In my article on the typological significance of status in the Lak verbal system (Friedman 1984), I accepted the terminologies of Zirkov (1955) and Burčuladze (1979) for the purpose of examining Lak status categories in the broader context of Balkan and Caucasian languages. Implicit in my acceptance of that terminology was the acceptance of certain assumptions about grammatical meanings associated with those terms unless otherwise specified. Thus, for example, I used the term confirmative (based on the Russian utverditel'nyj 'affirmative' and podverditel'nyj 'confirmative') for the synthetic finite verbal forms based on the participle in -ss[ə]-, and I cited some examples of typical usage without being able to enter into greater detail, due to the paucity of information in the available sources. I also attempted to draw some limited parallels with forms called confirmative in Balkan languages, e.g., Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Turkish. In this article dedicated to Academican Akaği Şanidze, I wish to examine these Lak screes in greater detail, and I will try to characterize their basic meaning, which, as I hope to justify here, I will label assertive.

I will be primarily concerned with the synthetic, finite, aspectually unmarked, nonmodal present and past screes of the type čičajssar, -a, -u ('write', present), čičussar, -a, -u ('write', past), and to a lesser extent čičašsija, -v ('write', imperfect). In addition to the two Russian terms mentioned above, these forms have been described by the Georgian term mṭšebetbi 'affirmative, assertive'. The available sources on Lak, however, do not go much further than the label in defining these forms. Burčuladze (1979:244) compares them with the English construction in do as in the following example:

(1) Na čičajssar čağar
I do write a letter.

Xajdakov (1961:116) observes that the present assertive is the standard screee used in proverbs and cites a number of examples, including the following:

(2) Kā'valin lavgunni karu laččul čimus naqu x—unu gaqabučajasar.
Having gone to the Kaaba, garlic does not return sweet.

Merkelinskij (1971) generally renders the affect of the Lak assertive into Russian by using the adverb dejstvitel'no 'really', although he also uses imenno 'precisely' and opredelenno 'definitely', as in the following examples:2

I wrote (precisely) [it].

(4) Ina čičussar. =Ty (dejstvitel'no) napisal. (Merkelinskij 1971:180)
You (really) wrote [it].

(5) Na zunftissara. =Ja (opredelenno) budu rabotat'. (Merkelinskij 1971:181)
I (definitely) will work.

Beyond these, there are no explicit observations on the assertive other than, e.g., Xajdakov's that the plain and assertive imperative are "verma bizki po značeniju drug drugu" (Xajdakov 1953:12, cited in Burčuladze 1979:195) 'extremely close to one another in meaning.3

The chief peculiarity of the present and past assertive is that they are used in what appear to be two distinct contexts and functions. On the one hand, these assertives function in colloquial speech as a type of emphatic, i.e., the speaker is purposefully emphasizing the truth of the proposition, as in example (6), where the surrounding context makes it clear that the speaker is greatly excited and is trying to impress his listeners with the urgency of the fact that the time to act has indeed arrived:

(6) Nani! Çunsar! (Murqgilinskij 1980:49)
Come on! It is time!

On the other hand, and this is not observed in the grammars, the present assertive functions in expository prose as the most common present tense screee. Example (7) is typical in this respect:

(7) Agar maq kiva čuralij čičajssar bux—urča, slovar’danumu kvagvu žura kkakkka buvnu bussar. (Xajdakov 1962:17)
If a word has two written forms, both forms are shown in the dictionary.

Consider also in this light the contrast between examples (8) and (9) as well as the statement made in example (10):

(8)

(9)

(10)
expository prose, e.g., as if a news item or historical event were being reported in a formal context. Or the purpose could be to impress the reader, i.e., as if the author were saying: “This really happened...” This second possibility seems less likely since the assertive continues to be used for the entire first paragraph of the story until the introduction of the dialogue.

