Animacy agreement in non-verbal predication in Botlikh

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Introduction

Botlikh (< Andic < East Caucasian) has two independent but intersecting gender agreement systems:

- ▶ A. Inherited noun class system
- ▶ B. Innovative animacy system

Introduction

(1) iš:i   č'ːidu-ku haʁ-a   č'ːard-u
     we.EXCL far-EL   see-AOR run-CVB
     b-eƛ-a=ɬa-b   ƛ'ank'ar
     N-go-PROG.CVB=AN.ATTR-N hare[N/AN]
     'We saw a hare running away from afar.'

A. Inherited noun class system

SG	M	F	N	
	w	j	b	

PL	AN			INAN
	r-/-l	r-/-l	r-/-l	b

Botlikh

PL	HPL	NPL
	b	r

Godoberi

Agreement with nominal head (attributive forms, genitive 1) or
absolutive argument (verbs, postpositions, adverbs).

A. Inherited noun class system

Some lexemes have variable agreement depending on
the parameters of their actual referent:

(2) gamušː=cːu-j   adam
     buffalo=SIM.ATTR-F person[M/F]
     'a woman who looks like a buffalo'

B. Innovative animacy marking system

	AN	INAN
Negative copulas	ɫi-čʼi	χu-čʼi
Interrogative particles		
Polar	=ɫi.ma	=χu.ma
Content	=ɫi.la	=χu.la
Attributive clitics	=ɫa-ᴄᴍ	=χo-ᴄᴍ
Participles		
Present	-ɫa-ᴄᴍ	-χa-ᴄᴍ
Future	-ɫa-ᴄᴍ	-χo-ᴄᴍ
Ordinal numerals	-ɫa-ᴄᴍ	-χo-ᴄᴍ

Same agreement principles: nominal head / ABS argument.

Animacy agreement

▶ Animacy as a distinct agreement parameter in the inherited noun class system is unique to Botlikh within the family

▶ The innovative system is a typological anomaly in general: it is probably < 1000 years old, rather than several millennia, cf. Dahl (2004: 112, 200); and the markers are most likely verbal in origin, rather than nominal, cf. Audring (2016)

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▶ Are these systems diachronically connected to each other?

Animacy agreement

► Dedicated animacy markers are often not obligatory in their respective domains

► Animacy shows inconsistent agreement patterns across speakers for both systems

► Could be due to lesser grammaticalization or ambiguity of referents / a combination of both

► Humans > animals > insects

(Naccarato & Verhees 2021)

Copula constructions

Defective copula for general present, existential verb 'be' in other tenses.

	Affirmative	Negative
General present	ida	łič'i, χuč'i, guč'i
Aorist	b-uk'-a	b-uk'-i-č'a

Sources

▶ Gudava (1967) describes the three negative copulas for general present with the corresponding agreement values (animate, inanimate, neutral)

▶ Few examples especially of *χučʼi* in the texts recorded by Gudava (1962)

▶ No examples of the marked copulas in the Botlikh-Russian dictionaries (Alekseev & Azaev 2019, Saidova & Abusov 2012)

Elicitation

▶ Qualitative in-person elicitation with 4 speakers: 2 males + 2 females, ages 50–70+ (Verhees 2021)

▶ Translation of different copula constructions from Russian to Botlikh and discussion of the examples

▶ *gučʼi* was used by default and judged appropriate in every context

▶ *łičʼi* was preferred for humans and allowed with animals

▶ Some suggested it was more appropriate for +plural animates +female

Elicitation

- ▶ *χučʼi* was generally dispreferred and rarely allowed
- ▶ Additional discussion online with a larger group of speakers revealed that *χučʼi* is socially marked
- ▶ Some speakers do not see it as a proper word in Botlikh, and associate it with dialectal or L2 speech
- ▶ Others view it as a variant of *gučʼi* used in some families or clans
- ▶ So far I have not come across anyone who claimed the use of *χučʼi*

Survey

Online survey where speakers were asked to judge 89 simple sentences consisting of a subject and a negative copula.

