

# Case, causation and mood in Chechen

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## 1. Introduction

These are some preliminary notes on verbs and the cases in which their arguments can occur. Of particular interest might be the overview given in Table 1.

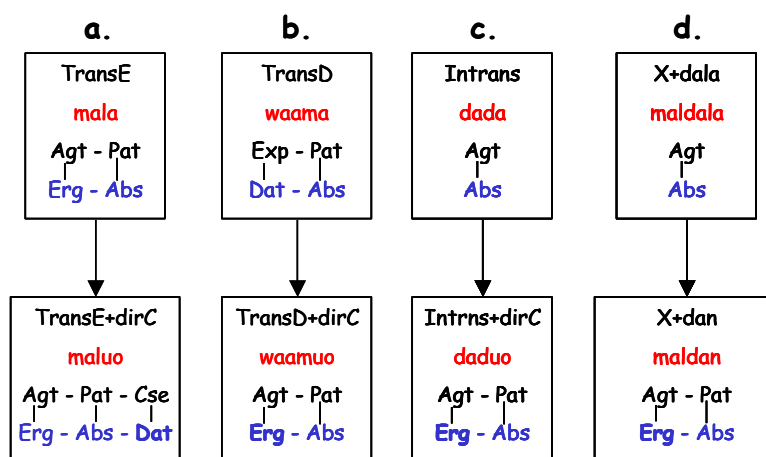
First some general words about cases in Chechen. While the object always occurs in the absolutive case, the subject case differs quite a bit. The subject of the intransitive verb – be it unergative or unaccusative – always is in the absolutive case. The subject of the transitive verb generally is in the ergative case. But for sensory verbs (see, know, find out, sense, hear etc) the subject is not an agent but an experiencer, and occurs in the dative case. Genitive case subjects occur in rare occasions, and I will leave them out of this discussion here for the moment.

In some occasions, as will be shown further down this memo, the subject can occur in the allative case. This is the result of adding a causative suffix to the verb or of adding a potential mood suffix.

## 2. Direct causative

Chechen has a direct causative suffix *-uo* (for the infinitive). This suffix can be attached to both transitive as well as intransitive verbs, as shown in Figure 1. The meaning of the suffix depends on where it is attached to – sometimes it simply expresses the addition of an agent. Sometimes it has more to do with direct causation.

Figure 1 Case changes due to direct causative suffix



The simplest usage of the direct causative is in (c), where the intransitive verb *dada* 'run/flee' becomes transitive *daduo* 'steal' (lt: cause to run/flee). Sometimes there is a change in meaning, like here. Sometimes there isn't.

Situation (d) is like (c) in that an intransitive verb is made transitive. In this situation the change is not so much from plain verb to suffixed verb, but from one suffix to another suffix (from the intransitive or reflexive *-dala* suffix to the transitive suffix *-dan*).

Situation (b) describes how a sensory verb like *waama* 'learn' becomes more transitive *waamuo* 'teach, learn'. In this situation the case of the subject changes from dative to ergative.

Situation (a) shows the influence of the direct causative suffix on a "core" verb – the transitive verb *mala* 'drink' that normally has an ergative agent. By adding the direct causative suffix one more role is added: a causee. The causee argument gets the dative case. In this situation the direct causative expresses the fact that the agent is quite directly involved in the action going on. So for *maluo* it is the agent who physically makes a horse (the causee) drink water (the patient) for instance. An example of the transitive verb *da'a* with the direct causative suffix is given in (1).

