Spotting labile verbs in Zilo Andi

Issues and challenges

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Introduction

Zilo Andi

Nakh-Daghestanian family

- Daghestanian branch
- Avar-Ando-Tsezic group
- Andic subgroup (8 languages)
- Andi language (± 6 dialects)
- Zilo dialect

Andi is a language of Daghestan.
It belongs to the Andic subgroup of languages within the Avar-Ando-tsezic branch of the Daghestanian languages.
This study is based upon data that I elicited during joined expeditions in the village of Zilo, where people speak their own dialect of Andi. This work is part of a project of collaborative grammar of Zilo Andi.

Goals

- Find relevant lability tests
- to spot labile verbs in Zilo Andi (aka ‘ZA’)

Labile verbs = verbs that can be used transitively or intransitively without any formal change.
+ rephrasing Letuchiy's idea: the argument that is present in both transitive and intransitive construction must have different semantic roles.

The two parameters of lability:

- Change in syntactic transitivity.
- Change of semantic roles.

[Letuchiy 2009: 247]

e.g. if the stable argument is patient in the tr constr, it has to be smth else in the itr construction: usually autonomous subject, or S.
This type of labile verbs is called patient-preserving lability, or P-lability.
No Agent-preserving lability in ZA. -> Focus of this study: spotting P-lability.

A-lability and P-lability

P-labile verbs: S=P

Dixon [1994]

Patient-preserving labile verbs = verbs that can be used transitively or intransitively with the same participant encoded as P in a transitive construction and S in an intransitive construction. As in English: I broke the car / The car broke.
Principle: in a given languages, lability is a lexical property of a limited set of verbs

Issues

2. Issues

The problem for spotting P-labile verbs in ZA has been described by Creissels in a 2014 article for three other Andic languages. He raised the problem as follows:
In ZA, the itr and the tr constructions show no other formal distinction than the presence vs. absence of an Ergative agent.
This is a typological feature that Creissels calls Radical P-alignment.

1. ZA has radical P-alignment

The consequence is that it applies to the tr and itr uses of P-labile verbs.

(1) a. *derʒik'a* *b-eʒ-a*
pumpkin ¬AN$_1$-brown-PST(AOR)
'The pumpkin has browned.'

b. *derʒik'a* *miɬir-di*
pumpkin sun.OBL-ERG
b-eʒ-a
¬AN$_1$-brown-PST(AOR)
'The sun has browned the pumpkin.'

¬an = inanimate.
The two constructions differ only in the presence/absence of the Ergative argument mi irdi ‘the sun’. No info about the argument structure is incoded in the verb or word order. Here the verb contains a class-marker b- agreeing with the absolutive argument. Verbs never agree with the Ergative argument, so it doesn’t show if there is one in the construction.
This is what Creissels calls weak lability. =Formal criterion.

Consequence: if a tr construction has its agent unrealized, it is formally identical to an intransitive construction.

The problem is that in ZA, any verb can have its agent unrealized, because it is the way the language expressed arbitrary/non-specific agent constructions, since it has no passive derivation.

2. ZA has no restriction to the arbitrary reading of null Agents.

Creissels [2014]

-> itr uses of lab verbs are always ambiguous with unrealized agent constructions with arbitrary reading.

Example: *arχon* ‘open’

(2) *hints’ːu arχ-on.*
door open-PST(AOR)
‘The door opened.’
/ ‘The door was opened.’

-> Spotting labile verbs requires specific tests.

Lability tests

3. Lability tests found in literature

1. Syntactic test: reading of the reflexive-intensive pronoun

Two possible readings: reflexive vs. focus

[Kibrik 1996: 111]
[Lyutikova 2001: 380]

It has two possible understandings: 1/ Reflexive: N does V by oneself.
2/ If this understanding is not available for semantic/syntactic reasons (N cannot exercise any control) -> focus meaning : it is N that V. Place the reflexive-intensive pronoun after the only overt argument of a verb suspect to be labile.

Pronoun *zi*<CL>=*gu*

- Only focus reading is possible → transitive verb
- Only reflexive reading is possible → intransitive verb.
- Both are possible → labile verb.

