



*grossir* ‘make/get thicker’;  
*refroidir* ‘make/get colder’  
*baisser* ‘make/get lower’;  
*chauffer* ‘make/get hotter’;  
*hausser* ‘make/get higher’

The problem is that these verbs admit two different approaches:

- ❖ “lability of verbs”;
- ❖ “lability of markers”: variance is caused by the properties of markers or declension types and does not depend on the meaning of the verb.

We can regard systems with a number X of base labile verbs “more labile” than systems with the same number of derived labile verbs: therefore, German is “more labile” than French, which is also proved by other facts.

### 1.2. Diathetic class of labile verbs

Lability can be divided into diathetic classes ([Ljutikova 2002], [Letuchiy 2004]): anticausative, reflexive, converse, passive, reciprocal lability. We can see which class is the main one in a system:

Alutor: reflexive class;

- (3) a.  $\gamma\text{əmm}\text{ə}$      $t\text{ə-tivla-tk}\text{ən}$   
 I.NOM    1SG.S-shake.off-IPF  
 ‘I shake myself off’;
- b.  $\gamma\text{əm-nan}$      $t\text{ə-tivla-tk}\text{ə-n}$      $nal\gamma\text{ə-n}$   
 I-ERG    1SG.A-shake.off-IPF-3SG.P    skin-acc  
 ‘I shake the skin (beat the dust out of the skin) off’.

Alutor is almost the only languages where reflexive lability prevales.

However, this case is rather rare: in almost all languages the **anticausative** type prevales, which is perhaps due to role of reflexive and causative/anticausative markers in language systems:

- ❖ almost all systems have reflexive markers, whereas many of them do not have either causative or anticausative markers;
- ❖ anticausative meaning combines naturally with a wider class of situations than reflexivity or reciprocity;
- ❖ lability tends to bind two “autonomous” situations, which can be presented as two variants of the same situation.

Reflexive, reciprocal and converse types are not only **rare**, but also **hardly predictable**: they do not strictly correlate with areals or grammatical properties of languages.

### 1.3. Semantic class of (anticausative) labile verbs

Anticausative labile verbs can, in turn, be divided into semantic classes. There are **core** and **peripheral** language systems:

**Core system:** Adyghe. Labile verbs belong to prototypically transitive class: they have a prototypical agent or causer and a prototypical patient, which is a material object and changes its properties during the situation:

- (4) a.  $\text{č}\text{a}\text{š}\text{k}\text{e-r}$      $q\text{w}\text{ə}\text{t}\text{a-}\text{ɕ}\text{e}$   
 cup-ABS    break-PERF  
 ‘The cup broke’;
- b.  $se$   $\text{č}\text{a}\text{š}\text{k}\text{e-r}$      $se-q\text{w}\text{ə}\text{t}\text{e}$   
 I cup-ABS    break-PRES  
 ‘I break the cup’.

Core systems are of the following types:

1. **patient**-prominent systems;

2. **spontaneity**-prominent systems.

In **1**, degree of patientivity of the second argument is important: the most prototypical are the patient of destruction verbs. On the other hand, some verbs like ‘begin’ or ‘sing’ do not have a prototypical patient at all.

**Lezgian**: verbs with prototypical patient: ‘kill’, ‘break’, ‘burn’ etc. Cf. also **Agul**: the most numerous class are destruction verbs ([Daniel, Majsak, Merdanova 2006]).

**Russian, Arabic**: no verbs with prototypical patient, cf. Arabic labile verbs of symmetric situations:

Arabic:

- (5) a. y-as‘ub-u                                    ‘alay-hi    ’an    y-usa:wi:  
           3M-be\_difficult-SG    on-3SG.M    to    3M-equal.PRS.SG

ma‘a al-’a:h̄ar-i:na    fi: al-mas’u:liyyat-i  
 with DEF-other-GEN.PL    in DEF-responsibility-GEN

‘It is difficult for him to be responsible equally with others’ (lit. ‘to be equal with others in responsibility’).

- b. y-usa:wi:-hi                                    ma‘a    al-Wuqrat-i  
           3M-equalize.PRS.SG-3SG.M    with    DEF-Wuqra-GEN  
           ‘It makes it (a football team) equal with Wuqra (a football team)’.

