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4 Blessings and curses are structurally different: Data from Daghestan

Abstract: The paper examines the expression of curses – one of the main ways of conveying impoliteness in Daghestan (North Caucasus). Blessings and curses, an integral part of communication in Daghestan, provide a case to look for grammatical and constructional distinctions between wishes with positive value (politeness) and wishes with negative value (impoliteness). The comparison of the morphological, syntactic and semantic properties of blessings and curses in Nakh-Daghestanian languages contributes to the discussion of whether impoliteness can be inherently associated with linguistic structures or is primarily determined by context. Data from three Nakh-Daghestanian languages are considered – Avar (Avar-Ando-Tsezic), Lak (Lak) and Rutul (Lezgian). The study reveals several structural features of curses. First, there are morphological forms in all three languages that are primarily associated with curses. Secondly, three constructional features were found to be particularly present in curses: the absence of words for ‘God’ and ‘Allah’, the presence of second person pronouns and their final position in the utterance, the last feature being the most consistent. Finally, an important finding of this study is that both the morphological and constructional features associated with curses manifest themselves only as tendencies.

Keywords: blessings, curses, impoliteness, Nakh-Daghestanian languages, optative, wishes

1 Introduction

Depending on the culture, wishes can be limited to a small number of idiomatic expressions used in specific situations such as English *stay well* or *go to hell*, or be an elaborate field with hundreds of formulae catering to the needs of (im)politeness. Formulaic language is highly characteristic of politeness, deeply rooted in social and cultural conventions (Terkourafi 2002). The conventionalized formulae ensure that “the speaker gets what he/she wants and is perceived as an individual within the group” (Wray and Perkins 2000: 18), since a hearer is more likely to

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interpret a message correctly if it is in a form he/she has heard before. While the use of formulae is thought to be a prominent feature of polite discourse in any culture (Terkourafi 2002), the role of the conventionalization in impoliteness – negatively evaluated (linguistic) behaviors that have offensive effects (Culpeper 2011: 117; Van Olmen, Andersson and Culpeper 2023) – is much less studied (see also Van Olmen et al., this volume) Are there any linguistic structures that are directly associated with impoliteness?

A pilot cross-linguistic study of insulting expressions showed that there is strong evidence for the existence of grammaticalized ‘insultive’ constructions in the languages of the world (Giomi and Van Oers 2022). In rural Daghestan, curses (ill wishes) are among the main means of expressing offense (cf. curses and ill wishes in the list of the conventionalized impoliteness formulae attested in the *Oxford English Corpus*, Culpeper 2011: 135–136; see also Culpeper, Van Dorst and Gillings, this volume). This paper seeks to find evidence for grammatical structures characteristic of curses in the languages of Daghestan (North Caucasus) (see Pater-noster, this volume, for a curse construction in Italian).

In Daghestan, wishes are an integral part of communication. Blessings are common speech rituals, almost obligatory in everyday village life as one of the main means of expressing politeness. Curses are used to express bad feelings directed at a specific person. For example, in the highland village of Archib where the one-village language Archi (Lezgian, Nakh-Daghestanian) is spoken, if someone comes from one of the downhill villages to bring an Archi person some goods, he can be greeted with the following wish:

- (1) *danna-k uq'a-šaw χ:wari-ši zaba šummar la:χa b-a*
 where-LAT 1.go.PFV-CONC be.glad-CVB come.IMP life be.long 3-do.IMP
 ‘Wherever you go, be happy when you come back, long live!’
 (Karim Musaev pc)

If the neighbors are fighting, one of them might use the following curse:

- (2) *ik^w o'rc-a*
 heart 4.freeze-IMP
 ‘Let (your) heart freeze (= May you die quickly).’
 (Karim Musaev pc)

The importance of wishes in the culture of Daghestanian people has been noticed by the specialists on Nakh-Daghestanian languages (Khaidakov 1961; Musaev 2002: 111; Mallaeva 2007: 69–60, Dobrushina 2011), but their structural properties have yet to be studied by linguists.

The expressions of wishes are usually considered by linguists as a whole, indiscriminately as to the value encoded by the wish. Meanwhile, as shown in Dobrushina (2024), curses can be expressed by dedicated morphological means:

- (3) Kazakh (Turkic)
aram qat-qyr
 filthy freeze-MAL.OPT
 ‘Drop dead.’ (‘Die filthy = pagan’)

Since both blessings and curses are very widely used in Daghestan, and are often expressed by the same suffixes, they present an excellent case to look for grammatical and constructional distinctions between wishes with positive value (politeness) and wishes with negative value (impoliteness). The comparison of the morphological, syntactic and semantic properties of blessings and curses in the languages of the Nakh-Daghestanian family is the aim of this paper. The study of conventionalized expression of curses will contribute to the discussion whether impoliteness can be inherently associated with linguistic structures or is primarily determined by context.

I will start with a short introduction to the region and the family. I will then briefly describe the main grammatical means that are used for wishes in the languages of the family. In the main part of the paper I will look at the data from three Nakh-Daghestanian languages (Avar, Rutul, Lak) to understand how they encode blessings and curses.

1.1 Daghestan and Nakh-Daghestanian languages

The republic of Daghestan is an area of high language density and linguistic diversity. Most of the languages spoken in Daghestan belong to the Nakh-Daghestanian (East Caucasian) language family, which counts up to 50 languages (depending on the researcher; see Figure 1). There are also three Turkic (Kumyk, Nogai, Azerbaijani) and two Indo-European (Tat and Russian) languages spoken in the area (for an overview of languages see Wixman 1980; Tuite 1999; Koryakov 2002; Berg 2005; Chirikba 2008). The estimated number of languages ranges from 30 to 50. The size of the language population varies significantly, starting from 500 people (Hinug) to half a million (Avar).

With so many languages packed in a relatively small area, it is not infrequent that in two adjacent villages located at a walking distance from one another, different languages are spoken. Economic and social ties between adjacent villages have always been strong. Interethnic communication requires knowledge of a shared

language. There was never a lingua franca common to all of Daghestan (Chirikba 2008: 30). Until the mid 19th century, the lowlands were dominated by speakers of Turkic languages, which led to the use of Kumyk and Azerbaijani as lingua francas in adjacent territories (Wixman 1980: 108–119). The local language Avar was used as a lingua franca in some parts of highland North Daghestan. Besides their native language, most Daghestanian highlanders also spoke the language of the closest village(s), and many of them additionally acquired some distant language due to the seasonal works or trade. A significant change occurred in the middle of the 20th century, when, due to the spread of secular schools, the Russian language came to Daghestan and became the all-Daghestanian lingua franca.