Results

Virtually all underived transitive verbs allow for the reflexive reading of the pronoun *zi*<CL>=*gu*. The only constraints are semantically-based.

roqχ'on 'close'

(3) *ʒi-r=gu* *hints'ːu*
RFL-¬AN$_2$=EMPH door
r-oqχ'-on
¬AN$_2$-close-PST(AOR)
'The door closed by itself.'
/ 'It is the door that was closed.'

ts'adi 'drink'

(4) *tʃaj zi-b=gu ts'ad-i-r*
tea RFL-¬AN$_1$=EMPH drink-PST-PROG
'They drink tea with nothing else in it.'
* 'The tea is drinking itself'.
OK'They are drinking tea with nothing else in it.'

k'ammi 'eat smth'

(5) *ħetʃ'ink'ol* *ʒi-r-ul=gu*
corn RFL-¬AN$_2$-PL=EMPH
k'amm-i-r
eat-PST-PROG
'It is the corn that are being eaten.'
OK'The corns are eating themselves.'

I

f one sets a fabulous context to the sentence to be elicited, then everything becomes possible: one can say in ZA ‘the corns are eating themselves’, and the sentence is grammatical. Any transitive verb, elicited within a fabulous context, can be used as intransitive with an antipassive reading.

kanni ‘square’

(6) *reʃa* *ʒi-b=gu*
wood RFL-¬AN$_1$=EMPH
kann-esːa
square-FUT.NEG
‘Timber isn’t going to square itself.’ [i.e. you have to work on it]

O

ther test: the setting of a negative sarcastic context: something isn't going to .. by itself. Any transitive verb can be used intransitively with an antipassive reading, if elicited in that kind of context.

Summary

(+) any context	(+) fabulous context
roqχ'on 'close'	*ts'enni* 'preserve'
dʒabi 'beat'	*roχo* 'brush'
b-iχ(ː)i 'take' ->collapse	*qχurun* 'crumble'
arχon 'open'	*k'ammi* 'eat'
b-edːo 'leave' ->turn (milk)	*tɬ'anni* 'smoke'

Summary

(+) sarcastic negative context	(-)
retɬ'esːa 'plough/sow'	*saʁi-jd-i* 'heal(tr)'
kanni 'square'	*b-iʁ-oɬ-i* 'stop(tr)'
t'ammi 'thresh'	
biqχo 'slaughter'	
raqχ'i 'hay'	

We see that the two derived verbs that have been tested don't allow for the reflexive reading of the pronoun. It is clear that it is because they are overtly marked for transitivity through productive transitivizing suffixes: The first is a factitive formed upon the adjective sa i 'healthy' meaning 'to make healthy', i.e 'to heal', and the other is a causative formed upon the itr verb b-i i 'to stop' meaning 'to stop sme or sth'.

Conclusion

This test does not help to single out any *lexical* class of 'labile verbs'.

It is tempting to consider that the labile verbs are only the ones that allow for the reflexive reading of the pronoun in any context. But the problem is they differ from the others only semantically, in that: in the absence of overtly expressed Agent, their semantics allow for spontaneous event interpretation. Lability is not spotted as a lexical feature proper to these verbs.

2. Morphological test: selection of the imperative form

[Kibrik 1996: 110]
[Lyutikova 2001: 379]

Two imperatives:

- intransitive PST + /-*b*/
- vs. transitive /-*o*/

Intransitive verbs form their imperative by affixing -b the past theme of the verbal stem.
Transitive verbs by affixing -o to the bare stem.
Labile verbs are expected to be able to form both imperatives. Commentaire de Creissels.

Results

Virtually all underived transitive verbs are able to form an intransitive imperative in PST + /-*b*/. The only constraints are semantically-based.

I paired the examples with the following test's examples.

3. Syntactic test: Argument selection for the imperative addressee

[Forker 2013: 493-494]

Imperative of a *transitive* verb
→ imperative addressee = ~~ABS argument~~
Only ERG argument

Imperative of a *labile* verb
→ imperative addressee = ABS / ERG argument

[Forker 2013: 493-494]

Imperative addressee: ”Guys, come here ”Boy, cut the meat”. As in Hinuq, a Tsezic language, in ZA, if the verb is transitive, only the ergative argument can be the imperative addressee. If the verb is labile, we expect that the imperative addressee can be both the absolutive argument, as for intransitive verbs, and the ergative argument. Therefore, if the morphologically intransitive imperative can be applied to transitive verbs, then it also should be able to select the absolutive argument as the addressee.

