

About the Past Progressive Suffix *watatti* and its Combined Usage with the Suffix *atti*

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1. Introduction

The purpose of these notes is to characterize the verbal suffix *watatti*, and to distinguish it from the form *atti*.

Further, we will look at one peculiarity in the usage of *watatti*. The point of interest here is the observation that *watatti* can be followed by the form *atti*, and the events expressed by *atti* occur in the same timeframe that is set by *watatti*, i.e. parallelly.

2. Distinction between *atti* and *watatti*

atti is a suffix that marks a **past imperfective aspect**:

Very often it is used as a **habitual**.

Ex. 1

Men köp hallarda derwazining keynige shepisiz kélip, möküp turup tingshayttim.
Many times I sneaked behind the gate, stood there hiding and listened.
(Qahar, Emethaji, p. 4)

But it can also express a **continuous**.

Ex. 2

... héliqi kishi öymu'öy yürüp ishiklerni qéqip warqiraytti: ...
... that man was going from house to house, banging at the doors and shouting: ...
(Hoshur, Nozugum, p. 326)

Ex. 3

Chöl asminida sansiz yultuzlar jimirlaytti. Etraptin tögilerning pushuldashliri, atlarning ot yéyishliri, sürgünlerning ulugh-kichik tinghan awazliri anglinatti. Patpat, panus kötergen quruqchilar uyaq-buyaqaqqa ötüp qalatti. Tütep köyüwatqan gülxanlardin chöl ösümlükliri yiltizining puraqliq isi kélip dimaghqa urulatti. Kigiz öylerdin mest bolup qalghan leshker bashliqlirining warqirashliri anglinatti.
On the sky above the desert countless stars were sparkling. From the surroundings one could hear the camels' wheezing, the horses's hey-eating, the sound of the captives' groaning. Again and again the lantern-carrying guards were passing back and forth. From the smoky burning bonfires the smoke smelling after desert plant roots came and was "hitting the nose". From the yurts the shouting of the drunken soldiers' leaders could be heard.
(Hoshur, Nozugum, p. 348)

Like *atti*, the form *watatti* also expresses **past continuous**. *watatti* is a combination of *atti* with the suffix *wat*. *wat* signals continuous aspect also in the present, compare

Balam her küni mektepke baridu. - "My child goes to school every day."

versus

Bala mektepke kétiwatidu. - "The child is going (is on his way) to school."

An example for the past continuous *watatti* is this:

Ex. 4

Yenida turghan ikki qiz téxiche uni ékskursiye qiliwatatti.
The two girls standing nearby still were examining him.
(Ghopur, Künlüksiz adem, p. 207)

It is actually not easy to render the difference between *atti* and *watatti* in an English translation, and at times one could be used instead of the other. The question arises, what the difference between the two forms is.¹ One explanation could be that *atti* may be used to describe something that was going on for a longer time, while *watatti* may be used for something that was going on for a shorter duration. But this distinction is not sufficient to explain the difference between the two suffixes. Without providing a full answer, the usage of *watatti* shall be characterized further.

3. Usage of *watatti*

watatti does not occur in a "vacuum". It describes **something that happened at a given moment** in the event line of a story. This point of reference can be given before or after the sentence with *watatti*.

a) When the point of reference is given before, then *watatti* is used to **describe that moment in more detail**.

Ex. 5

Shu tapta yéngilgen xelqning bir wekili uning sözini ret qiliwatatti.

Right now a representative of the defeated people was rejecting his word.

(Hoshur, Nozugum, p. 322)

Like in the above example, this form sometimes **underlines the tension** in a situation. In the course of a dialog, the following sentence is interspersed to relate the heated atmosphere. (The preceding finite verb is a speech orienter (*dedi* - "he said").

Ex. 6

Bowayning so'alliri aka-uka ikkisining yürükige zichtek sanjiliwatatti.

The old man's questions were piercing the hearts of the two brothers like skewers.

(Qahar, Aka-ukilar, p. 47)

b) When the point of reference is not yet given, then *watatti* points to it. It is used to describe **the situation which exists before a certain event occurs**, and thus often raises tension.

Ex. 7

Rexmitulla yérimlashqan tamning töpisiqe chiqip tash uruwatatti.

Seydulla bolsa topa tashlap bériwatatti.

Ebeydulla ularning yénigha keldi: ...

"Rechmitulla had climbed on top of the half-built wall and was pounding with the *tash* [a tool].

Seydulla for his part was helping [lit. giving] him throwing the dirt [to be pounded], (when) Ebeydulla came close to them: ..."

(Qahar, Aka-ukilar, p. 54).

