

THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE GEORGIAN AORIST

PJ Hillery¹

General remarks

The Georgian aorist² is a Series 2 screeve³ used in its perfective form to describe a single completed event in the past, and in its very much rarer imperfective form to render a repeated non-habitual past event without reference to its outcome.⁴ This aspectual contrast is evident from the following example:

იფიქრა, იფიქრა, მაგრამ მაინც გამოსავალი ვერ მოიფიქრა.
He thought and thought, but he just could not figure a way out.

The formation of the aorist in Georgian is a good illustration of what might appear at first glance to be a rather irregular feature of the verbal system, but it is one in which on closer inspection clear patterns begin to emerge. In general, however, the aorist form of a Georgian verb is not wholly predictable, and must be learned. This note addresses the underlying patterns in the system, but there are a number of exceptions that are omitted from this discussion for reasons of space and clarity.

Note that the frequent use of the perfect in negated past statements means that the aorist often appears in affirmative sentences. Contrast the aorist form არ გააკეთე 'I did not do it' with its nuance of unwillingness to the more neutral perfect form არ გამიკეთებია.

For almost all verbs⁵ the imperative has the same form as the second person aorist, e.g., გააღეთ can mean 'you opened it' or 'open it'.

Classification and paradigms

The aorists of Class 1, 2 and 3 verbs are traditionally classified as 'weak' or 'strong' according to their conjugation patterns. These may be summarized as follows:

CONJUGATION PATTERNS				
<i>person</i>	weak		strong	
<i>class</i>	C1, C3	C2(b)	C1	C2(a,b,c)
1,2 sing. (plur.)	-ე(თ)		-ი(თ) ⁶	
3 sing.	-ა			
3 plur.	-ეს	-ნენ	-ეს	-ნენ

A number of general observations may be made on these conjugation patterns:

- weak aorists are characterized by -ე in the first two persons, while strong aorists have -ი
- all third person singular aorist forms end in -ა⁷
- 'transitive' and 'medial' verbs have -ეს in the third person plural, while 'intransitives' end in -ნენ
- C1 and C2 aorists may be either weak or strong, while all C3 aorists are weak
- The C2 'radical intransitives' and 'suffixal intransitives' have strong aorists, while the 'prefixed' intransitives in this class may be either weak or strong.

¹ for contact details see <http://www.armazi.com>

² the Georgian term is წყვეტილი 'broken', 'interrupted'

³ see <http://www.armazi.com/georgian/grammar.html> for an introduction to Georgian grammar and for a list of abbreviations

⁴ it is also sometimes used with თუ in real conditions as an alternative to the more usual future

⁵ the main exceptions are the basic verbs of motion

⁶ non-standard singular forms without -ი are sometimes encountered

⁷ occasionally in -ო (see below *passim*)

Class 1 verbs

The formation of the aorist of these 'transitive' verbs varies according to the following criteria (not all are relevant in each case):

- the form of the present / future stem formant (-∅, -ებ, -ობ, -ავ, -ამ, -ი)
- whether the verb root ends in -ენ or -ევ in the case of verbs with PSF -∅ (root verbs)
- whether the root is vowelless or not
- whether the root ends in -ლ, -რ or -ნ.

Phonological changes that occur in the aorist forms of Class 1 verbs include:

- root ablaut (ე → ი)
- root expansion (-ა-, -ე-) in the first and second persons
- replacement of -ა by -ო in third person singular forms
- loss of -გ- / reappearance of lost -გ-.

