Issues in writing a grammatical sketch of the Burushaski language

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1. About the Burushaski language

Burushaski [1] is a language isolate spoken in a part of the Northern Areas of Pakistan by 60–100,000 people.

Figure 1. Map of Pakistan

Typologically, Burushaski is a typical agglutinative language, and it employs a certain number of prefixes, a lot of suffixes, and a few enclitics. The nouns in Burushaski are classified into four noun classes: HM, HF, X, and Y. HM is the class for human-male entities, HF is for human-female entities, X is for concrete things including animals and fruits, and Y is for abstract things including liquids, notions and trees. The basic word order of Burushaski is SOV, but the order is not so rigid.

2. How my study has developed

I started the study on Burushaski out of curiosity in 2003.

Learning Urdu in a undergraduate program => Studying Burushaski in a master/doctoral course

Firldwork:

5 times (total 6 months); in the Hunza, Nager, and Yasin valleys / mainly in Karimabad, Hunza

morphology of the variable suffixes for plural marking
=> morphophonology of so-called 'echo words'
==> morphology of Hunza Burushaski [M.A. thesis in 2007]
===> now, a descriptive grammar of Eastern Burushaski (Hunza-Nager Burushaski) [for Ph.D.]

I have met some worrying issues in writing a grammatical skecth of Burushaski. I don't know yet what to do about these issues. So I show the one of them here.

3. How do we give a name to an unfamiliar functional category?

There are two types of person-number-class agreement on verbs in Burushaski.

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[1] Phonologically, Burushaski has 5 vowels /i, e, a, o, u/ and 36 consonants /p, ph[pʰ], b, t[t̪], th, d, ṭ[ʈ], ṭh, ḍ, k, kh, g, q, qh, c[ts], ch, č[tɕ], čh, j[dʑ], c̣[ʈʂ], c̣h, j̣[ɖʐ], s, z, š[ɕ], ṣ[ʂ], γ, h, w, y[j], y[ɰ], m, n, ŋ, r[ɾ], l/. Vowels have the opposition between short and long. Burushaski employs a pitch-accent system, every word has one high-pitched accent as a rule. I represent accented vowels with an acute accent mark (´).
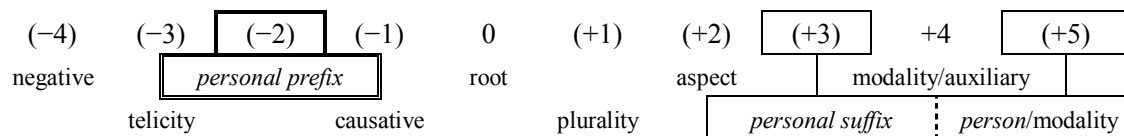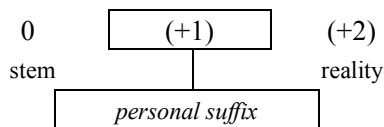
Figure 2. Verbal template in Burushaski

Figure 3. Auxiliary copular template in +4 slot in verbs of Burushaski

Agreement in +3/+5 slots of verbs and in +1 slot of auxiliary copulas is triggered by the subject of clause (+3 is only for the 1st person plural with imprefect aspect and the 1st person singular; +5 is for the rest). The personal suffix agrees with the absolutive argument in intransitive clauses; though it agrees with the ergative argument in transitive and ditransitive clauses.

Some of verbs need the personal agreement prefix in the stem. The personal prefix of −2 slot marks the person-number-class of either the absolutive argument in (involitional) intransitive, and transitive clauses, or the dative argument in ditransitive clauses.

(1) *éḍ   dáa phikarmánd imánimi.*

éḍ-Ø	dáa	phikarmánd	i-	man	´-Ø	-m	-i
Ed-ABS	and	worried	3SG.HM-	become	-PF	-IRR	-3SG.HM
			[−2	0	+2	+4	+5]ᵥ

'Ed got worried again.' (*uyúm daɣánum búšan*: #92)

(2) *íne   icé   šurómuc   dósmai bái*

ín-e	icé	šuró-muc-Ø	d´-	u-	s-	man	´-č	+bá	-i	-Ø
he:DIS-ERG	those:X	pie-PL-ABS	TEL-	3PL.X-	CAUS-	become	-IMPF	+COP:H	-3SG.HM	-RE
			[−3	−2	−1	0	+2	+4		]ᵥ
							[0	+1	+2]ₐᵤₓ	

