

Alireza Korangy, Behrooz Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari (Eds.)
Essays on Typology of Iranian Languages

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Essays on Typology of Iranian Languages

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Alireza Korangy dedicates this book to two people. He dedicates it to his “sunrise, sunshine, and sunset”, his four year old daughter Iran Ghazal Korangy: “my little linguist” ; and to the memory of Professor Lazard whose dedication to Iranian linguistics has not known and will not know an equal.

Behrooz Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari dedicates this book to the memory of Professor Lazard (d. 2018), whose very last article appears in this volume.

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Contents

Acknowledgments — VI

Bernard Comrie

Iranian languages and linguistic typology — 01

Bernhard Scheucher

Ergativity in New West Iranian — 05

Gilbert Lazard†

Aspect in Iranian two systems: Persian and Pashto — 26

Donald Stilo

Loss vs. expansion of gender in Tatic languages: Kafteji (Kabatei) and Kelāsi — 34

Habib Borjani

Mazandarani: A typological survey — 79

Geoffrey Haig and Shirin Adibifar

Referential Null Subjects (RNS) in colloquial spoken Persian: Does speaker familiarity have an impact? — 102

Ketevani Gadilia

A typological study of (in)definiteness in the Iranian languages — 122

Sascha Völlmin

The quotative marker in Gilaki — 133

Behrooz Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari and Hassan Rezai-Baghbidi

Plural marking in the New West Iranian languages and dialects: a historical and typological approach — 149

Thamar Eilam

A typological sketch of the Jewish Iranian dialects — 167

Alireza Korangy

Epilogue — 179

Index — 181

Bernard Comrie

Iranian languages and linguistic typology

Although I am not an Iranianist, as a typologist I recognize that Iranian languages can make an important contribution to our understanding of cross-linguistic variation. Hitherto, this potential has barely been realized, though there have been a few notable exceptions: thus, the now standard term “Differential Object Marking” and its abbreviation “DOM” were introduced by Bosson (1985) in his treatment of this phenomenon in Iranian languages. The present volume is an important step in redressing this balance.

As the reference to DOM has already shown, case marking is an area where Iranian languages have already made a contribution to linguistic typology, and this extends to other instances of flagging (case marking, use of adpositions) and indexing (pronominal indices on the verb) of core arguments, including the phenomenon of ergativity. The chapter by Bernhard Scheuchter succeeds in compressing many aspects of the synchronic and diachronic richness of Iranian, especially New West Iranian¹ languages into a digestible presentation that addresses Iranianists and typologists alike. In particular, it provides further empirical evidence of the “horizontal” or “double-oblique” alignment type, where the same form is used for both Agent and Patient of the transitive verb, a different form for the Single argument of the intransitive argument – see, for instance, the Northern Kurdish examples in his Section 5.1. This alignment pattern was first drawn to the attention of general linguists by Payne (1980), with material from Pamir languages, and Scheuchter’s contribution shows typologists that the pattern is more widespread in Iranian.

Another nominal category subject to variation across Iranian languages is gender, absent from innovative languages like Persian, but present in more conservative languages like Pashto. Don Stilo’s contribution shows that two neighboring, closely related, indeed mostly mutually intelligible Tatic varieties, Kafteji (Kabatei) and Kelasi, nonetheless differ strikingly in this regard. Kafteji has not only retained the grammatical masculine–feminine gender opposition, but has even extended its application to new domains within its verb-agreement system. Kelasi has lost the category completely. In addition to the detailed examination of the structural mechanisms involved, this chapter also points to important general issues in the study of language contact: given that Kafteji and Kelasi speakers are in close contact, might the retention of gender in Kafteji be perhaps a “shibboleth”

¹ I will retain the traditional Iranianist use of “New” rather than “Modern”.

by which Kafteji speakers assert their identity? Stilo does not unequivocally answer this question in the affirmative in his Section 5.3, but raises a possibility that merits investigation in other similar instances of language contact across the world.

