Verb focus in Ossetic: an L(r)FG approach

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Abstract

We propose an LFG treatment of the verb focus construction (which consists of a participle and a light verb) in Ossetic and model the complementary distribution of this construction and focalized complex predicates. We build on the analysis of the Ossetic clause presented by Belyaev (2022) enriching the rule for the focus position in the verbal complex and supplying i-structure annotations. We also sketch an LrFG analysis to account for the placement of preverbs in complex predicates.

1 Introduction

This paper explores two periphrastic constructions in Ossetic, an East Iranian (< Indo-European) language mainly spoken in parts of the Caucasus.† We mainly concentrate on the verb focus construction (VFC) and its complementary distribution with complex verbs and provide a lexicalist analysis of the patterns observed, but also sketch a non-lexicalist version of it. We compare the verb focus construction and complex predicates with other constructions as a way of potentially extending the lexicalist analysis.

Data without a cited source were collected during fieldwork in the city of Vladikavkaz (North Ossetia-Alania, Russia) in July & October, 2024, and July, 2025. Additional examples were drawn from the Ossetic National Corpus (ONC) and the Oral Corpus of Ossetic (OC).

2 The puzzle

In the context of narrow verb focus, simple verbs of Ossetic optionally participate in the formation of the so-called **verb focus construction** (VFC):

(1) Context: What has Zalina done to the floors? They are so clean!

zalinɜ *p'ol-tɜ* ***ɜxš-gɜ*** ***nək-kod-ta***
Zalina floor-PL clean-PCVB PV-do-PST.3SG
'Zalina HAS WASHED the floors.' (Podgornaia 2025: 164)

The construction is formed with a *-gɜ*-participle (which we gloss as PCVB) and the verb *kɜnən* 'to do' carrying the TAM markers. According to Belyaev & Vydrin (2011), The participle itself can be used both as a participle, i.e. an adnominal modifier, and as a converb, i.e. the verb heading embedded adverbial clauses in the sense of the term popularized by Haspelmath (1995).

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Cross-linguistically, constructions with 'do' as the light verb are frequently restricted to certain syntactic and pragmatic environments (Jäger 2006). In Ossetic, the VFC is infelicitous in environments other than narrow verb focus. For example, it cannot be used when the whole VP is in focus (2).

(2) Context: What has Zalina done? The room looks fresh.

#*zalinɜ p'ol-tɜ ɜxš-gɜ nək-kod-ta*
Zalina floor-PL clean-PCVB PV-do-PST.3SG
Intended: 'Zalina HAS WASHED THE FLOORS.' (Podgornaia 2025: 164)

The VFC is only formed with simple verbs, which form a closed class. A lot of other verbal meanings are expressed using complex predicates. These consist of a nominal component and a light verb.

Crucially for the purposes of this paper, the VFC is incompatible with complex predicates, which we understand as "items that appear to be distinct morphological and syntactic words, but show deeper signs of integration, such as sharing a single argument structure" (Andrews 2023: 268). Consider (3a), which features the complex predicate *gɜp: kɜnən* 'to jump'. The light verb is in its past tense form, and perfectivity is contributed by a preverb, in this case *a-*, which in (3a) attaches to the non-verbal component of the complex predicate. Now, (3b) is a version of (3a) with verb focus: here the preverb is attached to the LV. In the next section we will demonstrate that in such configurations the non-verbal component is located in a higher structural position compared to (3a), which explains variable preverb placement.

(3b) is the only way of focusing a complex predicate: (3c) shows an infelicitous attempt to form the verb focus construction with the same complex predicate.[1]

(3) a. *bɜx a-gɜp: kod-ta.*
horse PV-jump do-PST.3SG
'The horse jumped.'

b. *bɜx gɜp: a-kod-ta.*
horse jump PV-do-PST.3SG
'The horse JUMPED.'

c. **bɜx gɜp:-gɜn-gɜ a-kod-ta.*
horse jump-do-PCVB PV-do-PST.3SG
Intended: b=c

This is the puzzle at the heart of this paper: complex predicate focalization, involving non-verbal component displacement, and the verb focus construction are in complimentary distribution.

[1]The initial segment of the LV stem *kɜn-* undergoes voicing to *gɜn-* in *gɜp:-gɜn-gɜ* 'jumping' (3c). This is a known morphonological process in Ossetic.

3 The data

3.1 Basic facts and clause structure

The basic word order in Ossetic is SOV, although under certain information-structural conditions all permutations of the word order are possible. The alignment is nominative-accusative. Ossetic is a discourse configurational language (Belyaev 2022) with a very well structured preverbal area (Lyutikova & Tatevosov 2009; Erschler 2012; Belyaev 2022; Borise & Erschler 2023). This characterization has far-reaching consequences for clause structure: one prominent area is the so-called "verbal complex", which features several structural positions. These are summarized schematically in (4).[2] Elements which lie outside the verbal complex and precede it can only be non-focal. Postverbal elements have looser restrictions on their information structural content.

(4) Foc — Wh — Neg — V

Closest to the verb in the preverbal area are negative indefinites (5). They are in complementary distribution with sentential negation (5a), meaning this is a so-called "negative spread" system (Erschler 2010).[3]

(5) a. *žawər-ə* ***ni-či*** *(*nɜ=)* *žon-ə*
Zaur-GEN NEG-who NEG know-PRS.3SG
'No one knows Zaur' (Belyaev 2022: ex. 6a,c)

b. **ni-či* *žawər-ə* *žon-ə*
NEG-who Zaur-GEN know-PRS.3SG

Wh-words (and phrases including wh-words) are strictly preverbal and precede negative indefinites:[4]

(6) a. ***či*** *ni-sə* *žon-ə*
who NEG-what know-PRS.3SG
'Who knows nothing?' (Belyaev 2022: ex. 11a-b)

b. **ni-sə* ***či*** *žon-ə*
NEG-what who PRS.3SG

Narrow foci, if they occur before the verb, follow topical material and precede wh-expressions, cf. the position of a constituent modified by *ɜrmɜšt* 'only' (7). Belyaev (2022) also takes it to be possible for narrow foci to recur.

