Stem regularisation, stem synthesis and stem production in Tat

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Tat is a group of Iranian dialects, closely related to Persian and spoken historically in Azerbaijan and southern Russia. It is divided into two main dialect groups with little mutual intelligibility: Judaeo-Tat (JT) and Muslim Tat (MT), which further branches out into distinct varieties.

Tat tense-aspect-mood (TAM) categories, like in many Iranian languages, feature a binary stem distinction, whereby either stem represents the morphological nucleus of a given TAM category. The morphological distribution of the two stems in Tat resembles that in Persian. The Iranian linguistic tradition refers to them as "present stem" and "past stem". Owing to the semantic distribution of the Tat TAM categories, different from that of Persian, I have opted for the terms "Stem 1" (for "present stem") and "Stem 2" (for "past stem").

Tat dialects are affected by a stem reanalysis process, which, on the one hand, reduces or eliminates the difference between historical stems and, on the other hand, creates a new stem distinction. In this talk, I will use diachronic information and dialectal comparison to illustrate the development of this change, which seems to have been in progress since at least the mid-nineteenth century.
Tat dialects show a tendency for regularising the stems by likening Stem 1 to Stem 2 (Şirvan MT, being conservative, serves as the diachronic reference):

Table 1.

Verb	Stem	Şirvan MT	Qonaqkənd MT	Xızı MT	Quba JT	Abşeron MT
'to do'	1	*soz-*	*sä-, sän-, säz-, säx-*	*sä-, sän-*	*sox-*	*sax-*
	2	*soxt-*	*säxt-*	*säxt-*	*soxt-*	*saxt-*
'to sell'	1	*fürš-*	*fürš-, fürux-*	*fürux-*	*furux-*	*furux-*
	2	*furuxt-*	*füruxt-*	*füruxt-*	*furuxt-*	*furuxt-*

For some verbs, Abşeron MT shows complete syncretism of Stems 1 and 2:

Table 2.

Verb	Stem	Şirvan MT	Abşeron MT
'to want'	1	*xoh-*	*xast-*
	2	*xost-*	*xast-*
'to walk'	1	*gärd-*	*gešt-*
	2	*gäšt-*	*gešt-*

As a result, the categories whose only difference lay in the stem opposition can no longer be distinguished:

Table 3.

Verb	Category	Şirvan MT	Abşeron MT
'to walk'	Subjunctive	*gärd-um*	*gešt-üm*
	Preterite	*gäšt-um*	*gešt-üm*

The Abşeron MT sub-variety of Balaxanı has resolved this by shifting the stress from the stem to the agreement marker – the only case in Tat where stress becomes a morphological feature. This is done only for the verbs that display the synthesis. The Suraxanı sub-variety, however, displays complete loss of morphological distinction:

Table 4.

Verb	Category	Balaxanı		Suraxanı	
'to walk'	Subjunctive	ˈgešt-üm	ˈxun-üm	ˈgešt-üm	ˈxun-üm
	Preterite	gešt-ˈüm	ˈxund-üm	ˈgešt-üm	ˈxund-üm

Stem 2 is thus reanalysed as the basic form of which other forms are derived.

In Tat, the imperfective construction is relatively young, consisting (for most dialects) of the prefix *bä-* (grammaticalised out of a dative-locative adposition) + the infinitive (based on Stem 2) + the agreement marker, e.g. *raftän* (go.INF) 'to go' → *bä-raftän-üm* 'I (am) go(ing)'. This construction has yielded a "new imperfective stem" whereby the elements preceding the agreement marker have fused such that the original construction is no longer morphologically identifiable.

Table 5.

Şirvan			Qonaqkənd		
bä-güftirän-um	→	*äfän-um*	*bä-raftän-üm*	→	*bartan-üm*
		'I (am) say(ing)'			'I (am) go(ing)'
ba-dunustan-um	→	*bastan-um*	*bä-gästän-üm*	→	*bägäšt-üm*
		'I know'			'I (am) walk(ing)'

Some dialects have substituted *bä-* by *mi-*, e.g. *mi-raftän-üm* 'I (am) go(ing)'. For the verbs where *bä-* had already fused with the following morpheme, *mi-* attaches to the fused imperfective base, e.g. *mi-bastan-um* 'I know' (← *mi-ba-dunustan-um*), leading to *bastan-* being analysed as an imperfective stem in its own right.

With no external influence at play, it looks like Abşeron Tat is undergoing an internal functional reorganisation whereby morphology is "winning" over function until the system reacts in order to ensure functional clarity.