Plurality as a nominal category is retained across the Iranian languages, but the chapter by Hasan Rezai-Baghdidi and Behrooz Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari shows that there is nonetheless considerable typological variation within New West Iranian, both synchronically and diachronically, concerning both nominal marking and its interaction with syntax. While the most widespread markers are of the type *-ān* (from an earlier oblique plural marker) and *-hā* (from an earlier abstract noun marker), there is also *-gal* deriving from a noun ‘troop’, and even an outlier language, Abuzaydābādi, that sometimes uses a plural prefix *pāk-*.

Rounding out the chapters on nominal categories, Ketevan Gadilia examines expressions of definiteness and indefiniteness in Iranian languages. This includes both the use of definite and especially indefinite suffixes, but also the use of demonstratives as definite markers and the numeral “one” as an indefinite marker – plus, of course, DOM via reflexes of Old Persian *rādiy* as a combination of case marking and definiteness marking.

Turning to the verb, Gilbert Lazard presents a taste of the range of variation in the expression of aspect by contrasting two Iranian verb systems, those of Persian and Pashto. Of particular typological interest is the fact that Persian has overt marking for durative aspect (with the prefix *mi-*), while Pashto has overt marking of perfective aspect (via the prefix *wě-* or its stem-change or stress-shift allomorphs). The clear correlation between formal and semantic markedness in these two contrasting systems would provide an interesting *tertium comparationis* for the investigation of systems where the correlation between formal and semantic marking is less clear, e.g., the Latin perfect (and its Romance reflexes) or the Slavic perfective. This chapter, though concentrating on two Iranian languages, thus opens up new perspectives for the study of aspect more generally from a typological perspective.

Two chapters each deal more generally with an individual language or a group of languages, providing a typological profile. Habib Borjian’s chapter on Mazandarani follows the areal typological approach developed for West Iranian by Don Stilo, and shows, with a helpful tabular summary, a range of Mazandarani feature values that locate it relative to a selection of other West Iranian languages, in terms of whether Mazandarani shares or does not share the feature value with that other language. The results point to a particularly close typological affinity of Mazandarani with Gilaki, followed by Aftari and Semnani. An unusual typological feature of some varieties of Mazandarani is the distinction among four verbs “to be” in terms of combinations of equation, existence, containment, animacy, and emphasis.

Thamar Eliam's chapter is concerned with typological features of Iranian language varieties spoken by Jewish communities, i.e., Judeo-Persian (several usually mutually intelligible varieties), Juhuri (aka Judeo-Tat), and the secret jargon *Lutera'i*. As noted by the author, the term "Judeo-Iranian" delimits a social rather than a linguistic unity. Judeo-Iranian languages can profitably be studied typologically along two axes. One is the influence of New Persian, traditionally stronger on Judeo-Persian than on the local non-Jewish dialects of the same geographical region, which means that Judeo-Persian is here innovative, e.g., lacking gender and case marking of nouns even where these are present in local non-Jewish speech. The other is the presence of the Hebrew(-Aramaic) component in all Judeo-Iranian varieties, distinguishing them lexically from non-Jewish varieties.

Finally, two chapters examine one particular phenomenon in one particular language. Sascha Völlmin's chapter examines the quotative suffix in Gilaki, more specifically the Rasht dialect within the Western Gilaki dialect group; in this variety, the suffix is *-ə*. The chapter is based on the examination of an extensive corpus supplemented where necessary by elicitation. Völlmin shows that while instances of quotative *-ə* have appeared in previous works, they were not correctly identified as such, although the more extensive corpus shows that this is indeed a quotative marker, nearly always present when another's words are quoted (and thus crucially absent when one quotes one's own words). Quoted speech (thought, etc.) in Gilaki is always "direct" speech, lacking for instance the deictic shifts characteristic of "indirect speech" – although the language does have a logophoric form *xu*, literally 'self', to express coreference with the reporter. The richness of the system and the fine judgments that the author reveals lead one to desire equally detailed studies of this much-neglected domain in other oral Iranian languages.

