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GENERAL CONVERBS IN MEHWEB

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GENERAL CONVERBS IN MEHWEB[2,3]

This paper deals with the morphological and syntactic properties of general converbs in Mehweb, including the markers used to form general converbs and the alternations they undergo, periphrastic converbs, independent uses of converbs, their behaviour in combination with tensed verbs in the imperative, different strategies of how a converb clause shares its arguments with the main clause, and coordination/subordination properties of general converb construction. The description of morphological features of the general converbs is mostly based on the existing studies of Mehweb. The description of their syntactic properties is based on an analysis of elicited examples.

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I explore the properties of general converbs in Mehweb, a language of the Dargwa branch of the Nakh-Dagestanian language family, spoken by approximately 1000 people in a small village in Northeast Caucasus. Mehweb is an ergative language with SOV as a basic word order. All verb forms are derived from either the perfective or imperfective stem. Most verbs have a slot for agreement with their absolutive argument.

According to Haspelmath, "a converb is a non-finite verb form whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination"; in other words, "converbs are verbal adverbs, just like participles are verbal adjectives" [Haspelmath 1995:3] In Mehweb there are general converbs, which do not specify the semantic relation between the main and the converb clause, and specialized converbs (e.g. causal, immediate, temporal sequence), which do. For more on specialized converbs in Mehweb, see [Sheyanova 2015].

This paper is organised as follows: in section 2, the morphology of perfective and imperfective converbs is discussed, section 3 describes periphrastic converbs and section 4 deals with independent use of general converbs in Mehweb. In section 5 I describe their semantics when combined with imperatives, and section 6 is dedicated to different strategies of how converb clauses can share their arguments with the main clause. Finally, in section 7 I consider the coordination and subordination properties of the Mehweb general converb.

2. Perfective and imperfective converbs: morphology

General converbs in Mehweb can be derived from the perfective and imperfective stems. Below I will refer to them as perfective and imperfective converbs respectively.

The perfective converb is formed by adding the converb marker *-le* to the verb in the aorist [Magometov 1982:110], which can only be derived from the perfective stem [Magometov 1982:88]; it is, however, important to note that the affix undergoes regular morphonological alternations, which are described in detail in Daniel [2015].

Tab. 1. The formation of the perfective converb

	1st conjugation class	2nd conjugation class	3rd conjugation class
Aorist	*b-at-ur* N-leave.PFV-AOR 'left'	*b-ic-ib* N-sell.PFV-AOR 'sold'	*b-elč'-un* N-read.PFV-AOR 'read'
Perfective converb	*b-at-ul-le* (<*b-at-ur-le*) N-leave.PFV-AOR-CVB 'having left'	*b-ic-i-le* (<*b-ic-ib-le*) N-sell.PFV-AOR-CVB 'having sold'	*b-elč'-uwe* (<*b-elč'-ul-le*) N-read.PFV-AOR.CVB 'having read'

The imperfective converb is formed by adding *-uwe* to the imperfective stem. Here, the process is the same for all verbs [Magometov 1982:112].

Tab. 2. The formation of the imperfective converb

	1st conjugation class	2nd conjugation class	3rd conjugation class
Present participle	*b-alt-es* N-leave.IPFV-INF 'leaving'	*b-ilc-es* N-sell.IPFV-INF 'selling'	*luč'-es* N-read.IPFV-INF 'reading'
Imperfective converb	*b-alt-uwe* N-leave.IPFV-PRS.CVB '(while) leaving'	*b-ilc-uwe* N-sell.IPFV-PRS.CVB '(while) selling'	*luč'-uwe* read.IPFV-PRS.CVB '(while) reading'

The perfective converb is used to describe an event which precedes what is described in the main clause. Actions that take place simultaneously with the main event are described by the imperfective converb. Both imperfective and perfective converbs can be combined with finite verbs in the present or the past tense, cf.:

(1) ДечIра бакъиле, Муса вакъун хъули.

DEC'□RA B-AQ'-ILE MUSA W-AˤQ'-UN QULI

song□ADD N-do.PFV-CVB Musa M-go-AOR house(LAT)

'Having sung a song, Musa went home.'

(2) ДечIра бикъуве, Муса вакъун хъули.

DEC'□RA B-IQ'-UWE MUSA W-AˤQ'-UN QULI

song□ADD N-do.IPFV-CVB Musa M-go-AOR house(LAT)

'Singing a song, Musa went home.'

(3) ДечIра бакъиле, Муса аркъуве лев хъули.

