

Alignment Change in Iranian Languages



Empirical Approaches to Language Typology

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Alignment Change in Iranian Languages

A Construction Grammar Approach

by

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Abbreviations

A	Subject of transitive verb	LOC	Locative
A-past	A of past tense verb form	M	Masculine
A-pres	A of present tense verb form	MED	Medium (Middle Voice)
ABS	Absolute	MHG	Middle High German
ACC	Accusative	m. k.	<i>manā kartam</i> (construction)
Adj	Adjective	NEG	Negation
ADP	Adposition	NCS	Non-Canonical Subject
Badīn.	Badīnānī (dialect of Kurdish, Northern Group)	NHG	New High German
CLC	Clitic	NP	Noun phrase
COP	Copula	N	Noun
DAT	Dative	O	Object of transitive verb
DEF	Definite	O-past	O of past tense verb form
Det.	Determiner	O-pres	O of present tense verb form
DIR	Direct (case)	OBL	Oblique
DIREC	Directional	PTC	Past Transitive Construction
DOM	Differential Object Marking	PL	Plural
EXCL	Exclamatory	PLUP	Pluperfect
F	Feminine	PP	Prepositional phrase
FUT	Fut	PST	Past
GEN	Genitive	PTCPL	Participle
IMP	Imperative	PROG	Progressive
IND	Indicative	RECIPR	Reciprocal
INDEF	Indefinite	REFL	Reflexive
INNOBJ	Innovated object marker	s	Singular
INTERR	Interrogative	S	Subject of intransitive verb
IRR	Irrealis	SAP	Speech Act Participant
IZ	Izafe particle	TAM	Tense, Aspect and Modality
IZF	Feminine Izafe particle	TSA	Tense Sensitive Alignment
IZM	Masculine Izafe particle	V	Verb
IZP	Plural Izafe particle	VP	Verb phrase
Kurm.	Kurmanji (alternative name for Northern Group, Kurdish)	1s/2s/3s	First person singular/ Second .../Third ...

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Aims and assumptions

The Iranian languages are currently spoken across a vast stretch of Asia, ranging from the westernmost provinces of China to Central Anatolia in Turkey. Their speakers inhabit several distinct geographic and cultural areas and have been in long-standing contact with numerous genetically diverse languages. Typologically, the languages are also highly divergent; Ossetic, for example, is analyzed as having nine nominal cases (Thordarson 1989: 469), while the Central Group of Kurdish has no nominal case marking (see Chapter six). Yet despite the deep typological rifts cross-cutting the family, there is a striking grammatical property common to the vast majority of Iranian languages: the morphosyntax associated with past transitive verbs differs from that associated with all other verbs in the language concerned.

Iranian wasn't always like this. Some two to three thousand years ago, in the Old Iranian period, the case marking and agreement patterns associated with past transitive verbs were identical to those of the present tenses. At that time, the language had, in the terminology adopted throughout this study, a unified accusative alignment in all tenses. The first issue to be addressed in this book then, is this: why is it that throughout the entirety of Iranian, the alignment associated with past transitive clauses came adrift from the rest of the grammar, and what were the actual mechanisms involved?

After the initial shift away from accusative alignments in past tenses, Iranian languages have since undergone a broad spectrum of further changes. Some have completely ironed out the wrinkles in their past tenses and returned to unified accusative alignments (Persian, for example). But most have retained various kinds of hybrid constructions, still different to those of the present tenses, but which do not fit any of the various labels commonly conferred by linguists (see Section 1.3.4). A second major aim of this book, then, is to investigate the array of non-accusative alignments found in past transitive constructions in Iranian with the aim of reconstructing the pathways down which they have progressed, and identifying the underlying principles that guided their developments.

These questions have of course been addressed before. In the literature on alignment and diachronic syntax, a number of important studies have been devoted to explaining “the emergence of ergativity”. Obviously, the Iranian languages offer unique potential for this endeavour: alignment shifts from accusative to ergative, and back to accusative, can actually be traced in historically documented texts over some 2500 years. Furthermore, Iranian languages past and present have been richly documented across more than a century of Iranian philology, yielding a data base of staggering proportions, though of somewhat uneven quality and accessibility. Yet surprisingly, the existing accounts of alignment change in Iranian are based on a minute subset of the available data. Consequently, many of them are overly simplistic, or simply wrong. Nevertheless, most scholars within both typology and diachronic syntax have been content to accept them, and they are duly repeated in standard works on diachronic syntax (e.g., Harris and Campbell (1995), cf. Chapter two for discussion).

There has been a persistent reluctance to reassess these accounts against a more representative data base, or in the light of alternative syntactic theories. This is all the more surprising given that the other well-documented case of alignment change in Indo-European, the rise of ergativity in Indo-Aryan, continues to attract intense attention from linguists of all persuasions.¹ More than 20 years ago, in his pioneering study of Differential Object Marking in Iranian, Bossong (1985: 118) concludes (my translation) “the problem of ergativity [in Iranian] is in need of thorough analysis”. Ten years later Bubenik (1994: 121) urges that “more work has to be done on the morphosyntactic history of the ergative Iranian languages (Pashto, Kurmanji, Tati).” Yet even today, relatively little progress has been made in that direction. The present study is intended to go at least some way towards closing the gap by providing a more substantive treatment of alignment change in Iranian, drawing on both historical as well as comparative data from a large variety of Iranian languages.

As regards the scope of the data considered, I should point out from the outset that there is a heavy bias towards the western Iranian branch of the

1 See, among many others, Klaiman (1987), Peterson (1998), Bubenik (2001), Butt (2001) and Deo and Sharma (2006).

family, while Eastern Iranian languages have been woefully neglected. I am painfully aware of these shortcomings, but my conviction is that genuine insights into alignment systems can only be obtained through in-depth analysis of individual languages. Undertaking a truly representative study with the depth required would have more than doubled the size of this book. Despite these gaps, I have nevertheless formulated some explicit hypotheses on the mechanisms of alignment change in Iranian. No doubt some of them will require modification when they are scrutinized against additional data. This does not, however, detract significantly from their value. We need explicit hypotheses for defining research goals, the questions to be asked when we approach the next data set. And they permit the results to be related to more general theories of syntax, and language change. Over and beyond their relevance for reconstructing the history of Iranian syntax, the hypotheses formulated here have implications for understanding the alignment of proto-Indo-European, the evolution of case and agreement systems, and more generally, for understanding how typology constrains the outcome of morphosyntactic change.