Results

Virtually all underived transitive verbs allow for their Absolutive argument to be selected as imperative addressee. The only constraints are semantically-based.

riʃdi ‘lock’

(7) *hints’ːu, men riʃd-ib!*
door thou lock-IMP(ITR)
OK‘Door, lock yourself!’

qχabi ‘tear’

(8) *nasːil, men qχab-ib!*
sock thou tear-IMP(ITR)
OK‘Sock, tear yourself!’

Summary

(+)		(-)
dʒabi ‘beat’	*qχ’abʃun* ‘blink’	*saʁi-jd-i* ‘heal(tr)’
ruto ‘unfasten’	*arχon* ‘open’	
b-iχo ‘untether’	*qχ’urun* ‘crumble’	
bi-ʔo ‘bring’	*w-ak’arun* ‘gather’	
riʃdi ‘lock’	*obi* ‘touch’	
ʁwanqχ’un ‘sink’	*ts’enni* ‘preserve’	
bats’i ‘stick’		

Conclusion

These tests do not help to single out any *lexical* class of 'labile verbs'.

No time in this presentation for the fourth test, which is found in Haspelmath's Grammar of Lezgi and consists in checking the possibility for the Involuntary Agent Construction (possible only with intransitive constructions). The results are the same as for the three tests above.

4. Preliminary conclusions

All underived transitive verbs are labile.

Semantic constraints set aside.

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All underived transitive verbs are labile.

- Contradiction with our conception of lability.
- No straightforward *transitive vs. intransitive* distinction at construction level [Creissels 2014: 4].
- replaced by a new distinction.

1. This lability is not a lexical property of a limited set of verbs, but a feature of virtually all underived transitive verbs. Which contradicts our conception of lability.

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1. And dismisses a straightforward distinction tr vs. itr at construction level (Creissels).

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- replaced by a new distinction.

Distinction between 2 classes:

- Verbs that combine with an ergative NP in their non-derived form.
- Verbs that need to be causativized to combine with an ergative NP.

[Creissels 2014: 25]

1. can be called “labile” transitive verbs.
2. Correspond to strictly intransitive verbs”.

Causativization

4. The causativization test

Even with this new distinction replacing the traditional tr vs. itr distinction, the notion of lability still can survive in ZA as an in-between between the two classes.

Distinction between 3 classes?

- Verbs that combine with an ergative NP in their non-derived form [aka 'labile transitives'].
- Verbs that need to be causativized to combine with an ergative NP [aka 'intransitives'].
- In-between: aka 'proper labile'

Indeed, ZA displays a class of verbs whose behavior is intermediate between the two behaviors: verbs that can act as monotransitives under causativization AND without being causativized. As a consequence, the causativized form of these verbs is ambivalent: it can be both bivalent and trivalent. And this is how I spotted them.

To find all of them, I subjected all the potentially labile verbs to the causativization test

1. Results

(+)	
b-ezʒa ‘ripen, brown, fry’	*b-its’i* ‘fill’
b-ats’i ‘stick, fix’	*qχ’abʃun* ‘blink’
ʁʷanqχ’un ‘sink, choke’	*b-eqχ’aʃi* ‘hide, steal’
b-iʔo ‘go, bring, take away’	*b-ajtʃo* ‘untie’
b-edːo ‘leave, turn (milk)’	*obi* ‘touch’
b-iχːi ‘take, collapse’	

Example (-) : *roqχ'on* 'close'

(9) a. *hints'ːu* *roqχ'-on!*
door close-IMP(TR)
'Close the door!'

b. *hints'ːu* *roqχ'-on-no!*
door close-CAUSIMP(TR)
~~'Close the door (yourself)!'~~
'Make someone close the door!'

Example (+) : *b-its'i* 'fill'

(10) *ʃopurʃ-di* *maʃina*
driver.OBL-ERG car
ts'ek'irda-di *b-its'-i-j.!*
kid.PL.OBL-INST AN-fill-PST-PF
'The driver loaded the car with kids.'

(11) *ʃopurʃ-di* *maʃina*
driver.OBL-ERG car
ts'ek'irda-di
kid.PL.OBL-INST
b-its'-oɬ-i-j.
AN-fill-CAUS-PST-PF
'The driver loaded the car with kids.'
/ 'The driver had the car loaded with kids.'

2. Conclusions of the test

A new class a labile verbs

The verbs whose causativized form are ambivalent may be considered to form a specific class of ‘proper’ labile verbs.