DEC'□RA B-AQ'-ILE MUSA AR-Q'-UWE LE-W QULI

song□ADD N-do.PFV-CVB Musa away-go-CVB COP-M house(LAT)

'Having sung a song, Musa is going home.'

(4) ДечIра бикъуве, Муса аркъуве лев хъули.

DEC'□RA B-IQ'-UWE MUSA AR-Q'-UWE LE-W QULI

song□ADD N-do.IPFV-CVB Musa away-go-CVB COP-M house(LAT)

'Singing the song, Musa is going home.'

3. Periphrastic converbs

Apart from the perfective and imperfective converbs described above, most native speakers of Mehweb also allow forms consisting of a converb and a copula in the converb form, which are basically converbs formed from periphrastic verb forms. Below I will refer to such forms as periphrastic converbs.

The periphrastic converb form corresponds to resultative tense, composed of a perfective converb and a tensed copula.

(5) Ябу бициле лебле, МахIмудини хве ассиб.

JAˤ BUB-IC-ILE LE-B-LE MAˤħMUD-I-NI χWE AS: -IB

horse N-sell-CVB COP-N-CVB Mahmud-OBL-ERG dog buy-AOR

'Having sold a horse, Mahmud bought a dog.'

The same construction with an imperfective converb instead of perfective corresponds to present progressive, which was also described in [Magometov 1982:87] as "definite imperfect".

(6) Ябу билцуве лебле, МахIмуд лев виссуве.

JAˤ BUB-ILC-UWE LE-B-LE MAˤħMUD LE-W W-IS: -UWE

horse N-sell.IPFV-PRS.CVB COP-M-CVB Mahmud COP-M M-weep.IPFV-PRS.CVB

‘While selling a horse, Mahmud is crying.’

All the speakers also allow sentences like (7) and (8), where the copula in the converb form is preceded by a perfective or an imperfective infinitive. Formally, these forms correspond to future resultative and future progressive, which are composed of a perfective converb and a copula in the converb form, and an imperfective converb and a copula in the converb form respectively. However, the semantic difference between them is unclear and really subtle.

(7) Ябу бицес лебле, МахIмудини хве ассиб.

JAˤ BUB-IC-ES LE-B-LE MAˤħMUD-I-NI χʷE AS: -IB

horse N-sell.PFV-INF COP-N-CVB mahmud-OBL-ERG dog buy.PFV-AOR

‘Going to sell a horse, Mahmud bought a dog.’

(8) Ябу билцес лебле, МахIмуд лев виссуве.

JAˤ BUB-ILC-ES LE-B-LE MAˤħMUD LE-W W-IS: -UWE

horse N-sell.IPFV-INF COP-N-CVB mahmud COP-M M-weep.IPFV-CVB

‘Going to sell a horse, Mahmud is crying.’

4. Independent use

In most cases, converbs are used in sentences along with finite verbs. However, some speakers allow sentences that only contain converbial predication.

When used independently, the perfective converb can have resultative semantics.

(9) Уршини диъ беркуве.

URSI-NI DIʔ B-ERK-UWE

boy-ERG meat N-eat.PFV-CVB

‘A boy has eaten the meat (he finished it, so there is none left for me).’

Imperfective converbs can have the same semantics as habitual forms, i.e. (10) and (11) have the same meaning.

(10) Уршини диъ букуве.

URSI-NI DIʔ B-UK-UWE

boy-ERG meat N-eat.IPFV-CVB

‘A boy eats meat.’

(11) Уршини диъ букан.

URSI-NI DIʔ B-UK-AN

boy-ERG meat N-eat.IPFV-POT

‘A boy eats meat.’

5. Use in the imperative

Generally, a converb depending on an imperative form may or may not inherit the illocutive power of the main verb. In Mehweb, both variants are possible.

(12) Ахъули гьуйис нушала шабахI вакIиле, нушашу хъули вакIе.

AQULI HUJI-S NUŠA-LA ŠA-BAħ W-AK’-LE, NUŠA-ŠU

next time.OBL-DAT we-GEN village-ALL M-come.PFV-CVB we-AD(LAT)

QULI W-AK’-E

house(LAT) M-come-IMP

‘When you come to our village next time, come to our place.’

(13) Калтушка дишхъиле, хIарши дакъа.

KALTUŠKA D-IŠQ-ILE ħARŠI D-AQ’-A

potato NPL-peel.PFV-CVB soup NPL-do.PFV-IMP

‘When you have peeled the potatoes, cook the soup.’

In the contexts where the converb inherits the illocutive power of the main verb, using another imperative instead of the converb is possible. Thus, (14) has almost the same reading as (13).