[2]This pattern is sometimes complicated by the intrusion of adverbs in the comparative form into the preverbal area after wh-phrases (Erschler 2012: 678; Belyaev 2022: 45).

[3]Note that negative pronouns can trigger negative concord when placed in the postverbal position (Belyaev 2022: fn. 7).

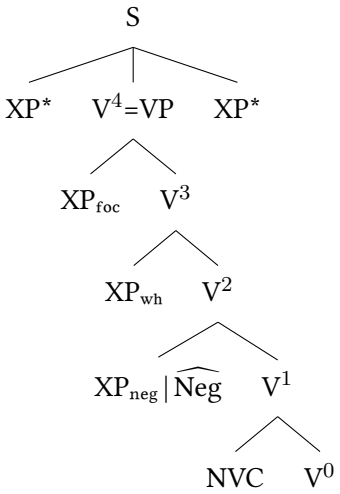
[4]However, wh-items precede the verbal complex in the multiple partitive construction, see Belyaev (2022: fn. 7).

(7) a. ***ɜrmɜšt*** ***žawər-ə*** *či* *fet:-a*
only Zaur-GEN who see-PST.3SG
'Who saw only Zaur?' (Belyaev 2022: ex. 13a,c)

b. **či* ***ɜrmɜšt*** ***žawər-ə*** *fet:-a*
who only Zaur-GEN see-PST.3SG

We follow Belyaev (2022: 55) in the LFG analysis of the Ossetic clause structure. Preverbal material is introduced as daughters of different V-bar levels (including above 2), represented in (8). The VP itself is the daughter of an S node, its right sisters represent topical material, and there is also an unstructured post-verbal area to the left (both the left peripheral and the post-verbal material is abbreviated as XP* for simplicity).

(8)



In (8), the non-verbal component of a complex predicate is structurally a V^0 complement. Later, we will suggest an alternative to this.

3.2 The verbal system of Ossetic

The Ossetic conjugation is quite complex, built upon two stems (traditionally labeled "present" and "past") and several sets of personal endings, making for a total of 8 unique TAM-paradigms, see Abaev (1964: § 92–161) for an overview. The basic morphological pattern for verbs includes perfectivizing preverbs with aspectual and spatial semantics and suffixal TAM-markers:

(9) preverb (PV) - √ - agreement/tense marker

Simple verbal roots constitute a rather small closed class. Similarly to other Iranian languages, many verbal meanings are expressed by complex predicates (CPrs). A complex predicate consists of a light verb (LV), which carries agreement and tense markers, and a non-verbal component (NVC), which can originate from a noun or an adjective. Most complex predicates feature *kɜnən* 'to do' as the light verb, as in (10).

(10) a. *ɜž* *dwar* *nɜ=* ***ba-jgom*** ***kod-ton***
1SG.NOM door NEG=PV-open do-PST.1SG
'I did not open the door.' (Grashchenkov 2018: 80)

b. **ɜž* *dwar* *nɜ=* *gom* *ba-kod-ton*
1SG.NOM door NEG= open PV-do-PST.1SG

Some other verbs can be used marginally as light verbs as well (see Section 4.3). The verb *wɜvən* 'to be' is used with prefixed intransitive adjectival CPrs, while *kɜnən* 'to do' is used elsewhere, cf. (11). For the purposes of this paper, we abstract away from this alternation, but see Lyutikova & Tatevosov (2013) for a transformationalist analysis thereof. It is important to note that CPrs with *kɜnən* do not show preference for agentive subjects, being compatible with patientive subject such as in (11a).

(11) a. *don* ***važal*** ***kod-ta*** / **iš.*
water cold do-PST.3SG EXST
'The water was cooling down.' (Lyutikova & Tatevosov 2013: 82–83)

b. *don* ***nəw-važal*** ***iš*** / **kod-ta.*
water PV-cold EXST do-PST.3SG
'The water cooled down.' (Lyutikova & Tatevosov 2013: 82–83)

Example (11b) above, as well as (10a), illustrates one of the most crucial language specific properties of CPrs: they act as a single unit with regards to placement of preverbs (except when focalization is involved, more on that below). This contrasts them with superficially similar constructions with a lexical verb *kɜnən* 'to do' and an unmarked direct object, where preverb placement on the nominal is ruled out.

(12) a. *siw-tæ* *axšton* *š-kod-toj.*
bird-PL nest PV-do-PST.3PL
'Birds built a nest.' (Grashchenkov 2016: 108)

b. **siw-tæ* *š-axšton* *kod-toj.*
bird-PL PV-nest do-PST.3PL
Intended: a=b

Other "integrative" properties of complex predicates include both parts of a CPr acting as a single unit for stress assignment and the rigid linear order of the two elements (Grashchenkov 2010, 2018).

Semantically, the nonverbal component contributes most of the meaning and determines the argument structure. Noun-based CPrs exhibit a certain degree of lexicalization. Consider (13a), where *fižonɜg*, a noun meaning 'grilled meat, kebab' (also called 'shashlik' in the Caucasus), is intended to appear as an NVC in a CPr *fižonɜg kɜnən* 'to grill'. Only half out of the 10 speakers consulted found this example acceptable, while more transparent combinations like (13b), which are judged as acceptable across-the-board. All in all, this suggests that this CPr might have been developed quite recently.