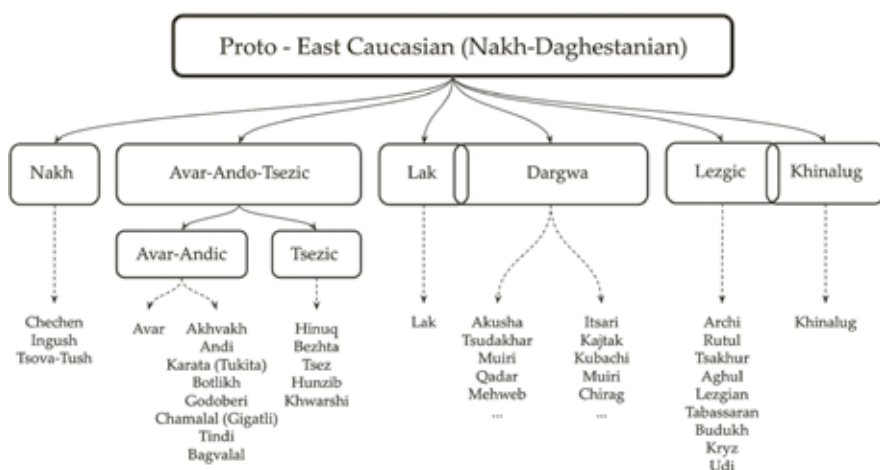


Figure 1: East Caucasian language family (courtesy of Michael Daniel).

In contrast to the extreme diversity in terms of languages and situations of language contact, Daghestan is rather homogeneous in terms of culture and history (Wixman 1980: 107). The vast majority of Daghestanians are muslims, and a command of classical Arabic was typical for some part of the population. Arabic was sporadically used for writing in local languages, but indigenous languages remained largely unwritten until the 20th century.

Nakh-Daghestanian languages are predominantly agglutinative, with most inflectional categories being expressed by suffixation. They are especially famous for their rich nominal paradigms with large systems of spatial cases. Most languages have the category of gender distinguishing from two to six values. The systems of moods are usually rich in volitional forms, but lack forms with general, non-specified irrealis meaning. Most languages have an inflectional prohibitive (negative

imperative) which is usually not derived from imperative. The basic word order in Nakh-Daghestanian languages is SOV, with nominal dependents situated to the left from the head. As all families endemic for the Caucasus, Nakh-Daghestanian languages are consistently ergative, which means that case marking distinguishes S/P vs A (where S is the sole argument of intransitive verb, P is a patient, A is an agent) and the agreement is largely controlled by nominative arguments.

1.2 Morphological means of expressing wishes in the languages of Daghestan

In the languages of the Nakh-Daghestanian family, wishes are most often expressed by synthetic optatives – morphological forms dedicated to expressing a wish or hope of the speaker that something would happen (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994: 321; Dobrushina, van der Auwera and Goussev 2013; Nikolaeva 2016: 77).

Dedicated morphological optatives are cross-linguistically rather infrequent, as was shown in the World Atlas of Language Structures (Dobrushina, van der Auwera and Goussev 2013). Only 48 of 319 languages surveyed in WALS have it, and many of them are found in northern India and Nepal and in the Caucasus. Most languages of the Caucasus have special morphological forms to express wishes; some of them have several such forms.

The forms which express optative meanings can have different functional scopes in Nakh-Daghestanian languages. In some languages, the optative expresses only blessings or curses, while another form is used to express indirect commands (the latter form is also referred to as 3rd person imperative or jussive); this is the case of Mehweb (Dargwa group of Nakh-Daghestanian family) in (4) and (5):

(4) Mehweb optative

ja-allah ħušab taliħ g-a-b!

PTCL-Allah 2PL.DAT luck give.PFV-IRR-OPT

‘May [Allah] give [you] luck!’

(Dobrushina 2019:143)

(5) Mehweb jussive

musa uz-e bet’a

Musa 1.work.IPFV-IMP say.PFV-IMP

‘Let Musa work.’

(Dobrushina 2019:143)

Many other languages combine the two functions in one form. For example, Rutul (Lezgian group of Nakh-Daghestanian family) has the same form to express blessings and curses addressed to 1st, 2nd or 3rd persons (6), and to express 3rd person imperatives (7). This form cannot be used for commands addressed to 1st or 2nd persons (8):

- (6) *zi / wi / had saʁ r-iš-ij*
 I / you / that healthy 2-become-OPT
 ‘May I / you / she be healthy.’
 (own fieldwork)

- (7) *said-a uqʼ sej-ij*
 Said-ERG grass 4.mow-OPT
 ‘Said should mow the grass.’
 (own fieldwork)

- (8) **wa-d uqʼ sej-ij*
 2SG-ERG grass 4.mow-OPT
 ‘You should mow the grass.’
 (own fieldwork)

In this paper, the forms that pattern similarly to those of Rutul will be classified as *optatives*. I reserve the term *jussive* for the forms which are restricted to third person only and solely express indirect commands as in Mehweb (Dobrushina 2019: 133–138), or maximally combine it with the expression of a wish with a 3rd person subject, as in Kumyk (Gadziakhmedov 2000).

Most languages of the family have either several dedicated morphological optatives or at least one dedicated optative and some additional means of expressing the wish of the speaker. These forms can be synonymous or can show some semantic distinctions. Semantic distinctions relevant for this paper (between blessings and curses) will be discussed in Section 2. As for the morphosyntactic distinctions, the most striking is that some optatives which will be discussed in this paper are not verbs in the proper sense. Nominal optative forms were mentioned, for example, in Abdullaev (1954) for standard Dargwa and thoroughly discussed in Sumbatova and Lander (2014) for Tanty Dargwa, where one of the optative forms takes nominal plural endings (9b), can occur in argument position and can be marked for case (9c):

- (9) a. *ʁuʰ allah-li w-at*
 2SG Allah-ERG 1-leave.PFV
 ‘May Allah let you be (i.e. May Allah bless you)!’
- b. *ʁuʰx:a allah-li d-at-are*
 2PL Allah-ERG 1/2PL-leave.PFV-PL
 ‘May Allah let you (plural) be!’
- c. *sa-j allah-li w-at-la kulpat b-erq-ab*
 self-M Allah-ERG 1-leave.PFV-GEN family HPL-blossom.PFV-OPT
 ‘May the family of (this person who was) let be by Allah multiply!’
 (Sumbatova and Lander 2014: 132)

In this paper, I will mainly focus on dedicated optative forms, but will also consider other means of expressing wishes if they are frequent enough in my data.

1.3 Blessings and curses in Daghestan

As was mentioned above, blessings and curses are very typical of the communication in Daghestanian villages. Blessings are abundantly used for greetings. The choice of blessing depends on the specific situation such as gender of the person who greets and is greeted, or the current activity in which one or the other party is involved (for example a woman who is milking the cow will be greeted differently from a woman who is mowing). Blessings will be used when someone leaves the village or comes back from a trip, bought a new cloth or recovered from a disease, moved into a new house or came back from the garden with the harvest. Curses are used when people fight or when an inferior misbehaves. There could be specific curses for different occasions, for example addressed to someone who eats too much, is stubborn or greedy, disrespectful or lazy. Unlike blessings, curses can be frequently addressed to animals.