(14) Калтушка дишхъа, хIарши дакъа.

KALTUŠKA D-IŠQ-A ħARŠI D-AQ’-A

potato NPL-peel.PFV-IMP soup NPL-cook.PFV-IMP

‘Peel the potatoes and cook the soup.’

The meaning of the two, however, is slightly different. Some speakers claim that in (13) it is implied that the potato should be peeled and then added to the soup, whereas (14) does not have such implication. Using converbs with imperatives implies that there is a closer semantic link between the two events than it would be in a sentence with two imperatives. A similar phenomenon in the Archi language is described in [Dobrushina 2008].

6. Argument sharing

Very often some arguments of the converb clause coincide with those of the main clause. Below I will refer to such situations as *argument sharing.*

In Mehweb, converbs may—but do not have to—share their S-, A-, P-, and other arguments with the main clause. Examples (15)–(18) illustrate some of the configurations.

Note that not all of the configurations are equally well evaluated by our consultants. It appears that only configurations that include sharing of at least one S-argument and/or an A-argument, regardless of the clause where it is expressed, like in (15) and (16), or sentences that include no argument sharing at all, like (20) and (21), are always understood in the expected way. Configurations which include sharing of P-arguments and/or no sharing of S-arguments, like (17) and (18), seemed to have different (expected or unexpected) readings among the speakers, and sentences where A- and P-arguments of one transitive clause are coreferent to P- and A-arguments of the other respectively, like (19) were never interpreted the expected way at all.

Two intransitive clauses sharing their S-argument, which is expressed in the converb clause:

(15) Даг хве гьарбухъуве, ишбари ашбахъиб.

DAG χʷE HAR-B-UQ-UWE IŠBARI AŠ-B-AQ-IB

yesterday dog away-N-run.PFV-CVB today back-N-come.PFV-AOR

‘Yesterday the dog ran away, today it returned.’

The S-argument of the intransitive converb clause is coreferent to the A-argument of the transitive main clause and is expressed in the converb clause:

(16) Муса вакIиле, Расуйче бахъиб.

MUSA W-AK’-ILE RASUJ-čE B-AQˁ-IB

Musa M-come.PFV-CVB Rasul-SUP(LAT) N-hit.PFV-AOR

'When Musa came, (he) hit Rasul.'[4]

Both clauses are transitive, the P-argument of the converb clause is coreferent to the A-argument of the main clause, the common argument is expressed in the main clause:

(17) МахIмудини ассиле гаттуини вацца буциб.

MAħMUD-I-NI AS-ILE GAT:U-I-NI WAC:A B-UC-IB

Mahmud-OBL-ERG buy.PFV-CVB cat-OBL-ERG mouse N-catch.PFV-AOR

'Mahmud bought a cat and it caught a mouse.'

Both clauses are transitive and share their A- and P-arguments, the common A-argument is expressed in the converb clause, the common P-argument is expressed in the main clause:

(18) Даг ХIамзатини ассиле, ишбари квигьа бергьун.

DAG ħAMZAT-I-NI AS-ILE IŠBARI KʷIHA

yesterday Hamzat-OBL-ERG buy.PFV-CVB today lamb

B-ERH-UN

N-slaughter.PFV-AOR

'Yesterday Hamzat bought a lamb, today he slaughtered it.'

Both clauses are transitive, the A- and P-arguments of one clause are coreferent to the P- and A-arguments of the other respectively:

(19) Расул уциле, Муса вабгIиб.

RASUL UC-ILE MUSA W-Aˁ Bʔ-IB

Rasul catch.PFV-CVB Musa M-kill.PFV-AOR

*‘Musa caught Rasul, Rasul killed Musa.’[5]

Sentences with no argument sharing like (19) and (20) are possible.

(20) МахIмудини диъ ассиле, ПатIиматини хве дубагIахъиб.

MAħMUD-I-NI DIʔ ASS-ILE PAT’IMAT-I-NI χʷE

Mahmud-OBL-ERG meat buy.PFV-CVB Patimat-OBL-ERG dog

D-UB Aˁʢ-AQ-IB

[4] The verb *#AQˁAS* 'to hit' is transitive, and it takes the instrument as an absolutive argument, though it may not be expressed in the sentence. This is why the noun does not stand in absolutive and the verb has a neutral class agreement marker.

[5] A possible translation: ‘Rasul was caught, Musa was killed.’

N-eat LV.PFV-CAUS-AOR

'Mahmud bought some meat, Patimat fed the dog.'

(21) Адамилини къар бишхъиле, хьунуйни буруш бакъиб.

