

**ON EUSCARO-CAUCASIAN LINGUISTIC
RELATIONS:
EVIDENCE OF THE SYSTEM OF LANGUAGES
AND THEIR HISTORY**

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W. Humboldt's philosophical mind was interested in the language of the Basques. Considerable attention was given to the same language by H. Schuchardt, a major specialist of the Romance languages and staunch supporter of the principle of historicism in linguistics—the author of the well-known studies: *Primitiae Linguae Vasconum* (Halle, 1923) and *Über den passiven character des Transitivs in den kaukasischen Sprachen* (Wien, 1895).

In his paper «From Pyrenean Guria» (1928) containing a colourful description of the impressions he gained from a visit to the mountains of Basses-Pyrénées, N. Marr paid special attention to the lexical coincidences of Basque with Caucasian languages.

The last Chapter of the «*Études comparatives sur les langues caucasiennes du Nord-Ouest (Morphologie)*» (Paris, 1932) by G. Dumézil, an eminent student of Ibero-Caucasian linguistics, is devoted to the analogies of the Basque language with Ibero-Caucasian languages in morphology.

The Ibero-Caucasian linguistic type has been characterized by N. Holmer (1946).

The well-known Bascologist and Kartvelologist R. Lafon found morphological similarities between the Basque, Georgian and Abkhazian languages.

In his book «*La lengua vasca*» A. Tovar touches on the problem of the relation of Basque with Caucasian, as well as other language groups, such as Hamitic, Ugro-Finnic, Palaeo-Siberian, etc.

As far back as in 1864 Friedrich Müller considered Caucasian as well as Basque to be relict languages; later, in his «*Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft*» (Bd. III) Müller gave a detailed exposition of the paradigm of

conjugation of the Basque verb; he pointed out the common feature of the object forms of the transitive verb in Caucasian languages and Basque.

When comparing Basque with some other language (or a group of languages) scholars proceed from whatever is found «in common» between them in vocabulary, and especially in morphology - in the morphological inventory (further, in «the inner form»)¹.

The problem of «the common» and «the distinctive» is basic to both historical linguistics and comparative typology, as well as to the philosophical theory of language.

It is important to know what place the «common» holds in the *system* of respective languages and in their *history*.

«The common» may be an *original* property, or it may have been borrowed from one language into another *directly* (or *via* one or several other languages; it may also have come into being independently as a manifestation of the general laws of the development of thinking («the dual number», «inclusive» - «exclusive»)...

To operate with this common without gaining insight into its history would be as unwarranted as to write the history of past times without a preliminary «critique of the sources» or to add or subtract fractions without «reducing» them to a common denominator.

With the present vogue of typology and typological comparison we believe it scientifically rightfull to give special attention to the history of language in relation to the history of culture and the history of thinking (M. Lazarus, G. Steinthal, W. Wundt, E. Cassirer, Kainz, an others).

Thanks to the principle of historicism, grammar is converted from an «art» (*techne, ars*) into a science, i.e., acquires the status of a scientific discipline. It was due to the principle of historicism that many hundreds of unwritten languages of the world became for the first time the object of scientific study.

The Basque written language originated in the 16th century, though individual facts of vocabulary are on record from the 10th century.

Of the Ibero-Caucasian languages 20 are unwrittend and 12 written (of the latter 4 belong to the Abkhaz-Adyghe group, 2 to the Nakh, 5 to the Daghestanian, and 1 to the Kartvelian group). The Georgian language is documented from the end of the 5th century. Abkhazian, Adyghe, Chechen, Avar, Lak, Dargwa... are languages of recent writing, with written documents dating from the 18th century.

In these conditions a scientific comparison of Ibero-Caucasian languages is complicated.

1. Thus, H. Schuchardt wrote that the ergative construction led him from the Basque to Caucasian languages.

Even typological analysis brings out strong divergences in the composition of phonemes, in the morphological categories of the noun and the verb, as well as in the syntactic relation of words. These divergences are observable not only between Kartvelian and mountain languages, the genetic relationship of which with Kartvelian languages is questioned by many authors, but within mountain languages as well.

The same applies to phonetics and morphology.

In his study «Nordkaukasische Wortgleichungen (WZKM, B. 37, 1930) N. Troubetzkoy identified about 100 root and other morphemes common to the languages of the Abkhaz-Adyghe, Nakh and Daghestanian groups. However, as noted correctly by G. Deeters, «the phonetic correspondences are largely obscure» (Kaukasische Sprachen, 1963). This is the situation with the inter-group relations of North-Caucasian languages.

Furthermore, hitherto no regular phonetic correspondences have been identified with such languages of the same group as Abkhazian, Adyghe, and Ubykh - although their kinship is not questioned by specialists.

It is natural to suppose that the original results of processes of divergence are strongly obscured due to those of convergence (between Caucasian languages and those of a different circle).

