Achtung!

Attention!
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Jost Gippert, Frankfurt 1998-2011
The formation of comparatives in the history of Georgian

Part I: The prehistory of the synthetic comparatives

A remarkable difference between Modern Georgian and the Old Georgian literary language consists in the fact that comparative forms of adjectives were built in a highly synthetic way in the latter whereas the modern language has analytic ones. The Old Georgian comparatives, nowadays used with a "superlative / elative" function only, were commonly formed with a prefixed u- plus a suffix that appeared either as a shorter variant, -e or -o, or as a longer, declinable one, -ës- (< -ëys-) or -ëys-. The Old Georgian Bible translation reveals examples like u-did-e / u-did-ës-i "bigger" from did-i "big, large" (e.g. Ps. 134,5), u-borot-e / u-borot-ës-i "worse" from borot-i "bad, evil" (e.g. Dan. 3,32), or u-pr-o / u-pr-ëys-i "more" (e.g. Lc. 7,43), obviously related to the root which is present in pr-iað "very". The last named short form, upro, is the element used in the modern language to build analytic comparatives of all adjectives such as, e.g., upro didi "bigger".

It can easily be shown that the synthetic type was inherited from Proto-Kartvelian, given that similar formations exist in the Zan languages as well as Svan; cp. Megrelian u-magal-aš-i "highest" (from magal-i "high"), Laz u-ʒgi-š-i "best", or Svan xo-lqmaš-a "strongest" (from lqmäš "strong"). Curiously enough, all sister languages show the same tendency as Georgian does, in that these formations are restricted to superlative / elative functions today while real comparatives are built analytically: Megrelian uses umosi, Laz, dido, and Svan, gun or ʒẽd as equivalents of Georgian upro.

As to the origin of the synthetic formation, a theory first published by I. QIPŠIJE (KIPŠIDZE) in his Grammar of Megrelian has become widespread. According to this theory, the prefix appearing as u- both in Megrelian and Georgian, is identical with the versional marker of a third person in finite verbal forms and refers to the object of the comparison:

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1 A preliminary version of this article was read on the occasion of the VII. Caucasian Colloquium in Marburg, 19.7.1994; the present edition is the first printed one. A second part concerning the historical development within Georgian has meanwhile been published separately (in: Studies in Caucasian Linguistics. Selected papers of the Eighth Caucasian Colloquium, ed. H. VAN DEN BERG, Leiden 1999, 32-44).
"Сравнительная степень образуется, как и в грузинском, с помощью местоименного объективного префикса родительного отношения 3-go лица г-ез, resp. ему... и суффикса бы, окончания Р. падежа, предваряющего гласным ʼо: ʼо-бы." (Кипшидзе 1914, p. 033)

It is not clear whether this interpretation was developed by Kipšidze himself or whether he learned it from N.Ja. Marr. In an article that appeared one year later than the Megrelian Grammar but was obviously written some time before, this author had come to the same conclusion after rejecting an alternative hypothesis considered by himself earlier, according to which the u- element had to be connected with the Kartvelian negative prefix:


As the quotation shows, the decisive argument for Marr’s changing his mind was the discovery that the Svan equivalent of the Georgian u- prefix was the element xo- otherwise appearing as a versional object marker. In his Grammar of Old Literary Georgian (1925), Marr further proposed that the Georgian word xuces-i, "vulgar" xuces-i "priest" had to be identified with the Svan comparative xo-ša "older, elder", thus revealing the prefix beginning with x- in Georgian too. Marr considered this to be a borrowing from Svan:

"къ во-о, вульгар. во-о священника ... Эта основа пока в грузинскомъ наблюдена лишь въ видѣ ʼо, но она также учтена въ во-о, она также заимствована изъ сванскаго. Во-о налицо — сванская сравнительная степень корня ʼо — во-о старшій, болѣе ..., съ перерождениемъ во въ (у) и о согласно свистящей природѣ грузинскаго и съ диалектическимъ передвиженіемъ мъ въ гъ въ префиксѣ ʼо-.