Wishes usually have a clear value – they call for something bad or good to happen. There are however very rare cases when the wish is neutral; in my data, these are wishes which are not addressed to anyone particular, see example (10):

- (10) Lak
q:a-b-u<w>ǰʰ-ajnan k:a<w>k:u-n kʰul b-an-naw
 NEG-3-<3>know-CVB.CNT <3>see-INF know 3-do-OPT
 ‘May those who do not understand see for themselves.’ (i.e., it is difficult to understand something unless one is convinced in practice)
 (Ramazanova 2005: 119)

There is some cross-linguistic evidence for forms dedicated to curses (maybe referred to as maledictives; cf. also malefactive imperative in Aikhenvald 2020). For example, such a form is reported for Tariana (Arawak, Aikhenvald 2020) and Kalamang (Trans-New Guinea, Visser 2022: 479–481). In Dobrushina (2024), I show that Kazakh (Turkic language of Central Asia) has a form which is used exclusively for curses. I did not however find forms dedicated to the expression of curses in Daghestan (neither in the Nakh-Daghestanian family, nor in the other languages of the region). Usually blessings and curses are expressed by the same morphological form, but in some languages certain forms tend to specialize towards blessings and curses. More than that, as will be shown in this paper, there are certain constructional properties associated with curses.

For this study I chose three Nakh-Daghestanian languages which belong to different branches and are not or almost not in contact: Avar, Rutul and Lak.

1.4 Data

My goal in this paper is twofold. On the one hand, I look at the optative forms in order to understand whether they tend to specialize towards blessings and curses or not. On the other hand, I want to analyze wishes irrespective of their form with the aim of finding all possible morphological and syntactic means of expressing wishes in each language. For this, besides the grammars which account for the main forms, I need a source of examples of wishes. Corpora can hardly help to collect a sufficient number of wishes. Wishes are mainly used in dialogues. Since most available corpora of Daghestanian languages consist of narratives, examples of wishes are not many. For instance, in the corpus of the Kina dialect of Rutul (about 20,000 words) there are 28 examples of wishes, from which only five are curses, while all other examples instantiate blessings. These data are not sufficient to study the distinctions between blessings and curses. This is why I used another type of data – dictionaries.

Dictionaries of Nakh-Daghestanian languages proved to be a good source of examples of wishes. Due to the local lexicographic tradition, dictionaries contain plenty of examples illustrating the usage of some words, wishes among them. For example, in the Rutul-Russian dictionary the verb *qiq'as* ‘to return’ is illustrated by the following wish:

- (11) *za ki-wi-d xiw wi-di ul-ab-a: qi-q'-ij*
 1SG.ERG PV-3.give.PFV-ATTR bread 2SG-ATTR eye-OBL.PL-IN.EL PV-4.come-OPT
 Curse: ‘May the good which I have done for you not benefit you.’ (lit. ‘Let the bread with which I have fed you go out of your eyes.’)
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 397)

Some dictionaries contain hundreds of wish expressions, thus providing sufficient data for the current research. For some languages, there are also dictionaries of idiomatic expressions or collections of folklore genres which often include wishes.

Since all these dictionaries and collections are bilingual in Russian, I used several Russian queries in order to identify wishes: *pust'* (jussive particle), *čtob* (conjunction used in insubordinate constructions denoting curses), *(ne) dai Bog* ('God (don't) give'), *da* (optative particle). Examples were manually extracted from the dictionaries, accumulated in an Excel table and coded according to their value (positive or negative) and to their constructional properties. Table 1 shows the sources which were used for this study and the number of examples collected for each language. In addition to these sources, I also cite examples from various grammars and examples provided by language consultants, but the quantitative study is based only on the sources listed in Table 1.

Table 1: The sources of the examples of wish expressions.

	Bilingual Russian dictionary	Dictionary of idiomatic expressions or collection of folklore genres	Number of examples
Avar	Gimbatov (2006)	Magomedkhanov (1993)	191
Rutul	Alisultanov and Sulejmanova (2019)	Makhmudova (2016)	96
Lak	Abdullaev (2015)	Ramazanova (2005)	238

Relative frequency of blessings and curses in the dictionaries is not meaningful; their actual frequency depends on the situation. For example, in the above mentioned corpus of Kina Rutul most of the blessings were used in one text, which was a toast. The distribution of formal means in relation to the value of the wish however can be meaningful. In this paper, the numbers are used in order to compare blessings and curses and to find out the formal means that are more typical of curses.

2 Blessings and curses in Avar, Rutul and Lak

In what follows I will consider the data from three Nakh-Daghestanian languages: Avar (Avar-Ando-Tsezic), Lak (Lak) and Rutul (Lezgic). My first question will be whether some of the morphological forms used for wishes show a preference for a positive or negative value. Second, I will consider whether curses have some special constructional properties which make them distinct from blessings.

2.1 Avar

Avar is the largest language in Daghestan with about 700,000 speakers. Avar was chosen for this study for two reasons. First, there are two sources from which wishes can be extracted: a large Avar-Russian dictionary and a dictionary of Avar idiomatic expressions. Second, there are several optative forms in Avar, which allows me to test whether there is a specialization of one of the forms towards the expression of curses. The following three forms were considered: *-gi*, *-ad*, and *-ja-G*, where G is a gender marker.

By far the most common optative form (according to the examples in the dictionary by Gimbatov (2006)) is the one with the suffix *-gi*.

- (12) *une-s-e* *nux* *b-it'a-gi*, *č'ole-s-e* *ruq'* *b-it'a-gi*
 leave-OBL-DAT road 3-straighten-OPT stay-OBL-DAT house 3-straighten-OPT
 Blessing: 'May the one who leaves have a good trip, may the one who stays
 stay happily at home'
 (Alekseev et al. 2012: 2024)

- (13) *ara-tu-sa* *w-us:un-ge-gi* *mun*
 go.PTCP-IN-EL 1-return-PROH-OPT you.sg
 Curse: 'May you not return from where you go (may you perish)'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 230)

The other two forms are morphologically nominal. The form with the suffix *-ad* can be classified as a kind of masdar (verbal noun). The optative in *-ad* can have plural ending *-al*, which is also found with nouns:

- (14) *gull-i-ca* *w-orł-ad*
 bullet-OBL-ERG 1-pierce-OPT
 Curse: 'May a bullet pierce you'.
 (Gimbatov 2006: 207)

- (15) *xur-ad-al!*
 exterminate-OPT-PL
 Curse: 'May you all be exterminated!'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 325)

The optative in *-ad* can inflect for case: ergative in example (17a), dative in (17b), genitive in (17c) (the last three examples provided by Zulaikhat Mallaeva).

- (16) *raλ'-aλ' k^w-ad*
 ground-ERG eat-OPT
 Curse: 'May you be swallowed up by the ground'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 929)
- (17) a. *rak' b-oχ-ad-i-c:a b-ic-ana he-b χabar*
 heart 3-rejoice-OPT-OBL-ERG 3-tell-AOR DEM-3 story
 Blessing: 'He brought this message, may his heart rejoice'
- b. *rak' b-oχ-ad-i-je b-ic-e he-b χabar*
 heart 3-rejoice-OPT-OBL-DAT 3-tell-IMP DEM-3 story
 Blessing: 'Tell him this message, may his heart rejoice'.
- c. *rak' b-oχ-ad-i-l χarb-i-l bercin-λi*
 heart 3-rejoice-OPT-OBL-GEN story-OBL-GEN beautiful-NMLS
 Blessing: 'How beautiful is his speech, may his heart rejoice'.