(13) a. *%alan ziza š-fižonɜg kod-ta.*
Alan meat PV-kebab do-PST.3SG
'Alan grilled the meat.'

b. *alan ziza-jɜ fižonɜg š-kod-ta.*
Alan meat-ABL kebab PV-do-PST.3SG
'Alan made shashlik from the meat.'

There are properties that are indicative of the non-atomic nature of complex predicates. The non-verbal component of a CPr can act as a landing site for 2P-clitics (14), whereas NPs are impenetrable for them (15):

(14) *nəx-xatər=**mən** **=ɜj** kɜn-ɜd Zətsːa*
PV-sorry =1SG.DAT=3SG.GEN do-OPT.3SG Zitsa
'let Zitsa forgive me' (OC: *Aguzarova Izeta*, 160.1)

(15) *[žaur-ə *=dɜm rɜšuǧd *=dɜm čənz]=dɜm ba-zərd-ta*
Zaur-GEN beautiful bride=2SG.ALL PV-speak-PST.3SG
'The beautiful bride of Zaur called for you.' (Lowe & Belyaev 2015: 223)

The NVC can undergo focalization, and in that case it can be separated from the verb by wh- and negative expressions, see below.

3.3 Verb focus in Ossetic

As mentioned in the previous section, the expression of verb focus in Ossetic depends on whether the predicate is simple or complex: simple predicates optionally participate in the verb focus construction (16), complex predicates instead exhibit NVC focalization (17).

(16) *wəjaš nɜma wəd-tɜn sɜmɜj =sɜ **fəš-gɜ** **nək-kɜn-on**.*
so_much not_yet be-PST.1SG in.order.to =3PL.GEN write-PCVB PV-do-SBJV.1SG
'I wasn't old enough to WRITE them DOWN.' (OC: *Fatima Aguzarova*, 49.1)

(17) *ɜž **moj** nɜ= **š-kɜn-zənɜn**.*
1SG.NOM husband NEG= PV-do-FUT.1SG
'I will not MARRY.' (OC: *Tale about love*, 4.1)

The two constructions exhibit parallel structural properties. In both cases, preverbs invariably attach to the light verb rather than to the participle or the non-verbal component of a complex predicate:

(18) *alan* ***kuš-gɜ*** ***a-kod-ta*** / **a-kuš-gɜ* *kod-ta.*
Alan work-PCVB PV-do-PST.3SG PV-work-PCVB do-PST.3SG
'Alan HAS WORKED for some time.' (Podgornaia 2025: 157)

Syntactic diagnostics show that both the participle in the VFC and a focalized NVC of a complex predicated are located in the focus position: in (19a), the *-gɜ*-participle strictly precedes *kʷə* 'when', a preverbal temporal subordinator; inverse order is impossible (19b). The same goes for the non-verbal component *arfɜ* 'thank' of *arfɜ kɜnən* 'to thank', which is focalized in (20a), cf. (20b).

(19) a. *don* *fəs-gɜ* ***kʷə*** *fɜ-kɜn-ə* *wɜd* *ag* *təng* *tɜvd*
water boil-PCVB when PV-do-PRS.3SG then pot very heavy
vɜjj-ə
be.HAB-PRS.3SG
'When water boils, the pot can be very hot.' (Podgornaia 2025: 162)

b. **don* ***kʷə*** *fəs-gɜ* *fɜ-kɜn-ə* *wɜd* *ag* *təng* *tɜvd*
water boil-PCVB when PV-do-PRS.3SG then pot very heavy
vɜjj-ə
be.HAB-PRS.3SG

(20) a. *alan* *xisaw-ɜn* *arfɜ* ***kʷə*** *ra-kod-ta* *wɜd* *ra-səd.*
Alan host-DAT thank when PV-do-PST.3SG then PV-go.PST[3SG]
'It is exactly when Alan had thanked the host (and not at any other point in time) that he left.'

b. **alan* *xisaw-ɜn* ***kʷə*** *arfɜ* *ra-kod-ta* *wɜd* *ra-səd.*
Alan host-DAT when thank PV-do-PST.3SG then PV-go.PST[3SG]

A *-gɜ*-participle and an NVC can even be coordinated in emphatic coordination using *dɜr* 'too' (21), on which see Belyaev & Khomchenkova (2022).

(21) *birɜ* *šk'olazaw-tɜ* ***axʷər=dɜr*** ***kuš-gɜ*** *=dɜr* *kɜn-ə* *žɜrdiagɜj.*
many pupil-PL study=ADD work-PCVB=ADD do-PRS.3SG diligently
'Many school students both study and work diligently.'

This reaffirms that the VFC and NVC in complex predicates displacement are in complementary distribution: the VFC is only used with simple verbs, whereas the NVC displacement occurs in complex predicates under focalization. Importantly, this is not a morphological constraint: *-gɜ*-participles are productively formed from complex predicates, cf. (22).

(22) ***diš-gɜn-gɜ*** *=jɜ* *ba-farš-ta* *k'ošta.*
wonder-do-PCVB =3SG.GEN PV-ask-PST.3SG Kosta
'{"Why, I wonder?"} Kosta asked him with wonder.'
(ONC: *Æsægælon arvy byn* [Under a foreign sky]. K'æbyšty U., 2010)

In the next section, we present an attempt at modelling the distribution of the verb focus construction and complex predicates in the LFG framework.

4 Analysis

To recapitulate the previous section, there are several key properties an LFG analysis of the Ossetic data should capture:

1. A focalized NVC and a *-gɜ*-participle in the VFC occupy a designated structural position in the clause;
2. They are incompatible with any focus types other than narrow verb focus;
3. *-gɜ*-participles derived from complex verbs cannot participate in the VFC.