Haig and Adibifar treat the phenomenon of null referential subjects in spoken Persian from a usage- and discourse-based perspective. By analyzing retellings of the Pear Story video by twenty-nine different speakers, they throw light onto possible factors governing variation in the frequency of null referential subjects. They investigate both factors that might be expected to lead to different rates of use (text length; number of new referents introduced in the text; speaker's familiarity with the interviewer) as well as those where expectations from studies of other languages are either absent or inconsistent (gender; age), and conclude that none of these factors yields a statistically significant correlation. This negative result is nonetheless interesting, in that it provides support for the hypothesis of the overall homogeneity of spoken language, in contrast to the heterogeneity of written language. Moreover, the chapter opens the door to enriched study of Persian in a usage-based approach, including in particular the much neglected spoken language.

In summary, this volume acquits itself fully of the task of bridging the gap between Iranian languages and linguistic typology, both advancing our understanding of existing problems and pointing to new areas that require investigation. While I have emphasized more what the typologist can learn from Iranian languages, the volume also shows how new insights into the synchrony and diachrony of Iranian languages can be gained by adopting a typological perspective. Of course, this volume can still only scratch the surface. There are many other areas in Iranian languages that merit study from a typological perspective; to cite just one: the processing complications that arise from the combination of verb-final constituent order with a frequently head-initial noun phrase, as seen particularly clearly in Persian, and the discourse strategies used to resolve potential conflicts (e.g., preposing noun phrases with a postnominal relative clause). More volumes like the present one are needed!

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Bernhard Scheuchner

Ergativity in New West Iranian

1 General

Indo-European languages are known for their accusative structure. Yet there are exceptions to this pattern: Various modern Indo-Iranian languages display split ergativity with a tense-aspect split. The past tenses in these languages are constructed ergatively. The ergative past traces back to an Old Indian and Old Iranian periphrastic perfect, which is formed by the past participle in *-ta-* with passive meaning and the present tense of the copula. In later linguistic stages of the Iranian and Indo-Aryan languages, this construction replaced the synthetic past tenses.

Many New Iranian languages have a split ergative construction. The historic roots of this ergative construction trace back to the Old Iranian linguistic stage, when the old synthetic perfect was replaced by an analytic construction with passive value. In Old Persian this replacement is attested by the renowned *manā kartam* construction ('by me it was done'). The subject of a transitive verb in the new perfect takes the genitive-dative case, whereas in Sanskrit the agent in that construction is marked by the instrumental case. The oblique case, which marks the agent of transitive verbs in the past tenses of Middle Iranian and New Iranian languages, stems from the Old Iranian genitive-dative case. In Hindi the subject of a transitive verb in the past tense is marked by a special agentive or ergative particle that has instrumental etymology (cf. Pirejko 1979).

Most New East Iranian languages have ergative past tenses. The remarkable exception is Ossetic, which is spoken in the Caucasus area, which is famous for the multitude of ergative languages spoken there. Among the West Iranian languages are many languages that have lost the ergative structure of the past tenses. For instance, New Persian, the Iranian language with the greatest number of speakers, is a purely accusative language. However, languages like Kurdish, Zāzākī, Gōrānī, and other smaller languages have retained the ergative construction.

2 Basic notions of ergativity

Ergativity is a morphosyntactic property of the ergative languages. In these languages the subject of a transitive verb is marked by a non-nominative case, which is often called ergative or agentive case. The Iranian languages have no

unique ergative case marking in the ergative past tenses. Instead they use the oblique case, which is also used in the accusative present tense and future tense to mark the direct and indirect object. The subject of an intransitive verb, however, is marked by a case, called nominative or absolutive, which is mostly characterized by zero marking. This case is often called absolutive case. The direct object of a transitive verb is also marked by the absolutive case. Transitive verbs in ergative languages often agree with the direct object or have no agreement at all.

Ergative languages are, for example, Basque, the Caucasian languages, Eskimo-Aleut, Tibetan, indigenous American, and Australian languages. There are also some ergative languages attested in the ancient Near East: Sumerian, Hattic, Elamite, Urartian, and Hurrian.