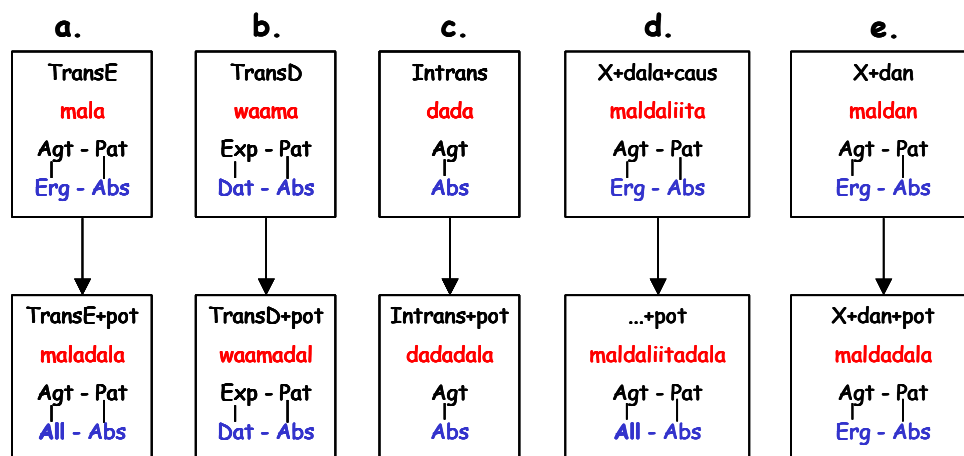
- (1) *Naanas beerana xudar da'ado.*  
 mother-ERG child-DAT porridge-Abs D-eat-DIR.CAUS-D-PRS  
 'Mother feeds her child porridge.'  
 (Maciev 1961:127)

The only core verbs that actually adhere to the scheme in situation (a) are *mala* 'to drink' and *da'a* 'to eat'. There are several other core verbs that have a variant with the *-uo* suffix, but in those situations the meaning of the verb changes so completely, that there is no relationship between the verb on *-a* and the verb on *-uo*. For instance the verb *laara* 'respect' is transitive, and when it gets the *-uo* suffix, the derivation *laaruo* means something totally different: 'manage'.

### 3. Potential mood

In Chechen the potential mood can in many cases be indicated using the suffix *-dala* (in the infinitive for d-class verbs). Sometimes the mood has to be indicated by other means. Examples of the usage of this suffix to plain verbs are shown in Figure 2. In general the potential mood suffix does not add any roles to the verb – but it sometimes has influence on the subject case.

Figure 2 Case changes due to potential mood suffix



As can be seen from Figure 2, adding the potential mood suffix to the sensory verb *waama* 'to learn' in (b) and the intransitive verb *dada* 'to run' in (c) doesn't cause any changes in the cases of the arguments.

The picture is different for the transitive verb *mala* 'to drink something' in (a) and for the causativized version of the intransitive verb *maldaliita* 'to make someone become weak' in (d). For these verbs the agent case changes from ergative to allative.

Finally there is the situation in (e), where the transitive verb *maldan* 'to weaken someone/something' gets the potential mood suffix. As far as cases is concerned nothing changes. The agent keeps its ergative case.

### 4. Indirect causative

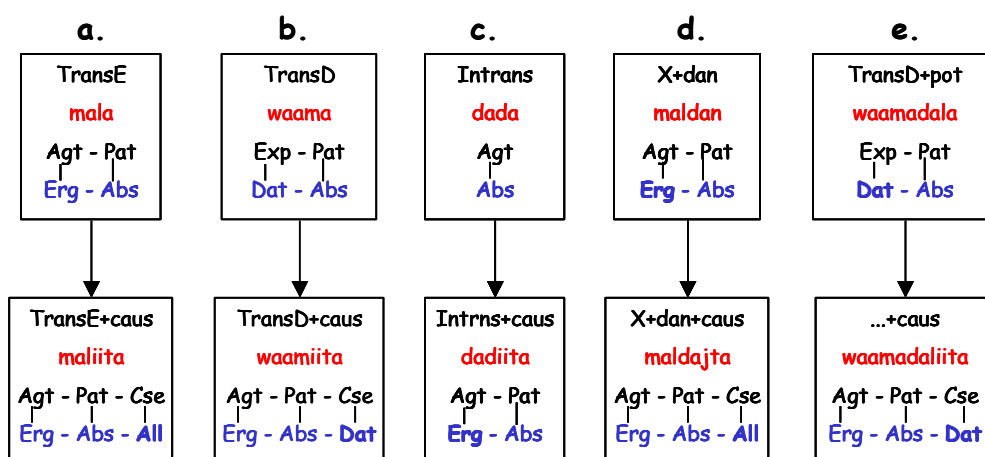
For the indirect causative Chechen uses the suffix *-iita* (in the infinitive). The suffix can be attached to almost all kinds of verbs. Sometimes it can even be attached twice<sup>1</sup>. Examples of the usage of this suffix to plain verbs are shown in Figure 3.