In what follows we discuss two analyses of these facts: a lexicalist one within standard LFG, and a non-lexicalist one in LrFG (Asudeh & Siddiqi 2023: 883–892).

4.1 Lexicalist analysis

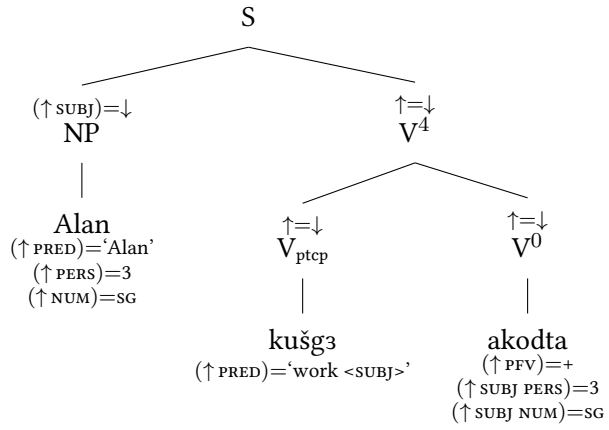
We propose that *-gɜ*-participles form from simple verbs have a complex lexical label, namely V_{ptcp} (standing for 'participle').

(23) *kušgɜ* V_{ptcp} (↑PRED)='work'

Two different usages are available to these participles. In the VFC, the participle presumably acts as a daughter to V^4 (we will discuss the V^4 rule later), see (24).[5] Note that we skip intermediate V-bar levels between 4 and 0, see (8).

(24) a. *alan kuš-gɜ a-kod-ta.*
Alan work-PCVB PV-do-PST.3SG
'Alan has worked for some time.' {=18}

b.



[5]The V_{ptcp} node should perhaps be non-projecting here, to avoid explicit double-headedness.

Note that by assumption the light verb is PREDless, much in line to the approach to complex predicates by Lowe (2016). While this simplifies the representations we give here, there can also be more substantive arguments for this. One is lexical restrictions on part of the non-verbal component: as shown in (13), certain nouns exhibit intraspeaker variation regarding their usage in complex predicates. The other is the nature of the light verb in Ossetic: the distinction between *kɜnən* 'do' and *wɜvən* 'be' is morphosyntactic rather than semantic in nature, see Lyutikova & Tatevosov (2013); Grashchenkov (2016), as well as example (11) and the discussion above it.

An alternative is the linking approach stemming from Alsina (1993) and Butt (1995), see also Butt (1995, 2014); Butt, Carnesale & Ahmed (2023); Butt & Bano (2024), among others. Another approach is PRED fusion by Asudeh & Rafiee Rad (2023). Andrews (2023: 289–291) provides an overview of competing approaches to complex predicates, including Lowe (2016).

Converbal clauses are different. They have internal structure, but do not seem to have a postverbal area. For instance, in (25) below, the PP *televizorə sur* 'in front of the TV' cannot appear after the verb *badgɜ* 'sitting'. Thus, the participle appears as a rather low, projecting V head.

(25) a. ***televizor-ə sur*** *ɜnafon-mɜ* *bad-gɜ*, *rajšom-ɜj* *nɜ=* *šə-št-zənɜ*
TV-GEN close_to late-ALL sit-PCVB morning-ABL NEG=PV-stand-FUT.2SG
'Watching television up until late, you will not get up early in the morning.'
(Belyaev & Vydrin 2011: 123)

b. **ɜnafon-mɜ* *bad-gɜ* ***televizor-ə*** ***sur***, *rajšom-ɜj* *nɜ=*
late-ALL sit-PCVB TV-GEN close_to morning-ABL NEG=
šə-št-zənɜ
PV-stand-FUT.2SG

The participle can indeed be said to head a VP here, since the dependents of the converb cannot be scrambled out of the converbial clause, and Ossetic does not allow such types of scrambling out of constituents.

(26) a. *rajšom-ɜj* *nɜ=* *šə-št-zənɜ* [*televizor-ə* *sur* *ɜnafon-mɜ*
morning-ABL NEG=PV-stand-FUT.2SG TV-GEN close_to late-ALL
bad-gɜ]
sit-PCVB
'Watching television up until late, you will not get up early in the morning.'
{=25}

b. #*rajšom-ɜj* *televizor-ə* *sur* *nɜ=* *šə-št-zənɜ* _ *ɜnafon-mɜ*
morning-ABL TV-GEN close_to NEG= PV-stand-FUT.2SG late-ALL
bad-gɜ
sit-PCVB
'You will not wake up near the TV early in morning if you watch (TV) up until late.'

Participles formed from complex predicates are similar and have the same lexical label as those formed from simple verbs. However, they have an additional f-structure annotation which restricts them to non-finite adjunct clauses, i.e. embedded adverbial clauses.