The third form, the optative in *-ja-G* is a participle with a position for gender marker that depends on the gender of the addressee, even if the addressee is not an argument of the verb:

- (18) a. *dur k^wer b-aq^{'w}a-ja-j*
 you.sg.GEN hand 3-become.dry.IMP-OPT-2
 Curse: 'May your hand become withered' (addressed to a woman)
- b. *dur k^wer b-aq^{'w}a-ja-w*
 you.sg.GEN hand 3-become.dry.IMP-OPT-1
 Curse: 'May your hand become withered' (addressed to a man)
 (Testelels n.d.)
- (19) *waj dur dada č'aqa-ja-j*
 INTJ you. SG.GEN dad be.healthy.IMP-OPT-2
 Blessing: 'May your dad be healthy' (addressed to a woman)
 (Gimbatov 2006: 453)
- (20) *insul ruq' b-aq^{'w}-ara-b roł-u-l c'e-ja-w*
 father.GEN house 3-become.dry.IMP-PST.PTCP-3 wheat-OBL-GEN fill.up-OPT-1
 Blessing: 'May your father's house be filled with dried wheat' (addressed to a man)
 (Gimbatov 2006: 526)

2.1.1 Distribution of the forms according to the value of the wish

There is no visible difference in the meanings of optatives in *-gi* and *-ja-G*. For example, in the dictionary by Gimbatov (2006) there are two synonymous examples with different optative forms:

- (21) *ʃumru λ'-un w-oχa-gi*
 life give-CVB 1-rejoice-OPT
 Blessing: 'May you be happy to live a long life'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 442)

- (22) *ʃumru λ'-un w-oχa-ja-w*
 life give-CVB 1-rejoice-OPT-1
 Blessing: 'May you be happy to live a long life'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 442)

Both forms are used to express both blessings and curses. The value can be deduced only from the sentential context. For example, the two following examples have an identical structure with the same transitive verb 'to wash'. The Agent participant is absent in both constructions. The first wish is positive; it is typically used in reference to a deceased person. The second wish is negative; it hints at the fact that dead bodies are washed before being buried.

- (23) *munah-al čura-ja-w*
 sin-PL wash-OPT-1
 Blessing: 'May his sins be forgiven!'
 (Magomedkhanov 1993: 223)

- (24) *čex čura-ja-w*
 stomach wash-OPT-1
 Curse: 'May you die!' (lit. 'May your belly be washed!')
 (Magomedkhanov 1993: 388)

As for the optative in *-ad*, all examples in my data (though not very numerous) are curses. Table 2 presents the distribution of the optative forms according to the value of the wish:

Table 2: Distribution of blessings and curses in Avar optatives

	Blessings	Curses	total
<i>-gi</i>	63	88	151
<i>-ad</i>	0	13	13
<i>-ja-G</i>	14	13	27

The preference for expressing curses by the optative in *-ad* is only a tendency; the expression of blessings is not ruled out. Although they were not found in dictionary data, the Avar consultant (Zulajkhat Mallaeva) came up with the following examples:

- (25) *rak'* *b-oχ-ad*
heart 3-rejoice-PTCP
Blessing: 'May your heart rejoice!'

- (26) *bet'er* *č'aq-ad*
head prosper-OPT
Blessing: 'May your head prosper'

- (27) *ħal* *č'aq-ad*
well.being prosper-OPT
Blessing: 'May you be well'

To sum up, the majority of wish expressions contain a verb form which is neutral (not associated with blessings or curses). I will now consider whether curses have some special constructional properties which make them distinct from blessings.

2.1.2 Distribution of the constructions according to the value of wish

There are several constructional peculiarities of blessings versus curses that manifest themselves at the quantitative level: the mention of a supernatural power, the explicit mention of the second person, and the final position of the second person pronoun.

Blessings and curses are peculiar in that, like imperatives, they imply performing a wish, but, unlike imperatives, the intended performer is not the addressee but a supernatural power. The implicit performer of most wishes in Daghestan is generally understood to be Allah; native speakers often translate optative utterances into Russian using the words ‘Allah’ or ‘God’, even when the reference to the god was not present in the original sentence.

Most often, the performer of the wish is omitted. This is why transitive wish constructions usually lack the ergative argument, as in the following example with the transitive verb ‘give’ and omitted subject:

- (28) *du-je* *ʃumru* *λ'e-ja-w*
 you(sg)-DAT life give-OPT-1
 Blessing: ‘May you live long’ (lit. ‘to you life may give’)
 (Gimbatov 2006: 442)

Wish expressions with an ergative are infrequent in my data, and are less typical for blessings than for curses. In blessings, the ergative position is always filled by the word *Allah*:

- (29) *allah-as* *c'una-gi* *hedina-b* *balah-al-da-s*
 Allah-ERG save-OPT such-3 trouble-OBL-LOC-ABL
 Blessing: ‘May Allah protect you from such a misfortune’
 (Gimbatov 2006: 98)

Besides ergative, the word *Allah* can be present in the form of the nominative (in intransitive clauses) or the genitive in a possessive construction:

- (30) *allah* *gurħa-gi*
 Allah have.mercy-OPT
 Blessing: ‘May Allah have mercy’
 (Gimbatov 2006: 44)
- (31) *allah-as-ul* *barkat* *daim-ʔa-gi*
 Allah-OBL-GEN grace be.eternal-become-OPT
 Blessing: ‘May God’s grace be everlasting’
 (Gimbatov 2006: 454)

Conversely, the ergative argument in curses is usually not the name of the supernatural force but rather a real entity which is meant to harm the addressee of the wish, such as ‘bullet’ (14), ‘wolf’ (32), or ‘raven’ (33):

- (32) *bac'-i-ca* *č^wa-gi* *mun*
 wolf-OBL-ERG kill-OPT you.SG
 Curse: 'May you be killed by a wolf'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 126)
- (33) *nuq-i-ca* *r-ik'a-gi* *dur* *ber-al*
 raven-OBL-ERG NPL.dig.out-OPT you.sg.GEN eye-PL
 Curse: 'May the raven pluck out your eyes'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 177)

I conclude that the presence of the word 'Allah' is typical almost exclusively of blessings.

Another feature that distinguishes blessings and curses is the explicit mention of the second person. In Avar, verbs do not inflect for person, so the only way for a personal reference to be expressed is the usage of a pronoun. Most wishes are addressed to the hearer, but the second person is often not present. Nevertheless, speakers may use second person pronoun when they translate wishes into Russian:

- (34) *k^wer-al* *q'ota-gi*
 hand-PL cut-OPT
 Curse: 'May your hands be cut off!'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 562)

Second person pronouns can be present in the nominative (as an object in transitive clauses) (35), genitive form (as a possessor) (36), or dative form (as an addressee) (37).

