This talk looks at the uses of the suffix -savit, added to fully inflected synthetic verb forms in modern spoken Georgian (Kartvelian) to express hesitation, uncertainty [JKB88] and approximation regarding the event or state referred to by the verb form to which it attaches.

Observe the verb form mt’kiva “my head hurts” in (1a). When it gets the ending -savit, as in (1b), there may be several readings, including having a discomfort resembling a headache, diminishing the real pain or being uncertain whether one can call it a headache at all.

(1) Georgian
a. (me) tav-i mtkiva.
I.DAT head-NOM it.hurts.me
‘My head hurts.’ (I have a headache.)
b. (me) tav-i mtkiva-savit.
I.DAT head-NOM it.hurts.me-savit
‘My head kind of hurts.’
1. not a real/strong headache (only resembles one); or
2. not important mentioning (to diminish the importance and avoid bothering others);

The sequence -savit consists of the DAT marker -sa and the postposition -vit “like”, “as”. It appears normally with nominals and can have both object- (2a) and meta-level readings (2b):

(2) Georgian
a. Object-level reading of { -sa-vit }
nino-sa-vit marqal-i.
Nino-DAT-like tall-NOM
‘As tall as Nino.’
b. Meta-level reading of { -sa-vit }
nino-sa-vit or-marqal-i’an-i sitqva
Nino-DAT-like two-syllable-poss-NOM word-NOM
‘Two-syllable word like Nino’ (ni.no is a disyllabic name)

Until the second half of the 20th century, the ending -savit, if added to verb forms, only had a meta-level reading in standard Georgian:
Standard Georgian, meta-level reading of -savit

venatrebi-savit otx+marci+i+an-i sitqa
(s)he.misses.me-savit four+syllable+poss+nom word+nom

Four-syllable word like (the form) venatrebi' (ve-na-ke-bi consists of four syllables)

In literary Georgian the application of the ending -savit to a finite verb form has always had a meta-level reading and thus has exclusively been a way to explain one form via another synonymous form, very popular in dictionaries. For instance, as mentioned in [Jap63, p. 95] and later also in [Sha73, p. 77], the famous Georgian writer and lexicographer Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1658–1725) in his Georgian dictionary interprets forms this way. For instance, in order to explain the form gaačuma (4a) and say that it is used like another form daaduma (4b), Orbeliani attaches the -savit to the latter form:

(4) Georgian of the 17th Century, cited in [Jap63, p. 95], meta-level reading of {-savit}

a. gaačuma – daaduma-savit.
   gaačuma daaduma-DAT-like
   '[The verb form] gaačuma [is used] like [the verb form] daaduma.'

b. daaduma.
   (s)he.made.him/her.silent
   '(S)he silenced him/her.'

In the Orbeliani’s times the ending -savit when applied to finite verbs had exclusively a meta-level use and referred only to the form of the item to which it used to attach. The ending did not affect the semantics of the host form or the syntactic status of the clause containing the form as its constituent.

The application of the ending -savit to finite verbs that affects the object-level reading of the verb (as in (1b)) has been characteristic to Georgian dialects for quite some time (see (5) and (6) from [Jap63]) before it spread into the modern spoken Georgian since the second half of the 20th century (7). There it acts as an approximator (further glossed as APPR):

(5) Tushian dialect of Georgian, Lower Alvan, [Jap63, p. 96]. Object-level reading of -savit

vugonoob-savit.
I.am.stripped.of.strength-APPR
'I am kind of stripped of strength.'

(6) Gurian dialect of Georgian, [Jap63, p. 97]. Object-level reading of -savit

gakaža-savit.
(s)he.got.angry-APPR
'(S)he got angry a bit.'

(7) Georgian, [Jap63, p. 95]. Object-level reading of -savit

a. mšia-savit.
   I.am.hungry-APPR
   'I am kind of hungry.'

b. šešešinda-savit.
   I.got.scared-APPR
   'I kind of got scared.'

In the 1960’s the marking was considered to be a violation of literary norms. Later, since the 1980’s, literary works have been reflecting such uses. Most importantly the forms are not comprehended by native speakers as dialectal, idiolectal, marginal or unacceptable any more. The marking serves a special function, to express uncertainty, doubt of the speaker regarding the event and its intensity referred to by the host verb form. Thus, apart from the usual meta-level use, the ending -savit got the object-level use as well, where the semantics of the host verb form gets affected.
[8] Georgian

a. mombezrda.
   I am fed up with it
   ‘I am fed up with it.’

b. mombezrda-savit.
   I am kind of fed up with it.
   (From [Mor04, p. 100])


momšvda-savit.
   I got hungry-appr
   ‘I got hungry a bit.’

The forms with the suffix -savit listed in [JKB88] are exclusively psych verbs. However, today the suffix can appear with any verb class, as the data collected for this talk shows.

The suffix -savit is interesting from typological and diachronic perspectives. Typologically, it shows a rare phenomenon of using exclusively nominal affixes with fully inflected verbs. Although there are cases of originally nominal affixes used with finite verbs cross-linguistically, they are mostly employed as a syntactic tool, namely, as subordinating affixes (see, e.g., the Dolakhali Newari inst marker -na in (10) or the Pitta-Pitta abl. marker -inya in (11), both used as subordinators). The Georgian suffix -savit with fully inflected verbs, however, is not a subordinator, affecting the syntax of the clause but rather a device, affecting the semantics of the base form, to which it attaches.

(10) Dolakhali Newari (Tibeto-Burman), [Gen91, p. 227]
    chē-ku yer-na wā ām-e naku məng-an con-gu
    house-LOC come-INST EMPH he-gen cheek swell-PARTICLE stay-3SG:PASTHAB
    ‘When he came to the house, his cheek was swollen.’

(11) Pitta-Pitta (Pama–Nyungan, Australia), [Bla99, p. 305]
    Tatyi-ka-inya, mutyi-ka nganyya
    eat-PAST-ABL sleep-PAST I
    ‘After eating, I slept.’

This talk will also consider the grammaticalization path from the old Georgian adverb vitar meaning “approximately” to the modern day postposition -vit “as”, “like” (see Table 1), used in the approximative suffix -savit. As expected in a grammaticalization scenario [HT03], there is a reduction of the form and the acquisition of more grammatical functions, in combination with losing the lexical characteristics related to the initial form.

Some of the recent uses, however, show the ending -savit separated from the base verb by some particles (12). Thus, the bound morpheme gets an unbound use, contradicting the principle of unidirectionality of grammaticalization. This makes the approximator (-)savit interesting from a diachronic perspective as well.

(12) Modern Georgian, posted on 6.08.2007 at
    https://forum.ge/?showtopic=33758767&view=findpost&p=6336527
    kalastan šederebi netrebko ubralod myeris, ra... savit.
    [Maria]Callas-to comparing [Anna]Netrebko simply she.sings PARTICLE APTR
    Lit.: Compared to Callas, Netrebko simply sings, well, kind of.
    ‘Compared to Callas, Netrebko’s singing only looks like singing.’
Table 1: Diachronic development of the modern Georgian postposition -vit “as”, “like” from the old Georgian adverb vitar “approximately”

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| “approximately” | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| “how” (interrogative) | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| “how” (relative) | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| “as”, “like” | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES |

References