Advantage: ambivalent causatives are a common feature of labile verbs cross-linguistically (see chapter 3.2 in Letuchiy 2009). Cf. English 'The water is boiling' (mono) / 'I boiled the water' (bi) / 'I made the water boil' (bi) / 'I made him boil the water' (tri).
Problem: there are transitive verbs in ZA, whose semantics don't allow for the anticausative interpretation, and whose causative forms are ambivalent, too.

Problem: Transitives with ambivalent causatives

- *tɬ'anni* 'pull'
- *qχelli* 'scrabble'
- *ruto* 'unfasten'

All these verbs express movement. Their causative might have conative-intensive semantics in their bivalent use. Some of the verbs I diagnosed as labile on the criterion of bivalent causatives might just be a subclass of transitive verbs semantically prone to lability within the class of transitive verbs which can undergo causativization without valency-increasing.

Transitives with ambivalent causatives

- *tɬ'anni* 'pull'
- *qχelli* 'scrabble'
- *ruto* 'unfasten'
- *qχ'abʃun* 'blink'
- *obi* 'touch'
- *b-ajtʃo* 'unfasten'

Lexemes	simple bi	mono	derived bi
b-ats'i	'mend'	'stick'	'paste'
b-eʒa	'fry'	'brown'	'fry'
b-eqχ'aʃi	'steal'	'hide'	'hide'
b-edːo	'leave'	'sour'	'make sour'
b-iχːi	'take'	'wreck'	'wreck/download'
b-iʔo	'bring'	'go'	'take'
b-its'i	'fill'	'fill'	'fill'
ʁʷanqχ'un	'choke'	'choke'	'choke'

Table with the remaining hypothetically labile verbs.
To account for the existence of such a class of verbs syntactically distinct from the two others, I follow a hypothesis that Letuchiy (2009:256) chose to dismiss, according to which this third class contains verbs whose two uses (tr and itr) behave synchronically as underived, and thus are distinct lexemes, which allows for both to be causativized.
Whereas in the case of what I called 'labile transitives', their intransitive use still behaves as derived form the transitive one.
unsurprisingly, the lexicalization of the derived use of labile verbs is often connected to a semantic shift : leave/sour. hide/steal, brown/fry, take/wreck, etc.

b-eqχ'aʃi 'hide/steal'

(12) a. *ports'ːi* *b-eqχ'aʃ-i-r.*
moon hide-PST-PROG
'The moon is hiding.'

b. *di-tʃ'u-kːu* *muhu*
I-AD-EL bread
b-eqχ'aʃ-i-j *Mariam-di.*
¬AN$_1$-hide-PST-PF Mariam-ERG
'Mariam stole the bread from me.'