The book is organized along the following lines: chapter one begins with an overview of the Iranian languages and the relevant features of their morphosyntax, introduces the terminology and theoretical background, and provides initial exemplification of alignment in the Iranian context. In Chapter two, alignment in Old Iranian is examined, based largely on the Old Persian texts. I argue at length against the theory that ergative alignments emerged from an agentive passive construction. An alternative proposal is formulated, according to which ergativity emerged through the extension of a pre-existing non-canonical subject construction. In Chapter three, some of the developments in the Middle Iranian period are discussed, whereby the treatment is, for practical reasons, largely confined to western Middle Iranian. The focus here is on the role that pronominal clitics played in defining a specifically Iranian brand of alignment, still widespread in many Iranian languages. Chapter four presents a comprehensive account of the evolution of case systems in western Iranian, and proposes certain universal principles that shaped the developments. The discussion centres on the relative importance of different functional principles (case discrimination, cross-system harmony) and the role of animacy. Chapters five and six present in-depth case studies of alignment in Kurdish languages, where an exceptionally broad range of align-

ment types is concentrated in a close-knit genetic grouping. The cross-section of currently observable variation in these languages reveals uncanny echoes of processes that have been playing themselves out in the history of Iranian across two millennia. Finally, in Chapter seven I present a synopsis of the historical developments, as I conceive them, and broach a number of broader issues of diachronic syntax and typology.

1.2 The Iranian languages

The Iranian languages constitute one branch of the Indo-European language family. Their closest genetic relatives are the Indo-Aryan languages; there is little doubt that the two are offshoots of a common Indo-Iranian protolanguage. The language of the oldest attested variety of Iranian, the Gatha Avestan texts, is so close to the oldest attested Indo-Aryan texts, Vedic Sanskrit, that the two may be considered almost dialectal variants (Beekes 1988: xvi, Mayrhofer 1989). The dating of the oldest attested Iranian texts, the Old Avestan (or Gatha-Avestan) texts remains controversial, with estimates ranging from the fourteenth to the fourth centuries BC (cf. Chapter two). The Old Iranian stage is also attested in the Old Persian texts, which can be reliably dated to 6–4c. BC.

A fundamental distinction is generally drawn between West and East Iranian languages, but it is uncertain whether Old Persian and Avestan should be considered to be the respective predecessors of these two branches. Traditionally, an additional distinction is drawn among the West Iranian languages between Northwest and Southwest Iranian respectively. Recently, however, there has been some debate on the relevance of the Northwest vs. Southwest distinction. Paul (1998a) suggests that it is not a matter of clear-cut genetic grouping, but involves a continuum of overlapping areal and genetic isoglosses (see also Paul (2003b), and Korn (2003) for a different view). In fact, much of the sub-grouping of Iranian languages remains highly controversial, and some of the issues are broached in the relevant sections below. At this stage, a very much simplified overview is provided in Table 1. Only a small selection of the better-known languages and language groups are included in the table – more detailed accounts are available in Sims-Williams (1998) and Schmitt (2000).

Table 1. Overview of the Iranian languages (simplified)

Historical stages	Major attested languages	
Old Iranian	Old Persian (6–4c.BC)	Old Avest., Younger Avest. (14c.–6c.BC?)
Middle Iranian (4/3c.BC–8/9c.AD)	Western Iranian Mid. Persian, Parthian	Eastern Iranian Sogdian, Khotanese
Modern Iranian	Persian Kurdish Balochi etc.	Pashto Pamir_Group Ossetic etc.

The data for this investigation comes from a varied selection of published materials; details on the sources are provided in the relevant chapters. The transcription systems used in the sources are extremely heterogenous, which has posed a number of practical difficulties of presentation. The default procedure adopted throughout is to follow the source conventions, where this is technically possible and if the transcription is Roman-based. Where the original is in another script (e.g., Arabic or Cyrillic), standard procedures of transliteration have been applied. The drawback of this procedure is that data from one and the same language may appear in different transcriptions, depending on the respective sources. However, the alternative, namely to attempt to create a cross-language standard transcription (or use the IPA) would have raised more problems than it would have solved. And in a book concerned with syntax and morphology, rather than phonology, some degree of inconsistency in the transcriptions appears tolerable. A second problem is the rendering of language names; here I have attempted to impose some standards by adopting wherever possible a single form, generally the orthographically simplest.

1.3 Alignment in the Iranian context

The term alignment is used here in the sense of Nichols (1992), or Harris and Campbell (1995), as a cover term encompassing labels such as ergative, accusative, active etc. Each of the latter is thus considered to be a distinct type of alignment. The choice of ‘alignment’ over the equally widely-used ‘grammatical relations’ is justified because the latter is often used to refer to individual relations (e.g. ‘subject’) rather than the specific bundling of features denoted by ‘alignment’. Furthermore, ‘alignment’ enjoys wider currency than alternatives such as ‘actancy schemata’ (Lazard 1998) or ‘argument linking’ (Stiebels 2002). There is a vast literature available on alignment, most of it skewed towards ergativity (see Dixon (1994) and Manning (1996) for book-length surveys), and it is unnecessary to recapitulate common knowledge here. At this stage I will introduce a minimum of basic concepts and definitions, while reserving more in-depth discussion to later sections.

Different alignments can be defined using the following three parameters:

Case The case marking of core arguments, restricted here to just subjects and direct objects (see below).

Agreement The formal means of cross-referencing core arguments outside of the NPs coding those arguments. Agreement is usually manifested on the verb, but in Iranian, agreement with core arguments may be via clitics on other constituents.

Syntactic processes Processes involving syntactic rules which can only be formulated with reference to specific core arguments. Typical examples are Equi-NP deletion, relativization, or control of reflexive pronouns.

The core arguments relevant to determining alignment are, in traditional terminology, subject and direct object. More recently, the concept of alignment has been extended to indirect objects (Siewierska 2004: 57, Croft 2001: 142–147), but this avenue will not be pursued here. A further distinction between transitive and intransitive subjects can also be drawn, yielding three core arguments. Following Dixon (1994), they are abbreviated as follows:

S=Subject of intransitive verb

A=Subject of transitive verb

O=Object of transitive verb

S, A and O correspond to S, A and P in Comrie (1978), or X, Y and Z in

Lazard (1998); my choice of symbol is dictated by mere force of habit.² The ergative alignment type is defined as one in which the morphosyntactic properties associated with an O are identical to those associated with an S, while those associated with an A are distinct from either. Accusative alignment on the other hand involves identical properties of S and A, while O is distinct. Active alignment, also known as split-S or fluid-S (Dixon 1994), is but marginally relevant in the Iranian context (the exception being East Iranian Wakhi, see Bashir 1986) and will play no significant role in this study.