(Marr 1925, p. 58 sq.)

In the same way, Marr regarded the Georgian versional object marker у- itself as a borrowing from Svan:

"Частица у-, представляется заимствованный, съ потерей спиранта Ь, изъ сванской диалектной среды префикс *иу- v ʼо-у- разновидность ʼо-, объективного префикса Р. падежа въ современномъ сванскомъ языкѣ ..." (ib., p. 91 sq.)

This view cannot be upheld any longer, of course. But the hypothesis that the comparative prefix was the same as the verbal version marker was further supported when in the 1920ies, the so called Xanmeti and Haemeti texts came to light. Here, the prefix of the comparative forms appeared as xu- and ku-, resp., i.e., it
showed the characteristic feature of these most ancient texts in the same way as the verbal prefix did; cp. the xanme ˙ti forms xu-did-ės-i "bigger" (Lc. 20,47), xu-pr-oys-i "more, bigger", xu-mcir-ės-i "smaller" (Mt. 11,11), xu-mţob-ės-i "better" (Mt. 5,29), xu-met-ės-i "bigger" (Mt. 5,37), xu-advil-ės-i "lighter" (Lc. 16,17), xu-cinar-ės-i "earlier" (Jo. 5,7), xu-mravl-ės-i "more" (Mt. 21,36) or the haeme ˙ti form hu-advil-ės-i "lighter" with a verbal form like xu-brzan-a "he ordered (to) him" (Mt. 8,9), Svan xu-sgoţ "id."

The importance of the xanme ˙ti and haeme ˙ti variants was underlined by A. ŠANIŽE in a paper about personal markers in nominal forms in the Kartvelian languages, read on a session of the linguistic section of the Rustaveli Institute in 1934 (ŠANIŽE 1934/1981, p. 402 sq.). In his Grammar of Old Georgian, this author stated briefly:

"ვისწავლეთ ფრენი ფურჯიომრთი სარკმლობის საადგილში ჭიჭეს ჭიჭუთ ა (ჰაებშიშთე ღრმა) ან ტ (საკვარნობი ღრმა): ბუქვიკროლოვა ჰაებშიშთე, ჟი ა (ტ (ჰაებშიშთე ღრმა–3 ობჟარტ–

ŠANIŽE further concluded that if forms like xumˇyob¯esi contained a third person object marker, a complete paradigm of all persons must once have existed in Kartvelian:

"აქელ გიგრძნოვ უძლიარ არხაჯერელ ბუქვიკროლოვა (ქრო ღრმა) და გაბაჯერელ ბუქვიკროლოვა (ქრო ღრმა), ხოლო არქაჯერელ ბუქვიკროლოვა და გაბაჯერელ (ქრო ღრმა) .." (ib.)

In order to motivate the assumption of a "personal conjugation" within nominal forms, he compared the system of possessive marking by prefixes to be found, e.g. in North West Caucasian languages; cp. his example taken from Abkhaz (ŠANIŽE 1934/1981, 406; transcription and translation J.G.):

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>s-ab &quot;my father&quot;</td>
<td>s-an &quot;my mother&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>w-ab &quot;your (masc.sg.) father&quot;</td>
<td>w-an &quot;your (masc.sg.) mother&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b-ab &quot;your (fem.sg.) father&quot;</td>
<td>b-an &quot;your (fem.sg.) mother&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>y-ab &quot;his father&quot;</td>
<td>y-an &quot;his mother&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>l-ab &quot;her father&quot;</td>
<td>l-an &quot;her mother&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a-ab &quot;its (non-hum.) father&quot;</td>
<td>a-an &quot;its (non-hum.) mother&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ŠANIŽE’s proposal was not universally adopted though. In 1940, K. DONDUA argued against that in no Kartvelian language any traces of a first or second person marking within comparative forms persist. At least in the most conservative language of the group, viz. Svan, he would have expected remnants of such a salient feature:

"Однако при таком допущении необходимо будет учесть тот факт, что ни в грузинском, ни в метрельском, ни даже в сванском мы не находим никаких следов изменения сравнительно-превосходной степени в 1-м и во 2-м лице; трудно допустить, чтобы эта морфологическая особенность в одинаковой мере бессольно могла исчезнуть в названных языках, если она в них и в самом деле существовала."
The formation of comparatives in Georgian

Osobennyo strannoi takaya sudba sovremennoi stepeni mozhet pokazatsya dla svanskogo jazyka, kotoryi, kak izvestno, edinstvennyi iz kartvelskix yazykov сохранил... stol', drevnuyu... formu vyrazheniya lica, kotoroyi je v grammafticheskoy kategorii inkluzivnoy ekzkluzivnoy. (Dondua 1940, 38 / 1975, 105).

Additional support for Šanîje’s hypothesis is available, however, if we compare not the possessive marking of the North West Caucasian languages but the way they build their own comparative forms. At a first glance, the system of today’s Abkhaz and Adyghe languages seems to be quite similar to the one of Modern Georgian, in that comparatives are usually formed by combining the normal (“positive”) form of the adjective with an adverbial element equivalent to Georgian upro meaning "more", viz. Abkhaz ejha and Adyghe nah. Cp. the Adyghe sample sentence (Rogava-Keraševa 1966, 73):

av nah dau ı cha's't'egå

"he/she became more beautiful."

It can be shown, however, that Abkhaz ejha has to be considered as a synthetic comparative form of its own, just as Georgian upro which derived from Old Georgian (x)u-pr-o(ys-i) "bigger". Cp. the following examples from Bible translation (Jo. 19,11) where Abkhaz ejha is used as an attributive adjective meaning "greater", equivalent to Old Georgian uproysi / udidësi, Xanmeti xudidësi (and Greek μεγίζων):

Jo. 19,11: θέλω τὸν ἁρματον τοῦ μεγίζων ἄμαρτιον ἐγγεζ.  
Xanmeti: amistros mincemelsa mas ěmsa šen xudidësi codvay xakus.  
Protovulgate (DE): amiswos mincemelsa mas ěmsa šendu udidesi codvay akus.  
Adiši (C): amistros romelman mico ma šen uproysi hrdi akus.  
Abkhaz (a): Ubri akantı ura sуттах xudideši lıwka lımou.

"Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

Another example from Bible translation shows that Abkhaz ejha is able to incorporate person marking with respect to the object of comparison, just in the way Šanîje expected Proto-Kartvelian comparatives to have done:

Jo. 21,15: σίμων Ἰωάννου, ἀγαπάς με πλέον τούτων;  
Xanmeti: simon ionayso, giqar mea uproys帮助企业 amatsa?  
Protovulgate (DE): simon ionayso, giqar mea uproys amatsa?  
Adiši (C): simon ionayso, giqar me umetes amatsa?  
Abkhaz (a): Simonı, Ioana ipa, ejbır pánxo bıına ılyoubı Caya?  

"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

Quotations from Abkhaz Bible translation are taken from the editions Stockholm 1981 (a: Gospel of John) and Tiflis 1912 (b: Four gospels). The Georgian xanmeti quotations are taken from the edition Kajaia 1984, the quotations from the Adiši New Testament (C) and the Protovulgate (DE) from the edition Šanîje 1945. The Greek text is given according to the edition Nestle-Aland 1963, English translations according to the King James Bible.
Here, the comparative form *ejha* has a prefix *r-* which obviously refers to the plural pronominal *eg’art*, "the others" (here corresponding to Georgian *amat-sa*). In the same way, a reference to a first person singular object of comparison is met with in St. John’s gospel:

Jo. 14,28: ".. δι' ὁ πατὴρ μείζον μού ἐστιν.
Protovulgate (DE): .. rametu manay čemi uproys čemsu ars.
Adiši (C): .. rametu manay čemi udides ars čemsa.
Abkhaz (a): .. izban akuzar Ab Sara дёнхайп.
Abkhaz (b): .. for my Father is greater than I."