The following table summarizes the formation of the aorist of Class 1 verbs.⁸

CLASS 1 ('transitives')						
PSF	type			weak	strong	examples ⁹ / notes
	root vowel	-ლ/რ/ნ	other			
-∅				✓		♦ წერ → დაწერ-ე 'write' ¹⁰
				✓		წმენდ → გაწმინდ-ე 'clean' ¹¹
			-ენ	✓		ი-სმ+ენ → მო-ი-სმ+ინ-ე 'listen' ¹²
			-ევ	✓		(-ე → -∅) ანგრ+ევ → და-ანგრ+ი-ე 'destroy' ¹²
			-მ-ევ		✓	(-მ-ევ → -ე-∅) არქმ+ევ → და-არქმ-ი 'name' ¹² <i>note: აჭმ-ევ → აჭამ-ე 'feed' (-ევ is not part of root)</i>
-ებ	+			✓		♦ ა-კეთ-ებ → გა-ა-კეთ-ე 'do'
	-			-ო (3s)		ა-ღ-ებ → გა-ა-ღ-ე (გა-ა-ღ-ო) 'open' <i>note: დ-ებ → და-ღ-ე და-ღე-ი (და-ღ-ო და-ღე-ა) 'put down'; უ-შე-ებ → გა-უ-შე-ი (და-უ-შე-ა) 'release'</i>
	-	+			-ე/ა- (1,2) -ო (3s)	ა-კლ-ებ → და-ა-კლ-ი (და-ა-კლ-ო) 'reduce' ა-სწრ-ებ → მო-ა-სწარ-ი (მო-ა-სწრ-ო) 'do in time'
-ობ	-			-ო (3s)		♦ სპ-ობ → მო-სპ-ე (მო-სპ-ო) 'destroy'
			-[ვ→∅]-ობ	-ო (3s)		ა-ცხ-ობ → გა+მო-ა-ცხ-ე (გა+მო-ა-ცხ-ო) 'bake'
	-				-ე/ა- (1,2) -ო (3s)	ი-პყრ-ობ → და-ი-პყარ-ი (და-ი-პყრ-ო) 'seize' ა-ყრდნ-ობ → მი-ა-ყრდენ-ი (მი-ა-ყრდნ-ო) 'lean against'

ctd

⁸ ♦ indicates that most of the verbs in the relevant PSF category behave in this manner
⁹ illustrative verbs are given as: 2s present → 2s aorist [(3s aorist)] unless otherwise noted
¹⁰ roots mostly have form C[ე]VCⁿ, where V is usually ე, sometimes ა or ო
¹¹ roots mostly have form CⁿVCⁿ, where V is usually ე, sometimes ა or ო
¹² -ენ and -ევ are former causative suffixes

CLASS 1 ('transitives') (ctd)						
PSF	type			weak	strong	examples / notes
	root vowel	ლ/რ/ნ	other			
-ავ	+			✓		მაღ-ავ → და-მაღ-ე 'hide' ¹³
	-				✓ (rare)	წვ-ავ → შე-წვ-ი 'fry' <i>note:</i> რგ-ავ → და-რგ-ე და-რგ-ი (და-რგ-ა და-რგ-ო) 'plant'; რწყ-ავ → მო-რწყ-ე მო-რწყ-ი (მო-რწყ-ა მო-რწყ-ო) 'water'
		+				-ა- (1,2)
-ამ	-				✓	ი-ცვ-ამ → ჩა-ი-ცვ-ი 'dress'
-ი	+			✓		თარგმნ-ი → გა+და-თარგმნ-ე 'translate'
	-	+			-ა-	თვლ-ი → და-თვალ-ე 'count'
						-ი- (1,2)

Class 2(a) verbs

These 'radical intransitives' all have PSF -ებ and invariably have strong aorists. Many of these verbs have corresponding Class 1 transitive forms in ა- – -ობ (such as თბები 'get warm' < ათბობ '(make) warm'). There are some instances of root expansions (-ე-) in this category.