Examples from modern standard Persian illustrating accusative alignment are:

- (1) *man ruznāme-rā mi-xān-am*
 1S newspaper-ACC PROG-read:PRES-1S
 ‘I(=A) am reading the newspaper(=O)’
- (2) *man be šahr mi-rav-am*
 1S to town PROG-go:PRES-1S
 ‘I(=S) am going to town’

Here S and A share the same case form (the morphologically unmarked, or Nominative case), and both determine agreement on the verb. The O on the other hand is marked with an additional Accusative case marker, and plays no role in person agreement with the verb. As preliminary illustration of ergative alignment, consider the following examples from Zazaki (West Iranian, Central Eastern Turkey):

- (3) *ti kām ē?*
 2S:DIR who COP:PRES:2S
 ‘Who are you?’ (Paul 1998b: 72)
- (4) *wexto ki to āw-i šimit-ā*
 at.time that 2S:OBL water-F:DIR drink:PST-F:3S
 ‘When you drank the water [...]’ (Paul 1998b: 91)

2 I remain non-committal on the universal status of S, A, and O (see Mithun and Chafe (1999) for critical discussion), though I am most sympathetic to the view of Du Bois (1985: 357), according to whom they are “simply a convenient but fictive intermediate level of analysis”.

Here it will be seen that the S in (3) and the O in (4) share a common case, the Direct, and both determine agreement on the verb. The A in (4), on the other hand, is in a distinct case, the Oblique, and does not determine agreement on the verb.

A distinction is commonly drawn between morphological ergativity, and syntactic ergativity (also called inter-clausal ergativity in Dixon (1994), but this terminology is not used here). Both types of ergativity imply the unity of S and O, as opposed to A, but they refer to different formal properties of the constituents concerned. Morphological ergativity is concerned solely with those properties that are systematically reflected in inflectional morphology, for example case marking, or agreement. Syntactic ergativity on the other hand concerns the properties as they relate to syntactic rules. To say that a language has syntactic ergativity implies that in a particular formally defined environment S and O exhibit identical properties with reference to certain syntactic rules.

In general, establishing the presence of syntactic ergativity for any given language is a much more challenging task than identifying morphological ergativity. Indeed, for many languages, controversy on their syntactic alignment continues unabated (see Chapter 1 of Manning (1996) for a balanced discussion). Fortunately, we are spared this particular can of worms because, according to general consensus, no Iranian language exhibits clear evidence of syntactic ergativity.³ However, the lack of syntactic ergativity, not only in the modern languages but in all earlier attested stages of Iranian, is nevertheless of considerable significance when it comes to evaluating theories of the emergence of ergativity in Iranian.

Having introduced the basic concepts and definitions related to alignment, we are now in a position to introduce four features that are characteristic of alignment in Iranian: Tense-Sensitive Alignment, lexical transitivity, the polyfunctional Oblique case, and the proliferation of hybrid alignment types.

3 The only exception known to me is Northwest Iranian Vafsi, where one textually very rare version of the ergative construction has the word order OAV, rather than the usual word-order in Vafsi transitive clauses, AOV. However, even the change in word order does not seem to affect underlying syntactic relations, although Don Stilo informs me that he does not have sufficient data to fully analyze the inter-clausal syntax associated with this construction.

1.3.1 Tense-Sensitive Alignment (TSA)

Throughout the entirety of the Iranian language family, ergative, or more generally non-accusative alignments, are almost completely restricted to a single formally defined environment: clauses headed by verb forms built from the past stem of transitive verbs. In all other environments we find accusative alignment. The sole noteworthy exception to this generalization occurs in certain languages where alignment with verbs of sensory perception, desire, and obligation pattern with past transitive verbs; this group is examined in Section 6.6. The situation found in many Iranian languages is often referred to as “split ergativity” (Dixon 1994), but the term is misleading. It is not ergativity that is split, but alignment: Accusative alignment is found in one part of the grammar, non-accusative alignment in another. Furthermore, the alignment associated with past-tense verb forms is in many cases not straightforward ergativity, but some brand of non-accusative alignment (see below). There are thus good reasons to reject the term ‘split-ergativity’ as a general characteristic of Iranian languages. Instead, I will refer to **Tense-Sensitive Alignment** (TSA) as the defining feature of the majority of Iranian languages.⁴

The restriction to past-tense environments conforms to the well-known universal regarding such tense-based splits: in a tense/aspect-based split, ergative alignment is invariably associated with past or perfective verb forms. There have been attempts to explain this distribution in terms of universal semantic/pragmatic principles, as in for example Dixon (1994: 98–99). However, it needs stressing that in Iranian it is not primarily some **semantic** notion of ‘pastness’ or ‘perfectivity’ that is crucial to triggering ergativity, but the historical link between certain verb forms, and a particular alignment type. The same general point is made by Anderson (1992: 355), and I will briefly reinforce it here. In the vast majority of modern Iranian languages, each verb has two stems, generally referred to as past and present (or past and non-past) respectively. Each of the two acts as the basis for a variety of different tenses and moods. Although this basic binary distinction is blurred and cross-cut by secondary distinctions in many of the languages, it is nevertheless a remark-

4 This terminology is reminiscent of Klaiman (1987)’s term TACS (Tense-Aspect Conditioned Split), which she applies to Indo-Aryan.

ably stable characteristic, one of the deepest traces of genetic unity across the family. The historical origins of this fundamental opposition in the verb system will be discussed in Chapter three. For the time being, it needs to be emphasized that ergative, or more generally non-accusative, alignments in Iranian languages are always associated with the past stems of transitive verbs. Now past stems are generally also associated with the semantic notions of pastness and perfectivity, while present tenses are generally associated with present and future meanings. But in some languages, the expected correlations do not always hold. Yet crucially, the link between ergative alignment and past stems continues to obtain, even when the semantics do not match up. For example, in the Awroman dialect of Gorani, a west Iranian language spoken in the Iranian province of Kurdistan, all verb forms are based on either the past, or the present stem of the verb. And typically, non-accusative alignments are found exclusively with verb forms based on past stems. Now Awroman also has a secondary development, a tense referred to by MacKenzie (1966: 38) as the Imperfect, which is based on the present stem. Crucially, the Awroman Imperfect, even when it has clear past-tense reference, still has accusative alignment rather than the non-accusative alignments associated with past stems of the verb. Similarly, the Badin dialect of Northern Kurdish discussed in Chapter five has a past irrealis ('I would have done X') based on the suffix *da-* plus the present stem of the verb. Again, alignment is accusative, despite the past-time reference. A very similar development is noted in Talyshi, where an imperfect tense with past tense reference is found, but based on the present stem of the verb. And here as well, alignment with these verb forms conforms with expected alignments with present-stem verb forms, despite the actual past reference (Don Stilo, p. c.). In sum, although the verb stems I am calling 'past stems' do, in general, express past-tense meanings, it is not past-time reference in itself which acts as the trigger for non-accusative alignments. It is ultimately a matter of the origins of particular verb forms, their links to the historical reflex of what was in fact once a participle.

