1. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the means of Agent encoding in Agul, a language from the Lezgic branch of the East Caucasian (Nakh-Daghestanian) family. Agul is spoken by approximately 30 thousand speakers in the Agul and Kurah districts of Southern Daghestan, Russia. Our study is based on the data from the /uni029C`uuni0305uq' dialect (spoken by some 600 speakers).

Agul is an ergative language with predominantly agglutinative morphology and SOV basic word order. It is a clear example of a ‘role-dominated’ language in terms of Foley & Van Valin (1984): the marking of arguments is semantically motivated, and there are no syntactic mechanisms of changing this marking by means of any voice-like operations like the passive or the antipassive. The Agent of a transitive verb (A) is marked by the Ergative case, the core argument of an intransitive verb (S) and the Patient of a transitive verb (O) are marked by the Absolutive:

(1) ze dad maskaw.di-as χab aldarku-naa
    my father.ABS Moscow-IN.ELAT back return-RES
    ‘My father has come back from Moscow.’

(2) dad.a guni ʕut’u-ne
    father.ERG bread.ABS eat-PST
    ‘Father ate bread.’

The Ergative and the Absolutive can be regarded as ‘canonical’ means of encoding core arguments in the two major clause types. There are, however, some

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2 Abbreviations: AD = location near a landmark, ELAT = motion from a landmark, IN = location inside a landmark, LAT = motion towards a landmark, POST = location behind a landmark, SUB/CONT = location under a landmark / in tight contact with a landmark, SUPER = location on a landmark. Singular and essive forms of nouns are not indicated (being formally unmarked).
minor clause types in Agul where other means of marking core arguments are used. As the Absolutive argument is normally present in such clauses, they would be probably treated as ‘extended intransitive’ in R.M.W. Dixon’s approach (see e.g. Dixon and Aikhenvald 2000:3). All other case forms that encode core arguments can be conventionally labelled ‘non-canonical’ means of argument marking.

First of all, it is the Dative that marks Experiencers with a number of sentence verbs like ag ‘see’, unxs ‘hear’, nua ‘know’, ãndea ‘love, want, need’ and others, for example:

(3) za-s we ruš agu-ne
    I-DAT your daughter.ABS see-PST
‘I saw your daughter.’

The Possessor is expressed by one of the two locative cases3 – the Ad-essive (originally referring to location near a landmark) and the Post-essive (referring to location behind a landmark), which distinguish between actual and permanent possession respectively:

(4) za-w nis=na guni fa-a
    I-AD cheese.ABS=and bread.ABS AD.be-PRS
‘I have cheese and bread with me.’ (So, we can take a snack now)

(5) za-q ʔu ruš=na sa gada qa-a
    I-POST two daughter.ABS=and one son.ABS POST.be-PRS
‘I have two daughters and one son.’

In fact, many other locative cases can be used as non-canonical means of core argument marking as well: in (6), for example, the Super-essive (originally referring to location on the upper surface of a landmark) is used to encode the participant of the situation ‘fall asleep’, expressed by the lexicalized compound aχun alča as:

(6) šünük.i-l aχun alčaj-ne
    child-SUPER fall asleep-PST
‘The child fell asleep.’

Note that in many cases the use of a locative form is correlated with the presence of a certain prefix on the verb (verbal prefixes in Lezgic languages usually have the same origin as locative case markers): cf. above za-w f-aa ‘I have (with me)’, za-q q-aa ‘I have (permanently)’, šünük-i al-čajne ‘child fell asleep’. It means that the use of locative cases for encoding of core arguments stems from the conceptual

3 Like the majority of the Lezgic languages, Agul possesses a rich system of locative cases. Locative case markers consist of two parts, the first one specifies the localization of a trajector with respect to a landmark (‘inside’, ‘above’, ‘below’, ‘near’, ‘behind’, etc.), the second one points at the direction of movement (‘to’ vs. ‘from’) or absence of movement (‘at rest’, zero marked). In total, there are 25 case forms in Agul (Ergative, Absolutive, Dative, Comitative and Genitive, and 20 locative forms).