

# Preface

This volume presents several papers on Mehweb, a one-village language spoken in the central part of Daghestan, a republic of the Russian Federation. The language has a relatively low number of speakers (about 800) but is not immediately endangered, as shown in the first contribution by Nina Dobrushina, which is an introduction to the sociolinguistic situation of Mehweb. The contribution covers the geographical position of Mehweb and its economic situation, the official status of the language, the ethnic affiliation of the villagers, the recent history of Mehweb, its neighbours and the patterns of multilingualism observed. While there are no visible signs of first language loss, the paper shows that there is a strong tendency towards the loss of traditional patterns of multilingualism, with Russian replacing all other languages for interethnic communication.

Mehweb belongs to the Dargwa branch of the East Caucasian (Nakh-Daghestanian) language family. It is often considered as a dialect of Dargwa (Magometov 1982), along with many other lects within the Dargwa branch. A different tradition treats Mehweb as a separate language (Khajdakov 1985; Koryakov & Sumbatova 2007). The survey of Dargwa idioms in Sumbatova & Lander (2014) indicates that Mehweb is most often classified as belonging to the northern group of Dargwa dialects. Although the residents of Mehweb presently consider themselves to be the descendants of re-settlers from the village of Mugi, where the Akusha dialect of Dargwa is spoken (Uslar 1892; see also Dobrushina 2019 [this volume]), there is no linguistic analysis that shows any special affinity between Mehweb and Mugi. According to lexicostatistical analysis, Mehweb is a member of the north-central group of Dargwa and shows more similarities to Murego-Gubden than to Mugi (Koryakov 2013).

The first linguistic source on Mehweb is a reference by Uslar (1892). This short grammar describes another dialect of Dargwa, but starts with a brief survey of different Dargwa languages and dialects. Among these dialects Uslar also mentions Mehweb, qualifying it as a dialect spoken in Mugi, but “notably degraded”. Two descriptions of Mehweb appeared in the 1980s, both in Russian. The first is a grammar of Mehweb which describes its phonology and morphology but not its syntax (Magometov 1982). This description, extremely clear and explicit, considers only the main morphological forms while excluding some less frequent ones,

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and does not provide a detailed analysis of their semantics. The second, a book by Khaidakov, was written at almost the same time as Magometov's grammar. It compares the formal morphology of several Dargwa languages and dialects, including Mehweb.

In 1990, a field team from Moscow State University came to work on Mehweb, but no publications followed. In the aftermath of this trip, in the 2000s, Nina Sumbatova started to work on Mehweb and, among other things, compiled a list of glosses and suggested an analysis of Mehweb verbal inflection, some elements of which are integrated into this volume (Sumbatova manuscript).

The only dictionary of Mehweb which exists to date is a small vocabulary supplement in Magometov (1982). One of the aims of our study was to compile a dictionary and document the main inflectional forms. The dictionary is being developed by Michael Daniel with the participation of many members of the field team, especially George Moroz, and implemented as a web page by Aleksandra Kozhukhar. The current version of the dictionary is available online – <https://linghub.ru/mehwebdict/>.

Mehweb texts were first published by Magometov (*ibid.*) with translation, but without morphological glossing. New texts were recorded and glossed during this project by Michael Daniel, including a sample of Pear Stories (currently transcribed but not yet glossed). The corpus includes 35 texts (including 13 from Magometov 1982) comprising about 1,000 sentences and 10,000 tokens and is also being prepared for open access.

The following brief overview is intended for the reader who is not familiar with East Caucasian languages. It provides background on the most important features of the language.

The consonant inventory includes voiced and voiceless consonants. Stops (but not other consonants) also have an ejective series. Unlike some other Dargwa dialects, Mehweb lacks phonologically distinctive geminate stops. The vocalic system has four members with a gap in the mid back position [i, e, a, u]; [o<sup>ɣ</sup>] only appears as a realization of [u] with the pharyngeal feature. Velar, uvular and radical consonants may be labialized. In addition to [ʔ, h, h], Mehweb also has the less common [ɬ, ʔ] which seem to be phonologically secondary, appearing only as pharyngealized counterparts of [h, ʔ], respectively. Pharyngealization is strongly – but not exclusively – associated with uvulars, pharyngeal and laryngeal consonants. For further details on phonetic inventories and pharyngealization see the contribution by George Moroz, who discusses details of the inventory, syllable structure, stress placement, morphophonological alternations and pharyngealization.