It can be said without exaggeration that, according to a number of structural characteristics, there are more divergences between Ibero-Caucasian languages than is the case between the Basque and a number of Ibero-Caucasian languages.

Take, for example, the category of grammatical classes. In some languages (Nakh, Daghestanian) the category of grammatical classes is determined by morphological make-up of the language, whereas in others (Kartvelian) the category is altogether absent.

Abkhazian and Abaza distinguish this grammatical category, whereas in Adyghe languages and in Ubykh (of the same Abkhaz-Adyghe group) grammatical classes are not distinguished, the same being the case with Kartvelian languages.

The semantic category of grammatical classes - persons and things are understood in an analogous way in all Ibero-Caucasian languages: animals are in all languages referred to the category of things (the question *What?*), *Who?* referring *only to human beings*.

It has been found that initially the morphology of all the four groups of Ibero-Caucasian languages distinguished the category of grammatical classes in the same way. Semantics has preserved the same understanding, while the morphology of a number of languages - mainly in the peripheral zones - has lost it.

The share of declension is very considerable in the morphology of Daghestanian and Nakh as well as Kartvelian languages. The share of

declension is incomparably smaller in the Adyghe languages, whereas there is actually no declension in the Abkhazian language: the entire burden of morphology falls on verb conjugation. Abkhazian may well have preserved the ancient state of Ibero-Caucasian languages.

In *Adyghe* languages, particularly in Ubykh, a complex system of *personal* conjugation –of subject and subject-object– is represented.

In Nakh languages –Chechen, Ingush, as well as in a number of Daghestanian languages– the verb has only *class* conjugation; here the intransitive can change according to the class (and number) only of the *subject*, while the transitive according to the classes (and number) only of the *object*: the subject in the conjugation of the transitive verb is not reflected at all (class *subjectless* conjugation of the transitive verb).

In a number of Daghestanian languages (e.g. Tabassaran) *personal* forms (subject, subject-object) appear along with class forms: *class-personal* conjugation comes into being.

When a language loses its grammatical classes *class-personal* conjugation evolves into *personal* conjugation (of Daghestanian languages Udi is an example; also Kartvelian languages in whose *personal* conjugation survivals of *class* conjugation have been preserved).

Class (subject-class conjugation of intransitive and object-class conjugation of transitive verbs), *class-personal* and *personal* conjugation² form three consecutive links of a single process.

The foregoing is an outline of the principal structural differences between Ibero-Caucasian languages when a reconstruction of their history proves feasible.

The striking diversity of structural features in the systems of highly differing Ibero-Caucasian languages is signified by their history. This history is illustrated by geographic mosaic of linguistic divergences.

Euscaro-Caucasian linguistic relations are primarily a problem of historical linguistics. It is but natural to tackle it by means of historical linguistics –under present conditions by means of internal reconstruction, i.e., by comparing the different evidence of the system of languages.

Typological comparisons are by no means rejected here³. On the contrary, a typological analysis of the morphology and phonology of Basque dialects in comparison with analogous phenomena in Ibero-Caucasian languages –with a possible account of their history and for purposes of history– appears to be an urgent task.

2. In transitive verbs, the subject finds expression with the emergence of *personal* conjugation, the predominance of the object being retained for a long time.

3. Typology is justified from the point of view of history, as an auxiliary means. Typological analysis is incapable of distinguishing what is same from what is identical. In this lies the weakness of typological comparison.

The presence of more than 32 Ibero-Caucasian languages –differing both lexically and structurally– affords ample opportunities for the reconstruction of the main features of their history.

The strong dialectal differentiation of the Basque language can, to a certain extent, compensate for the absence of a group of like languages, cognate to Basque, in solving problems of historical phonology, morphology and lexicology.

At present the Basque language does not differentiate the category of grammatical classes, roughly in the same way as is the case with Adyghe languages or Georgian: the absence of this category is their common typological feature.

Nowever, this common character is deceptive: both the Adyghe and Kartvelian languages once had the category of grammatical classes.

This category may have been present in the morphology of the Basque language? The answer should be expected from the history of the Basque language from Bascologists.

Cooperation of Bascologists and Caucasian students can naturally accelerate the solution of many problems of the history of the language and culture of the Basques - an ancient and original people of Western Europe, as well as of the history of the languages and culture of the ancient peoples of the Caucasus.

LABURPENA

Hizkuntz problema honetaz arduratu diren linguisten berri (W. Humboldt, H. Schuchardt, N. Marr, G. Dumezil, N. Holmer, R. Lafon, A. Tovar, F. Muller, N. Troubetzkoy, G. Deeters, e.a.) eta beren usteak ordenatuki azaldu ondoren, euskararen eta kaukasiar mintzairaren egiturazko ezaugarrien arteko kidesasun eta urruntasunak seinalatzen dira.

