This paper aims to deal with systematic ambiguities of [verb + verb] sequences in Noghay, which is a South Kipchak Turkic language spoken in the northern Caucasus. Noghay has a very rich inventory of complex verbal predications consisting of at least two verbal predicates which are formally connected by means of a converb in -A or -(I)p. These constructions, besides the fact that the involving verbs can potentially appear in their lexical meanings (pluripredicative reading), can denote various grammatical notions (Karakoç 2005, 2007, 2017). As a result of typical Turkic grammaticalization processes the second verb of such constructions, which belongs to a closed set of verbs, can serve as an actionality modifier or viewpoint aspect operator. In Noghay, certain constructions further manifest ambiguity between intraterminal and postterminal viewpoint aspects. Since the grammaticalized items often do not demonstrate any special morphological or syntactic properties distinguishing them from the corresponding lexical items, we have to deal with ambiguity in many cases (Johanson 1995a, 1995b, 2001, Csató 2003). For instance, the Noghay expression kelip turyan [come-(I)p.CONV stand-GAn.ACT.NOM], containing a converb in -(I)p of the lexical verb kel- ‘come’ and an inflected form of the auxiliary verb tur- ‘stand’, can systematically be ambiguous between:

(a) Pluripredicative reading: ‘who has come and is standing’
(b) Actionality reading: ‘who keeps on coming’
(c) Viewpoint aspect reading (high focal intraterminality): ‘who is coming’
(d) Viewpoint aspect reading (high focal postterminality): ‘who has come’, ‘who is in the state of having come’ (Karakoç 2005: 172; Karakoç 2017).

The research has shown that the use of different morphosyntactic patterns of negation can serve to disambiguation (Karakoç 2005, 2017). The present paper will focus on the relation between overtly present morphological and syntactic properties and the range of ambiguity. Further, it will discuss the role of suprasegmental factors and prosodic features in distinguishing between the possible readings. The question of to what extent accentuation can resolve certain types of ambiguities will be addressed.

References