¹ Compare what Tömür and Lee (362) write about the two forms: Regarding *atti* they say: "When the writer of a literary work is relating certain **things which were happening before or at the time of an event**, he basically uses the [this] form." (Tömür / Lee, Modern Uyghur Grammar, p. 362).

About *maqta idi* (and *watatti*, which is used parallelly in the example) they say, it can be used to describe "**an action which is continuing or a fixed state which is in existence before the occurrence of, or at the time of, a certain matter**". (p. 381).

It is difficult to make out the difference between these definitions.

In this case, where the two brothers work closely together, the two *watatti*-forms follow each other. Generally though there seems to be a tendency to avoid the immediate repetition of *watatti*.

Given the fact that *watatti* can point forward, it **draws the reader's attention to a particular scene**. The following example shows how a sequence of events (told with *-Ti*) is interrupted by *watatti*.

Ex. 8

Leshkerler ... kigiz öy tikishti. ... sürgünler ... tögilerning otturisigha orunlashturuldi. ... leshkerler gülxan yéqip yétishti. Shu tapta, nériraqtiki chong gülxanning etrapigha birmunche leshkerler olishiwalghan bolup, otturida olturghan qériraq leshker néme toghrisididur qiziship hékaye qilip bériwatatti.

The soldiers set up yurts The captives were placed in the middle of the camels ... The soldiers lit a bonfire and laid down. At that moment, some soldiers had gathered around the big bonfire that was a bit further away, and the elder soldier sitting in the middle excitedly was telling a story about something rather.

(Hoshur, Nozugum, p. 346)

Following this **setting** information, part of the soldier's story is rendered in the text.

4. Combined Usage of *watatti* and *atti*

It was just said that *watatti* is used to describe the situation which exists before a certain event occurs, and / or describes a scene. Such a description can extend over several sentences. One might expect that in such a case, where several simultaneous events are described, which were all going on before a certain new event happened, the simultaneous events are all described using the form *watatti*. But this is not the case, at least often it is not. There are a good number of texts where **first *watatti* is used, and then *atti*, while all actions refer to the same time**.

In a short story one finds the following scene:

Ex. 9

Helimu esimde, kech küzning bir küni, teneppus waqtida balilar <bök tashlash> oyuni oynawatatti. Men bir chette boynumni qisip titrep turattim. Anargül aldimga yügürüp kelip: Yamanlap qalghandek nemishqa chette turisiz? Yürüng oynaymiz, - dedi-de, meni qolumdin tartipla meydangha chüshürdi.

It's still in my mind, on a late fall day, at the time of the break, the children were playing the game "drop the hat". I was standing on one edge, downcast [lit. bowing my neck and trembling]. Anargül came running to me: Why do you stand on the edge like feeling wronged? Come, we play, - she said, and pulling me by my hand she took me to the playground.

(Qahar, Emethaji, p. 10)

The actions expressed by *oyawatatti* and *turattim* happen at the same time. It is difficult to say which began first, but most likely it is the playing (*oyawatatti*). This means that the action expressed with *watatti* does not happen in a shorter timeframe than the action expressed by *atti*. Both refer to the same situation.

The text *Qiyamet* ("The Last Day") by Enwer Ghopur is a short story with a sequence of many short unrelated scenes which culminate in the last two sentences: "Life was as always, continued as always ... Too bad, at one such a time all of a sudden the sun disappeared, and dunked everything into dark ... the last day [of judgement] had come."... The various scenes

function according to this sample: "This and that was going on ... (when that last day came)". Thus, in a way, the whole story is an introduction to the last paragraph.

In some of the scenes, there is only one verb used, and for this the *watatti*-form is employed ("was going on") (paragraph 5, 12, 13, 14). In other cases, the description is longer. There, after the first verb being a *watatti*-form, the description continues with *atti*-forms (paragraph 1, 2, 3, 17). I.e. the description is **not** continued with *watatti*, even though the various related actions happen at the same time, parallelly. Usually the first sentence gives a "bigger picture", but mostly it is irrelevant which of the actions began first. The main thing is that all of them were happening when the big event hit. In one case (paragraph 3), the sequence "*watatti* / *atti* / *watatti*" is used. Consider paragraph 2 as a representative example:

Ex. 10

Balnistta yatqan yash ana eng azabliq minutlarni béshidin ötküzüwatatti, u warqiraytti, yulqunatti, toxtawsiz ingraytti. Yéngi bir jan dunyagha köz échish aldida turatti...

A young mother lying in hospital was undergoing the most painful moments, she was crying, writhing, continuously groaning. A new life was about to have its first glimpse of the world.

