

MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE SPEECH OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE MERISI GORGE

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Abstract: The present paper deals with certain morphological features of the speech of the Merisi Gorge, one of the distinctive units of the Ajarian dialect. The study is based on the empirical material and authentic speech collected by me as a result of field dialectological research. The paper discusses in detail the grammatical phenomena manifested in noun form-building, verb structure, the functioning of preverbs, and the specific use of auxiliary parts of speech (conjunctions, postpositions, and particles). The analysis of the linguistic material of the Merisi Gorge will make a significant contribution to revealing the characteristic features of the speech of Upper Ajara, while the study of the Ajarian dialect will provide us with a comprehensive understanding of the southern speech of the Georgian language.

The article draws upon studies and research conducted as a result of observations of the southern speech varieties. It should be noted that many linguistic phenomena have been re-examined by modern scholarship, which has presented the distinctive features of the southern dialects in a more comprehensive manner.

In preparing the article, we employed the methods of empirical data processing, the historical-comparative method, description, analysis, synthesis, and comparison.

Keywords: Merisi Gorge; morphological features; Ajarian dialect; southern speech.

Discussion/Results: As in the southern dialects, various morphological features are also found in the Upper Ajarian dialect and, naturally, in the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge. Let us consider some of them.

Noun Declension:

In the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, nouns display distinctive features in declension. Vowel-stem nouns, both proper and common, take the semivowel **ა** (<ა/i) in the nominative case. For example:

In the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, the ergative case does not exhibit any particularly distinctive features. As in the standard literary language, the ergative marker **-ბ** (**m**) is attached to vowel-stem nouns, while **-ბა** (**ma**) is attached to consonant-stem nouns. However, there are also instances in which the ergative case is used instead of the expected nominative case.

In the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, cases of the loss of the case marker **-ბ** (**s**) in the dative case are frequent.

In the Merisi speech variety, cases of the loss of the genitive case marker **-ბ** (**s**) are also frequently encountered.

Specialized literature notes that “the loss of **-ლ (s)** is a phenomenon predominantly widespread with front-lingual consonant groups in the dialects of the Georgian language” (Tao, 2020:691; Klarjeti, 2016:533; Paghava..., 2022:25), and that “the basis of the loss of **-ლ (s)** should be sought in Georgian pronunciation” (Klarjeti, 2016:533).

Regarding the loss of **-ლ (s)**, Iv. Kavtaradze notes that it is a common Georgian phenomenon. The researcher cites examples from literary monuments of the later period (Kavtaradze, 1964:140; Paghava..., 2022:19).

In the Merisi speech variety, the instrumental case also displays distinctive features, as in other southern dialects. In vowel-stem nouns, the case marker **-თ(ი) (-t(i))** is replaced by **-ით (-it)**. For example:

The living speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge shows that in the adverbial case, the case marker **-ად/დ (-ad/d)** becomes devoiced, and **-ათ/თ (-at/t)** is systematically used. For example:

In the Merisi speech variety, nouns with the suffix **-იან (-ian)** are represented with the vowel **-ა (-a)** in the adverbial case.

In the Merisi speech variety, we encounter cases where one case form replaces another. Sometimes, the nominative case is used instead of the expected instrumental case.

As for the vocative case, in the Merisi speech variety, proper names, both consonant-stem and vowel-stem, are often accompanied by the case marker **-ჲ (-v)**, which is generally characteristic of the Ajarian dialect. For example:

In the Merisi speech variety, the main marker of the plural number is **-ებ (-eb)**. As is known from linguistic literature, with nouns ending in **-ე' (-e')**, two **-ე' (-e')** vowels come together in the plural form with the **-ებ (-eb)** suffix. However, in the Merisi speech variety, the two **-ე' (-e')** vowels undergo dissimilation, resulting in the ending **-იე' (-ie')**. This is an ongoing process not only in the Ajarian dialect but also in other southern dialects (Paghava... 2022; Paghava... 2023; Putkaradze, 2016: 251; Putkaradze, 2021: 184).

In the Merisi speech variety, nouns ending in the vowel **ა' (a')** form the plural with the ending **-იებ (-ieb)**, by analogy with nouns ending in the vowel **-ე' (-e')**.

Adjective

The adjective in the Merisi speech variety, as generally in the southern dialects, does not display any particular distinctive features.

Instead of the adjective **„უფროსი“ (uprosi ‘elder, older’)**, the form **„უმფროსი“ (umposi)** is found: უმფროსი < უმფროსი < უფროსი (umposi < umprosi < ufrosi). The consonant მ (m) in უმფროსი (umprosi) developed by analogy with უმცროსი (umtsrosi) (G. Akhvlediani).