ADAMI-LI-NI Q'ARB-IŠQ-ILE XUNUJ-NI BURUŠ B-AQ'-IB

husband-OBL-ERG hay N-mow.PFV-CVB wife.OBL-ERG bed N make-AOR

'The husband mowed the hay, the wife made the bed.'

Table 3 shows the distribution of different argument sharing strategies by native speakers' ability to interpret them in the expected way.

Tab. 3. The acceptability of different argument sharing strategies

Configurations that were always interpreted correctly	Configurations that were ambiguous for some speakers	Configurations that were never understood in the expected way
S=S	S=P	A=P, P=A
A=S	A=A	
no sharing	P=P	
	A=P	
	A=A, P=P	

7. Coordination vs. subordination

It has been noted that a close translation equivalent for a converb construction would be English clause coordination [Haspelmath 1995:8]. Their syntactic status is however unclear. Below I describe the syntactic properties of the Mehweb converb construction in terms of coordination vs. subordination.

7.1. Three syntactic tests

To find out whether the converbial construction in Mehweb is dependent on the main verb or not, three syntactic tests were applied to (22) and (23): changing the linear order (7.1.1), centre embedding (7.1.2) and relativization (7.1.3)[6].

In sentence (22), the converb clause shares its A-argument with the main clause, while sentence (23) has no argument sharing.

(22) Мусаини хъали бициле, изес ваиб.
MUSA-I-NI QALI B-IC-ILE IZ-ES W-AʔIB
musa-OBL-ERG house N-sell.PFV-CVB be.ill.PFV-INF M-begin.PFV-AOR
'Musa, having sold the house, became ill.'

(23) Адамилини къар бишхъиле, хьунуйни буруш бакъиб.
ADAMI-LI-NI Q'ARB-IŠQ-ILE XUNUJ-NI BURUŠ
husband-OBL-ERG hay N-mow.PFV-CVB wife.OBL-ERG bed
B-AQ'-IB
N-do.PFV-AOR
'The husband mowed the hay, the wife made the bed.'

7.1.1. Linear order

When two or more coordinate clauses describe a sequence of events, their order is iconic and cannot be changed without changing the sense of the entire sentence. In contrast, if one of the clauses is subordinate, the order can be changed with no influence on the general meaning. For instance, *I came, I saw, I conquered* is not semantically identical to *I came, I conquered, I saw*. However, sentences *Having seen, I conquered* and *I conquered, having seen* are both possible and have identical meaning.

In this respect, Mehweb general converbs seem to behave more like English subordinate clauses:

(24) Изес ваиб Муса хъали бициле.
IZ-ES W-AʔIB MUSA-I-NI QALI B-IC-ILE

[6] The tests were described in [Creissels 2012:143-145]

be.ill.PFV-INF M-begin.PFV-AOR Musa-OBL-ERG house N-sell.PFV-CVB
'Musa became ill, because he had sold the house.'

(25) Хьунуйни буруш бакъиб, адамилини къар бишхъиле.
XUNUJ-NI BURUŠ B-AQ'-IB, ADAMI-LI-NI Q'AR
wife.OBL-ERG bed N-make.PFV-AOR husband-OBL-ERG hay
B-IŠQ-ILE
N-mow.PFV-CVB
'The wife made bed, because the husband had mowed the hay.'

In both cases the main and the converb clauses can be swapped. It does not affect the order of the events, which is the same as in the original (22) and (23). However, note that this time translations provided by native speakers for both sentences included the word 'because'. This fact will be explained further in the paper.

7.1.2. Embedding

More evidence for subordination analysis is the possibility of the embedding of the converb clause into the main one.

In Mehweb, a converb clause which shares its A-argument with the main clause is perfectly fine between the main verb and its dependents.

(26) Муса хъали бициле, изес ваиб.
MUSA QALI B-IC-ILE IZ-ES W-AʔIB
Musa house N-sell.PFV-CVB be.ill.PFV-INF M-begin.PFV-AOR
'Musa, as he had sold the house, became ill.'

In this sentence, it can be clearly defined that the common argument belongs to the main clause because of its case marking. The verb *IZES #AʔES* 'to become ill' is intransitive, which is why its only argument stands in absolutive. If the noun belonged to the converb clause, it would have an ergative marker, cf. (27):

(27) Мусаини хъали бициб.
MUSA-I-NI QALI B-IC-IB

Musa-OBL-ERG house N-sell.PFV-AOR

‘Musa sold the house.’

In the absence of argument sharing, however, the situation is less clear. Speakers tend either to interpret the sentence not the way it was intended, or just mark it as wrong:

(28) Хьунуйни, адамилини къар бишхъиле, буруш бакъиб.