1.3.2 Lexical transitivity

Along with the past stem of a verb, a second triggering feature for non-accusative alignments is the transitivity of the verb. And here again, it is not transitivity in a semantic sense that is crucial. This fact can be observed most clearly when we examine the alignment associated with various types of complex predicate consisting of a non-verbal element and a transitive light verb. These complex predicates may express states of affairs hardly expected of transitive verbs. Consider the following examples, from three different West Iranian languages:

- (5) *Bihar-ê dest pê kir-i-ye*
 spring-OBL hand to.it do:PST-PTCPL-3S
 ‘Spring has begun’ (lit. Spring has put hand to-it) (Northern Group of Kurdish, Haig 2002a: 18)
- (6) *kāgī-ā bāl ku*
 crow-OBL flying do:PST:3S
 ‘The crow flew’ (Balochi from Karachi, Farrell 2003: 198)
- (7) *tani há=s kærd*
 He:OBL running=CLC:3S do:PST
 ‘He ran away’ (Vafsi, Stilo forthc. b)

All three clauses refer to states of affairs involving a single participant (‘spring beginning’, ‘flying’, ‘running away’), and we would probably hesitate to refer to them as ‘transitive’. But the case marking in the examples is non-accusative: the A is in the Oblique case, which it would not be for an intransitive verb in any of the languages concerned. The reason is simply that the lexical verbs on which these clauses are based, ‘do’, ‘make’ and ‘give’, are lexically specified as transitive, and hence in past tense forms take the non-accusative alignment appropriate for the class of transitive verbs. In the same connection Matras (1992/1993: 152) draws attention to certain modals in Northern Kurdish, which do not require a NP as direct object, but nevertheless trigger ergative case marking on their subjects in the past tenses. Thus it is not primarily a semantic, or “whole-clause” notion of transitivity (in the sense of Hopper and Thompson 1980) that is relevant, but the lexically determined class of the verb.

However, the semantics of the entire clause do in fact affect the way alignment patterns are distributed, and there are examples of etymologically transitive verbs shifting class under semantic pressure, as I will show. In Southern Balochi (Farrell 1995: 232), there are also some indications of whole-clause semantics impacting on the strictly lexical specification of transitivity. Likewise, there are interesting interactions between main verbs and auxiliaries, in those languages which have them. At this point, however, I am merely clarifying my terminology by stressing that when I use the term ‘transitive’ I am referring to a particular class of verb lexemes, rather than syntactic or semantic properties of actual clauses. In particular, it must be noted that ‘transitive’ in this sense does not necessarily imply the presence of a syntactically realized direct object (see Haig (2002a) for extensive justification of this standpoint).

1.3.3 The polyfunctional Oblique case

Another cross-linguistically unusual feature of Iranian is that the A of a Past Transitive Construction is often marked with a general-purpose Oblique case. The same case marker is also generally used to mark the O in present tenses. These facts are illustrated by past (ergative) and present (accusative) transitive clauses from Southern Balochi:

- (8) *jɪnk-a bəcɪk ja*
 girl-OBL boy:DIR hit:PST:3S
 ‘**The girl** hit the boy.’ (Farrell 1995: ex.(7))
- (9) *bəcɪk jɪnk-a jə-ã*
 boy:DIR(PL) girl-OBL hit:PRES:3PL
 ‘The boys hit **the girl**.’ (Farrell 1995: ex.(15))

It is well-known that for languages with an ergative construction, the case of the A is often formally identical with other markers, for example an Instrumental (see Palancar (2002) for a recent survey). Næss (2007: 169–170) notes that such functional polysemy is generally semantically justified: cases that share some values on features such as volitionality or affectedness are more likely to be marked by one and the same form. For example, Recipient markers may be identical to Possessors, Instruments to Ergatives or Locatives to

Goals. But what is found in Iranian, namely formal identity between an Ergative marker and an Accusative marker is, as Bossong (1985: 118–121) points out, a genuine typological rarity. The reasons behind this state of affairs are best understood against the background of the history of the case system, which is laid out in Chapter four. Note, however, that identity between the Ergative marker and the Accusative marker does not pose a problem for differentiating core arguments in a transitive clause, because the two functions have strictly defined functions according to the verb stem in a given clause: only with past stems is the Oblique interpreted as an Ergative marker (barring a number of complications to be discussed in Chapter four.) For the time being, then, readers should be alerted to the fact that nowhere in Iranian is there a specific ‘Ergative’ case marker. Thus the A of an ergative construction in an Iranian language is generally glossed simply with OBL(IQUE), barring certain Tatic-type languages discussed in Section 4.4.

1.3.4 The proliferation of past-tense alignments

For Iranian languages, alignment patterns are defined mostly in terms of two parameters: case marking, and verbal agreement. Assuming that there are two structural cases, Direct and Oblique, then we have four different possible constellations of case on A and O. Now the verb may, in theory, agree with either the A or the O. Or it may not agree with either. Thus we have three possible agreement constellations. These can be combined with the above-mentioned four possible constellations of case-marking to yield a total of twelve logically possible alignment types. Ergative and accusative alignments, given in Table 2, represent thus merely two of these twelve possibilities.

