From meta- to object-level reading
of the Georgian approximative suffix *-savit*

Nino Amiridze

nino.amiridze@gmail.com

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

This talk looks at the uses of the suffix *-savit*, added to fully inflected synthetic verb forms in modern spoken Georgian (Kartvelian) to express hesitation, uncertainty [JKB88] and approximation regarding the event or state referred to by the verb form to which it attaches.

Observe the verb form *mṭḳiva* "my head hurts" in (1a). When it gets the ending *-savit*, as in (1b), there may be several readings, including having a discomfort resembling a headache, diminishing the real pain or being uncertain whether one can call it a headache at all.

(1) Georgian

    a. (me) tav-i   mṭḳiva.
        I.DAT head-NOM it.hurts.me

        'My head hurts.' (I have a headache.)

    b. (me) tav-i   mṭḳiva-savit.
        I.DAT head-NOM it.hurts.me-*savit*

        'My head kind of hurts.'

        1. not a real/strong headache (only resembles one); or
        2. not important mentioning (to diminish the importance and avoid bothering others);

The sequence *-savit* consists of the DAT marker *-sa* and the postposition *-vit* "like", "as". It appears normally with nominals and can have both object- (2a) and meta-level readings (2b):

(2) Georgian

    a. Object-level reading of {*-sa-vit*}

        nino-sa-vit   maγal-i.
        Nino-DAT-like tall-NOM

        'As tall as Nino.'

    b. Meta-level reading of {*-sa-vit*}

        nino-sa-vit   or-marcvl-ian-i   siṭqva
        Nino-DAT-like two-syllable-POSS-NOM word.NOM

        'Two-syllable word like *Nino*' (*ni.no* is a disyllabic name)

Until the second half of the 20th century, the ending *-savit*, if added to verb forms, only had a meta-level reading in standard Georgian:

(3) Standard Georgian, meta-level reading of -*savit*

venaṭrebi-savit   otx+marcvl+ian-i   siṭqva
(s)he.misses.me-*savit* four+syllable+POSS-NOM word.NOM

'Four-syllable word like (the form) *venaṭrebi*' (*ve.na.ṭre.bi* consists of four syllables)

In literary Georgian the application of the ending -*savit* to a finite verb form has always had a meta-level reading and thus has exclusively been a way to explain one form via another synonymous form, very popular in dictionaries. For instance, as mentioned in [Jap63, p. 95] and later also in [Sha73, p. 77], the famous Georgian writer and lexicographer Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1658–1725) in his Georgian dictionary interprets forms this way. For instance, in order to explain the form *gaač̆uma* (4a) and say that it is used like another form *daaduma* (4b), Orbeliani attaches the -*savit* to the latter form:

(4) Georgian of the 17th Century, cited in [Jap63, p. 95], meta-level reading of {-*sa-vit*}

   a. gaač̆uma − daaduma-sa-vit.
       gaač̆uma   *daaduma*-DAT-like

       '[The verb form] *gaač̆uma* [is used] like [the verb form] *daaduma*.'

   b. daaduma.
       (s)he.made.him/her.silent

       '(S)he silenced him/her.'

In the Orbeliani's times the ending -*savit* when applied to finite verbs had exclusively a meta-level use and referred only to the form of the item to which it used to attach. The ending did not affect the semantics of the host form or the syntactic status of the clause containing the form as its constituent.

   The application of the ending -*savit* to finite verbs that affects the object-level reading of the verb (as in (1b)) has been characteristic to Georgian dialects for quite some time (see (5) and (6) from [Jap63]) before it spread into the modern spoken Georgian since the second half of the 20th century (7). There it acts as an approximator (further glossed as APPR):

(5) Tushian dialect of Georgian, Lower Alvani, [Jap63, p. 96]. Object-level reading of -*savit*

vuɣonoob-savit.
I.am.stripped.of.strength-APPR

'I am kind of stripped of strength.'

(6) Gurian dialect of Georgian, [Jap63, p. 97]. Object-level reading of -*savit*

gaḳuč̣ṭa-savit.
(s)he.got.angry-APPR

'(S)he got angry a bit.'

(7) Georgian, [Jap63, p. 95]. Object-level reading of -*savit*

   a. mšia-savit.   b. šemešinda-savit.
       I.am.hungry-APPR   I.got.scared-APPR
       'I am kind of hungry.'   'I kind of got scared.'

In the 1960's the marking was considered to be a violation of literary norms. Later, since the 1980's, literary works have been reflecting such uses. Most importantly the forms are not comprehended by native speakers as dialectal, idiolectal, marginal or unacceptable any more. The marking serves a special function, to express uncertainty, doubt of the speaker regarding the event and its intensity referred to by the host verb form. Thus, apart from the usual meta-level use, the ending -*savit* got the object-level use as well, where the semantics of the host verb form gets affected.

(8) Georgian

    a. mombezrda.
      I.am.fed.up.with.it
      'I am fed up with it.'

    b. mombezrda-savit.
      I.am.fed.up.with.it-APPR
      'I am kind of fed up with it.'
      (From [Mor04, p. 100])

[Jap63] is, to the best of my knowledge, the first work mentioning the readings of the ending *-savit* with verb forms that has an object-level application. [JKB88] describes the ending *-savit* with verbs to express slightness, resemblance, uncertainty and almost reaching the state, expressed by the unsuffixed form.

