

Between noun incorporation and lexical affixation in Northwest Caucasian
(with focus on Abaza)

Peter Arkadiev, PhD Hab.
University of Zürich, Slavisches Seminar

Northwest Caucasian languages have usually been considered to lack noun incorporation. Indeed, they do not feature Chukotkan-style “prototypical” incorporation, i.e. productive compounding of the verb with its P-argument under specific discourse conditions with consequences for transitivity. However, I argue that NWC languages still show incorporation-like phenomena, i.e. the so-called spatial preverbs, many of which not only historically go back to incorporated nouns, but may be analysed as such synchronically as well. I focus on two types of incorporated nouns in Abaza — body-part nouns and non-relational nouns, discussing similarities and differences in their behaviour and drawing parallels from other languages. I conclude that Abaza spatial preverbs form a cline from incorporated nouns to fully grammaticalised lexical affixes, suggesting several successive stages of incorporation and affixalisation.