**Grammaticalization paths of *ko* 'yes' in Megrelian**

This is a case study of the affirmative particle *ko* 'yes' and the affirmative prefix *ko-* in Megrelian, one of the Kartvelian languages spoken in Georgia. This paper addresses a typologically fascinating pattern, namely the grammaticalization paths of *ko*.

According to the data, the vast majority of verbal forms that refer to the past begin with *ko-* (or its allomorphs: *ku-*, *ki-*, *kə-*, *ka-*, *ke-*, and *k-*). Morphotactically, it is opposed to the negative marker *va-* (*ve-*, *vu-*) and, when it precedes a complex prefix, the perfectivizer *ge-* (*ga-*), cf. *gino-k'ilans* 'X locks Y' vs. *ve-gno-k'ilans* 'X does not lock Y' vs. *ki-gno-k'ilans* 'X does lock Y' vs. *ge-gno-k'ilans* 'X will lock Y'. The only case when *va-* and *ko-* cooccur within a verbal form, is when the speaker questions addressee's truthfulness, cf. *va-ku-mortuo?* 'How come X has not arrived?'

Being part of a finite verbal form and never attested in verboids, *ko-* is not an obligatory affix and in most instances may be omitted and, as my consultants reveal, "adds nothing noteworthy to the meaning of the verb." However, the range of its functions is very wide and includes, but is not restricted to:

(1) changing the tense and aspect of a verb (cf. *sxap'uns* 'X jumps' vs. *ko-sxap'uns* 'X will jump'), which is generally a function of derivational prefixes;

(2) introducing the meaning of contact vs. separation (cf. *ga-mk'osxap'u* 'X jumped off Y' vs. *ki-mk'asxap'u* 'X jumped on Y');

(3) affecting the number agreement of a verb (cf. *uc'u* 'X told Y$_{PL}$ Z' vs. *k-uc'u* 'X told Y$_{SG}$ Z');

(4) changing the deictic meaning of a following prefix and introducing the evidential meaning in stative verbs (cf. *muto-re* 'X is (in a country) here' vs. *mito-re* 'X is (in a country) there' vs. *ki-mto-re* 'X is evidently (in a country)';

(5) affecting the communicative status of an utterance (cf. *mortu* 'X came' vs. *va-mortu* 'X did not come' vs. *ku-mortu* 'X did come');

(6) maintaining discourse coherence (cf. *…do mortu.* '…and X came.' vs. *…do ku-mortu…* '…and X came (further narration required)')

For all these instances, with the exception of (5), there are other morphological, syntactic and lexical media that are specially designed for the expression of the listed meanings. However, the frequency of *ko-* in discourse is extremely high, which challenges the theory of grammaticalization in a way whether or not can it explain the range and varieties of *ko-*'s functions.