(27) *dišgɜngɜ* V_{ptcp} (↑PRED)='wonder'
(¬ TNS)
(ADJ ↑)

In (24), we have already provided the c-structure for VFC clauses in Ossetic, but we are yet to list the c-structure rules licensing this structure, specifically the rule for the fourth VP level, V^4, which in the analysis of Belyaev (2022) houses focalized material. We propose that this rule takes the following form:

(28) $V^4 \rightarrow \{ \underset{\substack{(\uparrow \text{AGFS})=\downarrow \\ \downarrow_\sigma \in (\uparrow_{\sigma\iota} \text{FOCUS})}}{\text{XP}} \mid \underset{\substack{\uparrow=\downarrow \\ (\uparrow_{\sigma\iota} \text{FOCUS})=\{\downarrow_\sigma\}}}{V_{ptcp}} \mid \underset{\substack{\uparrow=\downarrow \\ (\uparrow_{\sigma\iota} \text{FOCUS})=\{\downarrow_\sigma\}}}{\text{NVC}} \} \{ \underset{\uparrow=\downarrow}{V^3} \mid \underset{\uparrow=\downarrow}{V^4} \}$

This rule is quite complex and needs unpacking. The right-hand side contains two disjunctive sets, and we will go over them one-by-one. The first set introduces the focal material itself. These can be focalized noun phrases, quantifier phrases or other types of constituents (represented by XP). Alternatively, *-gɜ*-participles (V_{ptcp}) or non-verbal components of complex predicates can end up in this position. Note that the NVC is not a special lexical label, but rather an abbreviation for $\widehat{\text{N}}$ & $\widehat{\text{Adj}}$.

Now, recall that the VFC and focalized NVCs are not compatible with other types of focus other than narrow verb focus, but XPs are. We capture this with i-structure annotations in the phrase structure rule in (29). For this, we utilize the i-structure framework of Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011). Note that there are other LFG approaches to the formalization of information structure and its effects, see Zaenen (2023) for a recent overview.

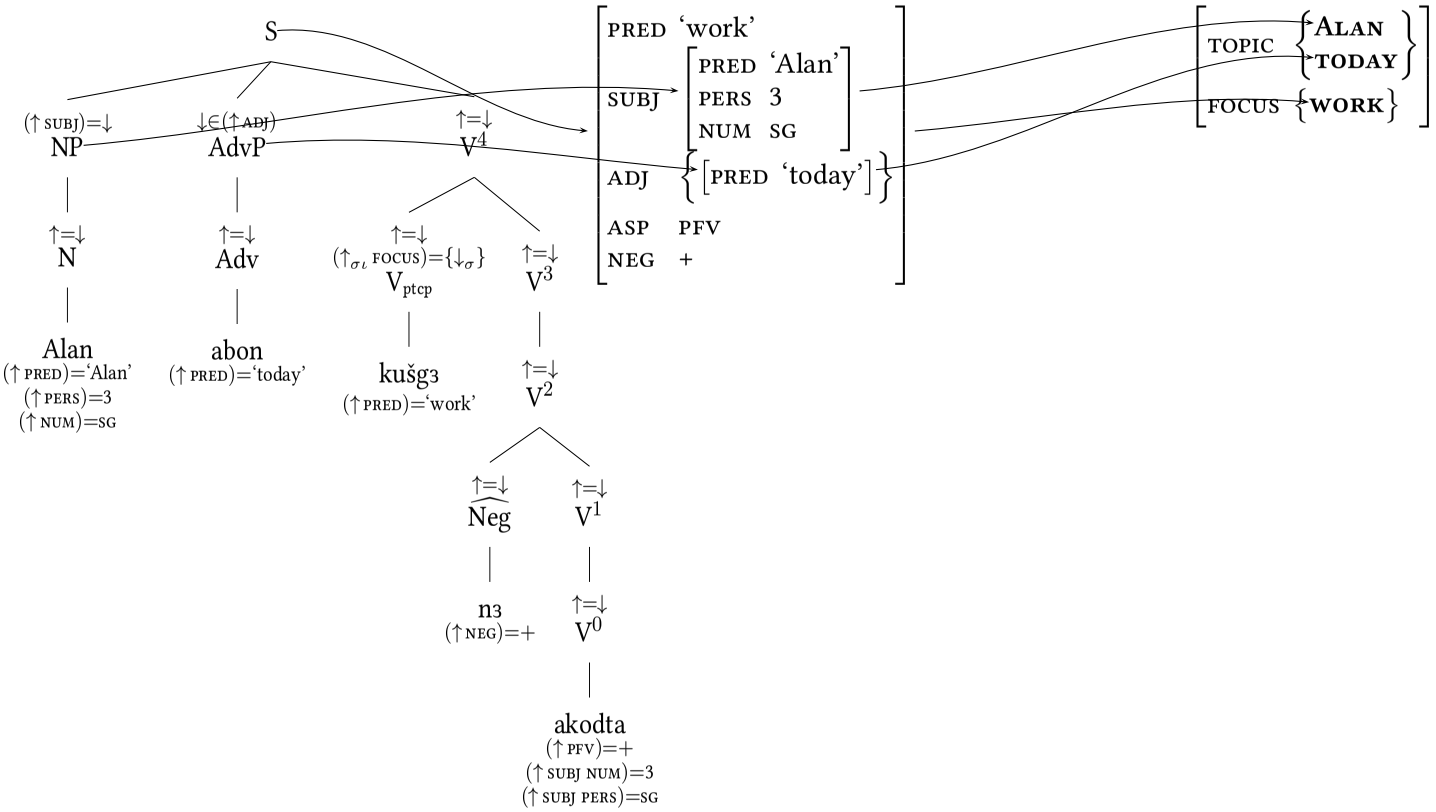
A focalized XP adds its Glue meaning constructor to the FOCUS set at i-structure, while a *-gɜ*-participle (as V_{ptcp}) and a focalized NVC **restrict** the FOCUS set to contain only its meaning constructor. The right set $\{ \underset{\uparrow=\downarrow}{V^3} \mid \underset{\uparrow=\downarrow}{V^4} \}$ is also there to account for the possibility of multiple foci, and the rule is hence recursive.

Given everything discussed above, we are now ready to represent c-structure, f-structure and i-mapping (30) for a VFC instance such as (29).