CLASS 2(a) ('radical intransitives')						
PSF	type			weak	strong	examples ⁹ / notes
	root vowel	ლ/რ/ნ	other			
-ებ						♦ რჩ-ები → და-რჩ-ი 'remain'
					✓	<i>note:</i> დგ-ები → და-დექ-ი (და-დგ-ა) 'stand'; წვ-ები → და-წექ-ი (და-წვ-ა) 'lie down'; ჯდ-ები → და-ჯექ-ი (და-ჯდ-ა) ¹⁴ , სხდ-ები-თ → და-სხედ-ი-თ (და-სხდ-ნენ) ¹⁵ 'sit down'
	-					-ი- (1,2) თვრ-ები → და-თვერ-ი (და-თვრ-ა) 'get drunk'

¹³ many verbs in this group are denominals such as ფიცავ 'swear' < ფიცი 'oath'

¹⁴ singular subject

¹⁵ plural subject

Class 2(b) verbs

Almost all of the verbs in this class of prefixal intransitives' have corresponding C1 transitives, and the aorist patterns in a similar manner. The table below classifies these verbs according to the corresponding transitive type, and the C1 root is given in each case. Note that these verbs can form relative variants in ე-. The following summary of the 3s present and aorist forms for the root -წერ- 'write' illustrates the relationship between related C1 and C2(b) verbs.

	C1 ¹⁶	C2(b)	C2(b) rel. (ე)
Present	მალ-ავს 'he hides it'	ი-მალ-ება 'he hides himself'	ე-მალ-ება 'he hides himself from smb'
Aorist	და-მალ-ა 'he hid it'	და-ი-მალ-ა 'he hid himself'	და-ე-მალ-ა 'he hid himself from smb'

CLASS 2(b) ('prefixal intransitives')							
PSF	corresponding C1 type			weak	strong	examples ^a / notes	
	root vowel	-ლ/რ/ვ	other			C1 root	
-∅				✓		-წერ-	ი-წერ-ები → და-ი-წერ-ე 'are written'
				✓		-კრებ-	ი-კრიბ-ები-თ → შე-ი-კრიბ-ეთ 'gather together' ¹⁷
			-ენ	✓		-ფენ-	ი-ფინ-ები → და-ი-ფინ-ე 'are spread out' ¹²
			-ებ	-ებ → -ი[ვ]		-რევ-	ი-რ+ევი → გა+და-ი-რ+იე (3p გა+და-ი-რ+იენ) 'become mad'
				-ებ → -ი[ვ] / -∅		-რკვებ-	ი-რკვ+ევი → გა+მო-ი-რკვ+იე (3s გა+მო-ი-რკვ-ა, 3p გა+მო-ი-რკვ+იენ) 'become clear' ¹²
					-მძრევ-	ი-მძრ+ევი → გა-ი-მძრ-ე (გა-ი-მძრ-ა) 'move'	
-ებ	+			✓		-ბად-	ი-ბად-ები → და-ი-ბად-ე 'are born'
	-			-ო (3s)		-წყ-	ი-წყ-ები → და-ი-წყ-ე (და-ი-წყ-ო) 'begin'
-ობ				-ო (3s)		-სპ-	ი-სპ-ობი → მო-ი-სპ-ე (მო-ი-სპ-ო) 'are destroyed'
			-[ვ→ ∅]-ობ			-ხრჩ-	ი-რხჩ-ობი → და-ი-რხჩ-ე (და-ი-რხჩ-ო) 'choke'
-ავ	+			✓		-კარგ-	ი-კარგ-ები → და-ი-კარგ-ე 'get lost'
	-				✓	-წვ-	ი-წვ-ები → და-ი-წვ-ი 'burn'
		+			-ა- (1,2)	-კრ-	ი-კვრ-ები → შე-ი-კარ-ი (შე-ი-კრ-ა) 'are tied'
-ამ					✓	-ბ-	ი-ბ-მ-ები → და-ი-ბ-ი 'are taut'
-ი	+			✓		-გზავნ-	ი-გზავნ-ები → გა-ი-გზავნ-ე 'are sent away'
	-	+	(most)		-ა-	-შლ-	ი-შლ-ები → გა-ი-შალ-ე 'are spread out'
	-	+			-ე- (1,2)	-ხსნ-	ი-ხსნ-ები → გა-ი-ხსნ-ე (გა-ი-ხსნ-ა) 'are opened'

¹⁶ note also the indirect C1 transitive form უ-მალ-ავს 'he hides it for / from smb', aorist 'და-უ-მა-ა'

¹⁷ usually used in plural

Class 2(c) verbs

These 'suffixal intransitives' all have PSF –ებ and their aorists all pattern similarly: they are always strong and invariably have a preverb. Note that many are derived from nouns or adjectives (e.g., წითლდები 'blush' < წითელი 'red').