Here, the form in question, *dsejhaup*, contains object marking (*-s*, 1st person singular, congruent with *sara* "I") as well as subject marking (*d-*, 3rd person singular masc., congruent with *ab* "father"); additionally, it contains the suffix *-uap* turning it into a finite stative verbal form "he is bigger than I". In another translation of John, an alternative method of marking the object of comparison was used. Here, the stative verb has the subject marking only (*d-ejha-*uap*), whereas the first person singular object appears in the shape of the pronoun *sara* plus a postpositional *s-ec` es* "with respect to me" only:

Abkhaz (b): .. isban akuzar, C=Ab Capa cвукве деихайп ha ıchaz.

In yet another passage from John, the two Abkhaz translations behave just the other way: Here, the older one has a subject plus object marking in the comparative form, whereas the younger one uses *-ačkos*:

Jo. 8,53: .. μὴ σὺ μείζον εἶ τοῦ πατρός ἡμῶν Ὄβραμα, ὅπως ἀπέδονεν;
Xamneti: .. nuqwe šen uproys xar mamis a’
Protovulgate (DE): .. nuqwe šen uproys xar mamis čeunisa abrahamisa, romeli mokuda?
Adiši (C): .. nutu šen udides xar mamis čeunisa abrahamisa, romeli-igi mokuda?
Abkhaz (b): Нас Уара инсаз хаб Абраам нашыс уехану?
Abkhaz (a): Ḥab Абраам ипс’из чаб Уары ярпайхама?

"Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead?"

Note that in *u-r-ejha-u-ma* "are you greater than he", the object is marked (by *-r*) as a 3rd person plural, most probably in the sense of a *pluralis maiestatis* referring to the patriarch Abraham.

The formation of comparatives that comprise both subject and object marking, thus producing stative verbal forms rather than adjectival ones, is not restricted to *-ejha-* "more" in Abkhaz as one might suggest on the basis of the examples quoted above. Thus, the Abkhaz grammar by ARSTAA and ČKADUA (1966, 61) provides an example of *-eje’ a-* "worse" treated in the same way (with *d-* subject marker 3rd person singular, *-i-* object marker 3rd person singular, finite ending *-uap*):

Акуш деилагар абгамыкку диницхойп.

"When a wise (man) is confused, he is worse than a fool."
It must be stated, though, that in modern Abkhaz, only a few comparatives exist that are capable of being "inflected" like this; to my knowledge, there are only two more of them, viz. ej' "better, more" and ejca "smaller, less", ejhava "older" and ejcbə "younger" being derived from ejha "greater" and ejca "smaller", respectively. It is certainly not by chance that all these forms contain an element ej- which seems to be identical with the marker of the so-called "reciprocal version" in verbal forms (cp. ej-š'to-üp "they follow each other"). This cannot combine with an object marker, however, so that it is not exactly the same element.

In the Circassian languages, similar features are not easy to find. When personal objects are involved in a comparison using nah "more" plus adjective in literary Adyghe, personal pronouns seem to suffice normally as in the following sentence (with oš "you"; ROGA-VA-KERAŞEVA 1966, 73):

Oш нахь паги а чьым егты.

"This earth will bear even a (man) more severe than you."

There is a peculiar case though where a personal prefix is added to nah in Adyghe, viz. where this is used in the sense of a superlative form, comparing a given subject with "all" others. The prefix in question is a-, identical with the personal marker of a 3rd person plural object in verbal forms; Adyghe a-nah is thus equivalent to Abkhaz r-ejha "more than they". Cp. the following two sentences (ROGA-VA-KERAŞEVA ib.):

Тэ тиметро - дунашм тетмэ аnahь дэгъу.

"Our underground is better than (all) the (ones) existing in the world."