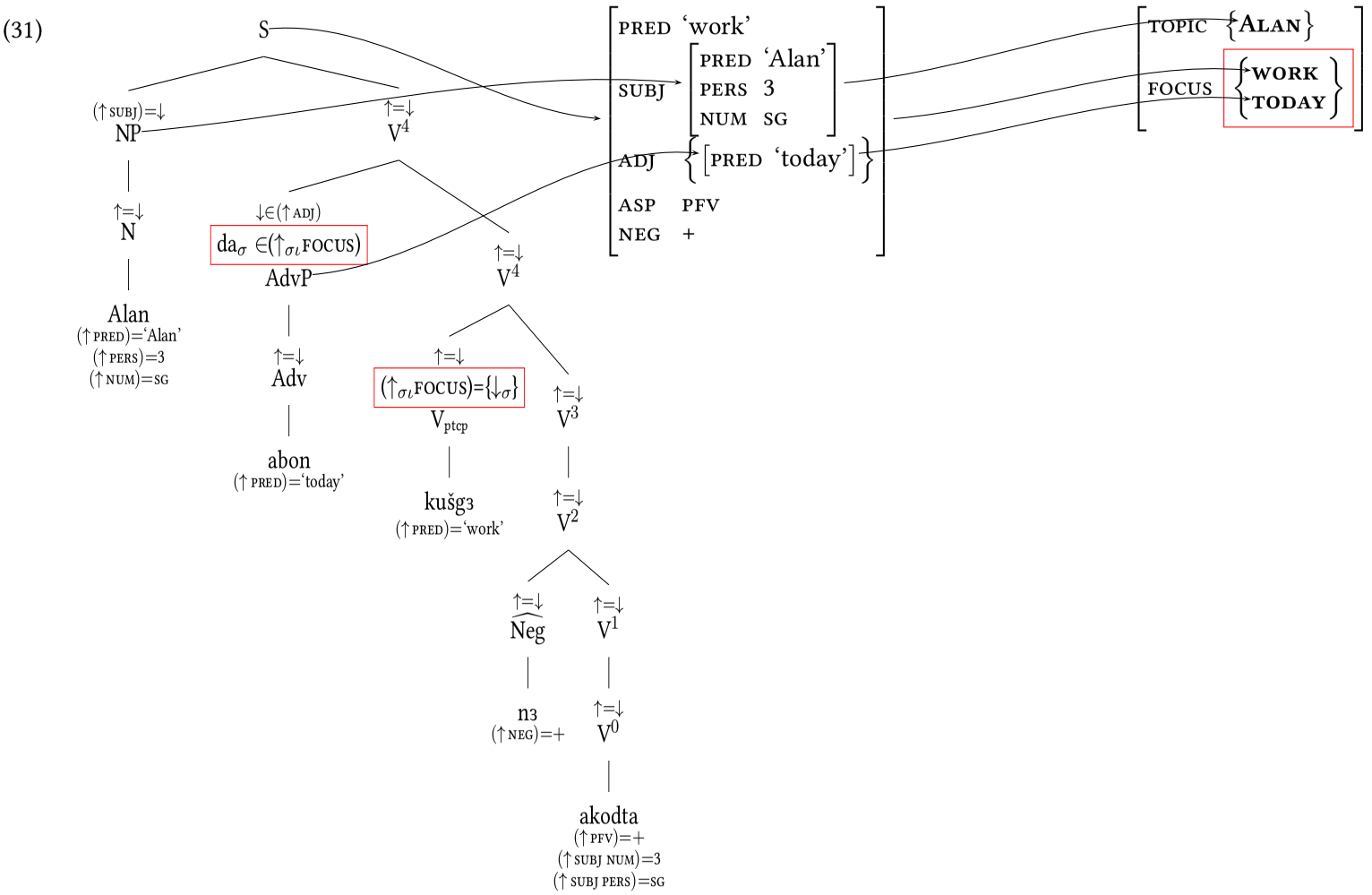
(29) *alan abon kuš-gɜ nɜ= a-kod-ta.*
Alan today work-PCVB NEG= PV-do-PST.3SG
'Alan did not WORK today.'

If, for example, *abon* 'today' is interpreted as being inside V^4 and part of the focus set (yielding the meaning 'It is not the case that Alan worked today {⇒ he instead worked yesterday}'), the VFC would be infelicitous. Our analysis captures this type of ungrammaticality, cf. (31) with conflicting constraints highlighted in red boxes.

(30)


S
(↑ SUBJ)=↓
NP
↓∈(↑ ADJ)
AdvP
↑=↓
V4
↑=↓
N
↑=↓
Adv
↑=↓
(↑σι FOCUS)=↓σ
Vptcp
↑=↓
V3
Alan
(↑ PRED)='Alan'
(↑ PERS)=3
(↑ NUM)=SG
abon
(↑ PRED)='today'
kušg3
(↑ PRED)='work'
↑=↓
V2
↑=↓
Neg
↑=↓
V1
n3
(↑ NEG)=+
↑=↓
V0
akodta
(↑ PFV)=+
(↑ SUBJ NUM)=3
(↑ SUBJ PERS)=SG
PRED 'work'
SUBJ
PRED 'Alan'
PERS 3
NUM SG
ADJ
PRED 'today'
ASP PFV
NEG +
TOPIC
ALAN
TODAY
FOCUS
WORK

(31)