- (35) *mun* *č'efer* *raλ'-al-d-e* *w-ača-ja-w*
 you.sg black soil-OBL-SUP-LAT 1-carry-OPT-1
 Curse: 'I wish you were dead!' (lit. 'May you be carried away onto black soil!')
 (Magomedkhanov 1993: 222)
- (36) *dur* *ruq'* *b-uħa-ja-w*
 you.sg.GEN house 3-burn-OPT-1
 Curse: 'May your house burn down!'
 (Magomedkhanov 1993: 127)
- (37) *du-je* *ʃumru* *λ'e-ja-w*
 you.sg-DAT life give-OPT-1
 Blessing: 'May you live long!'
 (Gimbatov 2006: 442)

Whatever the form, second person pronouns occur much more frequently in curses than blessings.

More than that, the second person pronouns in curses often occupy the final position in the clause (38–39), but are not excluded in blessings (40). Nakh-Daghestanian languages typically are verb-final (Forker and Belyaev 2016), so having a personal pronoun at the end of the clause is a rather marked word order:

- (38) *χab-a-t'a mič' b-iža-gi dur*
grave-OBL-SUP nettle 3-grow-OPT you.sg.GEN
Curse: 'May your grave grow nettles'
(Gimbatov 2006: 172)

- (39) *dandamaj-gi mun!*
swell-OPT you.sg
Curse: 'May you swell up!'
(Gimbatov 2006: 456)

- (40) *alžan λ'e-gi du-je*
paradise give-OPT you.sg-DAT
Blessing: 'May you go to heaven'
(Gimbatov 2006: 43)

Blessings feature such a word order much less frequently (Table 3). The counting shows that only 11% of blessings expressed by the form in *-gi* contain a second person pronoun, as compared to more than 60% of curses. As for the pronoun-final position, 51% of curses expressed by the form in *-gi* and only 6% of blessings have it. In the wishes expressed by *-ja* and *-ad* this tendency is not present.

Table 3: Second person pronouns in blessings and curses in Avar.

		absent	final position	non-final position	total
-gi	blessings	56	4	3	63
	curses	32	45	11	88
-ja	blessings	10	0	3	13
	curses	10	0	4	14
-ad	blessings	0	0	0	0
	curses	13	0	0	13

This observation complies with the evidence from some non-Nakh-Daghestanian languages. As shown in Van Olmen, Andersson and Culpeper (2023), insults tend to increase the pragmatic explicitness of the addressee, spelling out its second person target openly (see also Van Olmen and Andersson, this volume). This was noticed based on the data of several European languages which all use the construction *YOU+NP* with explicit second person pronouns (*you idiot*). In the further sections, I will test whether this tendency holds for other Nakh-Daghestanian languages.

To summarize, there are three optatives in Avar. None of them is used exclusively for curses, but one (the form in *-ad*) seems to prefer such contexts. There are several constructional distinctions between blessings and curses:

- curses usually do not contain the mention of Allah,
- curses more often contain second person pronoun,
- curses frequently feature the final position of the second person pronoun.

2.2 Rutul

Rutul belongs to the Lezgian group of the Nakh-Daghestanian family. Unlike Avar, Rutul is a minority language (about 10,000 speakers in Southern Daghestan). There was no bilingualism between Avar and Rutul as far as it can be traced; they are separated geographically and culturally. Rutul people were bilingual in Azerbaijani and used it for communication with adjacent language groups, Tsakhur and Lezgian. For this study, I collected about one hundred examples of wishes in the dictionary of standard Rutul (dialect of the village of Rutul, also called Mukhad Rutul) supplemented by two dozen examples in the dictionary of idiomatic expressions by Makhmudova (2016).

There is only one dedicated optative form in Rutul, a form with the suffix *-xʲ* or *-j* (variant of the same suffix) after a vowel.

- (41) *zi wi-di ul-i-s r-iq'-ij*
 I you.sg-ATTR eye-OBL-DAT 2-die-OPT
 Curse: 'May I be sacrificed for your eye!'
 (Makhmudova 2016: 178)

A plausible hypothesis expressed in Makhmudova (2002) is that the Rutul optative in *-xʲ/-j* originates from the imperative of the verb 'say' *jixʲ*. But as was discovered by the current study, apart from the form in *-xʲ/-j*, wishes can also be expressed by a form in *-di* (eleven examples in Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019):

- (42) *kan l-ešu-di*
 core PV-1.take.PFV-DI
 Curse: ‘May you die!’
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 178)

The existence and origin of the form in *-di*, to my knowledge, has never been discussed.

In Mukhad Rutul, the suffix *-di* is found in attributives (including participles). This suffix has two realizations depending on the preceding phoneme: *-di* after a consonant and *-d* after a vowel (see Alekseeva 2024):

- (43) *tʰi<wi>rka-d tila*
 <3>lame-ATTR dog
 ‘lame dog’
- (44) *husur-di kantʰ*
 sharp-ATTR knife
 ‘sharp knife’

The participial origin of the form used in wishes is very likely, as we find many parallels in other Nakh-Daghestanian languages. For example, the participle as the main predicate of wishes was found in another dialect of Rutul, that of the village of Kina. The problem with the wishes found in the Mukhad Rutul dictionary is that they have suffix *-di* after the vowels, which is not expected in participles. As I will show in Section 2.2.2, the empirical findings of this paper help to suggest a solution to this problem and to explain the origin of the *-di* form.

2.2.1 Distribution of the forms according to the value of the wish

While the optative in *-xi/-j* is equally used in blessings (45) and curses (46), the forms in *-di* (47) are found only in curses (see Table 4).

- (45) *duχ-re saχ d-iš-ij*
 son-PL healthy HPL-become.PFV-OPT
 Blessing: ‘May your sons be well!’
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 301)

- (46) *wi-di gadam midi qu[˘]-ma[˘]-bu[˘]χ^j*
 you.sg-ATTR step here RE-PROH-4.come
 Curse: 'May you never set foot here again!'
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 203)

- (47) *k'a[˘]šen jiši-di*
 coal 1.become.PFV-Dİ
 Curse: 'May you burn!'
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 230)

Although there are no examples of the *-di* form used in positive wishes in the dictionaries, my language consultants think that blessings can be also expressed by this form. The following example was suggested by Mariza Ibragimova (pc):

- (48) *baχt-li jiši-di*
 happiness-ADJ 1.become.PFV-Dİ
 Blessing: 'May you be happy!'

Table 4: Distribution of blessings and curses in Rutul optatives.

	Blessings	Curses	total
<i>-χ/-j</i>	51	34	85
<i>-di</i>	0	11	11

2.2.2 Distribution of the constructions according to the value of wish

As mentioned above, the optative in *-χ/-j* is used both for blessings and curses. The constructional tendencies observed for Avar show up in Rutul wishes with the optative in *-χ/-j* as well. Only blessings contain mentions of Allah or God (*jiniš* in Mukhad Rutul):

- (49) *jinc[˘]-i-re u[˘]χ-u[˘]χ^j wi*
 god-OBL-ERG 1.save-OPT you.sg
 Blessing: 'May God save you!'
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 168)

- (50) *allah-a-ra wa-s nusrat wij-ixʲ*
 Allah-OBL-ERG you.sg-DAT help 4.give-OPT
 Blessing: ‘May Allah help you!’
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 279)

Conversely, curses expressed by the optative in *-xʲ/-j* more often contain the mention of the second person, and especially in the final position (Table 5).

