On the Original Function of the Suffix -qe in the Historical Morphosyntactic Model of the Georgian Language

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Annotation

The paper examines the functions of the suffix **-qe** in the dialects of the Georgian language as well as in the standard literary language. It advances the view that the original function of the suffix-morpheme **-qe** may have been the expression of duality or pairing in verbal forms. Subsequently, this suffix appears to have acquired a pluralizing function after the grammatical category of the dual number was lost. The category of the dual number is attested in many languages and dialects worldwide, and in some cases, it is expressed by grammatical means. In the Kartvelian languages and their dialects, as well as in Old Georgian, a diverse body of lexical material reflecting duality is documented, a considerable portion of which remains in use today. However, grammatical markers of the dual number are generally absent from the modern language, with rare exceptions; notably, such markers are attested only in nominal forms and only in the Khevsurian dialect.

The suffix **-qe** is attested in Georgian written sources from the seventh century onward, while attempts to establish it in the Georgian literary language begin in the Middle Ages, most notably in the language of Ioane Petritsi and within the Gelati literary school. Up to that period, the suffix appears to have been widely distributed across both Eastern and Western Georgian dialects.

In many of the world's languages, the category of duality or pairing (the dual number) is expressed both grammatically and lexically. In Georgian, however, it is generally considered to be expressed only lexically, with the exception of the case mentioned above. Among the languages of the ancient world, the dual number is attested in Asian languages, while in European languages it comes from Old Indian.

Georgian, as a language characterized by a highly developed morphological system, must undoubtedly have possessed grammatical means of expression as well. Linguistic contact cannot be ruled out: among the ancient languages with which Georgian was in contact, the dual number has been reconstructed for Hittite and was present in the Old Anatolian languages as well as in the Attic dialect of Greek. In many extinct languages, the dual number is presumed to have existed but was subsequently lost. The dual number was also a feature of Arabic, traces of which are identifiable in Aramaic. Aramaic was widespread in Georgia in the centuries following the birth of Christ, and Arabic of the same period likewise retained the dual category. Notably, the period during which Arabic was present in Georgia coincides symptomatically with the earliest attestations of the particle **-qe**. It is generally assumed that grammatical devices expressing pairing or duality are associated with advanced stages of language development, that is, with a more developed linguistic consciousness; nevertheless, such features are also attested in so-called "exotic" languages (cf. W. von Humboldt).

It is also permissible to assume the incorporation of morphological inventory from the Mountain Iberian–Caucasian languages into Georgian: In these languages, syllabic elements such as ყო, ყუ, ყⷣე, ყა and ყე are attested in forms denoting the numeral 'two'. From the Mountain Caucasian languages, a number of Georgian stems are derived, such as ტყუ-ბი/ტკუ-ბი/ტყუ-ჯი…, in which ტ is regarded as a secondary development; the same root is also attested in Old Georgian, for example ტყუ-ელ-ვ-ა "clapping with both hands". In Zan and Svan, the numerals denoting 'two' exhibit, on the one hand, forms with ⷣორი and, on the other, ყ-ორი. It is thus established that in Megrelian and Chan, the phonetic substitution of ყ by ⷣ is documentarily attested.

The hypothesis that **-ყე** represents the result of the erosion of the defining pronoun ყველა "all" (Arn. Chikobava) may not correspond to the facts. In Georgian, plural markers are of diverse dialectal origin. The elements **-ყ** and **-ყე** in verbal forms do not function as markers of person or number; rather, they merely indicate plurality and may also express iterativity or repeated action.

The suffix **-ყე** appears to belong to a particular Georgian dialectal stratum, whose original function was likely to indicate duality of verbal persons. Subsequently, it acquired a function of expressing plurality, after the category of the dual number had already been lost. Comparable developments are observed in various languages worldwide, where the dual has similarly disappeared. In the multi-dialectal Old Greek, for instance, the dual number is attested only in the Attic dialect.