The ergative pattern is quite contrary to that which we know from most Indo-European languages, the Semitic languages, the Uralic languages, the Altaic languages, etc. In the latter languages, which are of the accusative type, the subjects of intransitive verbs and the subjects of transitive verbs form a morphosyntactic unity in the way that both are marked by the same case, namely, the nominative case, which is in most of these languages not characterized by an affix or by any other kind of morphological marking. The direct object of the transitive verb, however, is distinguished from the subject by a different case, which is traditionally called “accusative”. The verb of a transitive sentence usually agrees with the subject.

The term “ergative” was coined by Adolf Dirr, who labeled the case of the transitive subject in the Caucasian languages that way (cf. Dirr 1928). Before that it was common to read the ergative constructions, which were then already known from various languages as “passive”.

Many languages show ergativity only on the morphological intra-clausal level. Some languages, however, have ergative features on the syntactical level.

The term “intra-clausal ergativity”, also called “morphological ergativity” or “surface ergativity”, indicates that within a single clause S (i.e., the intransitive subject) and O (i.e., the direct object) are marked the same way, and A (i.e., the transitive subject or agent) is marked in a different way.

There are various means of distinguishing A and O: cases (Basque), particles (Tongan from the Austronesian language family), adpositions, constituent order, and pronominal cross-referencing on the verb (Abaza, Abkhaz). Many languages combine these strategies, e.g., Georgian and Circassian use cases and pronominal cross-referencing affixes (cf. Dixon 1994: 39).

The term “inter-clausal ergativity”, also called “syntactic ergativity” or “deep ergativity”, indicates that there are syntactic constraints on clause combinations, or on the omission of coreferential NPs in clause combinations, which treat S

and O in the same way and A differently. For instance, the Australian language Dyirbal is a language with inter-clausal ergativity (cf. Dixon 1994: 143).

The studies of Matras (1992–93, 1997) show that Northern Kurdish has intra-clausal ergativity, but not inter-clausal ergativity.

Many languages are not entirely ergative and follow the accusative pattern in parts of their system. In the Iranian languages we have a tense/aspect split. The present tense and the future tense are constructed accusatively and the past tenses show an ergative system. According to Dixon (1994: 99), this pattern is common among ergative languages with tense/aspect split:

Many languages can, of course, have nominative-accusative marking in all aspects and tenses, and others have absolutive-ergative marking unimpeded by aspect or tense [...]. But if a split is conditioned by tense or aspect, the ergative marking is always found either in past tense or in perfective aspect.

There are several other kinds of split ergativity. Splits can also be conditioned by the semantic nature of the verb: In some languages the S is marked like A (by the ergative case) when the meaning of the (intransitive!) verb implies that the S exerts control over the action, and it is marked like O (by the absolutive case) when the meaning of the verb implies that the S is affected by the action (cf. Dixon 1994: 70).

Another kind of split is determined by the semantic nature of the NP. According to a nominal hierarchy, a first person pronoun is to be expected more than any other part of speech to operate as A rather than as O. Second person agreement is next in the hierarchy, then demonstratives and third person pronouns, and at last proper names and common nouns (cf. Dixon 1994: 83; DeLancey 1981: 628). In Balōči, an Iranian language with the already mentioned tense/aspect split, first and second person pronouns are not marked by the oblique case when they act as A in the ergative domain (past tense), whereas third person pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, common nouns, and proper names in A function are marked by the oblique case in the ergative domain. As a consequence in Balōči, there is a nominal hierarchy split in addition to the tense/aspect split (cf. Farrell 1990: 67):¹

1	1SG	First Person Singular	N	Noun
	DIR	Direct Object		
	SG	Singular	IMPF	Imperfective
	PST	Past	PL	Plural
	3SG	Third Person Singular	M	Masculine
	OBL	Oblique Case	PP	Past Participle
	V	Verb	ACC	Accusative
	O	Object	PRON	Pronoun
	PRES	Present	3PL	Third Person plural

- (1) *mən* *bəcək* *ja*
 1SG.DIR boy.DIR.SG hit.PST.3SG
 A O V(=O)
 ‘I hit the boy’.
- (2) *təo* *bəcək* *ja*
 2SG.DIR boy.DIR.SG hit.PST.3SG
 A O V(=O)
 ‘You hit the boy’.
- (3) *aya* *bəcək* *ja*
 3SG.OBL boy.DIR.SG hit.PST.3SG
 A O V(=O)
 ‘He hit the boy’.