CLASS 2(c) ('suffixal intransitives')						
PSF	type			weak	strong	examples / notes
	root vowel	–ლ/რ/ნ	other			
–ებ					✓	ბერ-დ-ებ-ი → და-ბერ-დ-ი 'grow old'

Class 3 verbs

These 'medial' verbs all form weak aorists with the pre-radical vowel ი– in a manner similar to that of the future, as in the following examples (the first represents by far the most usual method of future derivation):

root	present	future	aorist
-თამაშ- 'play'	თამაშ-ობ	ი-თამაშ-ებ	ი-თამაშ-ე
-კითხულ- 'read'	კითხულ-ობ	ი-კითხ-ავ	ი-კითხ-ე
-სწავლ- 'learn'	სწავლ-ობ	ი-სწავლ-ი	ი-სწავლ-ე
-სტვენ 'whistle'	სტვენ	ი-სტვენ	ი-სტვენ-ე

CLASS 3 ('medial verbs')						
PSF	type			weak	strong	examples / notes
	root vowel	–ლ/რ/ნ	other			
–∅						წვიმ-ს → ი-წვიმ-ა ¹⁸ 'it rains'
–ებ						სრიალ-ებ → ი-სრიალ-ე 'slide'
–ავ				✓		ელ-ავ-ს → ი-ელგ-ა ¹⁸ 'it is lightning'
–ობ						ნადირ-ობ → ი-ნადირ-ე 'hunt'
–ი						ი-ცინ-ი → ი-ცინ-ე 'laugh'

¹⁸ third person singular

Class 4 verbs

The Class 4 'indirect' verbs form their aorists differently from verbs in the other classes. The table below lists some of the more common C4 verbs together with their aorist forms¹⁹ (where these exist)²⁰. These aorists are also C4 indirect verbs built on the same root as the present, usually with pre-radical vowel ე- referencing the logical subject, e.g.

present	ბავშვს კბილი ს-ტკივა	'the child has toothache'
aorist	ბავშვს კბილი ე-ტკინა	'the child had toothache'

where both the ს- in the present and the ე- in the aorist refer to the dative logical subject (ბავშვს).

Most C4 verb roots also form the basis of other related verbs that can serve in place of missing aorists, albeit with differing nuances. These include relative C2(c) verbs that are inceptive in meaning,²¹ e.g.

present	ბავშვს კბილი ს-ტკივდება	'the child's tooth begins to pain him'
aorist	ბავშვს კბილი ა-ს-ტკივდა	'the child's tooth began to pain him'

These inceptive aorists are particularly common and are listed in the table below.

While many C4 verbs can have any combination of subject and object references, some – such as in the examples above – only appear with a third person logical object²² (these are denoted by the symbol Ⓞ in the table below). Other C4 verbs (marked ①) have a redundant logical object marker, e.g., გ-შია 'you are hungry', and may thus be viewed as unipersonal verbs.

