Differential Place Marking and the reconstruction of the Proto-Nakh system of spatial cases

Within the East Caucasian language family, the Nakh branch (often assumed to be the first to have split off from the protolanguage) has often been described as typologically dissimilar to all other languages of the family (collectively known as Daghestanian) with respect to its marking of spatial relations. Where Daghestanian languages of various branches typically display two-slot systems, with one suffix marking location (in, on, under, through, at, near) and another marking direction (allative, ablative, essive) (Daniel & Ganenkov 2012), the Nakh languages have been analysed as having fewer, monomorphemic spatial cases and as making use of more postpositions (e.g. Nichols 2011).

Two recent advancements have shed new light on the Nakh data. Firstly, reanalysis of the Tsova-Tush data (the third Nakh language besides Chechen and Ingush) has allowed the recognition of a Daghestanian-style two-slot system of spatial cases, (Author, forthc.). See Table 1 for 12 of the 33 (combinations of) spatial cases in Tsova-Tush. Secondly, the Tsova-Tush data displays clear features of Differential Place Marking. The notion of Differential Place Marking identifies splits in the coding of locative, allative or ablative roles depending on subclasses of nouns, in particular place names (toponyms), inanimate common nouns and human nouns (Haspelmath 2019).

	Goal	Location	Source	Compatible nouns
'near, at'	*-go*	*-go-ħ*	*-go-ren*	animates
'among, in'	*-lo*	*-lo-ħ*	*-lo-ren*	liquids, masses, collections
'in'	*-i*	*-i-ħ*	*-i-ren*	rooms, buildings, containers, place names
Default	*-Ø*	*-ħ*	*-ren*	other

Table 1: Tsova-Tush spatial cases (excerpt)

Based on these findings, two questions arise:

- Should a two-slot system be reconstructed for Proto-Nakh, and if so, are the morphemes cognate with those found in Daghestanian languages?
- Is Differential Place Marking an innovation in Tsova-Tush, or is it inherited from Proto-Nakh?

This paper has three goals. (1) It puts the Tsova-Tush data in typological and areal perspective, and concludes that it shows clear parallels with the Daghestanian-style system, and furthermore that it obeys the typological universals concerning Differential Place Marking (i.e. there is less phonetic material in spatial suffixes on place names compared to other nouns, there is more phonetic material in spatial suffixes on animate nouns, and more phonetic material in non-spatial cases on place names. (2) It re-evaluates the Chechen and Ingush data, concluding that they show clear traces of a former two-slot system with many cognate morphemes (see Chechen comparative case *-l,* allative case *-ie/-ga/-a*); (3) It reconstructs the spatial case system for Proto-Nakh, with clear cognates to Daghestanian languages (as reconstructed by Alekseev (1997)), but concludes that the Differential Place Marking features of Tsova-Tush are secondary.

By answering the above questions, this paper aims to be an important case-study in (1) the grammaticalisation of locative markers; (2) the history and internal branching of the East Caucasian family, where often cognate sets of morphemes are established (e.g. Desheriev 1963:436), but attempts at reconstruction are few and far between; and (3) the recent topic of Differential Place Marking in Caucasian languages, where related phenomena such as Differential Subject Marking have been observed previously (see Arkadiev 2017).

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