- (51) *ul xed w-iš-ij wi-di*
 eye water 3-become.PFV-OPT you.sg-ATTR
 Curse: ‘May your eye become water’ ≈ ‘May you go blind!’
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 408)

- (52) *naʰhnet jik-ij wa-s*
 curse 4.become-OPT you.sg-DAT
 Curse: ‘Damn you!’
 (Alisultanov and Suleimanova 2019: 277)

Table 5: Second person pronouns in Rutul blessings and curses expressed by optative in *-xʲ/-j*.

	absent	final position	non-final position	total
Blessings	32	4	14	50
Curses	8	18	8	34

Wishes with the forms in *-di*, by contrast, never contain a second person subject in our data, although, according to the language consultant Alisultanov, they are always used with reference to second person.

The examples which were elicited with the help of the language consultant showed that the form is identical to a participle in all respects apart from the fact that it has the suffix *-di* instead of the expected *-d*. It is negated with the prefix *že-*, which is only possible in non-finite forms (unlike the optative in *-xʲ/-j*, negated as a prohibitive, the dedicated form for the negative imperative). If the form is addressed to several addressees, the nominal plural suffix *-bir* will be used:

- (53) *haj ke-že-d-gi-d-bir*
 INTJ PV-NEG-HPL-be.delayed.PFV-ATTR-PL
 Curse: ‘I wish you (plural) were gone!’
 (pc with Alisultanov)

It can take a case form, such as the ergative case in the following example, and has an attributive type of declension:

- (54) *ha ke-že-r-gi-d-nij-e* *midi? ul*
 that PV-NEG-1-be.delayed.PFV-ATTR-OBL.H-ERG here eye
li-qi-wi-r diš
 PV-PV-3.give.PFV-CVB NEG
 Curse: 'He never once looked this way/never showed up here (I wish he were lost!)'
 (pc with Alisultan Alisultanov)

Notably, in the cases of further inflection added to the participle-like form, the unexpected *-i* in *-di* disappears, and the form aligns with the regular participle. The uninflected form can be used with the variant *-d* only if the construction contains the name of the addressee of the wish (there are no such cases in the dictionary). Compare (55a,b) and (56a,b) (examples courtesy Timur Maisak and Mariza Ibragimova):

- (55) a. *dünja:-di:* *ke-že-r-gi-di*
 world-OBL.SUP(ESS) PV-NEG-1-be.delayed.PFV-DI
 Curse: 'May you be gone from the world!'
 b. *dünja:-di:* *ke-že-r-gi-d* *maḡač*
 world-OBL.SUP(ESS) PV-NEG-1-be.delayed.PFV-ATTR Maḡač
 Curse: 'May you be gone from the world, Makhach!'
- (56) a. *haj hu<r>xu-di*
 INTJ <2>burn.PFV-OPT
 Curse: 'May you burn!'
 b. *haj hu<r>xu-d* *riši*
 INTJ <2>burn.PFV-ATTR sister
 Curse: 'May you burn, sister!'

Based on this distribution, I suggest that the form in *-di* grammaticalized from the combination of the participle in *-d* with the second person pronoun *wi* (nominative):

kežergid wi -> kežergidi

The hypothesis explains why second person pronoun is never found in the wishes with *-di* form, why *-di* form can refer exclusively to second person and is incompatible with the further nominal inflection (54) or with reference to the addressee

of wish by a personal name (55b). On the other hand, it is also in line with the tendency found for Avar optative in *-gi* and Rutul optative in *-x/-j* that curses often have second person pronouns in the final position.

Interestingly, in another dialect of Rutul, that of the village of Kina, the contraction of second person pronoun and participle suffix did not happen. In this dialect, participles are used for wishes with the suffix *-d* and can be combined with the second person pronoun:

- (57) *wi-di mo'ho'bad düz ž-i<w>ši-d*
 you.sg-ATTR wish straight NEG-3.become.PFV-ATTR
 Curse: 'May your wishes not come true!'
 (personal fieldwork)
- (58) *hej kowχa hej saχ hiši-d wi kowχa*
 hey elder hey healthy 1.become.PFV-ATTR you.sg elder
 Blessing: 'Hey, foreman - hey, be well, foreman.'
 (Kina Rutul corpus)

To sum up, Rutul has an optative which is equally used for blessings and curses, and a form in *-di(-d)* (originally participle) used predominantly for curses. Wish-constructions with the optative share the same properties as Avar wishes: the mention of Allah (God) is more typical of blessings, while the presence of clause-final second person pronoun is found mainly in curses. I have also suggested a diachronic scenario of how a special form in *-di* has appeared through the contraction of the participle and second person pronoun.

2.3 Lak

Lak is another large language of Daghestan (an estimated 150,000 speakers). It is taught at schools and has a relatively long writing tradition. Lak constitutes a separate branch within the family.

The examples of wishes for this study were taken from the dictionary by Abdulaev (2015) and the collection of idiomatic expressions by Ramazanova (2005). Among 262 examples of wish expressions there are two dedicated forms (*-naw* and *-iwu*) and several non-dedicated forms; from the latter, I will only discuss the most frequent form.

Overall, the most common form is that with the suffix *-naw* (Desiderative I in Friedman 2021). Unlike most other Lak forms, the optative in *-naw* does not have personal endings.

First person

- (59) *harx:unu-s:a x:u d-an q:a-itan-naw*
 tonight-ADJ night 4-do-INF NEG-leave-OPT
 Curse: 'May I not survive tonight.'
 (Abdullaev 2015: 559)

Second person

- (60) *ja wi-x busu-l b-usan-naw ja ina*
 or you.sg-AD teller-ERG 3-tell-OPT or you.sg
lasu-l lasun-naw
 taker-ERG take-OPT
 Curse: 'May you either learn a lesson (lit. told by someone) or be taken away.'
 (Lit. 'Either let he who tells tell you, or let he who takes take you')
 (Abdullaev 2015: 393)

Third person

- (61) *c^w-an d-iwa-n allaha-na-l b-an-naw*
 REFL.I.PL-DAT 4-punish-INF Allah-OBL-ERG 3-do-OPT
 Curse: 'May God condemn (punish) them!'
 (Abdullaev 2015: 151)

Another form which comes up frequently in examples has the suffix *-iwu* (Desiderative II in Friedman 2021):

- (62) *ina a^rš:-ara-l o^q'-iwu*
 you.sg ground-OBL-ERG 1.swallow-OPT
 Curse: 'May you be swallowed up by the earth!'
 (Abdullaev 2015: 242)

It is often used with an additional element *-j* also found in vocatives (79 cases out of 96):

- (63) *š:al-li-l o^q'-iwuj*
 soil-OBL-ERG 1.swallow-OPT
 Curse: 'Go through the earth!' (literally 'May the earth swallow you up!')
 (Abdullaev 2015: 218)

The optative in *-iwu* can attach a nominal plural ending *-qul*, compare:

- (64) *ina c'ullu iwuj*
 you.sg healthy 1.be.OPT
 Blessing: 'May you be well!'
 (Rosa Eldarova pc)
- (65) *zu c'ullu b-iwu-qul*
 you.pl healthy HPL-be.OPT-PL
 Blessing: 'May you (plural) be well!'
 (Rosa Eldarova pc)

According to Eldarova (1999: 58), the form in *-iwu(j)* is a masdar with an optative meaning.

