

# Sentence-final conjunctions in Ossetic and Bartangi: “reverse insubordination” or “incoordination”?<sup>1</sup>

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Insubordination is typically understood as the independent occurrence of clauses marked as subordinate (Evans and Watanabe 2016b). A typical example of this is shown in (1), where *que* introduces an exclamative clause that serves as an answer to a question, i.e. in the absence of any main clause in the immediate context.

- (1) *Que ya he llamado.*  
that already have.1SG.PRS.IND called

‘(You have to call the bank.)’ ‘I have already called!’ (Spanish, Gras 2016)

In this talk, I will discuss the data of two Eastern Iranian languages, Ossetic and Bartangi, which display two patterns that are roughly reminiscent of insubordination, but do not easily fit into the established typology. The data come from published sources, the Ossetic National Corpus (Arkhangelskiy, Belyaev, and Vydrin 2012), as well as fieldwork conducted by the author in Vladikavkaz (North Ossetia, Russia) and Basid (Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region, Tajikistan) in 2022–2024.

The first pattern, found in Bartangi, is one of which *di*, usually analyzed as a clause-initial complementizer (2), acts as a particle at the end of independent sentences (3), or before following clauses that can hardly be classified as subordinating (4).

- (2) *mualim fikri čūg (di) māš=ti xu dars xoy-an*  
teacher thought do.PST LNK we FUT REFL lesson read.PRS-3PL

‘The teacher thought we were doing our lessons.’ (Bartangi, elicited)

- (3) *yi lap naxčir umder di!*  
one many mountain\_goat D3.LOC:IN PTCL

‘There are so many mountain goats there!’ (Bartangi, Karamxudoev 1973, 277)

- (4) a. *sarpiro=an di tar ýīw rawon ca sad di...* (1 s 130ms)  
before=3PL SUBD LOC.EQ hunt going SUBD go.PST.PL LNK

- b. *e... yi daxo vud*  
HES one prayer be.PST

‘When in the old times we went hunting... there was one prayer [before the hunt]’

(Bartangi, {jonali1\_200623}).

This pattern may be termed insubordination insofar as a subordinating marker starts being used with independent, or at least non-subordinating, sentences. However, the key difference between (3) and insubordination is that in the latter, it is the *subordinate* clause that acquires independent function. In contrast, in (3), it is the *main* clause that starts being used independently. The complementizer *di*, as it were, becomes detached from its subordinate clause (where it occupies the initial position) and reanalyzed as a clause-final marker instead.

The second pattern, found in both Ossetic and Bartangi, involves coordinating conjunctions (*æmæ* ‘and’ and *fælə* ‘but’ in Ossetic; *xu* in Bartangi) used sentence-finally, either marking temporal (5) and causal (6) relations, or acting as a kind of discourse particle (8).

- (5) *zaxmī sad yā čabūd, āz=um az um žer δod xu.*  
wounded go.PST.F D3.SG.NOM pigeon I.NOM=1SG OBJ D3.F.OBL stone hit.PST and

‘I hit the pigeon with a stone, and it became wounded.’ (Bartangi, Karamxudoev 1973, 258)

- (6) *jej, dənǰər læg, nart =mæ ra-rvəst-oj a-rdæm, næ= fos syd-æj mard-əstə æmæ*  
hey great man Narts me.GEN PV-send-PST.3PL this-DIR our cattle famine-ABL die-PST.3PL and

‘O great man, the Narts sent me here, for our cattle were dying of famine.’

(Ossetic National Corpus = ONC)

- (7) *a dod, tar mī mun kāzor mis yakbori čās : guǰ-puǰ-adas*  
hey uncle LOC.EQ D1.M.OBL me.OBL garden ADD once look.PRS[2SG] kid-REDUPL-EXT  
*arū na indīδ-d=xu*  
LOC.DOWN:D1.LOC NEG enter.PRS-3SG=and

‘Hey nephew, take a look at my garden from time to time: what if a goat kid or something comes here.’

(Bartangi, Karamxudoev 1973, 57)

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(8) Ossetic: *æmæ* (particle)

*axæm tarst =dæn kod-ton æmæ!*

such fear thee.DAT do-PST.1SG and

‘I scared you so much!’

(ONC)

Here, too, we have to assume that a coordinating conjunction, which otherwise stands between the two constituents it coordinates, has become reanalyzed as a marker attached to the *preceding* conjunct.

What these two patterns have in common is the fact that a marker that is traditionally assumed to introduce a subordinate clause (Bartangi *di*) or symmetrically connect two coordinate clauses (Bartangi *xu*, Ossetic *æmæ*) gets fused with a preceding clause, i.e. the main clause in the case of *di* and the first conjunct in the case of *xu*. This certainly has to do with the fact that in both languages the conjunctions in question are enclitics from the prosodic point of view. However, two questions remain unresolved. First, what is the synchronic status of these markers? Second, what was the diachronic pathway of their development?

With respect to synchronic status, one option is to assume that both Bartangi and Ossetic have developed a class of clause-final subordinators in addition to clause-initial and clause-internal ones; see Belyaev (2014) for a comprehensive account of Ossetic subordination and Belyaev (forthcoming) for a semantic analysis of clause linkage in Bartangi. However, while clause-final subordinators are common in OV languages, they are virtually unheard of in Iranian. Furthermore, the syntactic and pragmatic features of these constructions are different from those of canonical subordination in these languages. Thus, another option is to describe the markers in question as sentence final particles. Again, while sentence-final particles are widespread in languages of the world, specifically in some linguistic areas such as East Asia (Panov 2020), they are virtually absent in Iranian. However, Bartangi does have a final polar question particle =*o*, which lends credibility to such a hypothesis. More importantly, if all these elements are analyzed as sentence-final particles, then their subordination-like usages should be explained either as parentheticals, or as a further development of sentence-final particles into subordinating conjunctions. Both proposals require additional analytic steps that require independent justification.

In the diachronic dimension, there are also several possibilities to consider. One is that the markers in question emerged as final particles that later grammaticalized into conjunctions and subordinators. This account is credible in the case of Ossetic *æmæ* and Bartangi *xu*: the former goes back to the Proto-Iranian additive particle *\*hama* ‘also’ (cf. Persian *ham*) (Abaev 1958), while the latter according to Rastorgueva and Edelman (2007, 430) has the same origin as the reflexive *xu*, which in languages of this area often develops discourse particle function. The situation is less clear in the case of Bartangi *di*: Morgenstierne (1974, 29) connects it with phonetically similar particles in related languages, but Rastorgueva and Edelman (2000, 132) derive it from a demonstrative stem instead, which is compatible with different diachronic scenario. If the functions described above are to be derived from coordination/subordination, then in Ossetic and Bartangi we are dealing with a typologically interesting case of “reverse insubordination” or “incoordination” where it is the main, or preceding, clause that acquires independent status.

In the talk, I will describe the data in more detail, as well as discuss the formalization of the analytic options outlined above in terms of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG).

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