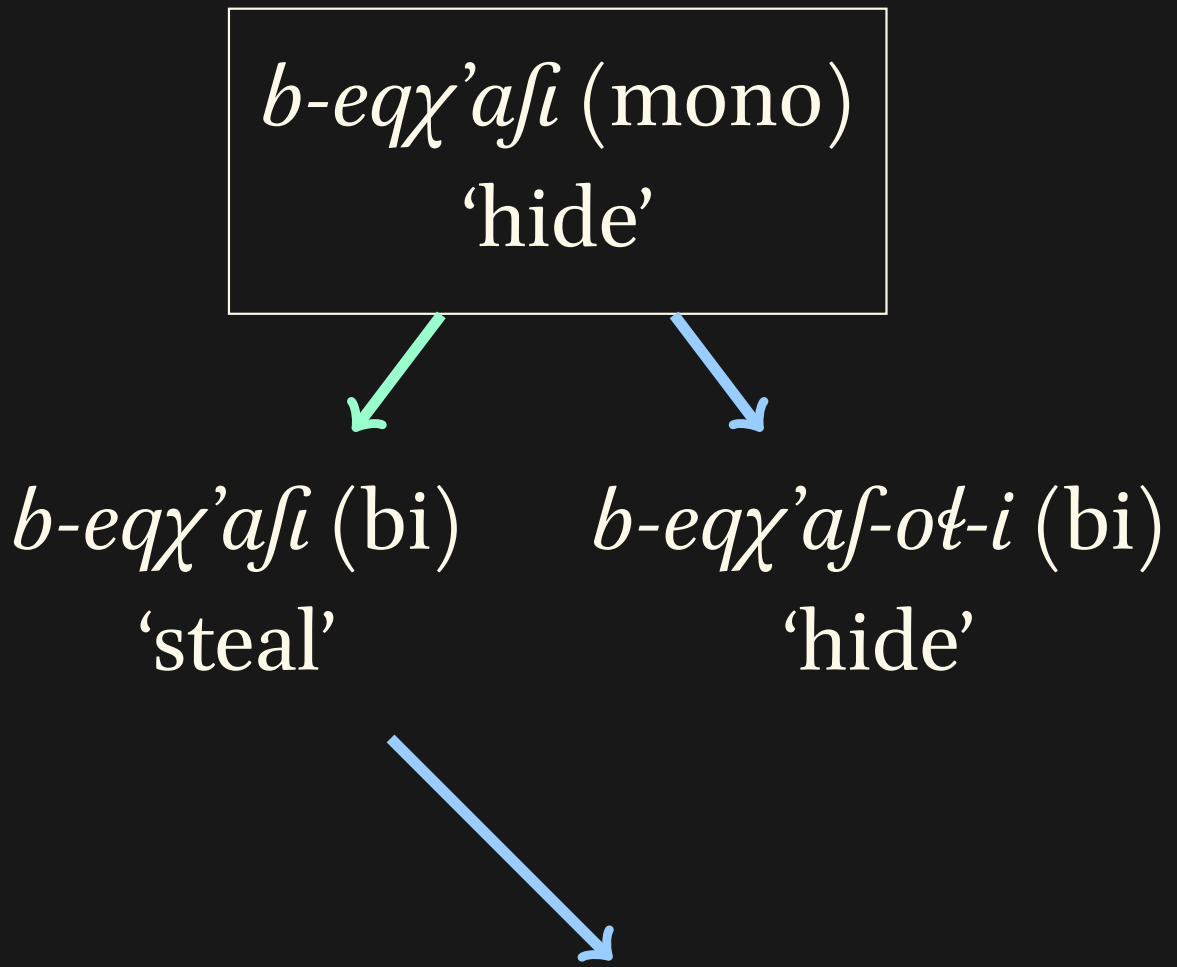
Example of a labile verb characterized by a strong semantic shift

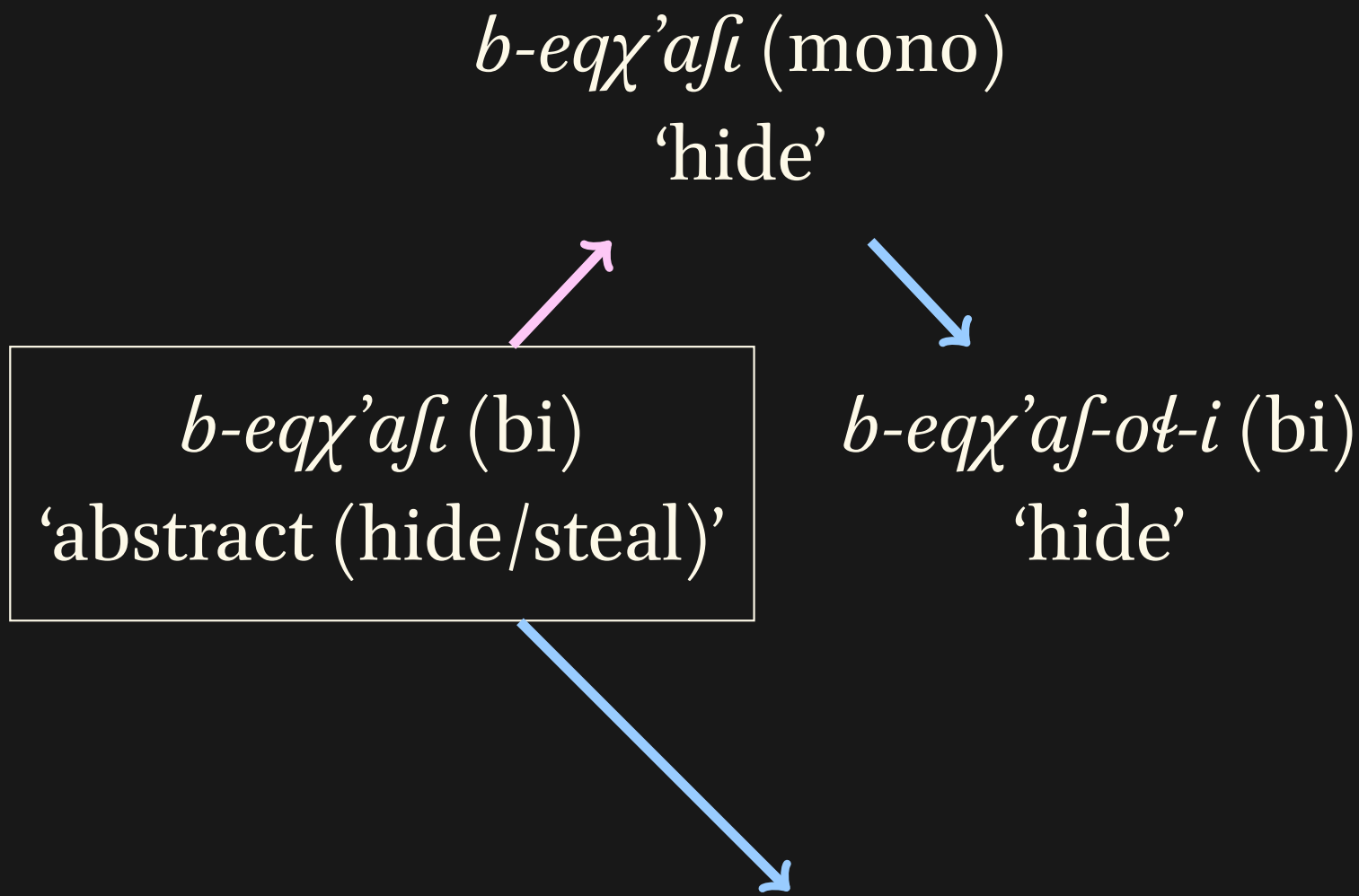
b-eqχ'aʃi 'hide/steal'