<sup>1</sup> The verb *gan* 'to see' becomes *gajta* 'to show', and can then become *gajtiita* 'to cause to show'.

Prototypical of the indirect causative suffix is the addition of a causee in the allative case for transitive verbs that normally take a subject in the ergative, as for the verb *mala* 'to drink' in (a). The indirect causative creates more distance between the agent (which is the causer) and the causee. In the situation of *maliita* 'cause to drink' it is the agent that provides the possibility for the causee to do the drinking (by himself). This would be a situation where someone gets water from the tap for someone else to be drunken.

The picture looks different for transitive sensory verbs as in (b). The indirect causative adds an agent role, which is taken up by an ergative case subject. Then the causee is still seen as experiencer apparently, and remains in the dative case. In the situation of *waamiita* it is the agent that provides the means for the causee to learn something. Nothing changes in this picture when the potential mood suffix *-dala* is added to *waama* in situation (e). As in (b), addition of the indirect causative provides a causee argument that is expressed in the dative case.

Figure 3 Case changes due to indirect causative suffix



Intransitive verbs as the verb *dada* 'to run' in (c) get an agent-causer role due to the addition of the indirect causative suffix. This role is expressed in the ergative case. Sometimes there is a slight change of meaning. E.g. the verb *daan* 'to come' becomes *da'iita* 'to send', i.e. to cause to come.

Now look at situation (d), at the verb *maldan* 'to weaken something/someone'. When the indirect causative suffix is added a causee comes into the picture getting the allative case as in (a).

## 5. Examples

This section contains several example sentences. For abbreviations used see section 9.

The simplest case is the subject of the intransitive verb. That is always absolutive – no matter whether the verb is unaccusative as in (2) or unergative as in (3).

- (2) Ysh iiigira cynan bwaergiex.  
 3P-ABS fall-PSTR 3S-GEN eye-PL-MAT  
 They fell from his eyes?  
 Baduev 1991

- (3) Shi mutawielam jystaxveelira.  
 two pupil-ABS aside-V-go-PSTR  
 The two medres-pupils stepped aside.  
 Baduev 1991

Even when the mood changes to the potential, the subject case remains absolutive, as in (4).

- (4) Ysh dwaacax baxalo.  
 3P-ABS away NEG B-go-POT-PRS  
 They are not able to go away.  
 che-para-34-00697:13

The verb *iesha* normally means 'to be defeated', where the subject is in the absolutive. Then in the direct causative *ieshuo* becomes 'to defeat someone', which is a normal kind of transitive construction

(ergative subject, absolutive object). Adding the indirect causative to it gets *ieshadajta*, which means 'cause someone to defeat someone', as in (5).

- (5) **Daala ieshadajtira israa'ilxuoshka i eskar.**  
 God-ERG defeat-DIR-CAUS-PSTR Israelite-PL-ALL that army-ABS  
 God made the Israelites defeat that army.  
 Jdg 20:35

On the same line, take a look at the unergative verb *saca* 'to stop'. Normally it has an absolutive case subject, and is intransitive. It is made transitive with the suffix *-uo*. So the form *sacuo* means 'to stop someone'. Then when this form is causativized with the suffix *-jta* it becomes *sacadajta* 'to cause someone to stop someone'. An example of the result is given in (6). Now the agents of the work (three of the shepherds) have become the causee, and are in the allative case. The causer, which is also the agent of the verb form as it is now, is in the ergative and the work itself in the absolutive.

