LANGUAGE SHIFT AND COMPLEXITY: LAZ UNDER THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

- Laz is an endangered and understudied South Caucasian language spoken in Northeastern Turkey. All speakers of Laz are bilingual and especially younger generations are monolingual speakers of Turkish, i.e. the dominant language.
- There are 5 different dialects of Laz, exhibiting differences in significant respects (Öztürk 2008, Kojam & Bucaklishi 2003).

GOALS

- Adopting an ecological approach (Mufwene 2001 et seq.), to investigate
  - The current situation of Laz as an endangered language undergoing language shift
  - The variation exhibited by two different varieties of Laz and the related ecological factors giving rise to the observed differences.
- The morpho-syntactic differences between the two varieties of main concern and how these differences can be examined with respect to the notion of language complexity and language evolution.

CURRENT SITUATION OF LAZ

- Mufwene (2020): “Language shift is the outcome of fewer and fewer opportunities that particular speakers have to practice their heritage vernacular. It might not lead to language endangerment and loss.”
- While Laz is mainly confined to the private sphere, Turkish dominates the semi-public and the public sphere.

LAZ UNDER THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

- **FACT 1**: Verbal prefix strategy for reflexives seems to be falling out of use.
  1. a. Reflexive Pronoun Strategy
  2. b. Verbal reflexive Marker Strategy
  - Ali-erg himself mirror-loc see-Pst.3sg
  - All-erg mirror-loc Refl see-Pst.3sg
  - ‘Ali saw himself in the mirror.’ (PL) ‘All saw himself in the mirror.’ (AL)

- **FACT 2**: In terms of vocabulary, which is typical of everyday life, Ardenesh speakers use more Turkish words and Pazar speakers.
  2. a. Ali himself mirror PV-see-Pst.3sg
  - Ali-erg himself mirror-loc see-Pst.3sg
  - ‘Ali saw himself in the mirror.’

ECOLOGICAL FACTORS: PL VS. AL

| Socio-economic statistics of Rize, Source: (State Planning Organization 2004) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ardenesh                       | Pazar           | Population      | 56,499 (231)    | 32,215 (428)    |
| Urbanization Rate (%)          | 97.39 (45)      | 45.50 (365)     |
| Population density             | 93 (214)        | 293 (43)        |
| Agricultural laborer (%)       | 47.77 (749)     | 73.70 (470)     |
| Industrial laborer (%)         | 11.65 (120)     | 7.78 (224)      |
| Literacy Rate (%)              | 91.73 (88)      | 84.91 (466)     |

SYNTAX OF AL IS MORE CONFIGURATIONAL

- Scrambling of main constituents is more restricted in AL than in PL.
  1. a. Fatma Ayşe /־Ayşe Fatma) bere me-־u. (AL)
  2. b. Fatma Aysel child PV-give-Pst.3sg
  - ‘Fatma gave the child to Ayşe.’
  - ‘Fatma gave the child to Ayşe.’
- While AL exhibits superiority effects, PL does not.
  1. a. *Mu mi ykom-־u (AL) b. Mu mi-k ykom-־u (PL)
  2. a. what who eat-Pst.3sg
  3. b. what who-erg eat-Pst.3sg
  - ‘Who ate what?’
  - ‘Who ate what?’
  - While extraction of possessive DPs is not licensed in AL, it is licensed in PL.
  1. a. *Mği si baba ga-zir-־u (AL) b. Migi si baba, dvzr-־u (PL)
  2. a. whose father you PV-see-Pst.3sg
  3. b. whose father you see-Pst.3sg
  - ‘Whose father did you see?’
- Superiority effects hold within the DP-internal constituents in AL, they exhibit more ordering possibilities in PL.
  1. a. (*k履职 ir /־ir履职 k履职) kalemele (AL)
  2. b. (*履职 ir /־ir履职 k履职) kalemele (PL)
  - my every pencil
  - ‘every pencil of mine’
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  - ‘Fatma gave the child to Ayşe.’

AN INTERPLAY BETWEEN DIFFERENT COMPLEXITY TYPES

- Ambiguity in forms and structures increases complexity in processing.
  - Hawkins (2009): “Complexity in form processing is matched by simplicity with respect to the processing functions performed by rich case marking and definite articles.”
- Steels & Beuls (2017): Human languages evolve ideally in a way to minimize complexity at all levels but often times there is interplay between them.
  - a) Inventory complexity (¬bit complexity)
  - b) Processing complexity (cognitive effort)
  - c) Form complexity (length of utterances)
  - d) population-level complexity (variation)
  - e.g. Reduce inventory/form complexity → Increase Processing complexity

PROPOSAL

- Different (word) orders are features in the Feature Pool of AL.
  1. F1: S-IO-DO, F2: IO-DO-S, F3: S-DO-IO,
  (where S=subject, IO=indirect object, DO=direct object)
- No competition when agreement markers readily resolve ambiguity.
  - (Inventory complexity reduces processing complexity.)
- Competition arises when agreement is not there. F1 is selected over the others.
- (Reducing inventory results in an increase in processing complexity)
- Alternative strategies for resolving ambiguities: Increase inventory to reduce processing complexity.
  1. a. Him on mektebi on… b. Him-u mektebi on…
  2. 3ps-animate school is ‘3ps-animate school is ‘S/he/it is at the school’ ‘It is a school.’
- Population-level complexity is at play.

QUANTITY BASED APPROACH TO COMPLEXITY

- **Bit complexity**: ‘The greater number of inflectional morphemes/syntactic rules → the greater complexity.’ (McWhorter 2001)
- **Equilibrium**: Less complexity in one module is balanced out by greater complexity in another. (Mufwene et al. 2017)
  1. World knowledge overrides the syntactic ordering rules in AL.
  2. Person agreement can also have an impact on the order flexibility in AL.
- **Hidden complexity**: ‘Seemingly simple surface structures can represent more than one construction.’ Less is more. (Bisang 2014)
  1. a. Ali tififini kert-zuz-i
  2. b. Him mektebi on.
  - All phone under-out-Pst.3sg
  - All phone under-out-Pst.3sg
  - ‘I put the phone under something.’ I. ‘She/it is at school.’
  - ‘All put something under the phone. II. ‘She/it is at school.’
- Take away messages:
  - a) Loss of inflectional morphology = less overall complexity
  - b) Assessing complexity based solely on quantity is problematic.

CONCLUSION

- Laz is undergoing language shift because it offers fewer opportunities to its speakers to practice their heritage vernacular.
- The loss of the case system in AL has given rise to a more configurational syntax.
- AL exhibits more context-induced properties with Turkish than PL does due to the differences in their language ecology.
- Assessing complexity is dependent on a complex interplay between different types of complexity, i.e. only a quantitative-based metric is not insufficient but also misleading.