(13) *di-tʃ'u-kːu* *muhu*
I-AD-EL bread
b-eqχ'aʃ-oɬ-i-j *Mariam-di.*
¬AN$_1$-hide-CAUS-PST-PF Mariam-ERG
'Mariam hid the bread from me.'

b-eqχ'aʃi 'hide/steal'

(14) *di-tʃ'u-kːu muhu woʃu-b-o*
I-AD-EL bread boy.OBL-¬AN$_1$-AFF
b-eqχ'aʃ-oɬ-i-j Mariam-di.
¬AN$_1$-hide-CAUS-PST-PF Mariam-ERG
'Mariam made her son hide the bread from me.'


b-eqχ'aʃi (mono)
'hide'
b-eqχ'aʃi (bi)
'steal'
b-eqχ'aʃ-oɬ-i (bi)
'hide'
b-eqχ'aʃ-oɬ-i (tri)
'make s.o. steal'


b-eqχ'aʃi (mono)
'hide'
b-eqχ'aʃi (bi)
'abstract (hide/steal)'
b-eqχ'aʃ-oɬ-i (bi)
'hide'
b-eqχ'aʃ-oɬ-i (tri)
'make s.o. steal'

The direction of the unmarked derivation is unsure yet, but what is clearer is that here, the lexicalization of the derived use of the verb correlates with the semantic shift involved in the derivation process.
I think it would be logical to consider the transitive use as primary. Then, because it has been used intransitively as the other transitive verbs can be, but more extensively than the latter, due to semantic reasons, and the intransitive used acquired a specialized meaning (‘hide’ rather than ‘be stolen’, ‘sour’ rather than ‘be left’): new meaning = new verb = new causative. -> Two homophonic causatives with different meanings. And then the transitive use of the underived verb could specialize as well. ‘hide/steal’ -> ‘steal’

Conclusions

5. Conclusions

All ZA transitive verbs are prone to lability.

Is there any syntactic difference between passive and anticausative uses of null-A transitive constructions ?

Given that the tests we used so far didn't allow to draw any syntactic distinction between passive and anticausative uses of transitive verbs in ZA, there are grounds to question the postulate that there is any. Maybe both constructions are equally syntactically intransitive. So far, we have thought of one test: the imperative test. How would the order 'be stolen!' be translated ? Through the itr or the itr imperative ?

‘Lability proper’ does exist in ZA as the lexical property of a limited set of verbs singled out on a syntactic criterion.

The ubiquity of a certain kind lability as a default feature of all transitive verbs does not prevent ZA to display a limited set of verbs defined by lability 'proper' as a lexical feature on the basis of strictly syntactic properties.

Thank you for your attention!

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