In a detailed study, Dorleijn (1996) investigates past transitive alignments in the Northern Group of Kurdish (see Section 5.4 for details). Remarkably, Dorleijn (1996: 118) finds all twelve logically possible alignments attested

Table 2. Two possible alignment types (two cases, no pronominal clitics)

ACCUSATIVE ALIGNMENT:	A=Dir.	O=Obl.	Verb agrees with A
ERGATIVE ALIGNMENT:	A=Obl.	O=Dir.	Verb agrees with O

in her data. Although certain combinations are vastly more preferred than others, her findings nicely illustrate a recurrent issue: there is nothing particularly privileged about ergative alignment, a point also brought home by Lazard (1999) and Payne (1980). Nor is it, in its pure form, even very common in Iranian. Rather, what we find time and time again are various types of hybrid alignments: they differ significantly from the accusative alignment regularly found in the present tenses, but are not pure ergative.

Matters are actually much more complicated than the Kurdish example suggests. In many other Iranian languages, Past Transitive Constructions crucially involve a set of pronominal clitics as part of their agreement configuration. An example has already been given in (7) from Vafsi, where a pronominal clitic obligatorily cross-references the A. When the complications of the pronominal clitics are also taken into account, the number of theoretically possible alignment types increases dramatically. In fact, every single language investigated in this study has several alternative alignments of case and agreement in its past transitive clauses. For example, Vafsi has three (Stilo 2004b: 243), as does the Baraki-Barak variety of *Örmuti* (Kieffer 2003: 186), and the languages examined in later chapters confirm this fact. The degree of variation found in past transitive constructions contrasts bluntly with the almost total lack of comparable variation in other environments, where we find the monotony of accusative alignment broken only by Differential Object Marking in some languages (see Section 4.3).

There has been a quite unwarranted tendency to concentrate research on one single alignment type, the ergative alignment. When other possibilities are mentioned, they tend to be discarded as unstable transitional phases which languages pass through on their implacable progression from ‘ergative to accusative’. But the widespread distribution and frequency of the supposedly intermediate forms suggests that they represent viable systems in their own right, of considerable stability and time-depth.⁵ In this study, I have avoided coining new taxonomic labels for the various hybrid alignments (cf. for example “anti-absolutive”, “inverse”, “superabsolutive” introduced in Bubenik 1989). Instead, I have found it more insightful to decompose alignment into

5 Note that the facts from Iranian make a mockery of attempts to reduce ergativity to a “Parameter setting”, with the values on/off, as claimed for example in Baker (2001).

its component sub-systems: case, agreement, and clitic pronouns. Each sub-system can be shown to follow its own trajectory of historical development, which, to a quite remarkable extent, is independent of the others. The advantage of this perspective is that it yields a natural explanation for the attested variation in alignment types: the various alignments emerge as contingent combinations of case, agreement and clitic pronouns; in fact, as epiphenomenal.

To briefly recapitulate the main points of this section, it is a basic fact of the syntax of modern Iranian languages that their Past Transitive Constructions (PTCs) display a variety of non-accusative alignments. Outside the PTC, simple clauses are quite uniformly accusative. It is this fact that is central to Iranian, not the presence of ergativity in some of the languages. Ergativity, I contend, is but one of the possible results of partially independent changes in case and agreement patterns, and it is with these that a historical account of alignment changes in Iranian must be primarily concerned.

1.4 Constructions and syntax

The data presented in this book are intended to be accessible to linguists, present and future, regardless of their theoretical preferences. For this reason, no special formalism is presupposed beyond what can be reasonably accommodated in the text. Nevertheless, the book is not ‘theory-neutral’: it has become increasingly evident that certain theories are much better equipped to explain the Iranian phenomena than others. The most promising candidate is Construction Grammar, for reasons that I will spell out now. A more detailed theoretical assessment of the results is deferred to the final chapter.

The term Construction Grammar now covers a family of theories, but I will concentrate here on the versions in Goldberg (1995) and Goldberg (2006). In Construction Grammar, syntactic constructions, to the extent that they carry non-predictable semantics, are taken as grammatical primitives. This can be contrasted with the orthodox view underlying what Culicover and Jackendoff (2005) refer to as Mainstream Generative Grammar. Here, there has traditionally been a strict division drawn between a lexicon, and an autonomous rule component, working on variables fed into it from the lexicon. On this account, then, the syntactic constructions that make up actual speech

are merely the epiphenomenal results of the application of rules. A further claim central to the Mainstream Generative Grammar, and indeed many other theories such as LFG, is the conviction that the structure of a clause is determined by the lexically-specified argument structure of its predicate (cf. the Projection Principle, Chomsky 1981: 38). The widespread acceptance of the Projection Principle has resulted in a good deal of effort going into developing a series of “universal, or near-universal” (Goldberg 1995: 8) linking algorithms mediating between the lexically-determined argument structure of the verb, and the syntactic structure it projects to. This approach has much to commend it, but it also suffers from significant drawbacks.

One major drawback is that if different syntactic structures are associated with one and the same verb, as they very often are, then corresponding differences must be sought in the lexical semantics of the verb concerned. Goldberg (1995: 11) gives the following eight syntactic structures associated with the verb *kick*:

- (10)
- a. Pat kicked the wall
 - b. Pat kicked Bob black and blue
 - c. Pat kicked the football into the stadium
 - d. Pat kicked at the football
 - e. Pat kicked his foot against the chair
 - f. Pat kicked Bob the football
 - g. The horse kicks
 - h. Pat kicked his way out of the operating room

Now a lexical approach to argument structure is obliged to account for all these distinct clause types by stipulating distinct argument structures, in effect, distinct senses of the verb *kick*. But apart from the proliferation of verb senses that would result, this approach seems to miss an important intuition, namely that there is a basic semantic unity in each sense of *kick* across all the above examples. An alternative way of accounting for this – actually very commonplace – situation is to admit the possibility that the different constructions in which *kick* occurs have an independent existence as grammatical units in their own right. Thus the clause structures found are not merely derivatives of lexically projected argument structures, but basic and independent entities

of language. And like other units of languages – morphemes, words – constructions have meaning, meaning that is to some extent independent of the actual items that instantiate a given construction. The different constructions associated with *kick* are thus explained in terms of a **fusion** (see Goldberg (1995: 50–52) for formalization of this notion) of the verb meaning with the meaning implied by a particular construction. The meaning and structure of a particular clause is thus not determined solely in a bottom-up manner, i.e., as projection from the lexicon into the syntax, but by a combination of lexical and constructional (top-down) processing.⁶

Relaxing the Projection Principle thus allows syntax to be co-determined by the lexical frame of the verb, and the semantics of the construction. A logical consequence of this move is that “a construction can add roles not contributed by the verb.” (Goldberg 1995: 54) The arguments that Goldberg rallies in support of this claim stem largely from English ‘Caused Motion Constructions’, such as the following (Goldberg 1995: 152):