Finally, wishes can be expressed by second person imperatives. In Lak, as well as in some other Nakh-Daghestanian languages, along with their regular usage in commands (66), second person imperatives can be used with third person subjects to express wishes (67–68):

- (66) *ca balaj uča žu-n*
 one song say.IMP we-DAT
 'Sing us a song'
 (Kazenin 2013: 286)
- (67) *ka d-ahi wi-l*
 hand 4-fall.IMP you.SG-GEN
 Curse: 'May your hand fall!'
 (Ramazanova 2005: 106)
- (68) *čahar b-uč'a wi-l*
 letter 3-arrive.IMP you.SG-GEN
 Curse: 'May news of you come!' (i.e., death notification)
 (Ramazanova 2005: 205)

There is a tendency for such imperatives to take the suffix which typically marks intransitive imperatives even if the construction is transitive (Eldarova 1999: 56; Friedman 2013). There is no strict correspondence between the imperative suffix and transitivity in Lak, but the tendency is that intransitive imperatives have *-u*,

while transitive imperatives have *-a* or *-i* (Friedman 2013). In the following sentence, the verb *öq'an* is used. This verb can be intransitive, meaning 'drown', or transitive, meaning 'swallow' (Abdullaev 2015). The wish below is a transitive construction with ergative and nominative arguments. However, in example (69) the verb is used with the suffix *-u* as if it were intransitive:

- (69) *š:al-li-l o'q'u ina*
 soil-OBL-ERG 1.swallow.IMP you.sg
 Curse: 'Go through the earth!' (literally 'May the earth swallow you up!')
 (Abdullaev 2015: 218)

The same is true for the following example with the verb *biš:un* 'strike'. This verb usually has an imperative in *-a*: *r-iš:-a* 'strike!' (Eldarova 1999: 57). In the following wish, however, the verb is used with the suffix *-u*:

- (70) *t:u-j-χ-gu i<w>š:u-n š:a-χ iš:-u ina*
 I-SUP-TRANS-ADD <1>1.strike-CVB ground-AD 1.strike-IMP you.sg
 Curse: 'May you first hit me, then the ground' (cursing at the address of the offender)
 (Ramazanova 2005: 176)

The suffix *-a*, typical for transitive imperatives, can also occur in wishes:

- (71) *ka-ru burk'-unt:u-lu d-iš-a (wi-l)*
 hand-PL gravestone-OBL-SUB NPL-put-IMP (you.SG-GEN)
 Curse: 'May (your) hands be put under the tombstone!'
 (Ramazanova 2005: 109)

2.3.1 Distribution of the forms according to the value of the wish

Optatives in *-naw* and *-iwu(j)* can be used in the same context:

- (72) *žan c'ullu d-an-naw*
 soul healthy 4-do-OPT
 Blessing: 'May (you) be healthy!'
 (Ramazanova 2005: 54)

- (73) *wi-l žan c'ullu d-iwuj*
 you.sg-GEN soul healthy 4-be.OPT
 Blessing: 'May your soul be healthy!'
 (Ramazanov 2005: 55)

- (74) *ina c'ullu iwuj*
 you.sg healthy 1.be.OPT
 Blessing: 'May (you) be healthy!'
 (Rosa Eldarova pc)

There is however a distinction between them in terms of their value, visible in the collected data. The optative in *-naw* is much more often used for blessings, while the optative in *-iwu(j)* occurs significantly more frequently with negative value (curses) (the latter fact was also noticed by Murkelinskij 1971: 216) (see Table 6).

Wish-expressions with imperatives seem synonymous with other optative forms (compare (75) and (76), (77) and (78)):

- (75) *š:al-li-l o'q'u ina*
 soil-OBL-ERG 1.swallow.IMP you.sg
 Curse: 'Go through the earth!' (literally 'May the earth swallow you up!')
 (Abdullaev 2015: 218)

- (76) *š:al-li-l o'q'-iwuj*
 soil-OBL-ERG 1.swallow-OPT
 Curse: 'Go through the earth!' (literally 'May the earth swallow you up!')
 (Abdullaev 2015: 218)

- (77) *š:ajt'an-nu-l lasi wi-l o'rč-ru*
 shaitan-OBL-ERG take.IMP you.sg-GEN child-PL
 Curse: 'May shaitan take your children!'
 (Rosa Eldarova pc)

- (78) *wi-l o'rč-ru š:ajt'an-nu-l las-iwuj*
 you.sg-GEN child-PL shaitan-OBL-ERG take-OPT
 Curse: 'May shaitan take your children!'
 (Rosa Eldarova pc)

However, all examples with imperatives in my database denote a curse (see Table 6).

Table 6: Distribution of blessings and curses in Lak optatives

	blessings	curses	total
naw	96	25	121
wu, wuj	21	74	95
imperative	0	22	22

Therefore, all wish-forms in Lak tend to specialize in either blessings or curses.

2.3.2 Distribution of the constructions according to the value of wish

The two constructional properties which were found in Avar and Rutul – the presence of the words *Allah* or *God* and the presence of second person pronouns – are less pronounced in Lak. Wishes with the optatives in *-naw* and *-wu(j)* do not show value-induced preferences with respect to either of those constructional properties. Conversely, imperative constructions, which always express a curse, contain the second person pronoun in the final position in 14 cases out of 22; and, vice versa, all cases with the second person pronoun in the final position which exist in my database are imperatives (see Table 7).

Table 7: Second person pronouns in Lak blessings and curses.

		absent	final position	non-final position	total
-naw	blessings	81	0	15	96
	curses	20	0	5	25
-wu	blessings	5	0	16	21
	curses	47	0	27	74
imperative	blessings	0	0	0	0
	curses	8	14	0	22

To summarize, Lak manifests a tendency to specialize on blessings or curses on the level of morphology – all three forms which are typical for wishes show a preference for a certain value. Constructional tendencies are pronounced weaker in Lak than in Avar and Rutul. The second person pronoun non-final positions and the presence of the words ‘Allah’ and ‘God’ are found both in blessings and curses, while the final position of the second person pronoun is attested only in curses.