In the living speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, the pronoun is also not characterized by any particular distinctive features. A specific feature is the use of the pronouns ეს and ის in shortened forms: the consonantal part of the pronouns is omitted, and the forms ე' (e) and ი' (i) are found.

In the Merisi speech variety, instead of the pronouns ამას (amas), ამის (amis), and მაგი (magi), the forms ამა (ama), იმა (ima), and მაი' (mai') (> იმაი) are encountered. For illustration, we present several examples:

In the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, instead of the pronouns „ასეთი“ (aseti) and „ისეთი“ (iseti), the forms „ამფერი“ (amperi) and „იმფერი“ (imperi) are found.

Verb

In the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, there are features related to the verb. The formation of the plural number of verbs is particularly noticeable. In the plural, instead of the **-ენ' (-en')** ending of the third subject person plural, the ending **-ენ' (-en')** is used:

It should be noted that “the use of **-ენ’** (-en’) instead of the **-ნენ’** (nen’) suffix is characteristic of the dialects of the western group, which is explained by the tendency toward the unification of forms” (Jorbenadze, 1989:529).

It is noteworthy that in the Merisi speech variety, the subject person marker **ჰ’** (h’) is often not represented in verbs.

In the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, there are cases when the ending **-ვი’** (vi’) is added to the **-ე** (-e) ending in the aorist series. For example:

Linguists note that such a formation is not characteristic of Kobuleti and Lower Ajarian dialects (Paghava, Tsetskhladze, 2017:57).

The forms under analysis show that in the Merisi speech variety, **-ევ** (-ev) is used instead of the **-ავ** (-av) stem marker.

Preverb

The change of the vowel component of preverbs is characteristic of the dialects of the Georgian language. In the living speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, the preverbs also undergo changes in their vowel components. Instead of the preverb **და’** (da’), the forms **დუ’** (du’) or **დე’** (de’) are used; likewise, **გუ’** (gu’) or **გე’** (ge’) forms are found:

The vowel component of the preverbs **შემო’** (shemo’) and **ჩამო’** (chamo’) is also changed:

Adverb

Adverbs display certain distinctive features in the Merisi speech variety. As is known from the literary language, the adverb of place is expressed with the postposition **-ში** (-shi); however, in the Merisi speech variety, it occurs without the postposition **-ში** (-shi) or takes the suffix **-ს’** (-s’).

Instead of the adverbs of place **აკ** (ak) and **იკ** (ik), the forms **აგზე** (agze) and **იგზე** (igze) are found in the Merisi speech variety.

The forms **აგზე** (agze) and **იგზე** (igze) are characteristic of Upper Ajarian. “These forms are unfamiliar to the Kobuleti dialect and, generally, to Lower Ajarian” (Paghava, Tsetskhladze, 2017:61); they are also found in the Klarjeti dialect.

The adverb **შიან’** (shian’) is sporadically found in the Merisi speech variety and means “inside, within.”

As Nizharadze notes, **შიან’** (shian’) appears to be a modified form of the postposition „**შიგან**” (shigan), widespread in Middle Georgian; “however, it does not represent a postposition but rather an adverb” (Nizharadze, 1975: 131).

Postposition

In the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, the form **-ტვინ** (-tvin) is attested instead of the postposition **-ტვის** (-tvis).

V. Topuria also discusses the alternation between **-ტვის** (-tvis) and **-ტვინ** (-tvin) (Topuria, 1941: 192).

In the Merisi speech variety, the form **-ვეთ** (-vet) is occasionally found instead of the postposition **-ვით** (-vit). For example:

Conjunction

In the speech of the inhabitants of the Merisi Gorge, conjunctions do not display any particular distinctive features.

The form **რომე** (rome) of the conjunction **რომ** (rom) is sporadically encountered.

Instead of the conjunction **თორემ** (torem), the form **თვარა** (tvava) is occasionally found.

Particle

In the Merisi speech variety, the modified form ‘ნა (‘na) of the particle უნდა (unda) does not occur independently; it is either fused with a noun or with a verb.

The particle უნდა (unda) is also attested in other southern dialects, including Klarjetian and Shavshurian (Paghava, Tsintsadze, Baramidze, 2022: 104; Shavsheti: 271–272).

Conclusion. A comprehensive analysis of the Ajarian dialect requires a localized study, focusing on specific Gorges and villages. Thus, the recorded material will reveal more analytical forms. In this regard, the study is naturally relevant and innovative, allowing us to study the dialect in a more specific, detailed, and in-depth manner.

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