

## Word order in Urum ditransitives: Evidence for contact-induced language change?

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Caucasian Urum is an Anatolian Turkish variety spoken by ethnic Pontic Greeks in Georgia (Skopeteas 2013). The Urum Greeks originate from several cities in Northeastern Anatolia and moved to the Caucasus in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, they have been in close contact with the other languages of the Caucasus, particularly with Russian, the dominant language in Georgia until the end of the Soviet Era in 1991 (Pavlenko 2008).

The Urum Greeks in Georgia are heavily imbalanced bilinguals. The Urum language is acquired as a heritage language at home and restricted to family communication (mainly with parents or grandparents) (Ries & Skopeteas 2013). Most speakers are bilingual in Russian, which is also the dominant language for them. Many speakers (especially from the younger generation) are also competent in Georgian.

Previous production studies have shown a difference in the syntax of older and younger Urum speakers. While the most frequent word order in Old Urum is OV (as in Turkish), the most frequent word order in Young Urum is VO (as in Russian) (Skopeteas 2013). Further evidence for a contact-induced change in the syntax of Young Urum comes from acceptability data, which lead evidence to the assumption that Urum does not change from a head-final to a head-initial syntax but to a syntax with head movement (Skopeteas 2014).

The present study examines word order variation in ditransitive constructions in two generations of Urum speakers. Based on elicited speech production data by 16 speakers, the study aims to investigate whether younger Urum speakers (N=8) differ from older speakers (N=8) with respect to

- (a) the effect of givenness on the order of the two verbal arguments (T<R or T>R); and
- (b) the position of the verb.

The results reveal that both generations have a general preference for R<T orders, independent from givenness. However, both orders (R<T and T<R) coexist and occur in the same discourse contexts (Figure 1). The general preference for R<T orders indicates that the order of the two verbal arguments is not triggered by discourse prominence but by other factors (e.g., animacy).

The second RQ examined the position of the verb. The data reveal that both generations preferred H-initial over H-final orders (Figure 2). Moreover, both groups frequently used a third type of construction with R and T on different sides of the verb (1-4). This construction type significantly increased among the younger speakers (Figure 2).

Overall, the findings support the assumption that Urum has not changed from a verb-final to a verb-initial syntax but to a grammar with head movement. In contrast to previous studies, the present study found this change in both speaker generations. However, the data of the younger Urum speakers showed considerably more word order variation than the data of the older Urum speakers.

## Examples

(1) *oğlan mama-sin-a ver-ier pismo-yi* (SO<sub>R</sub>VO<sub>T</sub>)  
 boy mother-POSS.3SG-DAT give-IPFV.3SG letter-ACC  
 ‘A/the boy is giving his mother a letter.’ (item 10, speaker Y-04)

(2) *oğlan konvert-i ver-ier ana-sin-a* (SO<sub>T</sub>VO<sub>R</sub>)  
 boy envelope-ACC give-IPFV.3SG mother-POSS.3SG-DAT  
 ‘A/the boy is giving the envelope to his mother.’ (item 10, speaker Y-01)

## Figures

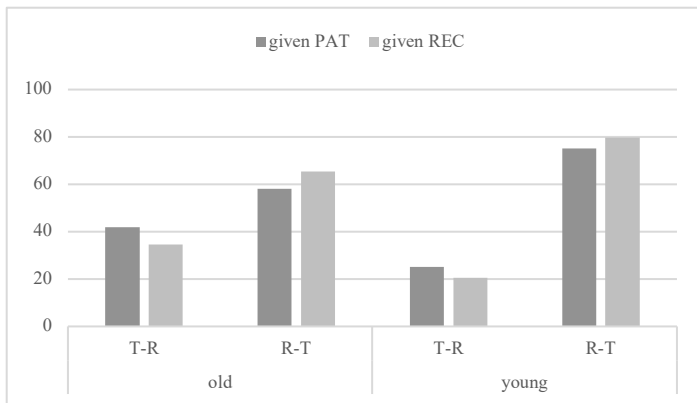


Figure 1. Proportion of R-T and T-R orders in Urum ditransitives, by generation (16 speakers, number of valid descriptions: 204).

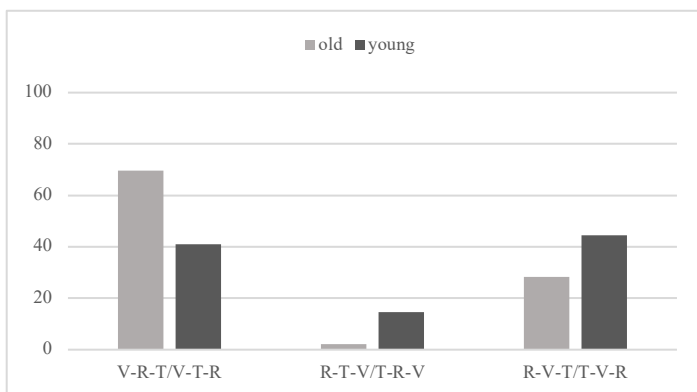


Figure 2. Position of the verb in Urum ditransitives (16 speakers, number of valid descriptions: 204).

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