Mehweb morphology is agglutinative. Mehweb is ergative in terms of both gender agreement and case marking. To start with the latter, the case inventory

includes the nominative (absolute), the ergative, the genitive, the dative, the comitative and some peripheral case forms. Note that some authors of the volume follow Kibrik (1997) in the use of the term *nominative* for ergative alignment. Spatial forms are bimorphemic, as is typical of East Caucasian. The first category is that of localization, defining a spatial domain with respect to the ground (in Mehweb: ‘on’, ‘near’, ‘at’, ‘in(side)’, ‘among’). The second category is that of orientation, defining the figure’s motion with respect to this domain (Goal, Source, Path) or absence thereof (Static location). Unlike other branches of East Caucasian – but as in the other lects of the Dargwa branch – the lative form (Goal) is zero marked and the essive form (location) is marked by the presence of a gender agreement slot controlled by the nominative argument of the clause. The plural is expressed by a number of suffixes, sometimes accompanied by alternations. For more on nominal morphology, see the contribution by Ilya Chechuro, dealing with plural formation, the oblique stem, case formation and formation of irregular locatives. There is also a brief discussion of the use of the case forms.

Mehweb verb inflection is by and large similar to that of other Dargwa languages. It resides upon a fundamental distinction between two stems, perfective and imperfective, from which all other forms are derived. The formal relation between the stems is irregular and can involve alternations, infixation and loss of agreement slots. Most forms are derived from both perfective and imperfective stems, except the prohibitive and the present/habitual, which are only available in the imperfective. The combination of the irregular relation between perfective and imperfective stems and the almost perfectly parallel inflection based on the two stems partly assimilates the Mehweb (and generally Dargwa) aspectual system to that of derivational aspect. Irregular verbs include verbs of motion, the verb ‘give’, the verb ‘say’ and some others. For more on verbal morphology, see the contribution by Michael Daniel.

Zooming in on one fragment of the verb morphology, Nina Dobrushina provides a detailed analysis of both form and meaning in the irrealis domain. Several features are typologically infrequent, although common for East Caucasian languages: the formal split between transitive and intransitive imperatives, the expression of the negative imperative by a dedicated inflectional form (the prohibitive), and the presence of a dedicated inflectional optative used in blessings and curses. The presence of a dedicated apprehensive is rare even within East Caucasian. The jussive and the hortative are expressed periphrastically. A detailed analysis of another fragment of verbal morphosyntax is provided in the contribution by Daria Barylnikova. She provides a survey of periphrastic constructions based on ‘drive’ and ‘let’ and explains the ways in which these constructions show incipient signs of grammaticalization into expressions of factitive and permissive causation, respectively.

Gender agreement in Mehweb follows strict semantic assignment: in the vast majority of cases, it is enough to know the semantics of the noun to determine its agreement pattern. Mehweb gender (class) agreement distinguishes masculine, feminine and neuter in the singular and human and non-human in the plural. One complication is connected to mass nouns; although morphologically singular (and capable of forming morphological plurals), these nouns control non-human plural agreement. While this behavior of mass nouns is typical of Dargwa languages, the next twist is an innovation and probably results from contact with Lak. The majority of feminine nouns have moved from the original Dargwa feminine (*r-*, glossed as F in the book) gender to a gender identical to non-human plural (*d-*, glossed as F1). The distribution is roughly between married/old (F) and unmarried/young (F1) women. The choice between the two agreement patterns is still partly flexible and may become a tool of language game or insults. One could speculate that the source of this development is some kind of indirect reference motivated by politeness. Another development in agreement is that personal agreement on the verb, well attested in Dargwa languages, developed into the typologically rare phenomenon of egophoric agreement; the suffix *-ra* (glossed EGO) appears with first person subject in the affirmative and with second person subject in the interrogative. Unlike gender, personal agreement works on an accusative rather than an ergative basis.