Китхър пеушълъо петеуми аnahь иных.

"Whales are bigger than all (other) animals."

For the Šapsu˙g dialect of Adyghe, Z. KERAŞEVA mentioned forms like yə-dăg°ə "better" which has to be considered as a derivation of dăg° "good", being characterized by an object marker of the 3rd person, yə- (KERAŞEVA 1957, 59; cf. ROGA-VA 1980, 42).

In this way, it is well conceivable that the integration of personal markers in the formation of comparative forms was a common feature of North West Caucasian. Returning to Kartvelian forms as represented by Old Georgian (xanmeti) xu-did-eys-i, we have to note the striking similarity of both the functional elements and their arrangement if we compare them with their Abkhaz equivalents:

Abkhaz dieic°oup "he is worse than he":

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<tr>
<th>Abkhaz</th>
<th>Georgian</th>
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<tr>
<td>d-</td>
<td>x+</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.ps.sg.subj.</td>
<td>3.ps.sg.ind.obj.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ei-</td>
<td>u-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>versional marker (?)</td>
<td>root</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c’ə-</td>
<td>yw-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>root (finite) suffix</td>
<td>suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u°</td>
<td>eys-</td>
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<td>nom.ending</td>
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Georgian xugwres-i "worse (than he)":

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abkhaz</th>
<th>Georgian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;(0)-</td>
<td>x+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.ps.sgsubj.)</td>
<td>3.ps.sg.ind.obj.</td>
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<tr>
<td>u-</td>
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<tr>
<td>versional marker-</td>
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<td>root (finite) suffix</td>
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<td>u°</td>
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<td>nom.ending</td>
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On the basis of this similarity, we should indeed expect forms like *mididēs-i "bigger than me", matching Abkhaz dseihau, to have existed within Kartvelian once, as A. ŠANJI suggested. Given that personal marking with respect to the object of comparison is hardly attested elsewhere, the South and North West Caucasian languages would surely deserve typologists’ attention (neither H. JENSEN in his article in 1934 nor P.K. ANDERSEN in his 1983 book took any notice of an "incorporational" type of comparatives as established here); and given that both language groups have always been located in a close geographical neighbourhood, we could even presume that the similarities are vestiges of an areal interrelationship ("Sprachbund") that might have existed in former times.

Several problems persist, however, that have to be explained before we can take these assumptions for granted.

First, we have to consider the fact that within Old Georgian, the object of comparison cannot be regarded as a simple indirect object because it does not appear in the dative case but in the dative of the hypostatical genitive paradigm (at least when it is a personal pronoun). Cp. the following examples (Mt. 3,11 / Lc. 12,24):

Protovulgate (DE): solo romeli-igi ˇcemsa şemdgomad movals, uzlieres ars ˇcensa.

"But he that cometh after me is mightier than I.”

Xanme: raoden xumˇyobes xart tk(ue)n mprinvelta?
Protovulgate (DE): raoden tkuen umˇyobes xart mprinvelta?
Adiši (C): ravden tkuen umˇyobes xart mprinveltasa?

"How much more are ye better than the fowls?"

If uzlieres- ˇcensa really substitutes a former *miˇzlieres- (me), the usage of the hypostatical genitive (ˇcem-sa, mprinvelta-sa) can be regarded as an easy way of avoiding the incongruence that originated by the loss of non-third person marking; ˇcem-i "mine" (sc. "my body") is a third person, not a first one. In this way, the usage of ˇcensa instead of *me does not contradict the assumption that u-ˇzlieres- etc. are marked for a third person object.