3 New West Iranian languages

These languages belong to the New West Iranian group, which traces back historically to the Old Iranian languages Old Persian and Median and the Middle Iranian languages Middle Persian and Parthian. New West Iranian is subdivided in two groups, in (a) the Southwest Iranian languages, which are descendants of Old and Middle Persian or genetically related languages, which are not attested, and in (b) the Northwest Iranian languages, which are descendants of Median and Parthian or genetically related languages, which are not attested.

The grouping inside the New West Iranian languages does therefore not rely on the present geographical location of the single languages but on their historical filiation. The following list shows which New West Iranian languages have ergative past tenses and which have accusative past tenses:

(a) North-Western subgroup

Kurdish (further subdivision in North, Central, and South Kurdish) (split ergativity)

Zāzākī (split ergativity)

Gōrānī (split ergativity)

Balōčī (split ergativity)

Māzandarānī (pure accusative system)

Gīlakī (pure accusative system)

Āzarī dialects (split ergativity)

Tāleši (split ergativity)

Semnānī (remnants of ergativity in the inflection of transitive verbs in the past tense)

Dialects of the region Semnān (remnants of ergativity in the inflection of transitive verbs in the past tense)

Central dialects (split ergativity)

(b) South-Western subgroup

Persian and its dialects (including Tajik and Dari) (pure accusative system)

Tāti (pure accusative system)

Lurī (pure accusative system)

Fārs Dialects (split ergativity)

Lārestānī, Baškardī, und Kumzārī (split ergativity)

4 Diachronic roots of the ergativity in New West Iranian

Ergativity in the New West Iranian languages emerges from a periphrastic perfective construction with passive value that is already recorded in Old Persian texts. In the western Middle Iranian languages, this construction has replaced the synthetic past tenses of the Old Iranian period. Due to the passive value of the construction, the agent is marked by a non-nominative case, namely, in Old Persian by the genitive-dative case, and in Parthian and Middle Persian by the oblique case.

4.1 Old Persian

Old Persian is the only representative of Southwest Iranian in the Old Iranian period. Consequently it is the ancestor of Middle Persian and New Persian. Old Persian is a highly fusional language with a rich case system and a complex tense system. It follows the accusative pattern. See the following example of a transitive verb in the imperfect:

- (4) *pasāva adam kāram pārsam frāišayam*
 thereafter 1SG.N army.A.SG Persian. SG send.IMP.1SG
 ‘After that I sent a Persian army’ (DB 3.2).

However, the original Iranian synthetic perfect has been replaced by an analytic construction with a passive value.² Some scholars have labeled this construction as

2 There exists one single remnant of the old synthetic perfect in Old Persian: *caxriyā* ‘has been done’.

manā-kartam construction. It consists of the participle perfect passive and optional the present tense form of the copula, which is often omitted in the third person.

The past participle of an intransitive verb has active meaning; its subject is marked by the nominative case:

- (5) *hamiṣyā* *hagmatā* *paraitā*
 insurgent.N.PL.M gather.PP.N.PL.M advance.PP.N.PL.M
Patiš *Vivānam*
 against Vivana.A.SG.M
 ‘The insurgents gathered and advanced against Vivana’
 (DB 2.32).