In such systems characteristics of the **participant** are more prominent than those of **the situation as a whole**.

In **2**, degree of spontaneity is important (see spontaneity scale above).

**Adyge**: lability of non-spontaneous situations: *qWEten* ‘break’, *jEteqWEn* ‘spill’, *zepEBEn* ‘break’, *ze(et)HEn* ‘tear’, *wEI&WejE* ‘dirt’; in the left end, lability is rare – most often a marked variant like in (6c) is used:

- (6) a.    psə-r                    ma-ž<sub>w</sub>e  
           WATER-ABS    DYN-BOIL  
           ‘The water boils’.
- b.    se    čet-ər                    se-ž<sub>w</sub>e  
           I    CHICKEN-ABS    1SG.A-BOIL  
           ‘I boil a chicken’.
- c.    se    čet                    se-ʁa-ž<sub>w</sub>e  
           I    CHICKEN    1SG.A-CAUS-BOIL  
           ‘I boil a chicken’.

The second variant, with a marked verb, is much more frequent.

**French**: lability of spontaneous situations: *brûler* ‘burn’, *fondre* ‘melt’, *sécher* ‘dry’. Verbs of the right end of the scale are either non-labile (‘spill’ *briser* ‘break’) or have both labile and non-labile patterns (*casser* ‘break’):

- (7) a.    *J’ai cassée la tasse* ‘I broke a cup’;  
       b.    *La tasse a cassé* ‘The cup broke’;  
       c.    *La tasse s’est cassé* ‘The cup broke’

See [Labelle 1990] on their distribution.

**Peripheral** systems: labile verbs do not belong to the prototypically transitive class: they either do not have a prototypical patient or a prototypical agent. The main classes which are labile in PS are **phase and motion verbs** (cf. the “move and change class”, usually analyzed as a single class which does not behave so concerning lability).

Russian, Ancient Greek, partially Polish: motion verbs:

Russian:

- (8) a. mašin-a mč-it po ulic-e  
 car-NOM rush-3SG.PRS along street-DAT  
 ‘The car drives fastly along the street’;  
 b. pojezd-Ø mč-al nas na jug-Ø  
 train-NOM rush-SG.M.PAST we.ACC to south-ACC  
 ‘The train drove us to South’.

Ancient Greek:

- (9) a. ball-o belos-Ø  
 throw-1SG arrow-ACC  
 ‘I throw an arrow’;  
 b. potam-os eis al-a ball-ei  
 river-NOM to sea-ACC throw-3SG  
 ‘The river flows into the sea’.

Motion verbs are not prototypically transitive:

- ❖ no prototypical patient;
- ❖ no prototypical agent (often express sociative causation).

Bulgarian and many other languages: phase verbs.

- (10) a. započn-a da govori  
 begin-3SG.PAST CONJ speak-3SG.PRS  
 ‘He began to speak’;π  
 b. godina-ta započn-a  
 year-DEF begin-3SG.PAST  
 ‘The year began’.

(!) Variance even in Turkic languages, which does not have lability generally.

Lability of phase verbs is presumably of different type: cf. *Samolet nachal padeniye* ‘The plain began to fall’, with the transitive, but not causative variant.

Mixed types of systems:

**French**, though having a large class of prototypically transitive labiles, also has a group of motion verbs: *descendre* ‘go/lead down’, *sortir* ‘go/take out’, *entrer* ‘go/take in’, *monter* ‘go/lead up’. Not surprisingly, lability in French affects the **left end** of the spontaneity scale and **agentive** verbs of motion.

**Adyghe**, having many non-spontaneous labiles, also have labile phase verbs. This proves that lability of peripheral verbs does not depend on “core” lability – but **peripheral systems** grammaticalize lability less than core.

1.4. Homogenous/heterogenous systems

We expect a grammatical marker to apply to a **semantically homogenous** class of objects: for example, **only a particular class of nouns**. It is not always applicable to lability.

The more homogenous a system is, the more lability is characteristic for a language system:

**German** is “more labile” than **French** (many labiles on the scale, no motion verbs).

**Bulgarian** (a whole labile group of phase verbs) is “more labile” than **Arabic** (labile verbs from different classes).

**BUT**

Lability of a particular class can be a result of different processes: labile motion verbs in Russian presumably results from omission of objects.