- (6) **Zhawujx qa'anga buolx sacabajtira as cwana battahw.**  
 shepherd-PL-MAT three-ALL work-ABS stop-AGT-CAUS-PSTR 1S-ERG one-OBL month-LOC  
 In one month I caused three of the shepherds to stop their work.  
 Zec 11:8

The unergative verb *tila* normally means 'to stray', where the subject is in the absolutive. Then in the potential mood it becomes *tiladala* 'to be able to stray'. In this situation the subject is still in the absolutive, and there is no object. When an agent enters the scene, we get *tiladaliita* 'to be able to let someone stray', as in (7). Now the subject is ergative, and the object absolutive.

- (7) **Ocu xarc hwiexamasha vaj tiladolyytu.**  
 these-OBL false teaching-PL-ERG 1P.INC-ABS stray-POT-CAUS-PRS  
 These false teachings make us stray.  
 Eph 4:14

Transitive verbs differ with respect to the subject case they take. Most verbs have the subject in the ergative case, as in (8).

- (8) **Pet'amata lyra muohw hwaeqira.**  
 Petamat-ERG fierce shout-ABS strike-PSTR  
 Petamat let a fierce cry escape.  
 Baduev 1991

When such a "core" verb is put into the potential mood, then the subject case changes to the allative, as in (9).

- (9) **Caerga chuorpa ca ja'ajelira.**  
 3P-ALL stew-ABS NEG J-eat-J-POT-PSTR  
 They could not eat the stew.  
 2ki 4:40

But there are other verbs – like 'to see', 'to know', 'to hear' – that take the subject in the dative case, as in (10).

- (10) **Qunna shi zuda gira.**  
 this-DAT two woman-ABS see-PSTR  
 He saw two women.  
 Baduev 1991

When these kinds of verbs are put in the potential mood, nothing really changes, as in (11).

- (11) **Daala booxurg ca tuosalo stagana.**  
 God-ERG say-NML-ABS NEG sense-POT-PRS person-DAT  
 A person is not able to sense what God says.  
 Job 33:14

A few verbs take the subject in the genitive. For example the idea of "to have" is expressed in Chechen by taking the verb "to be" and having the subject in the genitive, as in (12).

- (12) **Amma cunax txan duosh-m ca xilira.**  
 But 3S-MAT 1P.EXC-GEN word-ABS-M NEG be-PSTR  
 But we did not have a word (=promise) from him.

Then there are a handful of verbs taking the subject in the genitive, like for instance "need", which is one of the meanings of the root *dieza*, as in (13).

- (13) Txan c'iinan twamdanash gulban bieza.  
1P.EXC-GEN house-GEN leader-PL-ABS gather-INF B-need-PRS  
We have to gather the leaders of the house.  
Baduev 1991

An example of a transitive verb with the potential mood suffix and a goal.

- (14) Caerga t'ulgie aalalur du i dieshnash.  
3P-ALL stone-ALL say-POT D-PRS that word-PL-ABS  
They are able to speak these words to a stone.  
Jer 2:27

The verb "to reach" is a particular kind of verb, behaving in a slightly non-standard way.

- (15) Cuo [qechu naaxa q'ahwiegnarg] caarna dwaqaachiitira.  
3S-ERG other-OBL people-ERG toil-PSTN-NML-ABS 3P-DAT away-reach-CAUS-PSTR  
He made what other people had toiled for reach them.  
Psa 104:44

- (16) As qaachadojtur du ysh ocu mettigie.  
1S-ERG reach-DIR-CAUS-FUT D-PRS 3P-ABS this-OBL place-ALL  
I will make them reach that place.  
Psa 104:44

## 6. Overview

In Table 1 there is an overview of different verb types, and for each verb type there is a line for the possible combinations of mood and causative types. Then the line indicates what the case is of arguments in agent role, patient role etc.