Clause subordination is based on dependent verb forms, including action nominals, infinitives, participles and converbs, rather than on finite predication introduced by conjunctions. Converbs include two general (contextual) converbs (perfective and imperfective) whose relation to the main clause is context-determined and several special converbs that specify this relation (in Mehweb, immediate anteriority, gradual accumulation, cause, concession etc. – see the contribution by Maria Sheyanova). Some aspects of the syntax of general converbs are presented in the contribution by Marina Kustova, who covers periphrastic converbs, independent uses of converbs and their use in imperative contexts, and different strategies for how the converb clause may share its arguments with the main clause. In the absence of true clause co-ordination, the respective discourse/narrative function is performed by chains of general converbs. Kustova's contribution attempts to address this issue by considering several tests targeting the subordination – co-ordination distinction.

One apparent exception to the non-use of finite predication in subordination is constituted by reported speech constructions. Reported speech in Mehweb, as generally in East Caucasian, is structurally similar to direct reporting and typologically distant from true subordination. Mehweb has a pronominal stem *sa<CL>i*, used with a wide range of functions, from logophoric function in reported

speech to resumptive to reflexive, considered in the contribution by Aleksandra Kozhukhar. The author suggests that, in Mehweb, there is neither a morphological nor a (sharp) syntactic distinction between logophoric and long-distance uses of the pronoun.

The three other contributions on syntax are the chapters by Dmitry Ganenkov (syntax – case assignment and personal agreement – of the simple clause), Yuri Lander and Aleksandra Kozhukhar (the relative clause) and Yuri Lander (a survey of the uses of the focus particle). Ganenkov shows how the distribution of personal and gender agreement control classifies Mehweb verbs into several morphosyntactic classes, non-trivially connected to their transitivity, and demonstrates how this distribution is linked to conventional subject properties such as control of reflexivization. Lander and Kozhukhar argue that the use of the reflexive pronoun has been specialized as resumptive in relative clauses, taking as evidence the restrictions on its use as compared to the use of simple reflexives. Finally, Lander argues that the focus particle *g<sup>w</sup>a*, formally identical to the imperative of ‘see’, surprisingly does not have to be adjacent to the constituent in the scope of the focus.

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This volume is the result of a collective field research project run by the linguists from the School of Linguistics of HSE University, Moscow. Part of the team consisted of bachelor’s students who conducted their research under the supervision of the more experienced members of the team. Collective field research is a practice developed by Aleksandr Kibrik, an eminent Russian typologist who organized more than 40 field trips attracting hundreds of young people to the description of minority languages. Kibrik edited numerous grammars where chapters were contributed by all team participants, including students in their early years at university.

In 1990, Aleksandr Kibrik brought to Mehweb a large group of students which included, among others, Michael Daniel and Nina Dobrushina. This specific field trip produced relatively little in terms of scholarly output, the most important result being a three-page sketch of Mehweb morphology (a list of the major forms and morphemes) by Nina Sumbatova.

The more important legacy of the 1990 expedition was a personal/human one. Anvar Musaev and Maisarat Muslimova (now Musaeva), two teachers at the local school, took an active part in the organization of the life of the expedition. A long-lasting human bond was established with them. In 2010, Michael Daniel and Nina Dobrushina decided to pass by Mehweb on their way from Archib to Makhachkala. Anvar and Maisarat, this time a married couple with grown-up

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children, were so open and hospitable, and so full of memories of the 1990 visit, that the idea of working on Mehweb came very naturally. In 2013, five students from the Higher School of Economics accompanied by Michael Daniel, Nina Dobrushina, Dmitry Ganenkov, Yuri Lander and George Moroz came to Mehweb to start working on a description of the language. In the course of four field trips in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, each lasting about two weeks, we recorded texts, compiled a small dictionary, and wrote several papers. The student team was not always the same. Some of the students involved did not participate directly in this volume, but they all made a contribution to the analysis of the data. It is thus our pleasure to list the participants of all field trips over these four years: Ekaterina Ageeva, Darya Barylnikova, Ilya Chechuro, Violetta Ivanova, Aleksandra Khadzhijskaya, Aleksandra Kozhukhar, Marina Kustova, Yevgeniy Mozhaev, Olga Shapovalova, Semen Sheshenin, Aleksandra Sheshenina, Mariya Sheyanova.

