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Teaching Georgian as a Second language: Indefinite Pronouns and Modality¹

Abstract

In the Georgian language indefinite particles form a unified system and are derived from the question words (question pronouns) by adding particles -me and -ġac. All indefinite pronouns reveal the same formants. The indefinite pronouns with both particles have approximately the same semantics – an indefinite meaning of the given form. These two formants make two systems of indefinite pronouns, but there is no absolute synonymy of the forms. The language in general never provides two forms for one semantic meaning. There must be some difference in semantic nuances. The dictionaries of the Georgian language, both explanatory (monolingual) or translated (bilingual), do not reveal any difference in this case, the explanation of the forms is similar. It creates problems on the one hand in teaching practice, and on the other hand in the course of translation. In the present article the data of the dictionaries are analyzed and a key principle is formulated to distinguish the two systems for the Georgian language learners. The basic issue to scrutinize the forms is to distinguish between the known and unknown reality, in other words, plus control and minus control semantic category. -me particle is used with the known reality (or plus control), while -ġac particle is employed for the unknown reality (or for minus control). In addition, I will examine several contexts, special methods and strategies for teaching indefinite pronouns to the learners of Georgian as a second language.

Key words: *Second language teaching, dictionaries, indefinite pronouns.*

Introduction

In the Georgian language, the indefinite pronouns that are derived from interrogative pronouns form two systems: each interrogative pronoun is added by particles **-me** or **-ġac**. In both cases the derived pronouns are of similar type and meaning, and the semantics of indefiniteness plays a crucial role.

Interrogative Pronouns	Indefinite Pronouns	
	-me	-ġac
vin (who)	vinme (someone)	viġac (someone)
ra (what)	rame (something)	raġac (something)
sad (where)	sadme (somewhere)	sadġac (somewhere)
romeli (Which)	romelime (some)	romeliġac (some)
rogori (what kind of)	rogorme (somehow)	rogorġac (somehow)
ramdeni (how many/how much)	ramdenime (several)	ramdeniġac (several)

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The dictionaries of the Georgian language do not provide explanations of the differences between these forms in their definitions. The differences are not explained in the translation dictionaries either. Sometimes both forms are given as synonyms, in other cases they are used to define each other. Two-language dictionaries are not an exception in this regard (<https://translate.google.com/>; <http://dictionary.ge/>). The differences in the semantics of forms with **-me** and **-ġac** particles are not underlined in the scientific literature either. The indefinite pronouns with **--me** and **-ġac** particles form certain systems. Therefore, they are not absolute synonyms, as the same semantics is never expressed by means of two different formations in any language. Thus, it is likely that there are certain semantic nuances, which make these forms distinct.

Semantic Analysis of Forms with **-me** and **-ġac** Particles and Distinction Between These Forms

The semantic nuance comprising the systemic difference between these forms consists in the emphasis on **familiar and unfamiliar sets**. The **speaker** and his/her vision play a key role in this regard: the forms with particle **-me** underline **familiar sets**, whereas the forms with the particle **-ġac** denote **unfamiliar sets**.

Let us discuss several contexts:

(1) *sadme çavidet*. (Let's go somewhere) – this phrase means that the place is indefinite, unspecific, yet, familiar to the speaker. This phrase implies control on the part of the speaker. This may be a place of definite function (e.g. place of entertainment, place which offers catering, place of public gathering etc.), or some other place familiar to the speaker. The speaker implies selection of some place from the list of these indefinite places. This is **indefiniteness with the emphasis on the familiar set** (i.e. +control).

(2) *Ni □a sadġac çavida* (Nick has gone somewhere). – This sentence means that the place where Nick has gone is indefinite and also unknown to the speaker i.e. it forms part of the unknown set. This is **indefiniteness with the emphasis on the unfamiliar set** (i.e.-control).

This opposition is vividly illustrated by the sentence in which both forms are used. For instance:

(3) *gasaġebi sadġac dav □arge, naxe, ikneb sadme mand iq □os, moz ebne*.

(I have lost my key somewhere. Look for it, it may be somewhere here).