Table 1 Case, role and verb type

#	Verb type	Example	Gloss	Mood	Causation	Agent causer	Patient	Causee	Goal	Ben	Exp
1	unaccusative	duoxa	perish	plain		abs					
2		duoxadala		potential		abs					
3		duoxuo	destroy	plain	direct	erg	abs				
4		duoxiita		plain	indirect	erg	abs		(all)		
5		duoxadajta		plain	direct+ind.	erg	abs	all			
6	unergative	qojqu	call	plain		abs			(all)		
7		tuoxadala	hit	potential		abs					
8		tuoxadaliita		potential	indirect	erg	abs				
9		qajqiita	call	plain	indirect	erg	abs		(all)		
10		qajqadajta		plain	direct+ind.	erg	abs	all			
11	Transitive core verbs	mala	drink	plain		erg	abs				
12		maladala		potential		all	abs		(all)		
13		maluo		plain	direct	erg	abs	dat			
14		maliita		plain	indirect	erg	abs	all			
15		maladajta		plain	direct+ind.	??	??	??			
16	Transitive sensory verbs	gira	see	plain		dat	abs				
17		tuosadelira	sense	potential		dat	abs				
18		xietadaliita	reckon	potential	indirect	erg	abs	dat			
19		xietiita		plain	indirect	erg	abs	dat			
20	Transitive selected verbs	dieza	need	plain		gen	abs				
21		??		potential		??	??	??			
22	The verb "reach"	qoochu	reach	plain		abs			dat		
23		qaachalur		potential		abs			all		
24		qoochyytu		plain	indirect	erg	abs		dat		
25		qaachado		plain	direct	erg	abs		all		
26		qaachadojtu		plain	direct+ind.	erg	abs		all		
27	Noun + "dan"	buolx ban	work	plain		erg	abs			(dat)	
28		buolx babala		potential		all	abs			(dat)	
29	Adj/Adv + "dan"	xazdan	beautify	transitive		erg	abs			(dat)	
30		xazdala		intransitive		abs					(dat)
31		dicdaliita	forget	transitive	indirect	erg	abs				
32		dicdajta		intransitive	indirect	erg	abs	all			

## 7. Optimality theory

Case within optimality theory can be dealt with along the lines sketched by Woolford (2003). This means that a hierarchy of cases is acknowledged, such as shown in (i).

- (i) Case markedness hierarchy:  
allative > ergative > dative > accusative > nominative

Furthermore faithfulness constraints are recognized:

- (ii) Case faithfulness constraints:  
 MAX(allative) >> MAX(erg) >> MAX(dat) >> MAX(acc)

Finally the PUREDOMAIN constraint is operative in Chechen too. Taken together I suggest a general order for Chechen as follows:

- (iii) Chechen case constraints ranking:  
 MAX(allative) >> \*allative >> MAX(erg) >> \*ergative >> MAX(dat) >> \*dative >>  
 \*accusative >> PUREDOMAIN >> MAX(acc)

Take a normal ergative-verb sentence as in (17). The tableau for this example looks as in Table 2. The battle is between (a) and (b). But the last one wins, because (a) has one higher ranked violation of \*accusative.

- (17) C'aruo ysh baaguosh bu.  
 fire-ERG 3P-ABS B-burn-TRANS-PTC B-PRS  
 'The fire is burning them.'