(11) *They laughed the poor guy out of the room.*

It is difficult to maintain that a verb like *laugh* is lexically specified for an object, or for a component of ‘caused motion’. It is, nevertheless, like a large number of other verbs, compatible with the construction illustrated in (11). To account for these phenomena, Goldberg posits a construction in the grammar of English, a particular pairing of form and meaning, with the argument frame [Subj V Obj PP] (see Goldberg (1995: 160) for a fuller representation of the syntax and semantics.) Notice that this construction is posited **for the grammar of English**; there is no implication that it is part of the constructional inventory of other languages, and indeed, good evidence that it is not. Because constructions are basic units of language, we expect to find cross-linguistic variation, just as we do in the lexicon generally: just as a language

6 Of course even Construction Grammar must account for the very simple fact that not all verbs are compatible with all constructions, and it is fairly obvious that the lack of free combinability must be due to lexically specified constraints. In fact, lexically-specified argument structure creeps in the back door through the notion of “lexical profiling of participants” (Goldberg 1995: 52). But there is nevertheless a fundamental difference between Goldberg’s notion of fusion of lexical meaning with constructional meaning, and projection of argument structure from the lexicon to the syntax.

may or may not have a lexical ‘have’ verb, a language may or may not have a particular construction.

Another example of arguments contributed by a particular construction comes from German. Consider the following:

- (12) a. *Das Wasser ist kalt*
 the water is cold
 ‘The water is cold.’
 b. *Das Wasser ist zu kalt*
 the water is too cold
 ‘The water is too cold.’
 c. *Mir ist das Wasser zu kalt*
 to.me is the water too cold
 ‘The water is too cold for me/I find the water too cold.’
 d. **Mir ist das Wasser kalt*
 to.me is the water cold
 Intended: ‘The water is cold for me/I find the water cold.’

The Dative-pronoun *mir* is fine in (12c), but is not possible in (12d). How are we to account for this? Surely we would not wish to claim that the judgement-particle *zu* has somehow contributed an extra argument? The more reasonable explanation is that the constructional semantics of (12c) arise from the combination of *zu* with an adjective. This construction implies the existence of an Experiencer, which is coded via a fronted Dative, as in a whole family of related constructions with similar semantics in German.

Further evidence that supports the notion of argument structures independent of lexical verbal semantics comes from English, where almost any noun can be verbed. From this simple fact the following question arises: what is the source of knowledge which allows speakers to deploy a noun for the first time as a verb, governing arguments of its own? A syntax-from-the-lexicon approach obliges us to assume that each English noun (or adjective) is somehow fitted out with a ‘potential argument structure’, to be implemented when the noun is deployed as a verb. Construction Grammar would, simplifying somewhat, claim that the knowledge a speaker commands of the noun’s semantics, and of the meaning in the constructions available in her lexicon, are sufficient to allow her to decide on how to combine the new verb with an appropriate construction.

In the context of this study, the notion of non-lexically specified arguments is most relevant in connection with non-canonical subjects. They are provisionally defined here as clause constituents which differ in their morphology from the subjects of simple intransitive clauses, yet display at least some of the syntactic features generally associated with these (and other) subject constituents in the language concerned. Non-canonical subjects have been discussed under a variety of different labels in the literature (oblique subject, non-nominative subject, quirky subject, dative subject etc.) Several languages are said to have some type of non-canonical subject (see the papers in Aikhenvald et al. (2001) and Bhaskararao and Subbarao 2004). A fairly uncontroversial example of non-canonical subjects is provided by Icelandic. The following examples contrast a canonical (a) and a non-canonical (b) subject in Icelandic (from (Sigurðsson 2002: 692, 711), glosses slightly modified):

- (13) a. *Hún var fáklædd*
 she:NOM was scantily.dressed
 ‘She was scantily dressed’
 b. *Henni var kalt*
 she:DAT was cold
 ‘She was cold.’

Despite the fact that the first NP in (13b) is not in the Nominative, NPs in this configuration still exhibit largely the same set of syntactic properties that canonical Nominative subjects in Icelandic do (Sigurðsson 2002; 2004: 693). Icelandic thus illustrates the phenomenon of NPs which lack the morphological properties of full subjects (in particular, Nominative case), yet share most of their syntactic properties.

In other well-studied languages like Japanese or Russian, the analysis, and indeed the existence of non-canonical subjects remains highly contentious – cf. for example the ongoing debate on Russian (Moore and Perlmutter 2000; Sigurðsson 2002), or Japanese (Shibatani 2001; Kishimoto 2004). These controversies are symptomatic for the problems posed by non-canonical subjects for mainstream generative syntax: on the one hand they undoubtedly exhibit argument-like properties, on the other it is difficult to demonstrate that they are lexically licensed by the predicate, as they are often optional.

The most common solution is simply to list the relevant verbs in the lexicon as licensing exceptional, non-structural case marking of their arguments. Linking rules then account for which (if any) of the arguments is assigned to the subject position. Lightfoot (1999: 130) advocates this approach for Old English verbs such as *lician* ‘like’. But the lexicon-approach is much less appealing for a living language like Icelandic which, according to the figures mentioned in Sigurðsson (2004), has well over 500 verbs that trigger such constructions. Furthermore, there are sometimes different patterns associated with one and the same verb. The lexical-listing approach also misses a fairly obvious commonality across non-canonical subject constructions wherever they are found: they express a very typical cluster of meanings, centering on mental and physical perception, desire, need, and possession.

From a Construction Grammar perspective, non-canonical subjects have a natural explanation: they are arguments contributed by the construction, not the verb. More importantly, the Construction Grammar approach allows for an elegant and intuitively simple explanation of the semantic commonalities common to non-canonical subjects: they are part of the constructional semantics. For Construction Grammar, the raw material for the analysis is the construction itself, both its form and its meaning. Certain aspects of the construction’s meanings can be attributed to the construction without being derived secondarily from the verb’s thematic grid. And certain aspects of the formal properties of the non-canonical subjects (their subject-like properties) is also assignable to the construction itself, rather than via special linking rules. Croft (2001) has recently extended this line of thought. He argues that subjects are always construction-specific, rather than language specific. Each construction defines a specific set of properties that its particular ‘subject’ will possess. The relevance of this approach is that we are obliged to recognize distinct grades of subjecthood, rather than a single monolithic “grammatical relation”. A construction-specific approach to subjecthood will turn out to have considerable implications in explaining the diachronic developments in Iranian.