Anvar and Maisarat and their family invariably provided us with housing and logistical support and never grew tired of being our primary native consultants, including over email, Skype and now, in the final days of our work on the book, also over WhatsApp, a very useful tool for instant proofreading of examples. We are also infinitely grateful to our friends and consultants Abakar and Zalmu Sharbuzovy, to their daughters Patimat and Kamila, so intelligent and helpful, to the indefatigable Kazim, foe of all tea parties, his wife Munira and his sister Bulbul; to Patimat Tagirovna, who deserves to become the first announcer on Mehweb radio, if it is ever established; to Khavsarat, Magomedzagid, Mariam and many other Mehweb people the limits of whose patience we have been stretching for too many years. We remember the touch of the hand of Aminat, Maisarat's mother.

The authors are very grateful to Samira (Helena) Verhees who proofread most of the papers presented here, to our very patient type-setter, Vadim Radionov, and to the reviewers of drafts of individual chapters of the volume: Aleksandr Arkhipov, Gilles Authier, Oleg Belyaev, Denis Creissels, Francesca Di Garbo, Diana Forker, Martin Haspelmath, Olesya Khanina, Timur Maisak, Nina Sumbatova, Yakov Testelet, as well as to the anonymous reviewers of Language Science Press.

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*Michael Daniel and Nina Dobrushina*

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# Предисловие

Настоящий сборник – результат многолетней работы исследовательской группы Школы лингвистики Национального исследовательского университета Высшая школа экономики. В проекте приняли участие студенты бакалавриата, которыми руководили более опытные исследователи. Коллективная полевая работа – практика, введенная Александром Евгеньевичем Кибриком, выдающимся советским российским типологом, организовавшим более сорока лингвистических экспедиций, в ходе которых в полевых исследованиях малых языков приняли участие сотни студентов. А.Е. Кибрик выпустил большое число грамматик, главы которых писались в том числе студентами, лишь недавно начавшими учебу в университете.

В 1990 г. А.Е. Кибрик привез в селение Мегеб (Гунибский район Республики Дагестан) большую группу студентов, участниками которой были, в том числе, М. Даниэль и Н. Добрушина. От этой поездки сохранилось не так много материалов. Важным результатом стал краткий обзор мегебской морфологии (список основных форм и морфем), составленный Н. Сумбатовой.

С точки зрения человеческих отношений самым главным приобретением экспедиции 1990 г. стало знакомство с Анваром Мусаевым и Майсарат Муслимовой (ныне Мусаевой), молодыми учителями мегебской школы, которые приняли активное участие в жизни экспедиции. В 2010 г. мы (Н. Добрушина и М. Даниэль) решили заехать в Мегеб на обратной дороге из Чародинского района в Махачкалу. Майсарат и Анвар, к этому времени – семейная пара с двумя взрослыми детьми, приняли нас настолько радостно и тепло, были так полны воспоминаниями о той давней поездке, что идея возобновить работу над мегебским языком показалась совершенно естественной и даже неизбежной. В 2013 г. пять студентов ВШЭ под руководством М. Даниэля, Н. Добрушиной, Д. Ганенкова, Ю. Ландера и Г. Мороза приехали в Мегеб для работы над грамматикой этого языка. В результате четырех поездок (2013–2016 гг.), каждая продолжительностью около двух недель, мы записали некоторое количество текстов, собрали небольшой словарь и написали несколько черновых статей. Студенческий состав

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не оставался постоянным. Некоторые из участников этих экспедиций не приняли участие в написании настоящего очерка, но каждый из них внес тот или иной вклад в сбор и анализ данных. Мы приводим полный список участников всех экспедиций: Екатерина Агеева, Дарья Барыльникова, Виолетта Иванова, Александра Кожухарь, Марина Кустова, Евгений Можаяев, Александра Хаджийская, Илья Чечуро, Ольга Шаповалова, Семен Шешенин, Александра Шешенина, Мария Шеянова.