Table 2 Ergative verb sentence

Input: [vP S <sub>erg</sub> [vP DO <sub>nom</sub> V <sup>0</sup> ] v <sup>0</sup> ]	MAX(erg)	*erg	*acc	PUREDOMAIN	MAX(acc)
a. [IP S <sub>erg</sub> [vP DO <sub>acc</sub> V] I <sup>0</sup> ]		*	*!		
b. [IP S <sub>erg</sub> [vP DO <sub>nom</sub> V] I <sup>0</sup> ]		*		*	*
c. [IP S <sub>nom</sub> [vP DO <sub>nom</sub> V] I <sup>0</sup> ]	*!				*
d. [IP S <sub>nom</sub> [vP DO <sub>acc</sub> V] I <sup>0</sup> ]	*!		*		

The sentence above has a counterpart, as shown in (18). In this situation the subject is in the nominative (or: absolutive) case. On top of that agreement is with the subject and not with the object. I am suggesting that this situation differs from the one in (17) by an aspectual difference. While the situation in (17) has no particular aspect selected, the example in (18) is in the durative aspect (Nichols 1994b:105). For that reason I am arguing for a context sensitive markedness constraint \*ergative(durative). That is to say: the subject should not have ergative case in the context of a durative aspect. The tableau is shown in Table 3. Since \*ergative(durative) outranks all other constraints, the battle now is between (c) and (d). Again the candidate prevails where there is no violation of the \*accusative constraint.

- (18) C'e ysh baaguosh ju.  
 fire-ABS 3P-ABS B-burn-TRANS-PTC J-PRS  
 'The fire is burning them.'

Table 3 Ergative verb sentence in durative aspect

Input: [vP S <sub>erg</sub> [vP DO <sub>nom</sub> V <sup>0</sup> ] v <sup>0</sup> ]	*erg(dur)	MAX(erg)	*erg	*acc	PUREDOMAIN	MAX(acc)
a. [IP S <sub>erg</sub> [vP DO <sub>acc</sub> V] I <sup>0</sup> ]	*!		*	*!		
b. [IP S <sub>erg</sub> [vP DO <sub>nom</sub> V] I <sup>0</sup> ]	*!		*		*	*
c. [IP S <sub>nom</sub> [vP DO <sub>nom</sub> V] I <sup>0</sup> ]		*				*
d. [IP S <sub>nom</sub> [vP DO <sub>acc</sub> V] I <sup>0</sup> ]		*		*!		

Okay, but why would it never be possible to have an ergative case subject in the following situation:

- verb = Noun + *dan*
- present compound tense

The answer should be that the present compound tense *always* conveys durative aspect?

OR (21/4): N+*dan* always is only one VP or vP (cannot contain *external* argument), while *ysh+baaguosh* is vP+VP (contains external argument).

And why would it never be possible to have a *nominative* case subject in the the following situation:

- present habitual tense

This may be self-evident: the aspect is habitual, so can never be durative.

Consider the following table with examples

#	Transitive verb	#	Noun + <i>dan</i>	Tense	Agreement
1-a	<i>C'e ysh baaguosh ju</i>	2-a	<i>Muusa buolx biesh vu</i>	pres	double
1-b	<i>C'aruo ysh baaguosh bu</i>	2-b	* <i>Muusas buolx biesh bu</i>	pres	single
1-c	* <i>C'e ysh baaguor ju</i>	2-c	* <i>Muusa buolx biir vu</i>	fut	double
1-d	<i>C'aruo ysh baaguor bu</i>	2-d	<i>Muusas buolx biir bu</i>	fut	single

Conclusions:

- In future tense there can only be one IP licensing a nominative argument (the direct object) and licensing agreement with this nominative case argument.
- In present continuous tense the situation with one IP is only possible with a transitive verb (consisting of vP+VP). It is not possible when there is only one vP.
- In present continuous tense there can be double agreement (implying two different IP's)

## 8. References

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## 9. Abbreviations

ABS	Absolutive case
DAT	Dative case
ERG	Ergative case
GEN	Genitive case
IMPF	Imperfective past tense
J,B,D,V	Class marking prefixes
NML	Nominalizer
OBL	Oblique case (any non-absolutive one)
PL	plural
PRS	present tense
PSTN	past tense using suffix <i>-ina</i>
PSTR	past tense using suffix <i>-ira</i>
PTC	present tense participle
REL	relativizer



