Ergativity and the structure of complex predicates in Dari

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Conference on Complex Predicates in Iranian Languages
July 5, 2008

1 Introduction

- A central question in the literature on Iranian complex predicates: What is the structural status of the nonverbal element (NVE)?

- While it has been generally assumed that nonverbal elements contrast with direct objects in not bearing a thematic relation to the verb, the syntactic parallels between nominal nonverbal elements and nonspecific direct objects, at least in Persian, are striking:
  1. They occur in the same base position, immediately preceding the inflected verb.

(1) a. sohrab keTAR khard.
   Sohrab book buy.PAST.3SG
   ‘Sohrab bought books.’
   nonspecific direct object

b. sohrab ROSHD kard.
   Sohrab growth do.PAST.3SG
   ‘Sohrab grew.’
   nominal nonverbal element

- For this reason, some authors propose to assign nominal nonverbal elements and nonspecific direct objects the same structural position (Mohammad and Karimi 1992, Ghomeshi and Massam 1994, Farudi 2005).

- Others attempt to account for the difference in argument structure by proposing different structures for the two classes (Megerdianian 2002, Folli et al. 2005).

(2) a. NVE = Direct object
   (Mohammad and Karimi 1992)
   \[ \text{DP} \rightarrow \text{VP} \rightarrow \text{vP} \]

b. NVE ≠ Direct object
   (Folli et al. 2005)
   \[ \text{DP} \rightarrow \text{VP} \rightarrow \text{vP} \]

- The key difference between these two structures:
  - in (2a), the nonverbal element is the direct object of the ‘light verb’ (the complement of V), while
  - in (2b), the nonverbal element is the head of the extended verbal projection, with the light verb instantiating the functional category v.

- One of the problems in this debate is that Persian generally lacks cross-linguistically well-established diagnostics for the direct object (see Van Valin 2001:59-67):
  - Accusative case marking: It carries a semantic contribution (specificity) so that it does not appear on nonspecific direct objects (Karimi 1990).
  - Passive: There is no evidence that ‘passivization’ in Persian with shodan targets direct objects, as opposed to the patient thematic role.

- We use ergative agreement in Dari (Northwest Iranian, Central Plateau) to probe the structural status of the nominal nonverbal element.

- Ergative case/agreement tests for the direct object since it depends on the presence of a direct object (Donohue 2006:389–390).

- In the remainder of this talk, we will
  1. provide some background on split ergative agreement in Dari, and the structural theory of ergativity;
  2. consider the predictions for ergative agreement in Dari made by each of the views of complex predicates in (2); and
  3. test each set of predictions by examining a survey of Dari data, and show that ergative agreement in the language’s intransitive complex predicates supports (2a) over (2b).

2 Background on ergativity

- Dari is a caseless, split ergative language with ergative-absolutive verb agreement in the past tense and perfect aspect.

- The same suffix that marks agreement with subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs in the nonpast tenses marks agreement with intransitive subjects and direct objects in the past tense and perfect aspect:
Nonpast
   a. (mē) dātv-ē.
      i  run.
   b. (mē) in bin-ē.
      i s/he see.run
      ‘I see her/him.’

Simple past
   a. (mē) dātvū-ē.
      i  run.past
      ‘I ran.’
   b. (mē) oš di-ē.
      s/h 3SG see.past
      ‘S/he saw me.’

In the past tense and perfect aspect, the transitive subject is marked by a pronominal proclitic.

Agreement suffixes (intransitive subject and object in past tense)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sg</th>
<th>pl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-ē</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-ē</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agreement clitics (transitive subject in past tense and perfect aspect)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sg</th>
<th>pl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>om, me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>oš, de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>oš, sē</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We adopt Bittner and Hale’s (1996) view that ergative case assignment and agreement derive from the structural configurations of the DPs involved.

The presence of ergative agreement is dependent on there being a legitimate case competitor—or, in other words, a structurally inferior argument:

Licensing requirement on agreement clitics (past tense and perfect aspect)
A pronominal clitic agrees in φ-features with a DP a if
   i) a asymmetrically c-commands a distinct DP β, and
   ii) a and β are arguments of the same verb.

Our formulation is essentially identical to that of Bittner and Hale (1996) and Marantz (2000). The differences have to do with different theoretical assumptions (Government and Binding for Bittner and Hale and Distributed Morphology for Marantz).

Absolutive agreement (the agreement suffixes in the past tense and perfect aspect) is the default. Whatever doesn’t get a pronominal clitic, i.e. direct objects and intransitive subjects, shows absolutive agreement.

