

Armenian *t*-‘not’ and the Proto-Lezgian Dental Negative

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Armenian has a prefixed dental negative in *t*-, for which there have been several attempts at etymology: Skt. *duṣ-*, a negative prefix, and Lat *dē* ‘down from, concerning.’ The former cannot be justified on phonemic grounds, the latter on semantic grounds. This paper argues for a source in the Proto-Lezgian negative dental stop. There are numerous loans from Proto-Lezgian demonstrated in Armenian. The phonology is perfect, and the semantic fit is solid. In addition, there are other parallel negative suffixes in Armenian of Proto-Lezgian origin: *tara-*, *tor-* and *ta-*. There is also material which suggests that the standard Armenian stand-alone negative of *oč*-, for which there is no satisfactory etymology, might somehow be related to this system.

In a phenomenon solely confined to Armenian and the Lezgian group¹ of the North-East Caucasian (Daghestani) languages, the morpheme *t*- (in Armenian) or a dental stop (in the Lezgian languages) produces the negative². In Armenian, the particle is attached to the beginning of the word. It can appear with words of many origins, attached to substratum vocabulary (*thas* ‘unripe’ [*has* ‘ripe’]), to Iranian words (*tgoyñ* ‘colorless’ [MP *gōñ* ‘color’]), and to words of Indo-European origin (*tgēt* ‘ignorant’ [*gēt* ‘knowledgeable,’ IE **weid-* ‘know, see’]). This negative is well established in Armenian with either verbs, adjectives or nouns, having the negating *t*- appear before words that are consonant-initial only (curiously, I have found no example of a vowel-initial word taking a *t*-prefix). These negated words appear at the oldest level of the Armenian language, from the pre-literate period, and are found written in

¹The term Lezgian will refer to the language family while Lezgiic will refer to the particular language. For those interested in the North-East Caucasian/Urartian hypothesis, no dental negative exists in Hurrian nor Urartian (gratias ad Margarita Khachikyan).

²In Udi the word *te* means simply ‘no’: *Vi baba arene? Te!* “Did your father come yet? No!” (Gukasyan 1974:204). They do have an inseparable form *tet’u*, as in *tet’uuksa* “he can not eat,” (*uksun* ‘to eat’ [ibid.]).

the earliest fifth century texts.³ There are, according to my count, seventeen examples of a Classical Armenian word with a negating *t*.⁴ An example of an adjective would be *tkar* ‘weak’ (Bible 12x), noun: *thač* ‘dissatisfaction’ (Chrysostom 5th C.), and verb *tgitanam* ‘be ignorant’ (Bible 2x). Adjarian (1926-37) seems unaware of this prefix and in his root dictionary he makes no mention of it, listing all the words with *t* prefix under the larger root, without special comment. Bolognesi 1948 derives it from the precursor of Lat *dē* ‘away from,’ giving Arm. **tī-*, but the semantic fit “away from” = “negative” is worrisome.

In addition to *t*, Armenian has another similar dental prefix with a similar function, *tara-*,⁵ which is not quite as productive and makes changes in only eight different Classical Armenian adjectives of various etymological origins⁶: *tarazard* ‘indecorous’ (Bible 12x [*zard* ‘ornament’])⁷, *taražam* ‘ill-timed, at another time’ (Philo 6th C. [*žam* ‘time’])⁸, *tarahačeli* ‘unpleasant’ (Khorenatsi *Pitoyits* 7th C.? [*hačeli* ‘pleasant’]), *tarajayn* ‘dissenting, having another voice’ (David Anyaght 7th C.), *tarameržim* ‘outcast’ (Narek 10th C.), (*meržim* ‘expel’)⁹, *tarapayman* ‘excessive’ (Buzand 5th C. [*payman* ‘quality’]), *tarap’arč* ‘inglorious,’ (T’ēodorosi K’ot’enawordi 7th C. [*parč* ‘glory’]), *taraōrēn* ‘unlawful’ (Philo 6th C. [*ōrēn* ‘law’]).

³Actually, though the prefix *t* appears before three separate categories of Armenian words, it seems somehow to be adjectivally derived, and spread to other categories later.

⁴They include *tget* ‘ugly,’ *tg’t* ‘ignorant,’ *tgoyn* ‘colorless,’ *tzor* ‘powerless,’ *txmar* ‘foolish,’ *txur* ‘cheerless,’ *tkar* ‘weak,’ *tkelt* ‘simpleminded,’ *thal* ‘indigestible,’ *thač* ‘discontent,’ *thas* ‘unripe,’ *tjel* ‘unshapely,’ *tmahanam* ‘be immortal,’ *tmayn* ‘ugly, gloomy,’ *tmar* ‘foolish,’ *tmardi* ‘impolite,’ *tk’nut’iwn* ‘sleeplessness, wakefulness.’ Further, it seems most likely that a negative *t* was originally affixed only to monosyllables, and the system spread from there.