#XUNUJ-NI, ADAMI-LI-NI Q’ARB-IŠQ-ILE, BURUŠ

wife.OBL-ERG husband-OBL-ERG hay N-mow.PFV-CVB bed

B-AQ’-IB

N-make.PFV-AOR

‘The wife and the husband, having mowed the hay, made the bed.’

7.1.3. Relativization

Generally, clause coordination tends to place much more severe restrictions than clause subordination on the use of relativization strategies. For instance, English sentence *The boy cried when his sister punched him* can be relativized as *The boy, who cried when his sister punched him, came in,* whereas no such construction is possible with a sentence like *The boy’s sister punched him, and he started crying*.

In Mehweb, the relativization of the main verb arguments within the converb clause is allowed, if the converb clause shares its A-argument with the main one:

(29) Хъали бициле изес ваиби Муса вебкIиб.

QALI B-IC-ILE IZ-ES W-AʔIB-I MUSA

house N-sell.PFV-CVB be.ill.PFV-INF M-begin.PFV-AOR-ATR Musa

W-EʕBK’-IB

M-die.PFV-AOR

'Musa, who became ill because of selling the house, died.'

As for the sentence without sharing, again, evidence is not clear. None of the speakers suggested the expected interpretation (‘The wife, who made bed after her husband mowed the grass, came here’).

(30) Адамилини къар бишхъиле буруш бакъиби хьунул ише ракIиб.

#ADAMI-LI-NI *Q'AR* *B-ISQ-ILE* *BURUŠ B-AQ'-IB-I*

husband-OBL-ERG hay N-mow.PFV-CVB bed N-make.PFV-AOR-ATR

XUNUL IŠE *R-AK'-IB*

wife here F1-come.PFV-AOR

'The husband mowed the hay and made bed (for his wife), the wife came here.'

7.2 Co-subordination

After applying the tests to different sentences containing converbial predication, it seems that the Mehweb converbial construction displays different coordination/subordination properties under different circumstances. I take a closer look at the conditions that influence syntactical properties of the constructions. First, as seen from (24)–(26) and (29), in all the cases where the subordination tests worked, some sort of causal relation between the main and the converb clause is implied. Thus, I suppose that the coordinate or subordinate characteristics of the construction mostly depend on the semantic relationship between the main and the converb clauses. In other words, when a semantic link between the two appears, the converb construction is very likely to become subordinate.

Another important factor seems to be the presence of argument sharing between the main and the converb clause. (28) and (30) show that if the embedding test and the relativization test are applied to sentences with no argument sharing, the results may include the re-interpretation of the sentence's syntactic structure and, consequently, some other semantic interpretation.

Generally it seems that the behaviour of the converb construction depends on (a) the semantic relation between the main and the converb clauses and (b) the absence or presence of argument sharing between the clauses.

It seems very similar to what was described by Kazenin and Testelets [2004] for Tsakhur. the authors applied tests on coordination vs subordination to sentences containing general converbs. The tests turned out to show different results for one and the same sentence, depending on whether there was a causal relation between the converb and the main clauses or not. If a Tsakhur sentence contains a converb construction and the sentence's semantics may imply some causal relation between the main and the converb clause, then things like embedding the converb clause into the main one are only possible with a causal interpretation. In other words, tests on subordination

produce positive results only if there is a causal relation between the main and the converb clauses. However, centre embedding can also work with no causal relation between the clauses, if they both have the same subject.

8. Conclusion

In this paper I consider the properties of general converbs in Mehweb. I describe the converb marker and its morphophonological features, the distribution of perfective and imperfective converbs, the use of periphrastic converbs, independent use of converbs, the way they can combine with imperatives and share their S-, A- or P-arguments with the main clause. Coordination and subordination properties of the Mehweb general converb are discussed. The behaviour is either coordinate or subordinate depending on (a) whether there is a causal relation between the main and the converb clause and (b) whether the converb clause shares its main argument with the main clause or not.

List of abbreviations

AD	ad-localization	INF	infinitive
ADD	additive particle	IPFV	imperfective stem
ALL	allative orientation	LAT	lative orientation
AOR	aorist	LV	light verb
ATR	attributive	M	masculine agreement class
COP	copula	N	neuter agreement class
CVB	converb	NPL	non-human plural
ERG	ergative case	OBL	oblique stem
F1	first feminine agreement class (married women)	PFV	perfective stem
GEN	genitive case	PRS	present tense
HAB	habitual	SUP	super localization
IMP	imperative		

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