(9) Georgian, from [JKB88, p. 170]. Object-level reading of *-savit*

momšivda-savit.
I.got.hungry-APPR

'I got hungry a bit.'

The forms with the suffix *-savit* listed in [JKB88] are exclusively psych verbs. However, today the suffix can appear with any verb class, as the data collected for this talk shows.

    The suffix *-savit* is interesting from typological and diachronic perspectives. Typologically, it shows a rare phenomenon of using exclusively nominal affixes with fully inflected verbs. Although there are cases of originally nominal affixes used with finite verbs cross-linguistically, they are mostly employed as a syntactic tool, namely, as subordinating affixes (see, e.g., the Dolakhali Newari INST marker *-na* in (10) or the Pitta-Pitta ABL marker *-inya* in (11), both used as subordinators). The Georgian suffix *-savit* with fully inflected verbs, however, is not a subordinator, affecting the syntax of the clause but rather a device, affecting the semantics of the base form, to which it attaches.

(10) Dolakhali Newari (Tibeto-Burman), [Gen91, p. 227]

chẽ-ku   yer-na   wā   ām-e   naku moŋ-an   coŋ-gu
house-LOC come-INST EMPH he-gen cheek swell-PARTICLE stay-3SG:PASTHAB

'When he came to the house, his cheek was swollen.'

(11) Pitta-Pitta (Pama–Nyungan, Australia), [Bla99, p. 305]

Tatyi-ka-inya, mutyi-ka   nganytya
eat-PAST-ABL   sleep-PAST I

'After eating, I slept.'

This talk will also consider the grammaticalization path from the old Georgian adverb *vitar* meaning "approximately" to the modern day postposition *-vit* "as", "like" (see Table 1), used in the approximative suffix *-savit*. As expected in a grammaticalization scenario [HT03], there is a reduction of the form and the acquisition of more grammatical functions, in combination with loosing the lexical characteristics related to the initial form.

    Some of the recent uses, however, show the ending *-savit* separated from the base verb by some particles (12). Thus, the bound morpheme gets an unbound use, contradicting the principle of unidirectionality of grammaticalization. This makes the approximator *(-)savit* interesting from a diachronic perspective as well.

(12) Modern Georgian, posted on 6.08.2007 at
    https://forum.ge/?showtopic=33758767&view=findpost&p=6336527

ḳalastan   šedarebit neṭrebḳo   ubralod mɣeris, ra...   savit.
[Maria]Callas-to comparing [Anna]Netrebko simply   she.sings PARTICLE APPR

Lit.: Compared to Callas, Netrebko simply sings, well, kind of.

'Compared to Callas, Netrebko's singing only looks like singing.'

	Old Georgian Adverb [Sar97]	Old Geo. Adv. [Sar97]	Middle Geo. Adv. [GNC08]	Modern Geo. Adv. [Sha73] (Poetry)	Modern Geo. postposition [Jor89] (Dialects & Standard)	Some dialects, Postposition [JKB88]
	vitar	*vita*	*vit(a)*	*vit(a)*	*-vit(a)*	*-vi*
"approximately"	YES					
"how" (interrogative)	YES	YES	YES	YES		
"how" (relative)	YES	YES	YES	YES		
"as", "like"			YES	YES	YES	YES

Table 1: Diachronic development of the modern Georgian postposition -*vit* "as", "like" from the old Georgian adverb *vitar* "approximately"

References

[Bla99]   Barry J. Blake. Nominal marking on verbs: Some Australian cases. *Word*, 50(3):299–317, 1999.

[Gen91]   Carol Genetti. From postposition to subordinator in Newari. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott and Bernd Heine, editors, *Approaches to Grammaticalization, Vol II: Focus on types of grammatical markers*, pages 227–255. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 1991.

[GNC08]   The Georgian National Corpus. https://clarino.uib.no/gnc/page. (Subcorpus of the XVII–XVIIIcc.), 2008.

[HT03]   Paul J. Hopper and Elizabeth C. Traugott. *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

[Jap63]   Z. Japaridze. On the use of the postposition -*vit* with the verb in Georgian. In *Issues of the Structure of Kartvelian Languages, 3*, pages 95–98. Academy of the Sciences of the Georgian SSR, Tbilisi, 1963. (In Georgian).

[JKB88]   B. A. Jorbenadze, M. Kobaidze, and M. Beridze. *Dictonary of Morphemes and Modal Elements of Georgian*. Mecniereba, Tbilisi, 1988. (In Georgian).

[Jor89]   B. A. Jorbenadze. *Georgian Dialectology*. Mecniereba, Tbilisi, 1989. (In Georgian).

[Mor04]   A. Morchiladze. *mogzauroba qarabaγši* [*The Trip to Karabach*]. Bakur Sulakauri Publishing, Tbilisi, 2004. (In Georgian. First published in 1992).

[Sar97]   Z. Sarjveladze. *The Old Georgian Language*. Tbilisi State Pedagogical University Press, Tbilisi, 1997. (In Georgian).

[Sha73]   A. Shanidze. *Foundations of Georgian Grammar, I, Morphology*. Tbilisi University Press, Tbilisi, 1973. (In Georgian).