Morphologization of matrix verbs: the case of "Verificative" in Agul

Verbal paradigm of Agul[1] is rich, and is comparatively simply organized, the core tense and aspect forms being periphrastic formations composed of a participle, a converb or an infinitive and one of two postpositional auxiliaries — identification copula 'be' or locative copula 'be inside'. At present stage many such forms have undergone morphologization and are rather tight and almost synthetic, though their original periphrastic structure is quite obvious (cf. (1)). On the contrary, matrix verbs and their complements tend to remain autonomous and do not merge morphologically; cf. the causative construction in (2) with a matrix verb *aq'as* 'do' taking the infinitive clause as a complement.

Against this background, one grammatical formation of Agul seems very peculiar if not strange: being morphologically synthetic, it functions as a combination of a matrix verb with an "incorporated" complement. This is a "verificative" (or "checking") form which at first glance looks like some exotic mood, its marker *-čuk'-* adding the meaning 'someone checks or finds out whether the situation denoted by the verb is true', cf. (3)—(6). Although *-čuk'-* is morphologically bound, it manifests head properties akin to a matrix verb not only semantically (denoting a separate situation of "checking"), but syntactically as well. The *-čuk'-* marker governs the noun phrase in the Ergative case, referring to the participant who actually checks or finds out, cf. *ruš.a* in (3) or *gada.ji* in (4). In this respect the "verificative" form serves as a valence-increasing device, though with a very peculiar additional meaning of "checking". (It also turns out to be the only morphological valence-increasing device in Agul, as the causative construction includes the fully autonomous matrix verb 'do'.)

"Verificative" forms can occur in any tense, aspect or mood, the element *-čuk'-* serving as a morphosyntactic locus (like all standard verbal lexemes, it distinguishes perfective vs. imperfective stems), cf. the zero-marked Imperative in (3), the Perfective Past in (4), the Future in (5) or the Present in (6). The "incorporated" complement clauses retain the coding of their arguments; cf. the Absolutive pattern with intransitive verbs in (4) and (5) and the Ergative-Absolutive pattern with transitive verbs in (3) and (6). Unlike complements of standard matrix verbs (like 'know', 'want', 'begin', causative 'do' and so on), the complement clauses of the "verificative" are not headed by some particular non-finite form (participle, converb, infinitive or masdar). A whole plethora of variants is possible, which are semantically and structurally comparable to the main finite tense and aspect forms: e.g. *qajnaj-* in (4) is certainly related to the Resultative *qajnaa* ‖ *qajnaja* 'have come' and *quʕ̥aj-* in (5) has the same structure as the Present *quʕ̥aa* ‖ *quʕ̥aja* (also, note the corresponding aspectual contrast in the interpretation of a complement).

The structure of "verificative" forms becomes more transparent if we assume that it is historically related to conditional forms. Like the core tense and aspect forms, conditional forms in Agul are periphrastic in origin, the only difference being that auxiliary verb 'be' or 'be inside' takes the conditional affix *-či*, cf. (7). Apart from the protasis of conditional sentences, conditional forms are used in indirect questions (cf. (8) as an example), and it seems plausible that "verificative" forms could be a result of the morphologization of the indirect question construction. Roughly, that could be presented as a change from **quʕ̥aj ajči uk'-* 'check whether smn. is coming' with some (formely autonomous) matrix verb like **uk'-* 'check, find out' to the bound sequence *quʕ̥ajčuk'-* which we observe in the modern language, where *-uk'-* is already a sort of an "affixal matrix verb", fully contracted with its dependent clause.

This poses the question as to what particular matrix verb was used in that function (there is no lexical verb like *uk'-* in the modern language), and the answer is far from obvious. The "verificative" as such seems to be an old formation, as it can be found in several dialects of Agul (the examples given above are from the Huppuq' dialect): while in some dialects the marker looks like *-čuk'-*, in others it is *-čug-*, *-šag̥-* or even *-mag̥-*. The use of "verificative" in different dialects and its possible diachronic origin will be discussed in more detail during the presentation.

(1) *aq'une* 'did'   <   *aq'.u-na*   *e*
PERFECTIVE PAST   do.PF-CONV   is

aq'aje 'usually does' <   *aq'.a-j*   *e*
HABITUAL   do.IPF-CONV   is

aq'ase 'will do'   <   *aq'.a-s*   *e*
FUTURE   do.IPF-INF   is

aq'unaa, aq'unaja 'has done' < *aq'.u-na*   *aa, aja*
RESULTATIVE   do.PF-CONV   is.inside

aq'aa, aq'aja 'is doing'   <   *aq'.a-j*   *aa, aja*
PRESENT   do.IPF-CONV   is.inside

(2) baw.a   ruš.a   jakː   ʕut'.a-s   **aq'.u-ne**.
mother(ERG)   [daughter(ERG)   meat(ABS)   eat.IPF-INF]   **do.PF-PFT**
*The mother **made** her daughter eat meat.*

(3) ruš.a   dars   lik'.inajefej-**čuk'**-∅.
[girl(ERG)   lesson(ABS)   write:PF:RES:PART]-**čuk'-IMP**
***Check**, whether the girl has written the lesson.*

(4) gada.ji   dad   qajnaj-**čuk'.u-ne**.
boy(ERG)   [father(ABS)   come:PF:RES]-**čuk'.PF-PFT**
*The boy **checked**, whether his father had come.*

(5) zun   dad   quʕ˳.aj-**čuk'.a-s-e**.
1sg(ERG)   [father(ABS)   come:IPF:PRS]-**čuk'.IPF-INF-COP**
*I shall **check,** whether father is coming back.*

(6) baw.a   ruš.a   dars   ʜaraq'.unaj-**čuk'.a-a**.
mother(ERG)   [girl(ERG)   lesson(ABS)   learn.PF:RES]-**čuk'.IPF-PRS**
*Mother **checks** whether the girl has learnt the lesson.*

(7) *aq'unči* 'if he did'   <   *aq'.u-na*   *ejči*
PERFECTIVE PAST CONDITIONAL   do.PF-CONV   if.he.is

aq'ajči 'if he (usually) does' <   *aq'.a-j*   *ejči*
HABITUAL CONDITIONAL   do.IPF-CONV   if.he.is

aq'unajči 'if he has done'   <   *aq'.u-na*   *ajči*
RESULTATIVE CONDITIONAL   do.PF-CONV   if.he.is.inside

(8) gada.ji   ʕut'.unaj-**či**   χutːurf-∅.
[boy(ERG)   eat:PF:RES-**COND**]   look-IMP
Look whether the boy has eaten.

ABBREVIATIONS:

ABS – absolutive case; COND – conditional; CONV – converb; COP – copula; ERG – ergative case; IMP – imperative; INF – infitive; IPF – imperfective stem; PART – participle; PF – perfective stem; PFT – perfective past; PL – plural; PRS – present; RES – resultative