2.4 Second person pronoun in Karata, Botlikh and Godoberi wishes

Since the tendency to have explicit second person pronouns was less prominent in Lak than in Avar and Rutul, I decided to undertake a brief count in three other languages. Karata, Botlikh and Godoberi were chosen for practical reasons – there exist digitized versions of the dictionaries (Alekseev and Azayev 2019, Magomedova and Khalidova 2001, Saidova 2006, Saidova and Abusov 2012; Chuprinko, Moroz and Finkelberg 2023), and the number of examples of wishes is more than fifty for each language. All three languages belong to the same Andic branch of Avar-Ando-Tsezic languages.

We can see from Table 8 that a feature most strongly associated with curses is the final position of the second person pronoun. As for the presence of the words for ‘Allah’ and ‘God’, the number of examples found in the dictionaries of these languages was not representative.

Table 8: Second person pronouns in Karata, Botlikh and Godoberi blessings and curses.

languages		absent	final position	non-final position	total
Karata	blessings	65	3	3	71
	curses	12	11	4	17
Botlikh	blessings	30	7	8	45
	curses	19	18	9	46
Godoberi	blessings	37	7	5	49
	curses	3	7	0	10

3 Discussion and conclusion

Before summarizing the results and drawing conclusions, I want to discuss certain limitations of this study. As was explained in the beginning of the paper, I used the dictionary examples to examine wish expressions. These data might be skewed for several reasons. First, the examples in the dictionaries may reflect the personal preferences of the authors. Second, dictionary examples serve specific aims (demonstrating the usage of words), and the words that are not necessary for these aims can be omitted by the authors (including second person pronouns or words for ‘God’ and ‘Allah’). For example, in the small corpus of dialectal Rutul the word ‘Allah’ was found in 20% of the examples of blessings (5 out of 23), while in the dictionary of standard Rutul the proportion is 10%. However, corpora of a size which is sufficient for the quantitative study of wishes do not yet exist for any of Nakh-Daghestanian languages.

I consider curses to be a type of linguistic / interactional impoliteness. The aim of this study was to test whether there are structures that are associated with impoliteness realized as curses. As I showed in this paper, the answer is positive: there are structural properties of wishes which exhibit a bias towards impoliteness in every studied language.

First, in all three languages – Avar, Rutul and Lak – there are forms that are associated primarily with curses: optatives in *-ad* in Avar, *-di* in Mukhad Rutul, *-wu(j)* in Lak and second person imperatives in Lak. It is noteworthy that three forms out of four are morphologically nominal. The Avar form in *-ad* and the Lak form in *-iwu(j)* both inflect for case and number and thus may be qualified as masdars (verbal nouns) dedicated to the expression of wishes. The Mukhad Rutul form in *-di* originates from a participle and keeps the ability to inflect for case and number. This tendency needs to be tested in other languages of the family. If the association between verbal nominal forms and negative value is confirmed, this might be another structural feature related to impoliteness.

Second, three constructional features were found mainly in curses: the absence of the words for ‘God’ and ‘Allah’, the presence of second person pronouns and their final position in the utterance. Only the last feature was confirmed for all three languages.

With regard to the first feature, the usage of words for ‘God’ and ‘Allah’, I did not come across similar evidence in languages outside Daghestan. Although the presence of the word ‘god’ in wishes has been documented in several West African languages (Creissels 2022, Dombrowsky-Hahn and Francesco Zappa 2024), I have found no evidence suggesting that this phenomenon is more prevalent in blessings than in curses. Residents of Daghestanian villages often claim that cursing is not godly; although curses are widely used in certain situations, cursing is considered as committing sin. This may be the reason why Allah is not usually mentioned in curses.

The second feature, the presence of the second person pronouns, complies with the observations made for some European languages. As discussed in Van Olmen, Andersson and Culpeper (2023), the second person pronouns are superfluous in an address. Even without the presence of ‘you’, wishes are understood as addressed to the listener; it is the third rather than the second person that has to be specifically mentioned. The explicit expression of the second person increases the effect of the curse, in the same line as in the construction *YOU+NP* as an insult (e.g. *you (stupid) idiot*), studied in Corver (2008) and Van Olmen, Andersson and Culpeper (2023).

The most robust feature of the curses turned out to be the final position of the second person pronoun. It was found in all three languages in the study. Moreover, in Mukhad Rutul the final second person pronoun was most likely the source of the development of the optative affix *-di*. The post-verbal position is highly atypical for subject pronouns in Nakh-Daghestanian languages. In the corpus of Rutul, the imper-

ative followed by subject pronoun occurs only once; apparently, the word order has a contrastive value ('you go, I stay'). Probably, the post-verbal position of second person pronouns in curses is similarly motivated by emphatic reinforcement.

Finally, an important finding of this study is that both morphological and constructional features attested in curses manifest themselves only as tendencies. There are no structures that are associated with curses on the grammatical level: even when the data show a hundred per cent association with impoliteness, language consultants readily produce examples of blessings with the same structure, which means that evaluation is still partly a matter of the communicative context and the lexical meaning of the words. This may be one reason why forms and constructions that tend to express curses are usually overlooked by the grammarians.

The expression of curses studied in this paper illustrates the process of conventionalization, which, as was shown in Terkourafi (2005), is a matter of degree, and may well vary for different speakers, as well as for the same speaker over time. A similar conclusion is drawn by Van Olmen, Andersson and Culpeper (2023): in their study of *YOU*+NP in Dutch, English and Polish they show that impoliteness can be strongly conventionalized in a similar way across languages, but it is never completely conventional. The study of curse expressions in Nakh-Daghestanian languages, carried out in this paper, is consistent with this finding. The data revealed numerous forms and constructions expressing curses almost exclusively, but not entirely exclusively.

This observation supports the results in Dobrushina (2024): the cases of Kumyk and Nogai inflectional optatives and Russian optative constructions showed that grammatical items that have evaluative usages often exhibit a "fluid" value whose positive or negative character needs to be specified by their contexts. Even if the majority of examples is associated with negative value, there could be infrequent examples with positive value. Qualitative evaluation (positive or negative) emerges as a contextually defined speaker's perspective on a given situation. It comes as a satellite to some other meaning, and even if it specializes towards negative or positive attitude, it can still maintain its unstable character and display the opposite meaning in a certain context, as it happens in all cases considered in this paper.

Abbreviations

- 1 first gender (masculine)
- 2 second gender (feminine)
- 3 third gender (non-human)
- 4 fourth gender (non-human)

ABL	ablative
AD	adessive
ADD	additive
ADJ	adjectivizer
AOR	aorist
ATTR	attributivizer
CONC	concessive
CNT	continuative
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
EL	motion from a spatial domain
ERG	ergative
ESS	essive
G	gender
GEN	genitive
HPL	human plural
I	first person
IMP	imperative
INF	infinitive
INTJ	interjection
IPFV	imperfective
IRR	irrealis
LAT	motion into a spatial domain
MAL	maledictive
NEG	negative
NMLZ	nominalization
NPL	non-human plural
OBL	oblique stem
OPT	optative
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
PROH	prohibitive
PST	past
PTCL	particle
PTCP	participle
PV	preverb
RE	refactive
REFL	reflexive
SG	singular
SUB	subessive
SUP	spatial domain on the horizontal surface of the landmark
TRANS	translative

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