This principle ensures that the pronominal clitic agrees with the subject of a transitive verb. We assume that the pronominal clitic is head-joined to the verb in order to derive its position between the verb and the direct object.
3 Consequences for the analysis of complex predicates

3.1 Analysis 1: NVE = Direct object

(15) a. Intransitive complex predicate  

\[
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \rightarrow \text{DP}_V \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV} \rightarrow \text{DP}_V \\
\text{V} \rightarrow \text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v'} \rightarrow \text{DP}_V \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV} \\
\text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV}
\]

b. Transitive complex predicate

\[
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \rightarrow \text{DP}_V \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV} \rightarrow \text{DP}_V \\
\text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV}
\]

The subjects of both intransitive and transitive complex predicates asymmetrically c-command another DP argument. For (15a), this is the nonverbal element, which is sister of V.

Therefore, this analysis predicts that subjects of intransitive as well as transitive predicates should trigger ergative agreement with a pronominal clitic, since the nonverbal element qualifies as a legitimate case competitor.

In the case of transitive predicates, it is unclear whether we expect the nonverbal element or the direct object DP to trigger suffixal agreement on the verb. Something more must be said about how absolute agreement is determined.

3.2 Analysis 2: NVE ≠ Direct object

(16) a. Intransitive complex predicate

\[
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \rightarrow \text{DP}_V \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV} \\
\text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV}
\]

b. Transitive complex predicate

\[
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \rightarrow \text{DP}_V \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV} \\
\text{v} \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{DP}_V \rightarrow \text{v'} \\
\text{NVE} \rightarrow \text{LV}
\]

- The nonverbal element of both intransitive and transitive complex predicates is asymmetrically c-commanded by the subject (satisfies 7i), but it is not an argument (does not satisfy 7ii).
- Therefore, this structure predicts that the nonverbal element never counts as a legitimate case competitor.
- The subject of an intransitive complex predicate will always trigger absolute agreement.
- In the case of transitive complex predicates, only the direct object—and not the nonverbal element—should trigger absolute agreement.

3.3 Testing the two analyses

- The predictions each of these analyses make are summarized below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Nonverbal element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intransitive</td>
<td>Ergative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitive</td>
<td>Ergative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct object</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- To test these predictions, we surveyed the agreement patterns exhibited by a sample of semantically intransitive and transitive complex predicates with nominal nonverbal elements in Dari.

4 Complex predicates in Dari

4.1 Data

- We elicited from two native speakers all possible agreement patterns for 32 complex predicates, gathered from two dissertations (Firuzbakhsh 1997 [1376], Puladi-Darvish 2000), one dictionary (Koshâvarz 1993), and our own texts and elicitation.

- We restricted our scope to complex predicates with nominal nonverbal elements and the light verb kārvun ‘to do’, as exemplified in (17). (A summary of all our data is included in the appendix.)

(17) a. chêm kārvun

\[
\text{eye do ‘to look at’}
\]

transitive
b. *xarm kārtvun
   sleep do
   *‘to sleep’

• We focussed on nominal nonverbal elements because only DP/NPs receive case and trigger agreement.
• We only looked at complex predicates with *kārtvun ‘to do’ in order to keep the survey size reasonable and to maintain as uniform results as possible.

4.2 Results: Transitive complex predicates
• The subject of a semantically transitive complex predicate is always marked with a pronominal clitic, and the verb agrees optionally with the direct object via a suffix.

(18) a. *me me chem kārt-īn.
   I 1SG eye do.PERF-SPL
   ‘I looked at them.’ (elicitation, DF-49)

b. yo do yoqā mānāl ma kārta...
   one-two place residence SPL do.PERF
   ‘At one or two places we stopped (rested)...’ (narrative, YD1-4-ti,4)

• This pattern is unsurprising since there are (at least) two DP arguments (subject and direct object) in each of the clauses in (18).
• We can’t tell whether the nonverbal element or the direct object is responsible for licensing ergative pronominal agreement. As we concluded in the previous section, both of the above analyses predict ergative agreement with transitive complex predicates, but for different reasons:
  – Analysis 1: ergative agreement triggered by nonverbal element or direct object.
  – Analysis 2: ergative agreement triggered by direct object (DP sister of nonverbal element)

⇒ Transitive complex predicates won’t allow us to tease the two analyses apart. To isolate the predictions of each, we need to focus on the agreement patterns exhibited by *semantically intransitive* complex predicates.

