Languages of the East Caucasian family tend to have an opposition between the aorist-like and the perfect-like forms in their TAM systems. The same is true of Lezgic languages, which represent the southernmost branch of the family and are spoken in southern Daghestan and in northern Azerbaijan. As a rule, they possess a perfective past (aorist) which is the most widely used past tense and, in particular, occurs in the narrative main-line. They also have a form that can be identified as a ‘current relevance’ perfect, often retaining resultative uses (e.g. situations like ‘s/he is sitting’ are commonly expressed by means of the perfect/resultative, not by the present tense). Both perfective pasts and perfects are derived from perfective stems of the verb – at least in cases, where the inflectional perfective/imperfective distinction is clear-cut. There is, however, some variation both in the structure of these two forms and the functional range of the perfect.

First, it is remarkable that both aorists and perfects can be of periphrastic origin: e.g. in Agul, the former has the structure <perfective converb + copula>, and the latter has the structure <perfective converb + existential verb ‘be inside’> (both forms are morphologized, cf. *aq’una ‘did’ from *aq’una e and aq’una-a ‘has done’ from *aq’una a). Still, it is more common for the aorist to be synthetic, sometimes just syncretic with the plain perfective converb (e.g. in Tsakhur, Archi or Lezgian), possibly in some cases due to the loss of copula. Udi presents a rare example where both the aorist and the perfect are purely synthetic (cf. *bak-i ‘was’ vs. bak-e ‘has been’), the aorist being identical to the perfective converb/participle and the origin of the perfect being unclear. In general, morphologically the perfects are rather diverse in the languages of the group, so they are very unlikely to descend from a single ‘Proto-Lezgic’ form or construction.

Second, there does not seem to exist an obvious correlation between the synthetic vs. periphrastic status of the perfect form and its range of functions. On the whole, the Lezgic perfects seem to be “young” comparative to the aorists, and less morphologized. At the same time, from the perspective of the well-known grammaticalization path leading from resultatives to perfects and then to perfective pasts or unwitnessed pasts, it is clear that even the perfects that are formally quite “mature” may have a functional distribution rather expected of less grammaticalized forms. Thus, the synthetic Udi Perfect in -e displays the resultative and the perfect meanings and has not gone any further. On the contrary, the Agul perfect has (partly) evolved into an unwitnessed past without becoming totally bound: the auxiliary verb retains certain degree of autonomy (“full” variants like aq’una a, aq’una aja ‘has done’ are still possible) and cannot be considered a suffix. Only in Archi we find a case, where a more advanced functional stage “perfect + unwitnessed past” is covered by a bound form (syncretic with the perfective converb in -li), while the earlier resultative meaning is expressed by a structurally related periphrastic construction (perfective converb in -li plus copula).

On the whole, the Agul perfect stands out among the languages of the Lezgic branch as covering a wide range of functions from resultative to perfect proper and to indirect evidentiality in the past (both inferential and reportative). It is not infrequent even in

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1 There are nine languages in the Lezgic branch (Agul, Archi, Budugh, Kryz, Lezgian[an], Rutul, Tabassaran, Tsakhur, Udi). In the paper, I will use the data of most of them, paying special attention to Agul and Udi, whose verbal systems have been studied comparatively well.

2 Cf. Bybee et al. 1994, with important corrections made later by Tatevosov (2001) on the basis of the East Caucasian data.
narratives, as the main-line of “unwitnessed” stories (like fairy-tales or legends) is usually encoded by the perfect. Although in other Lezgic languages, evidentiality contrasts also tend to be grammaticalized, the evolution of the perfect into unwitnessed past is not a common choice. In some languages, the marking of evidentiality is independent of the particular verb form and may be applied to the perfect as well as to other forms of the paradigm (cf. the use of the borrowed Azeri enclitic -miš in Kryz, or the distinction between the “attributive”/“non-attributive” copula in the Tsakhur periphrastic forms). In such cases, perfect as such does not have evidential value. In Udi, neither the perfect nor any other dedicated means are used to express evidentiality, which appears to be completely absent from the grammatical system.

The paper will overview the morphology and use of perfect forms in the languages of the Lezgic group. Given the absence of historical evidence (for most of these languages, no sources before the end of the 19th c. are available), the origin and evolution of the perfects will be considered from a comparative intragenetic perspective and taking into account the cross-linguistic regularities observed in the perfect domain.

References