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Focus and word order in Caucasian Urum

Caucasian Urum is an Anatolian variety of Turkish spoken by ethnic Pontic Greeks in the Small Caucasus in Georgia. The Urum Greeks originate from several cities in Northeastern Anatolia and moved to the Caucasus in the beginning of the 19th century (Skopeteas 2013). Since that time, the Urum Greeks were in close contact with the Russian language, which was the language of administration and education in Georgia during the Tsarist regime and the Soviet Era (Pavlenko 2008).

In terms of grammar, Urum shares many characteristics with its substrate language Turkish. Moreover, Urum reveals some crucial influences from its contact language Russian, especially in the syntax and the lexicon. One result of this language contact is a change in the word order from OV (Turkish) to a language where both, OV and VO orders, may be used interchangeably in neutral discourse contexts.

The study presented in this talk examined the interaction of syntax and focus in Urum in comparison to Turkish and Russian. The study used a 2x2 factorial design with the factors FOCUS TYPE (non-identificational vs. corrective) and FOCUSED ARGUMENT (subject vs. object).

The empirical findings revealed several interesting differences between the languages. Whereas Turkish foci only occurred in the preverbal field, Russian foci occurred either in the beginning of a sentence or clause-finally. In contrast, foci in Urum appeared in all of these positions. Consider the examples in (1).

- (1) Who is eating the apple?
- a'. [Ǿ/Z]_F *alma-yi* *i-er.*
girl apple-ACC eat-IPFV[3]
- a''. [Ǿ/Z]_F *i-er* *alma-yi.*
girl eat-IPFV[3] apple-ACC
- b. *Alma-yi* [Ǿ/Z]_F *i-er.*
apple-ACC girl eat-IPFV[3]
- c. *Alma-yi* *i-er* [Ǿ/Z]_F
apple-ACC eat-IPFV[3] Girl.
'[A GIRL]_F is eating the apple.'

Though all three languages showed a significant interaction of focus and word order, the statistical analysis revealed that the effect of the FOCUSED ARGUMENT is much stronger in Turkish and Russian than in Urum. The effect of the FOCUS TYPE became significant for Turkish and Russian, but not for Urum.

In a nutshell, the empirical findings indicate that the information structural possibilities of Urum have been enlarged (e.g., the possibility to have postverbal foci) due to the Russian language contact.

References:

- Skopeteas, S., 2013. Caucasian Urums and Urum language (Kafkasya Urumları ve Urum Dili). *Journal of Endangered Turkic Languages* 3(1), 333–364.
- Pavlenko, A., 2008. Multilingualism in post-Soviet Countries: Language revival, language removal, and sociolinguistic theory. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 11(3-4), 275–314.