	1	2	3	4	5	
неправильно	○	○	○	○	○	отлично

In Botlikh this forms a felicitous sentence negating the presence of a referent: 'X is not [here]' or 'There is no X [here]'.

Survey

stimulus	singular gender	animate	human
book	n	no	no
cockroach	n	yes	no
butterfly	n	yes	no
cat	n	yes	no
cow	n	yes	no
I	m/f	yes	yes
brother	m	yes	yes
sister	f	yes	yes
person	m/f	yes	yes
family	n	yes	yes

Survey

- ▶ 10 stimuli * 2 number distinctions in combination with all three general present copulas = 60
- ▶ Same stimuli in plural in combination with the animate plural and inanimate plural forms of the past tense negative copula = 20
- ▶ 9 additional checks:
  - ▶ 7 singular nominals (from the set of 10) in combination with the appropriate form of the past tense negative copula
  - ▶ a human group noun in singular combined with *b-uk'ič'a* (neuter singular) and *r-uk'ič'a* (animate plural)
- ▶ Randomized order, no fillers

Respondents

Skewed in favor of women and adults who are neither young nor old (no respondents older than 55, and few younger than 26).[1]

Age	Female	Male	Total
16-25	3	2	5
26-35	4	4	8
36-45	5	0	5
46-55	5	1	6
Total	17	7	24

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[1]No strong interspeaker variation.

Results

Overall

Animacy is the relevant parameter guiding agreement patterns and their acceptability ✓

Examples that were correct assuming a rigid agreement system were evaluated as much better on average than incorrect examples (4.38 / 1.92).[2]

_____

[2]Average score (min. 1 / max. 5) over all 24 respondents.

Results

▶ *χuč'i* no longer carries a clear functional distinction ✗ and is poorly evaluated in general ✓

χuč'i was evaluated as significantly better with inanimates (2.88) than with animates (1.69).

	χuč'i	łič'i	guč'i
book	3.33	1.13	5
books	2.41	1.54	4.83

Results

► *łič'i* is indeed acceptable with animates (and not with inanimates) ✓, but generally evaluated as better with humans ✓ (with a slight preference for +female within the human domain ✗ +plural within the animate domain ✗, and animals > insects ✗)

Results

Innovative system: animate

stimulus	number	average score
book	sg	1.125
books	pl	1.5416666666667
cockroach	sg	2.9166666666667
cockroaches	pl	4.0416666666667
butterfly	sg	3.25
butterflies	pl	3.9166666666667
cow	sg	3.58333333333333
cows	pl	3.625
cat	sg	4.08333333333333
cats	pl	4

Results

stimulus	number	average score
family	sg	4.125
families	pl	3.58333333333333
brother	sg	4.08333333333333
brothers	pl	4.75
sister	sg	4.25
sisters	pl	4.45833333333333
person	sg	4.375
people	pl	4.70833333333333
I	sg	4.45833333333333
we(excl)	pl	4.375

Results

- ► *łič'i* with plural animates typically scores better than with singulars (3.9 vs. 3.62 on average)
- ► But a simple linear regression model showed that number was not a significant predictor (p = 0.08)
- ► So the difference could be a coincidence

Results

category	average score
insect	3.531250
animal	3.822917
human	4.337963

▶ Animate category as a predictor was significant only for humans ($p = 0.008$)

