

The Evolution of Verbal Agreement in Iranian Languages

Pollet Samvelian (Université Sorbonne nouvelle)

Thomas Jügel (Labex EFL, Inalco)

Verbal agreement in Iranian languages is usually onefold agreement with the subject. It is canonically realized by a verbal ending to the stem. However, in a number of languages so called clitic “pronouns” fulfill the function. In this talk, we investigate various historical sources of agreement markers such as verbal endings, auxiliaries, and pronouns, with a focus on enclitic pronouns. We will explain the reanalysis of the latter on the basis of their discourse functions in Middle Persian texts. Enclitic pronouns encoding the subject in an ergative construction are comparable with verbal endings in that they both are the “lowest degree” of cross-referencing the subject. In hanging topic constructions where the enclitic pronoun resumes the topic, a bridging context occurs in the way that the clitic encoding the subject resembles the agreement marker with a null (omitted or pro-drop) subject (see Table below).

| Encoding of subjects + cross-reference ¹ | | | | |
|---|-------------------|---------------------|------------|--------|
| | “high” | “neutral” | “low” | “null” |
| accusative alignment | NP + AGR | Pron + AGR | ∅ + AGR | — |
| ergative alignment | NP.obl | Pron.obl | EP.obl | ∅ |
| → reanalysis | | | ∅ + EP.AGR | |
| generalisation | NP(.obl) + EP.AGR | Pron(.obl) + EP.AGR | ∅ + EP.AGR | — |

This paves the way for the grammaticalization of the clitic as an agreement marker. It also explains why other oblique enclitic pronouns (e.g. encoding objects) “do not make it” (Siewierska 1999), because such a bridging context does not exist for them. The use of enclitic pronouns as agreement markers is most famously illustrated by Sorani (Jügel 2009, Haig 2008, Samvelian 2007, Bynon 1979), but also frequent among languages of the central Iranian plateau and the Fars province (Jügel and Samvelian, in press), which opens up to various hypotheses for the dialectal development of Persian.

We will apply our account to the use of enclitic pronouns in so called “compound verbs of experience” (Barjasteh 1983) in Modern Persian, e.g.

bačče *dard=aš* *mi-âmad*
child pain=PC.3sg IPFV-come.PST.3sg
‘The child was suffering pain.’ (lit. The child, pain was coming to him/her)

Despite evidence for a cline of cross-reference ranging from pronominal realization to agreement marking in the history of Iranian languages, we will nevertheless argue in favor of maintaining both concepts as different phenomena.

References

- Barjasteh, Darab. 1983. Morphology, syntax and semantics of Persian compound verbs: A lexicalist approach. Diss. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
Bynon, Theodora. 1979. The Ergative Construction in Kurdish. BSOAS 42. 211–224.

¹ NP: Noun Phrase, AGR: Agreement marker cross-referencing the NP, Pron: Pronoun, EP: enclitic pronoun, ∅ omitted constituent/pro-drop, obl: oblique (NP, Pron, or EP).

- Haig, Geoffrey. 2008. *Alignment Change in Iranian Languages – A Construction Grammar Approach*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Jügel, Thomas. 2009. Ergative Remnants in Sorani Kurdish? *Orientalia Suecana* 58. 142–158.
- Jügel, Thomas and Pollet Samvelian. In press. Les pronoms enclitiques dans les langues ouest-iraniennes – Fonctions et distribution géographique. *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 2016. 30 pp.
- Samvelian, Pollet. 2007a. What Sorani Kurdish absolute prepositions tell us about cliticization. In *Texas Linguistics Society IX: The Morphosyntax of Understudied Languages*, ed. by F. Hoyt, N. Seifert, A. Teodorescu & J. White, 263–283. Stanford: CSLI publications.
- 2007b. A Lexical Account of Sorani Kurdish Prepositions. In *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*, ed. by S. Müller, 235–249. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Siewierska, Anna. 1999. From anaphoric pronoun to grammatical agreement marker: why objects don't make it. *Folia Linguistica* 33: 225-251.