Нашими неизменными хозяевами и главными переводчиками были Майсарат и Анвар. Они и их сыновья обустроивали нашу жизнь и неутомимо отвечали на наши вопросы о мегебском языке, в том числе по электронной почте, скайпу, а в последнее время – по WhatsApp'у, совершенно незаменимому инструменту для того, чтобы в последний момент вносить правку в корректуру статей по малым языкам. Кроме того, мы бесконечно благодарны нашим друзьям и переводчикам – Абакару и Залму Шарбузовым, их дочерям Патимат и Камиле, таким умным и всегда готовым поделиться своим временем, неутомимому чаененавистнику Казиму, его жене Мунире и его сестре Булбул; Патимат Тагировне, которая несомненно заслуживала бы роли первого диктора мегебского радио, если таковое когда-нибудь начнет вещание; Исрапилу, Кавсарат, Магомедзагиду, Марьям, Саиде и многим другим мегебцам, границы терпения которых мы испытывали в течение стольких лет. Всем им мы желаем долгих лет жизни и здоровья.

Мы помним рукопожатие Аминат, мамы Майсарат, Муниры и Марьям.

Авторы сборника очень признательны Самире (Хелене) Ферхеес, которая вычитала многие из статей, Вадиму Радионову, который взял на себя сложную верстку тома, рецензентам первых версий статей – Александру Архипову, Жилю Отье, Олегу Беляеву, Дени Кресселю, Франческе Ди Гарбо, Диане Форкер, Мартину Хаспельмату, Олесе Ханиной, Тимуру Майсаку, Нине Сумбатовой, Якову Тестельцу, а также анонимным рецензентам издательства Language Science Press.

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*Михаил Даниэль и Нина Добрушина*

## **List of abbreviations**

ABS	absolutive
AD	spatial domain near the landmark
ADD	additive particle
ADVZ	adverbializer
DIR	motion directed towards a spatial domain
ANTE	anteriority converb
AOR	aorist
APPR	apprehensive
APUD	spatial domain near the landmark
ATR	attributivizer
AUX	auxiliary
CARD	cardinal numeral
CAUS	causative
CAUSAL	causal (case form)
CL	gender (class) agreement slot
COMIT	comitative
COMP	complementizer
CONC	concessive
CONC2	concessive
COND	conditional
CTRF	counterfactual
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
EGO	egophoric
EL	motion from a spatial domain
EMPH	emphasis (particle)
ERG	ergative
ESS	static location in a spatial domain
F	feminine (gender agreement)
F1	feminine (unmarried and young women gender prefix)
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
GRAD	gradual converb
HAB	habitual (durative for verbs denoting states)
HPL	human plural (gender agreement)
IMM	immediate converb

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IMP	imperative
IN	spatial domain inside a (hollow) landmark
INCP	inceptive converb
INDEF	indefinite particle
INF	infinitive
INTER	spatial domain between multiple landmarks
INTJ	interjection
INTR	intransitive
IPFT	imperfect
IPFV	imperfective (derivational base)
IRR	irrealis (derivational base)
LAT	motion into a spatial domain
LOC	locative converb
LV	light verb
M	masculine (gender agreement)
N	neuter (gender agreement)
NEG	negation (verbal prefix)
NEGVOL	negation in volitional forms (negative imperative, negative optative)
NMLZ	nominalizer
NOM	nominative
NPL	non-human plural (gender agreement)
OBL	oblique (nominal stem suffix)
OPT	optative
ORD	ordinal numeral
PFV	perfective (derivational base)
PL	plural
PROH	prohibitive
PST	past
PSTR	posterior converb
PTCL	particle
PTCP	participle
PURP	purposive converb
PV	preverb (verbal prefix)
Q	question (interrogative particle)
QUOT	quotative (particle)
REPL	replicative (nominal case)
SG	singular
SMLT	simultaneous converb
SUBST	substitutive (nominal case)