Alde batetik ba dira Kaukasiar klase gramatikalak bereizten duten hizkuntzak (nakh, Daghestanekoak...) eta bestetik klaseen kategoriarik ez dutenak ere, kartveliarrak, kasu. Inoiz, gainera, hizkuntz talde berekoen artean, abjhazi-adyghiar mintzairatan kasu, batzuk (abjhaziak eta abazierak) klaseen kategoria dute, beste batzuk (adyghierak eta ubyghierak) ez duten artean. Azpimarratzekoa da, bestalde, klaseen kategoria duten kaukasiar hizkuntza guztietan animaliak *gauzen* sailean sailbanatuak direla, hau da, *zer* eta *ez nor*) gisa.

Kaukasiar hizkuntzen baitan kartveliar familiak (geogiera barne) Ipar Mendebaldeko taldearekin (abjhazi-adyghiarra) kidesasun nabariagoak ditu besteekin baino; esaterako, aditz-joko pertsonala bietan azaltzen da. Euskararen tipologia, gainera, hauekin loturik dago, baina klaseen kategoriarik eza, egileen ustez, hizkuntza horietan eboluzioz galduta den zerbait dateke, eta euskararen ere beste horrenbeste gertatu ote den galdetzen da, morfologian horren arrastoak bilatzeko komenientzia azalduz.

RESUMEN

Tras dar cumplida cuenta de los lingüistas que se han venido interesando por este problema (W. Humboldt, H. Schuchardt, N. Marr, G. Dumézil, N. Holmer, R. Lafon,

A. Tovar, F. Müller, N. Troubetzkoy, G. Deeters, etc.) y exponer ordenadamente las opiniones de cada uno al respecto, se pasa a señalar las afinidades y divergencias entre las características estructurales de la lengua vasca y las lenguas caucásicas.

Por un lado, existen allí lenguas que distinguen las clases gramaticales (naj, lenguas del Daghestan...), pero por otro lado, también hay lenguas, como las kartvélicas, que no presentan esta característica. A veces, incluso dentro de un mismo grupo de lenguas, v. g. en el grupo abjaz-adyghe, algunas de ellas, como el abjaz y el abaza, conocen esta categoría de clases, mientras que otras (adyghe y ubyj) lo desconocen. Es señalable, por otra parte, el hecho de que en todas las lenguas caucásicas los animales se clasifican como «cosas», es decir, en oposición a *quien*, referido siempre a las personas.

En el seno de las lenguas caucásicas, la familia kartvélica, en la que se incluye el georgiano, presenta afinidades más numerosas con el grupo Nord-occidental (abjaz-adyghe) que con el resto, siendo una característica común de ambos la conjugación verbal personal. La tipología del vasco coincide con estos grupos, pero los autores piensan que la falta de categoría de clases se debe, en aquellas lenguas, a una pérdida ocasionada por la evolución, y se preguntan si ocurre lo mismo en vasco, indicando la conveniencia de indagar en la morfología de este idioma en busca de algún posible rastro.

RÉSUMÉ

Après mentionner les linguistes qui s'ont intéressé par ce problème (W. Humboldt, H. Schuchardt, N. Marr, G. Dumézil, N. Holmer, R. Lafon, A. Tovar, F. Müller, N. Troubetzkoy, G. Deeters, etc.) et après d'exposer ordonnément les opinions de chacun sur ça, nous passons à signaler les affinités et divergences entre les caractéristiques appartenant à la structure de la langue basque et des langues caucasi-ques.

D'une part, il existe au Caucase des langues que distinguent les classes grammaticales (nakh, langues du Daghestan...) mais d'autre part, il y a aussi des langues comme les kartvéliques que ne présentent pas cette caractéristique. Quelquefois, même dans un même groupe des langues, v. g. dans le groupe abkhaz-adyghe, quelques de cettas langues, comme le abkhaz et le abaza connaissent cette catégorie de classes, pendant que des autres (adyghe et ubykh) ne le connaissent pas. C'est à signaler, d'autre part, le fait que dans toutes les langues caucasiques les animaux se classifient comme «choses», c'est à dire, par opposition à *qui*, rapporté toujours aux personnes.

Dans les langues caucasiques, la famille kartvélique, dans laquelle nous incluons le georgien, présente des affinités plus nombreuses avec le groupe nord-occidental (abkhaz-adyghe) qu'avec le reste, soyant une caractéristique commune aux deux la conjugaison verbale personnelle. La typologie du basque coïncide avec ces groupes, mais les auteurs pensent que le manque de la catégorie des classes est dû dans cettas langues là, à une perte occasionnée par l'évolution et on se demande si ça en arrive aussi dans le basque et nous signalons aussi la convenance de rechercher dans la morphologie de cette langue pour chercher quelque possible trace.