S
(↑ SUBJ)=↓
NP
↑=↓
V4
↑=↓
N
Alan
(↑ PRED)='Alan'
(↑ PERS)=3
(↑ NUM)=SG
↓∈(↑ ADJ)
daσ ∈(↑σι FOCUS)
AdvP
↑=↓
Adv
abon
(↑ PRED)='today'
↑=↓
V4
↑=↓
(↑σι FOCUS)={↓σ}
Vptcp
kušg3
(↑ PRED)='work'
↑=↓
V3
↑=↓
V2
↑=↓
Neg
n3
(↑ NEG)=+
↑=↓
V1
↑=↓
V0
akodta
(↑ PFV)=+
(↑ SUBJ NUM)=3
(↑ SUBJ PERS)=SG
PRED 'work'
SUBJ
PRED 'Alan'
PERS 3
NUM SG
ADJ
PRED 'today'
ASP PFV
NEG +
TOPIC
ALAN
FOCUS
WORK
TODAY

4.2 Potential for a non-lexicalist analysis

The current analysis needs a mechanism to control for preverb placement. Displaced NVCs cannot appear with preverbs: the preverb is left behind on the verb. This is illustrated in (32a–b), which shows that it's impossible to attach the preverb to a non-verbal component in the focus position before negation (32b).

(32) a. *ɜž dwar **gom** nɜ= **ba-kod-ton**
1SG.NOM door open NEG= PV-do-PST.1SG
'I did not open the door.' (Grashchenkov 2018: 80)

b. **ɜž dwar baj-gom nɜ= kod-ton*
1SG.NOM door PV-open NEG= do-PST.1SG

In a lexicalist setting, a noun with a preverb is a separate item in the lexicon. It would require another parametric label (Frank & Zaenen 2002) in order to account for the fact that nouns do not appear with preverbs outside complex predicates. Thus, a noun like *fižonɜg* would have three separate lexical entries: one corresponding to its usage as a common noun meaning 'grilled meat', and two to its usage as part of a complex predicate, prefixed and unprefixed.

(33) a. *fižonɜg* N (↑ PRED) = 'grilled meat'

b. *fižonɜg* N (↑ PRED) = 'grill <SUBJ OBJ>'

c. *šfižonɜg* $\mathbf{N}_{pv}$ (↑ PRED) = 'grill <SUBJ OBJ>'

In order to avoid the proliferation of lexical entries, the analysis should be interfaced with morphology in some way. We present one possible option within Lexical-Realizational Functional Grammar (LrFG), see Asudeh & Siddiqi (2023: 883–892) a.o.[6]

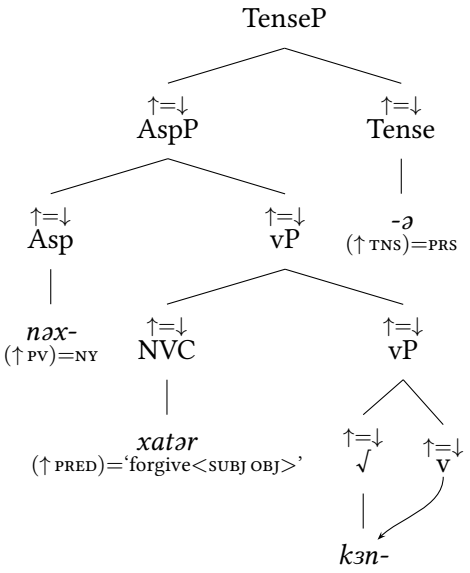
In our view, the key is to structurally uncouple the preverb from its hosts. Its position is then fixed in the tree as head of the Asp projection below Tense.[7] We assume that the NVC is a non-projecting adjunct to vP, where v is the label for the verbalizer head in LrFG. At the same time, *kɜn-*, the stem of the LV 'to do', is a PRED-less realization of the verbalizer head. Consider (34), the representation of a finite complex predicate *nəxxatər kɜnə* '(he/she) forgives' from example (14), repeated below for convenience.

[14] *nəx-xatər=mən =ɜj kɜn-ɜd Zətsːa*
PV-sorry =1SG.DAT=3SG.GEN do-OPT.3SG Zitsa
'let Zitsa forgive me' (OC: *Aguzarova Izeta*, 160.1)

[6]We present the analysis in LrFG, instead of using other, perhaps more traditional approaches to morphology in LFG, since we are interested in exploring the possibility of an analysis in a realizational morphosyntactic framework that realizes purely syntactic information without a separate encapsulated morphology and morphological features.

[7]The preverb contributes an f-structural feature which directly corresponds to its type. This is required to account for preverb selection on the part of the NVC (Grashchenkov 2010).

(34)

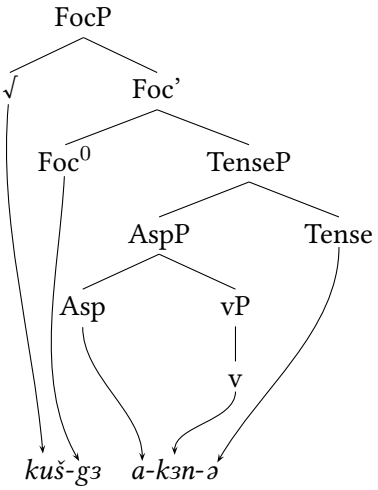


We take *-gɜ* to head its own projection, FocP, which essentially corresponds to V^4 above. LrFG allows us to position the verbal root directly in Spec,FocP, accounting for the VFC.[8] This position also houses focalized NVCs and focused noun phrases.