Second, we have to cope with the question what the suffixal elements in comparative forms such as udid-ˇes-i and udid-e are. In the corresponding Abkhaz forms, there can be no doubt that the suffixes have to be classified as verbal morphemes: -u in dseihau "he is bigger than me" is the same element as -u in st’o-u "I am standing", i.e. the marker of finiteness in stative verbs. If we consider that in Kartvelian languages, personal marking is restricted to verbal forms normally, we should therefore expect that their comparatives were verbal forms originally too.
In this connection, it would be necessary first to investigate whether the difference between the so called longer and shorter forms can be accounted for on syntactical grounds. At a first glance, it seems that the short form was predestined for usage as a predicate form in copular sentences such as Mt. 5,29 in the Adiši gospels:

Adiši (C):  .. rametu umʒobe ars šenda, rayta çarçımıdes erti asota šentagani ..  
"for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish .."

It has to be stated, though, that from earliest times on, the endingless form of the longer stem was used equivalently in this environment; cf. the same passage in the xanmeti text and the Protovulgate:

Xanmeti:  .. r(ame)tu xumʒobės ars šenda r(ayt)a çarçımıdes erti asota šentagani ..  
Protov. (DE):  .. rametu umʒobės ars šenda, rayta çarçımıdes erti asota šentagani ..

In the next verse from within Matthew (5,30), in an otherwise identical sentence, even the Adiši text prefers the longer form:

Adiši (C):  .. rametu umʒobe ars šenda, rayta çarçımıdes erti asota šenta[ɣan]i ..  
Xanmeti:  .. r(ame)tu xumʒobės ars šenda r(ayt)a çarçımıdes erti asota šentagani ..  
Protov. (DE):  .. rametu umʒobės ars šenda, rayta çarçımıdes erti asota šentagani ..

As was stated above, N.Ja. Marr proposed that the element -eys/-oys- of the (longer form of the) comparatives could be interpreted as being a genitive stem, built upon the shorter form (in -e/-o) by addition of the genitive ending -is-. This assumption seems to be well supported by the similar appearance of derived genitive stems from adverbs ending in -e, such as gareš-i = gareše-ys-i "the outer one" from gareš "outside" or çinaš-i = çinaše-ys-i "the former one" from çinašhe "before". But this would imply that shorter forms such as (x)udide or (x)upro would have to be regarded as adverbial forms originally, not verbal ones, and we have to consider that adverbs like garešhe could as easy be nominalized by simply adding the case endings; cp. Ez. 42,7 with nominative garešhe = gareše-i beside the genitive stem gareš-i = gareše-ysa-:

da nateli garešhe vitarca iqi saqldarni eçosa mis garešišani ..  
kai φῶς ἰζόην ὄν τρόπον αἱ ἐξέδροι τῆς αὐλῆς τῆς ἰζοτήρας ..  
"And light from outside, like the thrones of the outer court .."

Furthermore, the problem remains that even in xanmeti texts, several examples occur where the suffixes are not written -eṣ- or -oys- but -eṣ- and -oṣ-; note, e.g., the following examples (Jo. 16,7 / Mc. 12,43):

Xanmeti:  .. xumʒohes ars [k]w[e]n]da r(ayt)a me [çarv]ide ..  
Protovulgate (DE):  .. umʒohes ars kuenda, rayta me çarvide ..  
Adiši (C):  .. umʒohes ars kuenda, me tu mivide ..  
"It is expedient for you that I go away .."

Xanmeti:  .. kurivman am[an] glaxakanman xupros qovelta şemoçira pasis sacavsa ..  
Protov. (DE):  .. kurivman aman glaxakanman uproys qovelta şemoçira pasis sacavsa amas ..  
Adiši (C):  .. kurivman glaxakanman uproys qoveltasə şeçira şesاقıravsa amas zeda ..  
"This poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury".
Is it really believable that this is a mere matter of orthography as Z. Saržvelažė proposed (1984, p. 276 sq.)?

A lot of further investigations will be necessary in order to finally decide these questions, and it may well be that some of them will remain unanswered, simply because Georgian written tradition began too late to preserve clear vestiges of the original state. But the assumption that Kartvelian comparatives once had personal (object) marking has a good deal in its favour if we take the parallel from North West Caucasian as established here seriously.

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