'he is baking the pies' (*uyúm daɣánum búšan*: #11)

(3) *"zarúur,   maɣóyam,"   flemingóoe teí nusén   icéer   bútan*

zarúur	ma-ɣon-č-a-m	flemingóo-e	teí	n-sén	icé-ar	bút-an
necessary	2PL-give:PL.Y.OBJ-IMPF-1SG-IRR	flamingo-ERG	such	SEQ-say	those:X-DAT	much-EMP

asqúriŋ   uɣónimi.

asqúr-iŋ-Ø	u-	ɣon	´-Ø	-m	-i
flower(Y)-PL-ABS	3PL.X-	give:PL.Y.OBJ	-PF	-IRR	-3SG.X
	[−2	0	+2	+4	+5]ᵥ

' "Of course, I'll give you," said the flamingo, and it gave them lots of flowers.' (*uskó jóṭišo urkái ke uyúm ɣuníkiṣ qhúuq*: #40)

Now, I cite here the major ditransitive alignment types from Haspelmath 2005 (it seems based on Dryer 1986); there are three types of alignment are assumed in respect of the relationship among Patient-like argument, Theme-like argument, and Recipient-like argument.

P	
T	R
directive	indirective
a. indirective alignment

P	
T	R
b. neutral alignment

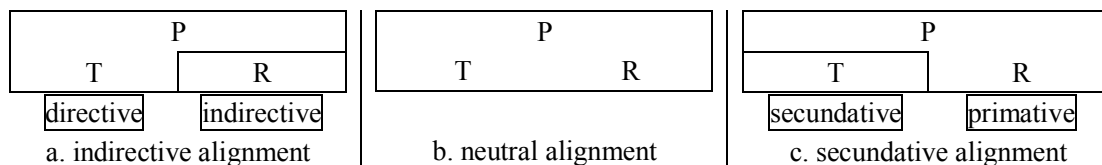| P	
T	R
secundative	primative
c. secundative alignment

Figure 4. The major ditransitive alignment types (Haspelmath 2005: 2)

As for mono- and di-transitive verb stems in Burushaski, the personal prefix agrees with the primative (object) argument as illustrated in Figure 6.
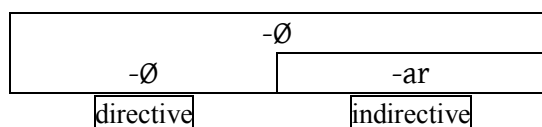
-Ø	
-Ø	-ar
directive	indirective
Figure 5. Indirective flagging in Burushaski

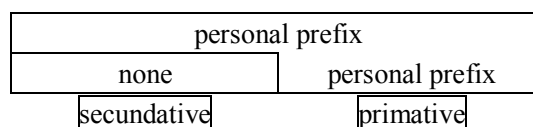| personal prefix	
none	personal prefix
secundative	primative
Figure 6. Secundative indexing in Burushaski

But the personal prefix can co-occur even with intransitive stems as shown with example (1). Please see Table 1, I indicate the worrying point with question marks here.

Table 1. Indexing and flagging systems in Burushaski

type of clause	indexing				flagging
	personal prefix		persosnal suffix		
intr.	ABSOLUTIVE	??	ABSOLUTIVE	SUBJECT	ABS
tr.		PRIMATIVE	ERGATIVE		ABS, ERG
ditr.	DATIVE				ABS, ERG, DAT

Abbreviations

ABS	absolutive	IMPF	imperfect	SG	singular
AUX	auxiliary (copula)	IRR	irrealis	T	theme-like argument
CAUS	causative	OBJ	object	TEL	telic
COP	copula	P	patient-like argument	V	verb
DAT	dative	PF	perfect	X	X-class
DIS	distal	PL	plural	Y	Y-class
EMP	emphasis	R	recipient-like argument	1	first person
ERG	ergative	RE	realis	2	second person
HM	H(uman)M(ale)-class	SEQ	sequential	3	third person

Reference

Haspelmath, Martin. 2005. Argument marking in ditransitive alignment types. *Linguistic Discovery*, 3/1: 1-21.