(35) a. FocP → { $\underset{\substack{\uparrow=\downarrow \\ (\uparrow_{\sigma\iota}\ \text{FOCUS})=\{\downarrow_\sigma\}}}{\surd}$ | $\underset{\substack{\uparrow=\downarrow \\ (\uparrow_{\sigma\iota}\ \text{FOCUS})=\{\downarrow_\sigma\}}}{\text{NVC}}$ | $\underset{\substack{(\uparrow\ \text{AGFS})=\downarrow \\ \downarrow_\sigma\in(\uparrow_{\sigma\iota}\ \text{FOCUS})}}{\text{XP}}$ } $\underset{\uparrow=\downarrow}{\text{Foc'}}$

b. Foc' → $\underset{\uparrow=\downarrow}{\text{Foc}^0}$ $\underset{\uparrow=\downarrow}{\text{TenseP}}$

(36) **C-structure and VI-mapping for *kušgɜ akɜnə* '(he/she) is WORKING'**



The root itself is barred from appearing both high (in Spec,FocP) and low (in vP as a sister to the verbalizer) due to a PRED clash. But we also have to restrict *-gɜ* to appear

[8]We thank Dan Sidiqqi for this suggestion.

with verbal roots only. There are two ways of approaching this. In the earlier versions of the LrFG formalism, cf. Asudeh & Siddiqi (2023: 887), this could be achieved with a HOST [TYPE VERBAL] specification in the vocabulary item entry for *-gɜ*:

(37)
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{PHONREP} & /\text{g}\text{ɜ}/ \\ \text{DEP} & \text{LT} \\ \text{HOST} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{TYPE} & \text{VERBAL} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

However, the LrFG theory later moved away from using the TYPE feature at v-structure. The required restriction can still be achieved through a $\lambda \circ \nu^{-1}$ mapping, constraining the syntactic category of the host at l-structure (Kaplan 1995).[9]

(38)
$$\langle [\text{Foc}], \underset{\langle\langle \lambda \circ \nu^{-1}(\bullet \text{HOST}) \notin \{\text{N,Adj}\}\rangle\rangle}{-} \rangle \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{PHONREP} & /\text{g}\text{ɜ}/ \\ \text{DEP} & \text{LT} \\ \text{HOST} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{IDENT} & + \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

The restriction comes in form of a constraining equation on the f-structural content of *-gɜ*. There is no actual contribution that *-gɜ* itself makes to f-structure, which is why no second member of the tuple pair is listed in (38), but it is conditioned by its host (•HOST) c-structure node (ν^{-1}; ν itself is a mapping from terminal nodes to vocabulary items) not having an N or Adj category at l-structure (λ-mapping).

4.3 Beyond the VFC and CPrs

Ossetic has a number of other periphrastic constructions / non-atomic syntactic units realizing a single predication.

Light verbs besides *kɜnən* 'do' and *wɜvən* 'be' have been reported to be rarely used in complex predicates with idiomatic meanings, which we call minor light verbs. An example *kɜšən* 'to look' in *kommɜ kɜšən* 'to obey' (lit. 'to look in the mouth') (39). Importantly, preverbs here can also attach to the nominal component (40).

(39) *alan-mɜ jɜ= fərt nɜ= kom-mɜ kɜš-ə.*
Alan-ALL POSS.3SG=son NEG=mouth-ALL look-PRS.3SG
'Alan's son does not obey him.' (lit. 'does not look into his mouth')

(40) *alan-mɜ jɜ= fərt nɜ= **ba**-kom-mɜ kašt.*
Alan-ALL POSS.3SG=son NEG=PV-mouth-ALL look.PST[3SG]
'Alan's son did not obey him.' (lit. 'did not look into his mouth')

Another CPr with a minor LV *daryn* 'to hold' is *qəgdaryn* 'to disturb':

(41) *ni-kɜj qəgdard-ta.*
NEG-who.GEN disturb-PST.3SG
'He didn't disturb anyone.'

Certain speakers do not even recognize the meaning of this unit if in its written form it appears with a space and attempt to understand it compositionally.

[9] This has been suggested to us by Ash Asudeh, for which we are grateful.

(42) *ni-kɜj* *qəg* *dard-ta.*
NEG-who.GEN trouble hold-PST.3SG
'He didn't took offence from anyone.' (lit. 'didn't hold anyone's trouble')

Qəgdaryn 'to disturb' can even participate in VFC formation, suggesting a high degree of lexicalization:

(43) ***qəgdar-gɜ*** *=mɜ* *kɜn-ut.*
disturb-PCVB=1SG.GEN do-PRS.2PL
'You are disturbing me.'
(ONC: Max dug, 3, 1997; cited after (Podgornaia 2025: 159))

The modern intransitive preterite is also periphrastic in origin, being the combination of the past participle and the verb *wɜvən* 'to be' (Abaev 1964: 51, 68):

(44) a. *səd-əštə* <go-PST.3SG> '(they) went'
b. *səd* <go.PTCP.PST> 'movement, moved'
c. *štə* <be.PRS.3PL>

A potential avenue for expanding the lexicalist analysis is combining data from different diagnostics (preverb placement, availability of NVC displacement) and explicating how and what is stored in the lexicon (and how this evolved in the history of Ossetic), since all the constructions described above clearly lie on a "lexicalization–univerbation" scale.

5 Conclusions

In this paper, we have proposed an LFG analysis for the Ossetic periphrastic verb focus construction and accounted for its complementary distribution with focused complex verbs. Following the previous proposals, we consider a *-gɜ*-participle in the VFC and a NVC in a focused CPr to occupy the structural position for focal elements in the verbal complex, and a light verb (generally *kɜnən* 'to do') to be the PREDless locus of TAM-marker attachment. We built upon the treatment of Ossetic clause structure proposed in (Belyaev 2022) by expanding the rule for the focus position and supplying it with the i-structure annotations in order to model the distribution of the VFC and focalized complex predicates. Additionally, we extended the analysis to preverb placement in LrFG. Much in line with the goals of this framework, we are able to account for all the data within the confines of syntactic modules without resorting to a separate encapsulated morphology. However, the lexicalist approach also has its merits in being better suited to potentialy take into account other periphrastic constructions of Ossetic.

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