The participle of a transitive verb has passive meaning when there is no logical subject/agent. If there is an agent, it is marked by the genitive-dative case. The patient/logical object is marked by the nominative case (examples from Schmitt 1989a: 80):

without agent:

- (6) */taya Bardiya* *ava-jata/*
 that Smerdis.N.SG.M kill.PP.N.SG.N
 ‘that Smerdis has been killed’

without agent, with copula:

- (7) */yadi kāra* *Pārsa* *pāta* *ahati/*
 when army.N.SG.M Persian.N.SG.M protect.PP.N.SG.M be.PRS.CONJ.3SG
 ‘when the Persian army has been protected’ (DPe 1.22).

with agent:

- (8) */ima kartam/* *taya* *manā*
 PRON (3-N/A-SG-n) do (PP-N/A-SG-n) RELPRON (N/A-SG.n) PRON (1SG-G/D)
 ‘that what I have done’ (DB 1.27).

The *manā-kartam* construction has traditionally been regarded as a passive form (cf. Pirejko 1979; Jamison 1979a, 1979b). Some, however, for instance Emile Benveniste, took the view that it is a possessive construction because the agent is marked by the genitive-dative case. Benveniste stated that the *manā-kartam* construction is an active perfect, which is expressed by a possessive syntactic structure (in analogy to Latin *mihi factum est* → *habeo factum*) (cf. Benveniste 1952: 56). As a matter of

fact, the oblique endings found in various Middle Iranian and New Iranian languages derive diachronically from Old Iranian genitive endings (cf. Pirejko 1979; Jamison 1979a, 1979b). The suffixed pronouns, which denote the ergative agent in Middle and New Iranian, also have possessive meaning. Nevertheless this theory cannot explain the passive meaning of the agentless *manā kartam* construction (cf. Skjaervo 1985: 217).

The passive value of the past tense stem is still visible in ergative New Iranian languages, when a transitive verb in the past tense has no agent, cf. the Northern Kurdish examples:

- (9) *ez* *dîtîm*
 PRON (1SG-DIR) see (PAST-1SG)
 S V(=S)
 ‘I was seen’.

But with agent:

- (10) *wî* *ez* *dîtîm*
 PRON (3SG-OBL) see (PAST-1SG) pron (1SG-DIR)
 A O V(=O)
 ‘He saw me’.

The passive meaning of the past tense stem is lost in the new Iranian languages with accusative past tenses, cf. the New Persian examples:

- (11) *man* *dîdam*
 PRON (1SG) see (PAST-1SG)
 S V(=S)
 ‘I saw’.
- (12) *man* *to-râ* *dîdam*
 PRON (1SG) see (PAST-1SG) PRON (2SG)-OBJPART
 A O V(=A)
 ‘I saw you’.

4.2 Parthian and Middle Persian

In Middle Persian and Parthian, the Old Iranian tense system has been reduced radically. The synthetic past tenses have vanished entirely and have been replaced

by a construction like that found in the Old Persian analytic perfect. In older Middle Persian and Parthian, the past participle has retained its passive value.

4.2.1 Parthian

If there is no agent, transitive verbs in the past tense have passive value. If there is an agent, it is marked by the oblique case, the logical object is unmarked (direct case), and the verb agrees with the subject. However, in Manichaean Parthian only the personal pronoun of the first person singular distinguishes between direct and oblique case. In the inscriptions of the Arsakid period, there is an oblique case for the noun in the plural. In the singular, however, there is no distinction between direct case and oblique case (cf. Sundermann 1989b:130).

Examples (from Gippert 1996: 152):

- (13) *hawīn* *abgundām*
 PRON (3PL) uncover (PRES-1SG)
 ‘I uncover them’.
- (14) *abgust* *ahēnd*
 uncover (PP) be (PST-3PL)
 ‘they were uncovered’
- (15) *man* *abgust* *(a)hēnd*
 PRON (1SG-OBL) uncover (PP) be (PRES-3PL)
 ‘I uncovered them’
- (16) *az* *Kāram*
 PRON (1SG-DIR) do (PRES-1SG)
 ‘I do’
- (17) *man* *kird*
 PRON (1SG-OBL) do (PP)
 ‘I did’
- (18) *az* *vāžam*
 PRON (1SG-DIR) say (PRES-1SG)
 ‘I say’