Therefore, we can see the following types of systems:

large, homogenous, core: **Adyghe, Agul**

small, homogenous, core: **Lezgian**

small, homogenous, peripheral: **Russian**

large, homogenous, peripheral: **no examples**  
 small, heterogenous, core: **Bagvalal?**  
 large, heterogenous, core: **German, English, Avar, Greek**  
 small, heterogenous, peripheral: **Bulgarian, Arabic**  
 large, heterogenous, peripheral: **French**

We can see that lability is more grammaticalized in **large, homogenous, core systems**: it serves as a derivational marker and not a lexical semantic process. French is, for example, more grammatically labile than Latin and other Romance languages, but less than German.

### 1.5. Compatibility of labile verbs with markers

Labile verbs can admit or prohibit addition of derivational markers: cf. Russian *kapat* ‘drop/fall in drops’ - \**kapat’sja* ‘fall in drops’ and Adyghe verbs *qWEten* ‘break’ (does not admit the causative marker) and *wEI&wejEn* ‘soil’ (compatible with the causative marker).

This factor can also prove stronger/weaker grammaticality of lability:

**French, Bulgarian**: labile verbs are compatible with the marker *se*;

**German, Adyghe**: non-spontaneous labiles are incompatible with the markers (be it causative or anticausative marker).

In German and Adyghe lability is the only way to express derivations of particular verbs – therefore, it is a sort of grammatical marker.

## **2. Factors of lability in language system**

1. alignment ([Drossard 1998], [Vajda 2005]);
2. system of derivational markers ([Klimov, Alexeev 1980]);
3. pro-drop ([Vajda 2005]);
4. structure of verb form ([Polinskaja 1986], [Vajda 2005]).

### 2.1. Alignment

Does not really affect the **number** of labile verbs; rather their semantic classes:

Ergative: core, homogenous systems.

Accusative: peripheral, heterogenous systems.

Presumably it is connected with transitivity systems:

Ergative: “semantic” transitivity ([Testelec 1998]):

- (11) se      čale-m      s-je-we  
 I      BOY-ERG      1SG.S-3SG.IO-HIT  
 ‘I hit a boy’;

Accusative: transitivity characterizes a large class of predicates, not obligatorily prototypically transitive.

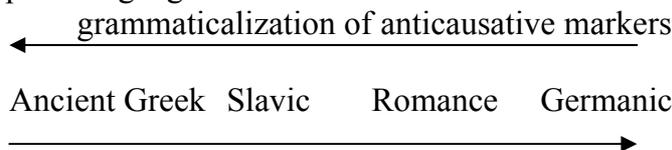
Lability characterizes “rather transitive” predicates, which are supposed to be prototypically transitive by a particular language system.

### 2.2. System of derivational markers

[Klimov, Alexeev 1986]: lability in Caucasian languages results from “absence of passive markers”, which does not really explain variety of Caucasian systems (11 labiles in Godoberi, 28 in Agul, about 80 in Adyghe).

More exact is the parameter of **degree of grammaticalization** of markers.

Indo-European languages:



Germanic marker: case and person inflection;

French: only person;

Slavic: neither person nor case.

Lability is particularly rare in languages with “middle inflection” (Ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic, Kartvelian), because in such cases markers are built into the system of inflection. In Greek and Romance it is more developed because of change in valency-changing markers.

Indo-European

grammaticalization of anticausative  
“spontaneous” labile verbs  
more peripheral labiles

vs.

Caucasian languages:

grammaticalization of causative  
non-spontaneous labile verbs  
less peripheral labiles

**NB: generally, spontaneity scale tend to be included into “anticausative” zone.**

**Therefore, Indo-European languages tend to have more peripheral labiles. Lability, as predicted partially by [Nichols 2004], “substitutes” for anticausative and not causative – in the case of absence of the causative marker it occupies the peripheral zone.**

Of course, these tendencies are rather scalar than binary:

- ❖ small Caucasian systems are more “core” than small European systems (cf. Lezgian – only verbs with prototypical patient);
- ❖ big Caucasian systems are more homogenous than big European systems (cf. Adyghe – only verbs of non-spontaneous situations).

Peripheral labiles almost do not correlate with the properties of grammar – therefore, they are rather a result of lexical semantic processes.