4.3 Results: Intransitive complex predicates
• Subjects of intransitive complex predicates in Dari, just like subjects of transitive complex predicates, exhibit ergative agreement.
• The subject is cross-referenced with a pronominal clitic:

(19) a. *me xarm om kād.
   I sleep 1SG do.PAST
   ‘I slept.’ (elicited, DF-48)

b. *me shāna om kād.
   I crying 1SG do.PAST
   ‘I cried.’ (elicited, DF-49)

• This pattern can only be accounted for under Analysis 1, since it is only under this analysis that the nonverbal element qualifies as a case competitor.

(20)

• Assuming that agreement is syntactically determined, this finding provides a clear diagnostic with which to group nominal nonverbal elements with direct objects.
• Note that we can’t use the (im)possibility of absolutive agreement with the nonverbal element as evidence, since the third person singular absolutive suffix is null (16).
• We therefore conclude that intransitive complex predicates with nominal nonverbal elements in Dari are syntactically identical to transitive verb phrases with a nonspecific direct object. That is,
  – the light verb is a lexical V head, and
  – the nominal nonverbal element is sister to V.

(21) a. Transitive simplex predicate
   b. Intransitive complex predicate

5 Conclusion and issues for further investigation
⇒ We conclude that intransitive complex predicates in Dari should be analyzed as identical to transitive verb phrases with a nonspecific direct object (Analysis 1).
• This raises the issue of transitive complex predicates: Analysis 2 in which the nonverbal element is not an argument seems intuitively satisfying.
(22) mē me chām kārt-tān.
I 1sg eye do PERF-3PL 'I looked at them.' (elicitation, DF-ty)
⇒ We may have to be open to the possibility that the syntax of complex predicates is not uniform, even within a single language.

• Accounts in the spirit of Folli et al. (2005) are appealing since they seem to offer a syntactic analysis that reflects the semantics of complex predicates (see also Toosarvandani, to appear). But in the end, arguments for syntactic structure must come from syntactic phenomena. Agreement is such a phenomenon.

• Interestingly, this seems to be a syntactic pattern that is well-attested cross-linguistically:

(23) a. Mīrən-ek ni jo n-aq-
Mīrən-ERG me.ABS hit 1sg-have.3SG 'Miren hit me.' (transitive simplex predicate)
b. Mīrən-ek ház əgin du-
Mīrən-ERG word done have.3SG 'Miren spoke.' (intransitive complex predicate)
c. Mīrən ərər da-
Mīrən.ABS fallen 3SG.be 'Miren fell.' (intransitive simple predicate) (Basque; Bittner and Hale 1996:27)

(24) a. Aaz cīsjk louza-du-
Aaz.ERG cat(D) play-D.CAUS 'I play with the cat,' 'I amuse the cat.' (transitive simple predicate)
b. Aaz nāb jū-
Aaz.ERG sleep(F) J.do 'I sleep.' (intransitive complex predicate)
c. Cīsjk louazh du-
cat(D) playing D.be.PRES 'The cat is playing.' (intransitive simple predicate) (Ingush; Nichols 2007-5-6)

Appendix: Dari complex predicates in kārttān

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicative Form</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bozos kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to give away (in marriage)</td>
<td>'I gave away my friend.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫūk kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to smell (it)</td>
<td>'I smelled it.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chaw kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to stink, give evil eye</td>
<td>'I stink.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dīw kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to lack at</td>
<td>'I lack at.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḥaw kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to look at</td>
<td>'I looked at.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huk kārttān</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to rent (out)</td>
<td>'I rented it out.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huk kārttān</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to check</td>
<td>'I checked it.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārttān</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>to want, borrowed</td>
<td>'I wanted.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>to lock past</td>
<td>'I locked it past.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫau kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to steal, to steal out</td>
<td>'I stole out.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫau kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to step off, to step out</td>
<td>'I stepped out.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫau kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to get married, married</td>
<td>'I got married.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫau kārttān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>to stand, to stand out</td>
<td>'I stood out.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārttān</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to enter</td>
<td>'I entered.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>to blow air into</td>
<td>'I blew air into.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫa aw kārt tāt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>to sleep</td>
<td>'I slept.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>to run, a lover</td>
<td>'I ran as a lover.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārttān</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to leave (it)</td>
<td>'I left (it).’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to tear (it)</td>
<td>'I tore (it).’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to find</td>
<td>'I found.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to blow air into</td>
<td>'I blew air into the bag.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to sleep</td>
<td>'I slept.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to feel, to feel like</td>
<td>'I felt like.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to throw</td>
<td>'I threw.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to throw</td>
<td>'I threw.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to throw</td>
<td>'I threw.'</td>
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<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to throw</td>
<td>'I threw.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫaw kārt tāt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>to throw</td>
<td>'I threw.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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References


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