How, then, can the meanings of ‘personal emphasis’ and ‘neutrality’ be reconciled? One possible explanation is suggested by the Turkish enclitic -dir, etc., which functions both as a type of emphatic and as a copulative particle. The principle functions of -dir can be illustrated by the following examples from Lewis (1967:97):

(12a) Vesika kasadad.  
Writing/Formal Speech: The document is in the safe.  
Informal speech: The document is surely in the safe/The document is in the safe.

(12b) Vesika kesada.  
Informal Speech: The document is in the safe.

As Lewis points out, -dir functions as a copula in writing and formal speech (as in 12a), but it is ordinarily omitted in informal speech (as in 12b). The use of -dir as a copula in informal speech will usually have the effect of emphasizing the predicate, although such emphasis can actually render the predicate less certain, as can be seen from the translation of (12b) which uses the adverb surely. The Turkish enclitic -dir has a wide range of uses which are not comparable to the Lak assertive, but the essential dichotomy — formal:neutral/informal:emphatic — is analogous. I would suggest, therefore, that the two different uses of the Lak assertive are reconcilable into a single meaning, viz., ‘objective assertion.’ Formal contexts are ordinarily supposed to be objective, and so the use of a form that specifies the predicate as an objective fact will be contextually neutral. Informal contexts, however, usually imply some degree of subjectivity, and so the use of a marked objective form will be contextually emphatic, i.e., emphasis on objectification (vs. personal opinion) is neutral in a formal context but emphatic in an informal one.

This in turn leads to my choice of the term assertive over, e.g., confirmative or affirmative. I eschewed the term affirmative (Russian uveritel’nyy) in my earlier work on Lak due to the fact that in English this term is often opposed to negative and interrogative as one of the three basic types of sentences, and I still hold to that view. In my work on Balkan languages (e.g., Friedman 1978), I have used the term confirmative to refer to screes in which the speaker always personally
vouches for the truth of the predicate. Such forms are characterized, among other things, by the fact that they can only refer to events which have already occurred (i.e., are past) and can thus be truly vouched for as well as merely believed in. The Lak assertive occurs not only in the past and present but also, e.g., in the future (čičišvara) and conditional (čičijašanja, čičijašanja). Also, the common (plain, unmarked) forms to which the Lak assertives are opposed do not carry nuances of nonconfirmativeness (e.g., reportedness) such as occur in the nonconfirmative past forms of the Balkans. Such nuances in Lak are carried by various analytic and syntactic constructions, e.g., those in jar, unukka, xxaj ur, and the present gerund with -usa -ur. The term assertive, which is one of the possible translations of the Georgian mtkacebiti, best captures the meaning of the Lak finite synthetic forms based on the participle in -s(a). Just as in English, an assertion can be objective or aggressive (consider, e.g., the term assertiveness training), so also in Lak the assertive can be objective in formal writing or speech but aggressive, or emphatic, in informal speech.

This Lak phenomenon is extremely important to a broader understanding of status categories, i.e., categories involving a personal evaluation of the narrated event. Despite the obvious similarities between assertive and confirmative meanings, the two are clearly different gradations on a continuum of “positive personal involvement,” while nonconfirmATIVE, unwitnessed, reported, etc., continue in the direction of “negative personal involvement.”

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Notes

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2 Interestingly enough, Murqulinskij (1980:108-111) does not distinguish between assertive and nonassertive screeves in his section on tense in his Lak school grammar.

3 Murkelnijk uses opredelenny only in future assertive screeves, which are beyond the defined scope of this article. Nonetheless, an example has been included in order to give a fuller picture of the nuances carried by assertive forms.

4 This pair of forms is problematic in many respects, including the accuracy of the label impreFFect, and I will treat them in a later work. In the remainder of this article, I will restrict my attention to the forms labeled present and past (čičajšar, čičusšar, etc.).

5 There are certain contexts in informal speech where -dir is not or cannot be omitted, but these are not relevant to this discussion (see Lewis 1967:97).

6 See Lewis (1967:97-98, 139-41; also Friedman 1978:112-13). The analogies are potentially quite far-reaching, but they must be the subject of a separate study.

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