### 2.3. Pro-drop

[Vajda 2005]: lability is not developed in languages with pro-drop: cf. English, Kartvelian.

BUT: compare Adyghe, with developed pro-drop and lability:

- (12) ə-qwəta-ɤ  
3SG.A-BREAK-PAST  
‘(S)he broke it’.

Intransitive and “pro-drop” uses are not homonymous because of personal agreement in the verb form.

Cf. also Bulgarian which is “more labile” than Russian and has more developed prodrop:

Bulgarian:

- (13) iska-Ø      da      ni      vid-i  
want-3SG      CONJ      we.ACC      see-3SG  
‘He wants to see us’;

Russian:

- (14) on      xoche-t      nas      vid-et’  
he.nom      want-3sg      we.ACC      see-INF  
‘He wants to see us’.

Maybe pro-drop (of objects) is connected with A-lability – these two phenomena are generally hardly distinguishable. Both pro-drop and A-lability are connected with pragmatic properties of the object.

### **3. Areal features of lability**

Lability characterizes particular language areals. [Nichols 2004]: Eurasia (which is not true for the whole Eurasia).

**Areal with highly-developed lability:**

1. Standard average European, Central Europe:

- Germanic languages;
- French – more than any other Romance.

2. Caucasus

3. Eastern Asia – Chinese (?)

#### 4. Africa (see below)

##### **Areal with small groups of labile verbs:**

###### 1. South Europe:

- Bulgarian – more than any other Slavic (lability of all phase verbs); also is typologically more close to SAE than any other Slavic language: developed TAM system, not grammaticalized anticausative marker, non-developed case system.
- Romance;
- South America – many prototypically-transitive labile verbs.

###### 2. Semitic: Hebrew, Arabic

##### **Areal (almost) without lability:**

###### 1. Eastern Europe:

Baltic, East Slavic.

###### 2. Central and Northern Asia:

Turkic, Iranian.

### **3.1. Africa**

African languages tend to have lability of stative-passive type, which is generally unusual for all other areals.

Bamana: passives proper [Vydrine 1994]: *dán* ‘plant/be planted’, *sinsan* ‘enclose/be enclosed’.

Songay [Galiamina 2006]: some statives of the type *taka* ‘create (of God)’/‘be created (by God)’, *husu* ‘damn’/‘be damned’

Cabiyle: agentless passives (cf. a passive proper in 16c):

- (15) a. mDl-n            t            ukSar  
bury-3PL.M            him below  
‘They buried him below’;
- b. ugi-n            ad            y-mDl            ukSar  
refuse-3PL.M IRREAL            3SG-bury            below  
‘They did not want him to be buried below’. [Chaker 1983: 294].
- c. y-Tw-aDfr            s            wuŠn  
3SG-PASS-pursue by jackal  
‘He was pursued by a jackal’ [Chaker 1983: 312].

These different diathetic types are manifestations of the same tendency to “stativity-passivity” – cf. Caucasian languages without stative labiles.

### **Conclusions**

- ❖ Properties of a system can show how much is lability “grammatical” – serves as a sort of grammatical marker. – but the main parameter is not the number but core/peripheral lability, homogenous/heterogenous etc. Whereas small homogenous core systems of lability are similar to grammatical markers, peripheral systems are not.

#### Grammatical and non-grammatical lability.

“Grammatical” (Caucasian languages)	“Non-grammatical” (Indo-European languages)
many labile verbs	few labile verbs
“core” labile verbs	“peripheral” labile verbs
incompatible with markers of derivations	compatible with markers
homogenous	heterogenous

- ❖ Therefore, “non-grammatical” and “grammatical” systems of lability can be regarded as different phenomena – however, “non-grammatical” systems with lability of a particular small class of verbs can turn into “grammatical” systems.

- ❖ Properties of systems depend on areals and grammatical properties. The main grammatical parameter is properties of derivational markers – non only their (non)-existence, but also degree of grammaticalization.
- ❖ “Standard average European” and “Standard average Caucasian” not by **number** of labile verbs, but by **their semantic class**. Therefore, in the latter lability is more “grammatical” than in the former.
- ❖ Properties of labile systems let us speak about lability as a typological parameter not only in terms of number of labile verbs.

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