(Ghopur, Qiyamet, p. 246)

Thus, we can see that once *watatti* has been used, *atti* is enough to continue with, even when the same situation is elaborated on. It seems that usually *watatti* is only used once at a time, for reasons of style. To put it differently, **once *watatti* has established the relation to the main story line, the subsequent clauses are built with *atti*.**

Let us take a look at another example with an extended description of a scene.

Ex. 11

Burutliri emdila xet tartishqa bashlighan bir yigit topiliq harwa yolida atliq keliwatatti. Etrapitiki dalalarda chöl torghiyi churuqlishatti. Yiraqtiki toghraqliqlardin kakkuk awazi keletti. ...

On the dirt cart-road a young man whose moustache had just started to grow was coming on horseback. On the surrounding countryside the desert-lark [?] was twittering. From the trees [species?] afar the cuckoo's voice was coming. ...

(Hoshur, Nozugum, p. 337f.)

The above example is shortened. In the original, there is one clause with *watatti* and five follow with *atti*. The example (3) given further above shows that such **an extended description can also be given by only employing *atti*-forms**. The question how *watatti* and *atti* differ, could be answered by saying that a writer will start out with *watatti* (even if he continues with *atti*) for the purpose of marking that section **more prominent in the discourse**. In relation to the story event line though, *watatti*-clauses are still background information.

5. Conclusion

Both *atti* and *watatti* can be used as past continuous. Usually the time frame for *atti* is longer. Both can describe a scene. But while *atti* presents it from a somewhat more distant viewpoint, *watatti* aims at involving the reader in the current action. *watatti* expresses an event more acutely. It describes what was happening in a particular moment, and raises tension. It comes not rarely at the beginning of a paragraph and draws the reader's attention to a new scene or character.

Like *atti* as well, *watatti* can be used to describe the situation before a certain event. But when this is the case, the subsequent clauses, which elaborate on the situation, are often built with *atti* - while referring to the reference point given by *watatti*. In such cases there is no difference regarding the time frame that *watatti* and *atti* refer to.

One way of distinguishing *atti* and *watatti* is to call *atti* a "past continuous" form, and *watatti* a "past progressive" form. Hahn calls the *wat*-form "focal progressive".²

Tömür and Lee (381f.) quote an example from the works of Sabir where several actions which happen parallelly are rendered with a sequence of *watatti*, *maqta idi*, *watatti*. Thus, it is not an iron rule that *watatti* must be followed by *atti*. It is interesting though that in that example too, at least the immediate repetition of *watatti* is avoided.

All examples given here deal with the form *watatti*, i.e. the indicative mood (or "declarative", or "direct statement", as Tömür and Lee call it). For the forms of the other moods (e.g. *watqaniken*) see Tömür and Lee, p. 374ff.

6. *watatti* and *maqta idi*

The form *maqta* has almost the same meaning as the form *wat* (see Tömür / Lee p. 363ff.), and ***maqta idi* can be used interchangeably with *watatti*** (p. 374ff.). The form *maqta* is typically used in the language of journalists (cf. Friederich p. 101), but occurs also in narrative. The following example shows how *watatti* and *maqta idi* are used parallelly, only interrupted by one clause with *idi*.

Ex. 12

..., *jamening ichige ésilghan yoghan qazanlarda puruqlap gösh qaynawatatti*. ...
ashpezler aldirash idi, ..., *bu yerde Yang Daréngha alahide ziyapet teyyarlanmaqta idi*.

..., fragrant meat was cooking in the large pots that had been hung up inside the central mosque. ... the chefs were busy, ..., here was a special meal being prepared for the "Daren" [title] Yang.
(Hoshur, Nozugum, p. 321)

It is not surprising then, that the combination of *watatti* and *atti* as described under (4.) above works also for *maqta idi* and *atti*.

Ex. 13

Yéngi wélisipit üstide olturghan Hoshuraxun asfaltliq yolda shamaldek ghuyuldap chapmaqta idi we arilap dimighida ghingship naxsha éytatti.

Hoshuraxun, sitting on top of the new bike, was roaring like the wind, and racing along the paved road and occasionally humming a song to himself.
(Qahar, Arzu, p. 70)

Ex. 14

... *Sürgünler topi aldida palaqlap kéliwatqan pakar boyluq, saqalliq kelgen adem ... ene shundaq warqirap kelmekte idi*. *Uning uzun perije chapini ayighigha yögiship, ittik méngishigha kashila qilatti*.

... In front of the captives' crowd was coming, ... shouting like this, a man of small stature, busily running, having grown a beard. His long [traditional] cloak, flapping around his feet, was hindering him from walking fast.
(Hoshur, Nozugum, p. 335).

² In: Johanson / Csato: "The Turkic Languages", p. 393. Not specifically about the past form *watatti*, but applied to the present.