The final point to be emphasized in this section is that Construction Grammar rejects a derivational approach to syntax. As mentioned, constructions, to the extent that they exhibit non-predictable aspects of form and meaning, are taken as primitives in their own right. There is no attempt to derive one from another, nor to set up more abstract representations based on semantic

equivalence. But constructions are not simply isolated elements of an unstructured inventory. Instead, they form a structured network, linked to those other surface constructions with which they share aspects of form and meaning. There is an extremely important principle at work here, which Goldberg (2006: 25) formulates as follows:

Surface Generalization Hypothesis: There are typically broader syntactic and semantic generalizations associated with a surface argument structure form than exist between the same surface form and a distinct form that it is hypothesized to be syntactically or semantically derived from.

In essence, Goldberg argues here for the primacy of surface form in explaining the properties of a given syntactic structure. In the context of different alignments, this principle has far-reaching implications. Effectively, each distinct alignment, for example an accusative alignment associated with a present-tense verb, and the ergative alignment associated with the same verb's past tense, are distinct constructions. There is no requirement to derive one from the other. Consequently, there is no necessity to postulate additional mechanisms to account for the non-identical case and agreement constellations across the two constructions (no Exceptional Case Marking, no additional Infl-nodes etc.) Derivational approaches are faced with intractable problems when confronted with the numerous hybrid types of alignment introduced in the preceding sections, and taken up below. I would, incidentally, apply a similar non-derivational approach to the analysis of the passive in many languages, including English, but this is not the place to expand on that possibility.

A Construction Grammar approach on the other hand, is well placed to cope with these phenomena. If we assume that Past Transitive Constructions are constructions in their own right, then it is perfectly natural that they should have developed in highly divergent ways, while the corresponding present tense constructions remained unchanged over millennia. Croft (2001: 168) explicitly endorses the view that distinct alignments are distinct constructions in languages with alignment splits, and this is also the approach adopted here. The Past Transitive Construction is of course closely related to the present transitive construction through the common semantics, and shared aspects of syntax, but it is a relationship of loose interdependence, comparable to that existing in a lexical network, rather than a derivational relationship. Fur-

thermore, the construction approach paves the way for exploring the links between Past Transitive Construction, and other types of construction in the language, in particular non-canonical subject constructions.

Finally, like other items in the lexicon, constructions display polysemy. Goldberg (1995: 31) suggests that constructions are “typically associated with a family of closely related senses rather than a fixed, abstract sense.” She nevertheless proposes that a construction will have a central sense, but allows for radial extensions to related ones. The notion of constructional polysemy has considerable explanatory power in the area of syntactic change. It has long been recognized that one of the preconditions for semantic change of individual words is their polysemy (see for example Evans and Wilkins (2000). Constructional polysemy, if accepted, provides a simple explanation for changes in the way a particular construction is used. The central meaning of a construction shifts to one of its radial extensions, in a manner paralleling semantic change in words. This is then a further important consequence of adopting a constructional view of syntax: the differences between syntactic change and lexical change, a difference still axiomatic for many generative accounts of syntactic change (Kroch 2001: 699), are radically reduced.

In sum, a Construction Grammar approach offers a number of significant advantages over alternative models. Of course this is not to suggest it will provide answers to all the questions raised here, but taken on balance, it appears much better equipped for explaining what is, as we shall see, best conceived of as the history of a particular construction in a group of related languages.

Chapter 2

Alignment in Old Iranian

The stage of Iranian referred to as Old Iranian is attested in two major bodies of texts, the oldest surviving records of any Iranian language: Avestan and Old Persian.¹ The Avestan texts are religious in nature, and are traditionally divided into two groups: Old Avesta (sometimes also called Gatha Avesta), and Young Avesta. The texts were first written down around 600 AD, but prior to this they were transmitted orally “by specially trained priests” (Skjærvø 2003: xiii) over several centuries. Their precise ancestry and place of origin remain controversial. However, on both archeological and comparative linguistic evidence – the Old Avestan texts are linguistically extremely close to the language of the oldest parts of the *R̥gveda* – the earliest Avestan poems can probably be dated to around 1500 BC (Skjærvø 2003). Geographically, it is assumed that Avestan reflects an Iranian language spoken in what is now northeastern Iran. Young Avestan refers to a body of texts differing linguistically quite sharply from Old Avestan. The language is quite close to Old Persian (see below) and is dated at a similar period. Young Avestan does not comprise a homogenous body of texts; the consistency with which the texts may be considered to faithfully reflect the language of the time varies according to the date at which the texts were committed to writing, and the respective knowledge of the scribes. Given the difficulties in dating, in distinguishing corrupt scribal practices from genuine linguistic features, along with the highly arcane religious nature of the content, the interpretation of Avestan texts is an incredibly complex undertaking, mastered by only a handful of specialists world-wide. For all these reasons I have made but sparse reference to Avestan data, concentrating instead on the other well-attested variety of Old Iranian, Old Persian.

Unlike Avestan, the extant records of Old Persian are firmly rooted in time and place. The texts are written in a cuneiform script inscribed in stone

1 At least two other ancient Iranian languages are known to have existed in the first millennium BC, Median and Scythian. However, as nothing is known of their syntax, they will be ignored henceforth.

and dated 5–4c. BC. The language itself is considered to have been spoken in what is now southwestern Iran and was presumably the vernacular of the rulers of the Achaemenian dynasty, whose deeds are recounted in the inscriptions. According to Schmitt (2000: 30–31), however, Old Persian played no role in the administration of the Empire, where Aramaic continued to be dominant. The longest texts, the Behistān inscriptions, are generally accompanied by translational equivalents in Elamite and Accadian, in some cases also by a version in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Although the syntactic interpretation of Old Persian is, on the whole, more straightforward than that of Avestan, three main difficulties remain: First, the corpus is quite restricted in size. Second, the cuneiform script coupled with damage to parts of the inscriptions renders some passages difficult to interpret. Finally, the texts are written in a stylised and formulaic register. As Schmitt (2000: 30) notes, the inscriptions were not intended primarily to be read – some were inscribed on inaccessible cliff faces, or built into the foundations of buildings. The main purpose of the inscriptions appears to have been representational rather than communicative. This raises doubts with regard to the extent to which the syntax of the inscriptions reflect the syntax of ‘normal’ spoken language. Clearly then, when interpreting the syntax of Old Persian, a good deal of caution is required. Despite these difficulties, most previous research on the evolution of alignment in Iranian has taken as its starting point certain features of Old Persian, and I will be continuing that tradition here.

