

The Nature of the Word

There is a long history within linguistics of struggling to define the notion word and to identify universal characteristics of the word. Among the characteristics that have been discussed in recent linguistic literature are those listed below.

- *The integrity of the word.* The word cannot be split by other units.
- *Phonology-free syntax.* The syntax cannot make reference to (or “see into”) the phonological structure of the word.
- *Anaphoric islandhood.* Words are separated from surrounding material for purposes of coreferentiality.
- *Phrasal recursivity.* Words are built on a base of words and bound morphemes, not on phrases.

Experience with languages of two families spoken in the Caucasus, the Kartvelian language family and the North East Caucasian languages, suggests that some of these claims about the nature of the word are not universally true. More careful research confirms that some of these languages have true counterexamples to some of these proposed universals.

In Udi, a language of the Nakh-Daghestanian family, clitics may be positioned between the morphemes of complex verbstems and inside monomorphemic verbstems. On the basis of accepted tests for wordhood, it is shown that complex verbstems are single words, not phrases. On the basis of criteria developed by Zwicky and Pullum (1983), it is shown that the clitics of Udi are true clitics. Further, it is shown that phonological phenomena do not provide an alternative basis for positioning these clitics. This is the first documented example of true endoclitics, clitics that occur inside words. This is important because endoclitics show a new kind of complexity in the word and demand explanation in terms of origins and human cognitive capacity to deal with this complexity. The project shows that although true endoclitics have not been previously documented, and although the set of conditions is highly unusual, both can be accounted for under an existing theory, Optimality Theory. This contributes to an understanding of the cognitive mechanisms that enable humans to use such a complex system. The project explains most aspects of the origins of this complex system, out of a much simpler system.

Georgian (Kartvelian) poses several challenges to current theories of word structure. For example, although it is generally held that words do not contain conjunctions, units that appear to be words routinely do contain *da* ‘and’ in Georgian, such as *oc-da-or-i* [20-and-2-NOM] ‘twenty-two’. Though many believe that in general phrases cannot form the basis of words, in Georgian units that have the characteristics of words can routinely be based on postpositional phrases, such as *umlaut-amde-l-i* [umlaut-until-ADJ-NOM] ‘before umlaut (ADJ)’, where the suffix *-(e)l* forms an adjective, from *umlaut-amde* ‘until umlaut’, headed by *-amde* ‘until’, which appears to be a postposition, not a case suffix. While it is generally accepted that words are anaphoric islands, in Georgian units such as *u-šen-o* ‘*you-less’ are routine, where *šen* ‘you (SG)’ is a fully referential pronoun, and *u--o* is a circumfix (prefix-suffix combination).

This project is intended as a contribution to the description of synchronic and diachronic universals of language and its significance is not limited to the analysis and explanation of phenomena particular to Georgian or any other language.

National Science Foundation, SBR-9710085, "The Origins of Udi Syntax", 1997-2000, Principal Investigator.

National Science Foundation, BCS-0091691, "Synchrony and Diachrony of the Word in Georgian", 2001-2003, Principal Investigator.

Selected publications from this project:

Where in the Word is the Udi Clitic? *Language* 76: 593-616. 2000.

Endoclititics and the Origins of Udi Morphosyntax. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2002, pp. xvi, 299.

Origins of Apparent Violations of the "No Phrase" Constraint in Modern Georgian.

Linguistic Discovery. 2002. [on-line journal] <http://linguistic-discovery.dartmouth.edu/WebObjects/Linguistics.woa/1/page/article/141.html> Once

Revisiting Anaphoric Islands. *Language* 82: 114-130. 2006.

In Other Words: External Modifiers in Georgian. *Morphology* (new journal, successor to *Yearbook of Morphology*) 16: 205-229. 2007.

On the Order of Morphemes in Georgian Verbs and Substantives. *Guram K'art'ozia* 75, ed. By Alexandre K'art'ozia, 399-415. [Kartvelological Library, 11.] Tbilisi. (Publisher not listed.) 2009.