⁵This exists, for instance, as a suffix *-dar* (sometimes spelled *dər*) in Budukh: *k’uldže bukh čay’ardar* “he did not bring his dog home” (Talibov 2007:248).

⁶Actually, and more accurately, the prefix *tara-* in Armenian is not exactly negativizing, but rather expresses something ‘other,’ Note Modern Eastern dialect *taradram* ‘a currency other than the dram,’ which also shows that this prefix remains productive.

⁷Adjarian seems also unaware of this prefix and divided this word *taraz-ard* (*taraz* ‘form’ and *ard* ‘recently, now’) which really doesn’t quite work.

⁸These words with *tara-* can be from a variety of etymological origins.

⁹The prefix *tara-* here seems to function as a double negative, for emphasis, as in colloquial English: “I didn’t do nothing.” Note Plato (Plato. *Lg* 808b) *καθεύδων οὐδείς οὐδένος ἄξιος οὐδέν μάλλων τοῦ μὴ ζῶντος* “Not no sleeping is no better than not living.” In Russian also я никогда не сделал это “I didn’t never do that.”

There are a few other oddities in Armenian: a prefix *ta-* as in *tabun* 'unnatural' (*bun* 'nature'); and a prefix in *toro-* *torabanam* 'to speak incomprehensibly, be prolix, to speak in another voice/language' (Grigor Magistros 11th C. [*banam* 'to speak']). The *tor-* prefix occurs also in the Lezgian languages, specifically as Tabasaran *dar-*, Kryts *da'r*, Budukh *dər-* (or *daər*) (Alexseev 1985:101).¹⁰

The relationship of the Lezgian languages with Armenian is somewhat unclear. Though we can be sure that this N. E. Caucasian contact preceded the creation of the Armenian alphabet (early 400s AD), it seems probable that it came after the great Armenian consonant shift in the undatable past. That there are Daghestani words in Classical Armenian has been known for decades, first expressed in modern times by Ghapantsyan (1975:240)¹¹ and later in Vinogradova and Klimov (1977:154-158) who proposed twenty-three examples but felt that the Lezgian words originated in Armenian and came thence into the Caucasus. Though they included many solid examples,¹² they also had questionable examples, being merely wander-words, not originally Daghestani nor Armenian: Arm. *katu* 'cat,' *t'onir* 'oven;' words of Iranian origin, Arm. *gund* 'ball, lump,' MP *gund* 'testicle,' Arm. *dew* 'demon,' MP *dēw* 'id'; Arm. *mkrad* 'scissors,' Arab *mqrād* (مقراض)¹³, as well as words of unknown origin. But it is difficult to think that Armenian itself had a direct effect on all the Lezgian languages. If so, one would expect Armenian to have transferred some Indo-European vocabulary, especially in Armenian shape. But there is none. Since the 1970s there have been some successful attempts to find more Lezgian/Armenian correspondences in Armenian. Greppin (1996, 2008, 2009) shows more than thirty correspondences. Examples such as Arm. *bag* 'snout,' Tsakhur *bok* 'id,' Arm. *kaxard* 'witch, wizard,' Lezgian *qwarc* 'house spirit,' Arm. *kokord* 'throat,' Rutul *qwarqar-ak* 'id,' Arm. *sand* 'pounding mortar,' Lezgian *sunt* 'hammer,' Arm. *sunk*

¹⁰In addition to ignoring the Arm. *t-* negator, mentioned above, Adjarian also does not mention *tara-*, nor *tor-* nor *ta-* in his *Grammar*, volume five on negative particles (1965:239-241).

¹¹Ghapantsyan mentions non-Indo-European Arm. *c'et* 'tribe, branch,' which appears in Udi as *cil* 'grain, seed.' This etymology was weak semantically, but better were to follow later.

¹²E.g., Arm. *čči* 'worm,' Budukh, Kryts *č'č'i* 'worm in an apple.'

¹³These terms came into Lezgian and Armenian separately and are not derived through the Lezgian group.

‘mushroom,’ Udi. *ša'mkal* ‘id.’ That vocabulary has been shared between Armenian and the Daghestani languages from preliterate times is clear.

