

Finiteness in Hinuq – Converbs, Participles and Other Beasts

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Hinuq is the smallest of the five Tsezic languages spoken in western Daghestan (Russia) in the Caucasus, by about 600 speakers. It belongs to the Avar–Ando–Tsezic subbranch of the Nakh–Daghestanian language family. Typologically Hinuq is overwhelmingly concatenative and strongly suffixing. The language is Ergative case-marking. The most frequent word order is SOV.

Hinuq has a rich system of verbal forms. In independent main clauses there are five analytic TAM forms, 22 periphrastic TAM forms, and two heterogeneous TAM forms that cannot be attributed clearly to one of these two groups. In dependent clauses there are about twenty forms that serve adverbial function, attributive function (i.e. headed and headless relative clauses) or complement function. To these forms belongs endings that are traditionally called participles, adverbial participles (=converbs), infinitive and masdar.

There is no one-to-one match between verb suffixes/verb forms and clause types, i.e. the majority of the verb forms occur in more than one clause type. For example, the suffix *-(y)o/-ho* can be used on its own for a simple present tense meaning (1a). It can be used together with the copula to yield an explicitly present progressive that refers to ongoing situations (1b). It occurs in complement clauses (1c), in adverbial clauses (1d) and together with the Present Participle of the verb ‘be’ in relative clauses (1e).

(1) *me se r-u-ho?*

a. you.SG.ERG what V-do-PRS
‘What are you doing?’

b. *hibaytu-λ'o λ'ere ħalt'ezi Ø-iq-o goł hawsaɫat*
that-SR on work I-become-PRS be.PRS now
‘Currently I (masc.) am working on that.’

c. *hayto-z toq-o [iyo-y ac y-ayi-yo]*
he.OBL-DAT hear-PRS mother-ERG door IV-open-PRS
‘He hears that mother opens the door.’

d. *xexbe r-ah-yλ'o [hagbe r-išer-ho]*
children NPL-yell-SIM these NPL-feed-PRS

λexwe-s-λen eλi-yo baru-y
 remain-WPST-QUOT say-PRS wife-ERG
 ‘When the children cried, I remained feeding them, says the wife.’

e. *b-aq’-o hayto-de-r hibaw [haʔo-y kiki-yo*
 III-come-PRS he.OBL-ALOC-LAT this he.OBL-ERG feed-PRS

goʔaʃ coy
 be.PTCP eagle(III)
 ‘To him comes the eagle that he had fed.’

The question is now how the verb forms in (1a–1e) can be analyzed. For example, makes it sense to ask whether the suffix *-(y)o/-ho* represents a finite or a nonfinite ending?

In my talk I want to analyze Hinuq verb forms and clause types with respect to categories and phenomena that have been associated with finiteness, e.g. tense marking and subject agreement on verbs, the possibility of having an overt subject, case marking of arguments, etc. Some of these criteria (e.g. tense and agreement morphology) are traditionally linked to finiteness. Others point to non-finiteness, e.g. marking of arguments with the Genitive case. I will explore which of the criteria actually apply to Hinuq and whether they form a cluster that could be subsumed under the notion of finiteness. Is finiteness a notion that helps us to understand better how certain verb forms and clause types pattern in Hinuq?