CLASS C4 ('indirect verbs')			
PRV	present	aorist	
		C4	rel. C2(c) inceptives
∅-	გ-ყავს (პ-ყავს) 'have smb'	გ-ეყოლა (ე-)	
	გ-სურს (სურს) 'wish' Ⓞ	გ-ესურვა (ე-)	მო-გ-სურდა (მო-) ²³
	მო-გ-წონს (მო-ს-წონს) 'like'	მო-გ-ეწონა (მო-ე-)	
	გ-ტკივა (ს-ტკივა) 'it pains you' Ⓞ	გ-ე-ტკინა (ე-)	ა-გ-ტკივდა (ა-ს-)
	გ-ცივა (ს-ცივა) 'are cold' ①	–	შე-გ-ცივდა (შე-ს-)
	გ-შია (შია) 'are hungry' ①	–	მო-გ-შიგდა (მო-ს-) ²⁴
	გ-წყურია (ს-წყურია) 'are thirsty' ①	მო-გ-ეწყურა (მო-ე-)	მო-გ-წყურდა (მო-ს-) ²⁵
	გ-ჭირდება (ს-ჭირდება) 'need'	და-გ-ჭირდა (და-ს-)	
	გ-ძინავს (ს-ძინავს) 'sleep' ①	გ-ეძინა (ე-)	
	გ-გონია (პ-გონია) 'it seems to you'	გ-ეგონა (ე-)	მო-გ-აგონდა (მო-)
	გ-ცხელა (ცხელა) 'are hot' ①	–	
	გ-ღვიძავს (ღვიძავს) 'are awake' ①	გ-ეღვიძა (ე-)	გა+მო-გ-ეღვიძა (გა+მო-)

¹⁹ verbs are given in the form 2s (3s) with 3s logical direct object

²⁰ the imperfect often replaces the missing aorist, e.g. გ-ინდა (present) → გ-ინდოდა (imperfect)

²¹ these verbs use indirect pronominal markers and PRV ∅- to refer to the dative logical subject in the present and aorist screeves under discussion

²² sometimes called 'objective conjugation'

²³ note also the parallel form მო-ესურვება

²⁴ cf. C4 present გ-შივდება 'become hungry'

²⁵ cf. C4 present გ-წყურდება 'become thirsty'

CLASS C4 ('indirect verbs')			
PRV	present	aorist	
		C4	rel. C2(c) inceptives
ი- (უ-)	გ-იყვარ-ს (უ-ყვარ-ს) 'love'		შე-გ-იყვარ-და (შე-უ-)
	გ-ინდა (უ-ნდა) 'want'		მო-გ-ინდა (მო-უ-)
	შე-გ-იძლ-ია (შე-უ-ძლ-ია) 'are able'	შე-გ-ეძლ-ო (შე-ე-)	
	გ-იხარ-ია (უ-ხარ-ია) 'are glad'		გა-გ-იხარ-და (გა-უ-)
ა-	გა-აქვ-ს (ა-ქვ-ს) 'have sthg'		
	გა-აკლ-ია (ა-კლ-ია) 'lack'		და-გ-აკლ-და (და-ა-)
	გა-ახსოვ-ს (ა-ხსოვ-ს) 'remember'	–	
ე-	გ-ე-სმ-ის (ე-სმ-ის) 'hear, understand'	მო-გ-ე-სმ-ა (მო-ე-)	
	გ-ე-შინ-ია (ე-შინ-ია) 'are afraid'		შე-გ-ე-შინ-და (შე-ე-)

References

This note has benefited from the detailed treatment of the Georgian aorist in the following works.²⁶

Hewitt, B. G.: **Georgian: A structural reference grammar**, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995.

Hewitt, George: **Georgian: A Learner's Grammar**, London: Routledge, 1996.

შანიძე, აკაკი: (თხზულებანი თორმეტ ტომად, ტ. III) **ქართული ენის გრამატიკის საფუძვლები**, თბილისი: თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 1980.

Tschenkéli, Kita: **Einführung in die georgische Sprache**, Band I: Theoretischer Teil, Zürich: Amirani Verlag, 1958.

Vogt, Hans: **Esquisse d'une grammaire du géorgien moderne** (særtrykk av Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap Bind IX-X) Oslo: A. W. Brøggers, 1936.

Vogt, Hans: **Grammaire de la langue géorgienne**, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971.

© PJ Hillery 2001

Revision 1.0

²⁶ see <http://www.armazi.com/georgian/biblio.html> for a fuller bibliography of works on the Georgian language