In this sentence, the first form *sadġac* implies that the location of the key is indefinite and, at the same time, it forms part of the unfamiliar set. The first part of the sentence may be paraphrased as follows: I don't know, I don't remember, I am totally unfamiliar with the place where I have lost the key. The second part of the sentence, where the form *sadme* is used, implies that the location of the key is within the area of the set which is familiar to me (e.g. a specific home, a specific balcony, one of the rooms etc.). In the given context, the opposition between **familiar** and **unfamiliar** sets is revealed in the use of the forms with particles **-me** and **-ġac**.

The method of replacement proves that free replacement of forms with **-me** and **-ġac** particles is impossible in affirmative sentences. The forms with the **-ġac** particle clearly point to the **indefiniteness within the unfamiliar set**. The same semantics cannot be retained when replacing this form with the form containing the particle **-me**.

It should be also noted that in certain contexts the forms with **-me** and **-ġac** particles are interchangeable. This is due to the **obvious modal semantics**, which implies equal attitude of the speaker to both sets (familiar and unfamiliar). For instance, **the semantics of assumption** may freely refer to both familiar and unfamiliar sets. This is the precondition for the interchangeability of the above-mentioned forms. The modality of assumption is expressed by the words **albat (probably)**, **ikneb (maybe)**, **unda (must)** (in the meaning of assumption) and other language means expressing assumption. Interchangeability of the above-mentioned forms is also possible in case of modality of **wish, request and necessity**. In such cases the indefinite semantics of both sets (familiar and unfamiliar) is combined with the specific semantics of modality.

It should be also mentioned that **questions** contain only the forms expressing **familiar sets by means of forms with particle -me**. The reason for this is that, logically, it is impossible to ask a question about the

unfamiliar set: such question cannot be answered. Thus, if the forms are not interchangeable in certain contexts, i.e. the form with particle **-ḡac** cannot be replaced by the form with the particle **-me**, replacement is still possible in case the sentence is replaced by **interrogative modality**.

Thus, the following conclusion can be drawn: the semantic analysis of indefinite pronouns with particles **-me** and **-ḡac** has proved that the two systems express two different semantics, namely, the semantics of **indefiniteness within familiar and unfamiliar sets: -me for the familiar set, and -ḡac for the unfamiliar one**.

Recommendations for the Teaching of Forms with **-me** and **-ḡac** Particles

In the process of teaching Georgian as a second language or as a foreign language, the forms with particles **-me** and **-ḡac** constitute a problem. The indefinite pronouns of both systems [**vinme** - **viḡac** (someone), **rame** - **raḡac** (something), **sadme** - **sadḡac** (somewhere) etc.] are actively used in everyday speech as well as literature. Frequently the differences between the two forms are unnoticed by the learners of the Georgian language. However, at a certain stage of language acquisition (levels A2, B1, B2) the issue of distinction between the two forms arises. Georgian-language learners frequently make mistakes in the use of the two forms. They often ask questions in order to identify the differences between the two forms and use them correctly. Usually, these forms have only one correlate in another language; hence, the important semantic nuance is lost in the process of translation. Therefore, the teacher should give a profound explanation of the pragmatic aspects related to the use of the two forms in Georgian. Thus, when teaching the given forms, the teacher should focus on the following:

1. In the affirmative sentence, the forms with particle **-me** are used in order to denote familiar sets, whereas the forms with the particle **-ḡac** are used to denote unfamiliar sets.
2. If the sentence contains modal elements *albat* (probably), *ikneb* (maybe), *unda* (must), both forms (with particle **-me** and with particle **-ḡac**) can be used equally: *albat, ikneb, unda* + **-me** / **-ḡac**.
3. The two forms are also freely interchangeable in sentences expressing assumption, wish, request, doubt and necessity; assumption, wish, request, doubt and necessity + **-me** / **-ḡac**.
4. In questions only the forms with particle **-me**, denoting familiar sets, are used: *rame ginda?* (*Do you want anything?*) / *vinme naxe universiṭ eṭ ṡi* (*have you seen anyone at the University?*).
5. The given difficulty should be overcome by means of special exercises as well as the analysis of numerous contexts in which the two forms are used.

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