The original Indo-European negator in Armenian was IE syllabic **n̥*, which produced Arm. *an-*, as in *ankar*, and is paralleled by a third negator, of unknown origin: *č̣-*. In Armenian three different negators can appear with the same root, *ankar*, *tkar*, and *č̣kar*, all meaning (though there are slight semantic variations) ‘impossible, powerless.’

The history of Armenian *č̣'*, the most productive negator¹⁴, is unknown, but there is evidence that it too might be part of this same Lezgian negative group. We find the following suffixal negatives: Lezgian *-č̣* (along side the simple negative *-t*), Rutul **δ* (along side the simple negative **d-*) and Archi medial *-č̣u-*. These voiced and voiceless dental affricates might reasonably be derived from the Lezgian negative dental system.

To add to the mystery, we can point out that prohibitions are expressed in the Lezgian group by *ma*¹⁵ which finds parallels with IE **mē*, Indo-Iranian *mā*, Gk. *μη*, Arm. *mi*, and Toch. *mā*. It is perhaps not coincidental that the Indo-European prohibition particle *mē* came into Lezgian from Iranian *mā*¹⁶, since the North-East Caucasian languages as a whole contain abundant Iranian loan words. Alekseev and Shejxov (1997:114) suggest that the bulk of the Iranian influx came in the third and seventh centuries AD, during the Sassanid period, though I think there is cause to suppose it was a bit earlier.

Let me now list some more of the various Lezgian dental negatives so we can see how complete that system is. In Tsakhur (Talibov 2004:402) we find the negative *d-* (or *-id-*) for use in non word-final situations: *dac'as* ‘not to know’ (*ac'as* ‘to know’); *idoxanas* ‘not to eat’ (*oxanas* ‘to eat’); if the verb is independent we get a final *deš*: *oxanas deš* ‘to not eat’ (*oxanas* ‘to eat’). This is closely paralleled in Rutul by *diš* (Alekseev 1994a:233) *kurč'ir diš* ‘to not begin’ (*kurč'er* ‘to begin’). In Archi we have *-t'u-* (Kibrik 1994a:329): *arxar* ‘to lie down,’ *arxart'u* ‘to not lie down.’

The case of Khinalug is difficult. Some say that Khinalug

¹⁴The stand-alone form *oč'* is the standard Armenian word for ‘not,’ as in *č̣'e* ‘no,’ literally ‘it is not.’

¹⁵Note Udi prohibitive *qoš ma bəγ-a* ‘do not look back,’ but standard negation *nana te-ne-arci-i* ‘mother is not sitting down’ (Harris 2002:270).

¹⁶Other examples exist: Nakh, Tsez, Lak, Agul, Kryts, Budukh; West Caucasian **mə* (Starostin 1994:797).

has no negative in a dental (Harris 2002:268) but Starostin and Nikolaev (1994:404) say Khinalug has *-n-dä*, a suffix of negative particles. Kibrik (1994b:390) says there are no negative forms for the aorist or concrete present, while being vague elsewhere. It appears that the Khinalug negative remains unclear, as does so much else in that quite odd language. Many feel that Khinalug is not part of the Lezgian system, though, in addition to the dissimilarities, there are many surprising correspondences.

In Kryts (Saadiev 1994:432) we find an initial *d*-attached to the verb: *dataj* ‘not to beat’ (*ātāj* ‘to beat’). Budukh, closely related to Kryts, has a negative in *-d-*, whose vowel is partially determined by harmony, and is internal: *siderni* ‘not do,’ root **sirn* ‘do’ (Alekseev 1994:280).

Lezgian (Haspelmath 1993:133) can use a simple *t*-negator before a verb beginning with a vowel (*taxun* ‘not see,’) or *tV-* before a verb beginning with a consonant, the vowel determined by harmony (*tü-tün* ‘not eat’). In addition to this simple *t-*, Lezgian also has a stand-alone negative, *tuš* as in *am γ^weč’ tuš* ‘he is not younger’ (Talibov and Gadzhiev 1966:318).

Udi, in addition to the examples mentioned in footnote two, has *oqa* ‘(he) went’, but *oqa t’u* ‘(he) didn’t go’; *at’u* ‘(he) cut,’ *at’u t’u* ‘(he) didn’t cut’ (Kaxadze 1979:305).

There seem to be plenty of words from Lezgian in Armenian, and that seems to be the direction of the flow, lacking Indo-European words of Armenian shape in Lezgian. Acknowledging this, it seems quite straightforward that the similar negative dentals in Armenian are from Lezgian and the origin of principal Armenian negative *oč’* is somehow related to this system though a description of the process would be speculative.

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