construal. Curiously, it appears that there are some semantic nuances associated with these two patterns; in particular there were cases for which it was found that the choice of the absolutive marking of the subject (Backward Concord) correlates with the inanimacy / non-volitionality of the subject and with the serial type of inception (cf. Nedjalkov 2002 on the typology of inceptive meanings), for instance with the meaning of the acquisition of a habit, etc. The very presence of a semantic contrast, even if of a rather subtle one, between a Forward and Backward configuration is something that calls for a theoretical assessment. It is all the more challenging since there seem to be a certain conspiracy between the factors favouring Backward resp. Forward configurations; in particular both of the factors that were found to correlate with the choice of Backward configuration in the constructions with transitive matrix verbs, namely, the serial type of predicate and less volitional / animate / intentional subjects, are associated with the decrease of Transitivity in terms of (Hopper and Thompson 1980). This point will be briefly resumed in the last section.

8. Conclusions and suggestions

The overall distribution of case marking of the subject in complex ‘begin’ type sentences in Adyghe is represented in Table 2. If a certain combination of the three main parameters involved (the matrix verb, the transitivity of the embedded verb and the morphological form of the embedded verb) allows two possibilities of case marking of the subject, these two possibilities are both represented in the table; if the two variants are separated by a slash it means that they are generally equally acceptable, symbols ‘>>’ and ‘>’ iconically represent more and less pronounced preferability of the first variant over the second one. Those case marking variants that are associated with the argument structure of the embedded and not the matrix verb – that is, indicate that it is a Backward configuration – are highlighted. For the verb % PHEn the structures involved seem to be potential cases of Backward Raising, for other matrix verbs the relevant structures are cases of Backward Control.

Table 2. Marking of the subject in Adyghe complex inceptive sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>transitive matrix verb</th>
<th>intransitive matrix verb</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>wOblen</td>
<td>jeReZ'en</td>
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<tr>
<td>jeZ'en</td>
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<tr>
<td>HWEn</td>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-new</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg&gt;ABS</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg&gt;ABS</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ew</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg&gt;ABS</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg&gt;ABS</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“stem”</td>
<td>?(Erg)</td>
<td>?(Erg)</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg&gt;ABS</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Abs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masdar</td>
<td>?(Erg)</td>
<td>?(Erg)</td>
<td>Erg</td>
<td>Erg&gt;ABS</td>
<td>Abs</td>
<td>Abs</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be thus seen that the paper adds to the growing database of already documented backward configurations. There seems to be some interest in areal-typological assessment of this cross-linguistically unusual phenomenon, since it has been reported for several Caucasian (Daghestanian) languages, such as e.g. Tsez (Polinsky 2001), Bezhta (Kibrik 2003: 604), Tsaxur (Lyutikova and
Bonch-Osmolovskaya 1999: 499), possibly Lak (Kibrik 2003: 472). Besides, the lists of verbs allowing Backward Concord in various languages appear to be strikingly and not quite yet understandably homogenous, with ‘begin’ verbs as probably the likeliest entry in such a list. Unfortunately, there are many questions with respect to complex inceptive structures in Adyghe that remain unanswered in this paper. In particular, syntactic properties of overt and silent elements must be studied in more detail in order to provide a deeper and fuller structural analysis of the control and raising configurations in Adyghe, especially of the relatively exotic backward varieties thereof. There are, however, two more points pertaining to the constructions at issue that can be proposed here though yet in somewhat loose terms. Both of these points are related to the ‘human-oriented’, or ‘functional’, in the current parlance, explanation of the observed phenomena.

First, it was mentioned above that in some cases it seems easier to interpret attested patterns of case marking in terms of linear rather than hierarchical structure of the sentence. In particular, there is an impression that in many cases it is easier to formulate the rule of case assignment to the subject in terms of finding the linearly nearest verb, rather than the structurally nearest verb. This preliminary hypothesis is obliquely supported by the structure of the Adyghe’s nearest analogue to coordinate reduction as represented in (75-76):

(75)  
\[
\text{boy-ABS} \quad \text{came-and} \quad \text{cow-ABS} \quad 3SG.ABS-3SG.A-milk-PAST
\]
\[
\text{‘The boy came and milked the cow.’}
\]

(76)  
\[
\text{boy-ERG} \quad \text{cow-ABS} \quad 3SG.ABS-3SG.A-milk-and \quad 3SG.ABS-go-REV-PAST
\]
\[
\text{‘The boy milked the cow and went away.’}
\]

In sentences represented in (75-76) the shared subject of the two clauses is marked with the case assigned by the linearly nearest verb, which is intransitive in (75) and transitive in (76). This pattern is natural and expected for coordinate reduction. However, the crucial point about the Adyghe structures in (75-76) is that these constructions are not coordinate structures sensu stricto. All the verb forms in such chains, except for the last one, must be in a special dependent non-finite form. Thus, in these constructions the subject is also sensitive to linear rather than to structural proximity of the verb.

Second, summing up the data in Table 2 one might acknowledge that the choice between ergative and absolutive case assignment in Adyghe depends on a number of factors, the syntactic transitivity of the embedded and matrix verbs being the most important but not the only ones. It was shown above that there are particular situations where the choice of the ergative marking correlates

1. positively with the animacy of the subject (wohllen and jekceten);  
2. inversely with the serial type of inception (jekceten);  
3. positively with the choice of supine as sentential argument (as opposed to present converb).

Elsewhere I tried to demonstrate that the Adyghe supine designates the onset rather than nucleus in terms of (Freed 1979) and thus shows properties gravitating towards the Transitive pole of the corresponding Hopper and Thompson’s continuum (Say 2003);  
4. positively with the choice of the verb wohllen as opposed to other verbs discussed here. And again, it was shown elsewhere that among other inceptive verbs wohllen is most closely associated with the semantic s of the volitional instigation of the event (Say 2003).  
Summing up the points in 1-4 one can conclude that the ergative marking of subject in complex inceptive constructions is positively correlated with at least 4 of the parameters involved in the multidimensional property of Hopper and Thompson’s Transitivity (Kinesis, Aspect, Punctuality and Volitionality).

It thus emerges that case assignment in Adyghe inceptive verb complexes is dependent on a whole bunch of various factors, syntactic as well as lexical and semantic. On closer examination, the latter group of factors seems to show some relevant hierarchies compatible with the Transitivity hypothesis (Hopper and Thompson 1980) with ergative subject marking gravitating towards the Transitive pole of the corresponding continua.

Abbreviations

A Agentive (agreement series)  
ABS Absolutive (case marker and agreement series)  
AL Alienable  
BEN Benefactive  
COMIT Comitative  
CONV Converb  
DIR Directional
References