▶ So only part of the hierarchy human > animal > insect can be confirmed

Results

► *guč'i* is acceptable with any type of controller ✓, and is systematically evaluated as the better option in comparison to the copulas marked for animacy ✓
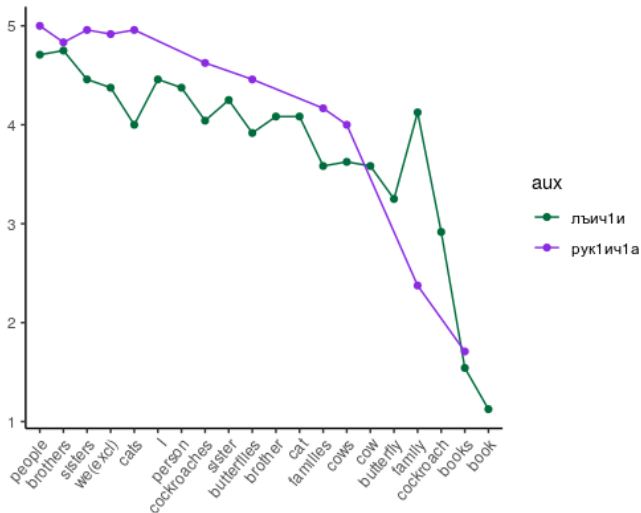
Results

Innovative system
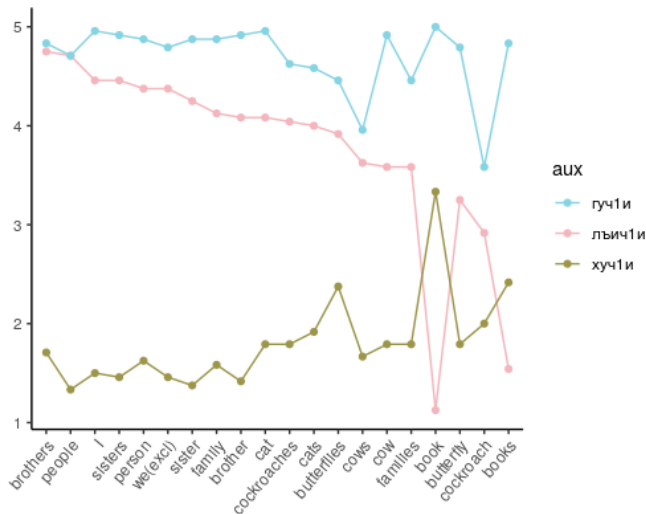
Results

Innovative vs. inherited

▶ the two agreement systems do indeed overlap
semantically based on their behavior with the
same controllers ✓ Human > animal > insect ✗

▶ the inherited system is more entrenched, resulting
in better average evaluations ✓

Results

Innovative vs. inherited

Results

The animate forms from both systems follow a similar trendline, but in the inherited system not even human is a significant predictor ($p = 0.6$).

category	average score
animal	4.479167
insect	4.541667
human	4.775000

Results

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However, the inanimate form was significantly less appropriate with humans than other animates.

Results

Inherited sg vs. pl

▶ additionally, whether the singular domain of the inherited system is more entrenched, since it appears to be older ✗

correct	number	average score
no	pl	2.129167
yes	pl	4.708333
yes	sg	4.761905

Discussion

- ▶ Two speakers rated the use of the inherited animate plural form + plural inanimate controller as 'excellent'

- ▶ Only one of them failed the proficiency question (maybe the proficiency question was bad and they are equally poor speakers)

- ▶ But neither of them were outliers compared to the rest of the respondents

- ▶ Another speaker used the animate plural for inanimates in a prior experiment (Naccarato & Verhees 2019)

Tentative diachrony

- ▶ Botlikh was on track to develop a general plural noun class as in Avar, its main contact influence
- ▶ Started by marking human plural with *r*
- ▶ Gradually expanded to include animals
- ▶ The innovative agreement system formed and started following the same pattern
- ▶ Systems started converging semantically
- ▶ Binary opposition of marked terms in the innovative system prevented further development towards general plural

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Abbreviations

AN	animate 3, 4, 6
AOR	aorist 3
ATTR	attributivizer 3, 5
CM	noun class marker slot 6
CVB	converb 3
EL	elative 3
EXCL	exclusive 3
F	feminine 4, 5
HPL	human plural 4
INAN	inanimate 4, 6
M	masculine 4, 5
N	neuter 3, 4
NPL	non-human plural 4
PL	plural 4
PROG	progressive 3
SG	singular 4
SIM	similative 5

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