Morphology, Semantics, and Pragmatics
of Negative Rhetorical Questions in Megrelian

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This paper discusses a complex set of morphological and semantic features that characterize negative rhetorical questions in Megrelian, a Kartvelian (South Caucasian) language spoken in Western Georgia. These include such diverse linguistic parameters as affirmation, negation (including double negation), verbal aspect, and presupposition, whereby the morphological means involved is circumfixation of complex verb forms that already carry prefixes and suffixes. These parameters have been discussed in the literature on Megrelian severally (Gudava & Gamq'reliʒe 1981/1987; Harris 1991; Reseck 2014), but have never been treated together as parts cumulatively inducing one phenomenon, namely negative rhetorical question constructions. The aim of this contribution is thus to assemble this puzzle and explain its structure.

The Kartvelian verb is well-known for its complexity, and it is Megrelian that stands out from the family in terms of the degree that this complexity reaches: this language has both the highest number of TAM paradigms and the most sophisticated system of verbal inflection, in view of the number of affixes attachable to the root and the rules applying to their interaction. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, in a simplified manner, the slot structure of the finite verb in Megrelian:

Table 1   Finite verb prefixation

SLOT	−6	−5	−4	−3	−2	−1
MARKER	AFF/FOC/PFV/NEG/PROH	PV(:PFV)	IMPFV	EVID	IO/DO/S	VERS
	ko-, ge-, o-, va-, num-	*mic'o-…*	*tima-…*	*no-*	*v-, g-…*	*i-…*

Table 2   Finite verb suffixation

SLOT	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	+7	+8
MARKER	R.EXT	AUX/CAUS	ITR	SM	EM	IND/SBJV	IO/DO/S (SG/PL)	COND
	-on…	*-apu…*	*-d*	*-en…*	*-d*	*-i, -a…*	*-s, -u…*	*-k'on*

Note that slot −5 preverbs are involved in lexical derivation and can, under particular circumstances, additionally perfectivize the verb, thus yielding inherently perfective lexical items featuring both finite and nonfinite forms. At the same time, the perfective aspectual value expressed by some of the slot −6 prefixes (which only occur in finite verb forms), viz. *ge-, o-*, and, more rarely, *ko-*, is confined to the domain of inflection.

Apart from the affixes presented in Tables 1–2, the finite verb can attach clitics of diverse function, including the question enclitic =*o* that is obligatory on the predicate in polar questions and ruled out in content question constructions; note that =*o* a clitic and therefore not included in the suffixation template, for it can be separated from the verb by other clitics, such as quotative =*a* (cf. ex. 1) that are also attachable by other parts of speech (e.g. nouns, cf. ex. 2):

(1)   *kirsian rekiavo? k'itx.*
   kirsian   r-e-k = i = <u>a</u> = v = **o**   k'itx-[u]
   Christian   be-SM-S2SG = EV = <u>QUOT</u> = EC = **QST**   ask-[S3SG.PST]

‘Are you Christian? <u>X asked Y</u>.’ (Xubua 1937: 45.29)

(2) *kumop'idi ate skani lak'via.*
ko-mo-m-ʔid-i   ate   skan-i   lak'v-i = <u>a</u>
PFV-PV-IO1-buy-IMP   this   your-NOM   puppy-NOM = <u>QUOT</u>
‘Sell me this puppy of yours, <u>X said to Y</u>.’ (Xubua 1937: 7:10)

Together with the negative marker *va*= that is otherwise to be found in slot –6, the question enclitic forms a clitic circumfix, or, rather, a circumclitic, *va*=__ = *o*, whose function is to create a verb form that can serve as a predicate in a negative rhetorical question construction that implies an affirmative answer:

(3) *dasuro koɣolə ʒɣabik irpeli, muč'o uc'ɯu bošikən, teši, vakiʔɯɯo martalk?*
dasuro   ko-ɣol-u   ʒɣab-i-k   irpel-i
indeed   AFF-do-S3SG.PST   girl-B-ERG   everything-NOM
muč'o   u-c'w-u   boš-i-k = ni   teši
how   VERS-tell-S3SG.PST boy-B-ERG = COMP   that way
va = ko-i-ʔ-u = **o**   martal-k
NEG = AFF-VERS-be-S3SG.PST = **QST**   true-ERG
‘Indeed, the girl did everything as the boy had told her, (exactly) that way, and (**do you think** everything) **didn't** prove to be true? (i.e. it did.)’ (Xubua 1937: 55.13-14)

(4) *mioǯineso, dasuro vagemc'odirtuo ʒɣabik eše?*
mi-o-ǯin-es = o   dasuro
PV-VERS-look-S3PL.PST = COMP   indeed
va = ge-mic'o-dirt-u = **o**   ʒɣab-i-k   eše
NEG = PFV-PV-stand.up-S3SG.PST = **QST**   girl-B-ERG   upwards
‘When they looked (at her), **didn't** the girl **really** stand up? (i.e. she did.)’ (Xubua 1937: 25.1)

(5) *do vaoč'k'omɯo?*
do   **va** = o-č'k'om-u = **o**
and   **NEG** = PFV-eat-S3SG.PST = **QST**
‘And **didn't** X eat Y? (i.e. X did.)’ (Rostovtsev-Popiel 2011: 205)

The formation of such verb forms requires the verb to carry a slot –6 inflectional prefix (either multiuse *ko*- whose primary function is to mark affirmation and focus, and perfective aspect as well—among its secondary functions, ex. 3; dedicated perfectivizer *ge*- used with preverbed verbs, i.e. such verbs that carry a slot –5 preverb, ex. 4; or dedicated perfectivizer *o*- attached by verba simplica, i.e. those without a slot –5 preverb, ex. 5). Consequently, with a view to the combinability of the negative marker and the affirmative marker *ko*-, this phenomenon was addressed as “combining the uncombinable” (Rostovtsev-Popiel 2011; see also Boeder 2013 for discussion). However, as was maintained later on in (Rostovtsev-Popiel 2012), it was rather the perfective aspectual function of slot –6 prefixes that made it possible to juxtapose the affirmative marker *ko*- and the negative marker *va*= within one verb form (cf. absence of this phenomenon in imperfectives). Furthermore, there is also recent fieldwork evidence of circumfixation, or, rather, circumcliticization, of verb forms, such that already carry the negative marker *va*- (as well as its positional variants, such as

ve-, vo-, v-), i.e. one of further mutually-exclusive slot –6 prefixes. This inflectional operation yields double negation:

(6) *gemi tiʒgura xargeli rdu, šk'a ɣwas išo vavedinc'q'uo?*

gem-i	tiʒgura	xargel-i	r-d-u
ship-NOM	that.kind	loaded-NOM	be-EM-S3SG.PST
šk'a	[z]ɣwa-s	išo	**va** = <u>va</u>-do-i-nc'q'-u = **o**
middle	sea-DAT	thither	**NEG₁** = <u>NEG₂</u>-PV-VERS-sink-S3SG.PST = **QST**

'(Given that) the ship was so loaded, **didn't** she sink to pot in the middle of the sea? (i.e. she did.)'

As the translation suggests, such constructions do not differ semantically from those formed after models *va = ko-__ = o*, *va = ge-__ = o*, and *va = o-__ = o* and convey an affirmative presupposition, whereby the proclitic part of the circumclitic can be dropped, as in e.g. ***vedinc'q'uo?*** '**didn't** she sink? (i.e. she did)', thus eliminating the double negation pattern. It is worth mentioning here that in their pilot work on Megrelian morphophonemics, Gudava and Gamq'reliʒe pointed at the fact that prefixal *va-* and *va =* that occurs in negated rhetorical questions should not be treated as one same expression (Gudava & Gamq'reliʒe 1981/1987: 239); however, the authors, within the framework of their paper, neither expanded on the latter *va =* as part of a circumclitic nor discussed its semantic and pragmatic functions.

Basing upon available corpora, extant textual materials, and our first hand fieldwork data, we aim to provide a comprehensive account of morphological, semantic, and pragmatic properties of the phenomenon in question, both synchronically and diachronically—in particular, against the background of the data found in the sister languages, and to explain how diverse domains of linguistic structure interact in the formation of negative rhetorical questions in Megrelian. Special attention will be drawn to lexically-determined aspectual properties of verb lexemes discussed and their interplay with the inflectional perfective aspect value, as well as to constraints on the appearance and retention of certain combinations of affixes and clitics throughout the Kartvelian family.

Abbreviations

2 – 2nd person; 3 – 3rd person; AFF – affirmative marker; AUX – auxiliary; B – base; CAUS – causative; COMP – complementizer; COND – conditional; DAT – dative; DO – direct object; EC – euphonic consonant; EM – extension marker; ERG – ergative; EV – euphonic vowel; EVID – evidential; FOC – focal marker; IMPFV – imperfectivizer; IND – indicative; IO – indirect object; IMP – imperative; ITR – intransitivizer; NEG – negative marker; NOM – nominatve; PFV – perfectivizer; PL – plural; PROH – prohibitive; PST – past; PV – preverb; QST – question marker; R.EXT – root extension; S – subject; SBJV – subjunctive; SG – singular; SM – series marker; VERS – versionizer.

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