The examples cited here are based on the version of the text corpus provided in Kent (1953). Although Kent’s readings have in some cases since been superseded (cf. Brandenstein and Mayrhofer (1964), Schmitt (1990) and Schmitt (1999) for more recent interpretation), for the sake of consistency, all examples follow Kent’s transcription and system of cross-referencing, unless indicated otherwise. Thus I continue to write *kartam* instead of the now more usual *kṛtam*. Where more recent scholarship has shown Kent’s readings to be mistaken, supplementary notes and references have been added. The examples have been supplied with a highly simplified morphological glossing: only those inflectional categories considered relevant for the syntactic analysis of each example have been included. Furthermore, both active Aorist and Imperfect are given a unified gloss as PAST, because the difference in meaning is slight and does not appear to be relevant here (see Kent (1953: 90–91) on the use of the two tenses).

Alignment in Old Persian was accusative throughout all tenses, and this can be assumed to be representative of Old Iranian generally. S and A took a uniform case, the Nominative, and the verb agreed with them, while O was marked with a special case, the Accusative. The following examples of a transitive clause (14) and an intransitive clause (15) demonstrate the formal identity of S and A, both in case marking and agreement on the verb, and the accusative marking of O:

- (14) *pasāva adam(A) kāram(O) frāišayam Bābirum*
 thereupon 1S:NOM army:ACC send:PST:1S to.Babylon
 ‘Thereupon I(A) sent an army(O) to Babylon’ (Kent 1953: DB III,84)
- (15) *adam(S) xšāyaθiya abavam*
 1S:NOM king become:PST:1S
 ‘I(S) became King’ (Kent 1953: XPf,36–37)

Likewise in Old Avestan we find in all tenses accusative alignment, shown in the case marking and verbal agreement of the following past-tense transitive clause:

- (16) *at zī θwā fšuyantaē=cā vāstrāi=cā*
 and indeed 2S:ACC(O) cattle.breeder:DAT=and herdsman:DAT=and
θwōrəšta tataša
 fashioner:NOM(A) has.created(3S)
 ‘And indeed the Fashioner(A) has created you(O) for the benefit of the cattle-breeder and the herdsman.’ (Old Avestan, Yasna 29,6)

However, in many modern Iranian languages, alignment in past tenses is no longer accusative. Past transitive clauses with the accusative alignment found in (14), or (16), were, by Middle Persian, simply no longer part of the grammar, and indeed in many modern languages they remain a syntactic impossibility. In this chapter I will be developing proposals to explain the loss of this type of construction, and the complementary spread of non-accusative alignments in past transitive clauses.

2.1 The *manā kartam* construction

It is generally assumed that the ergative alignment of past tenses in modern Iranian did not develop from a finite transitive construction such as that illustrated in (14). Rather, the source is a construction headed by a resultative participle, rather than a finite verb form. I refer to this construction as the *manā kartam* construction, abbreviated to **m. k. construction**. An example is the following:

- (17) *ima tya manā kartam pasāva yaθā xšāyaθiya*
 that which 1S:GEN do:PTCPL after when king
abavam
 become:PST:1S
 ‘This (is) that (which) **was done by me** after (I) became king’ (Kent 1953: DB I,28–29)

This particular phrase, with minor variations, is repeated in the texts at least twenty times, suggesting a strongly formulaic character.² The m. k. construction consists of:

1. a NP in the nominative case (here the ‘relative article’ *tya*, Nominative Neuter Singular)
2. a NP in the Genitive case expressing an Agent (here *manā* ‘first person singular Genitive’)
3. a resultative participle in *–ta*, here *kartam*, from *kar-* ‘do, make’, carrying Nominative Singular Neuter ending in agreement with *tya*. Optionally, the participle may be extended with a form of the copula verb, for example *astiy* in (18). However, it is unclear what factors influence the presence or absence of the copula.

A second possibility for expressing the Agent-phrase was through a clitic form of the Genitive pronoun, as in (18) and (19):

2 Schmitt (1999: 103) suggests that all m. k. constructions occur in relative clauses. However, examples such as (19) are not relative clauses.

- (18) *utā=maiṣ aniyasṣiy vasiy astiy kartam*
 and=1S:GEN much else COP:PRES:3S do:PTCPL
 ‘and much else was done **by me**’ (Kent 1953: DB IV,46)
- (19) *avaθā=šām hamaranam kartam*
 thus=3PL:GEN battle do:PTCPL
 ‘thus **by them** battle was done’ (Kent 1953: DB III,18–19), cf. also
 DB III,40, 47–48,63–64,68–69;DB II,27,42,47,56,98

The importance of clitic expression of the Agent-phrase cannot be overemphasized: it has proved to be one of the most resilient features of Iranian syntax and it remains a characteristic feature of the majority of modern Iranian languages to this day. In Section 2.4.3 below the features of Old Persian cliticization are taken up once more, and the histories of clitic Agent-marking will be picked up at various points in the book (see Appendix, A.2 for an overview). For the time being, we should simply note that expressing the Agent through a clitic pronoun was already in Old Persian at least as widespread as full NP or free pronoun Agents.

Although the basic outline of the m. k. construction is well-established, its precise analysis and status within Old Persian syntax remains very controversial. In the next sections I will review some of the more important literature on the topic before going on to present my own analysis.

2.1.1 The possessive interpretation

Traditionally, the m. k. construction had been interpreted as a passive, but this view was challenged in a short paper by Benveniste, first published in 1952 (Benveniste 1952/1966). Benveniste’s article is perhaps the most widely cited contribution to the debate on the m. k. construction, but in evaluating his proposals it should be noted that the bulk of the article is concerned with broader parallels between possession and perfectivity from a cross-language perspective. His claims on Iranian take up just four pages, and are of a brief and programmatic character. Benveniste claims two things: (i) the m. k. construction displays clear parallels with a type of possessive construction, also involving a fronted Genitive. The parallels extend to the use of a clitic pronoun to express the possessor. Compare the use of the clitic pronoun =*taiy* ‘second

person singular’ to express a possessor in (20), and the clitic pronoun =šām ‘third person plural’ expressing Agent in (19), a phrase attested many times in the corpus and repeated here for convenience:

(20) **Possessor as clitic**

utā=taiy tauhmā vasiy biyā
and.also=2S:GEN seed much may.be

‘and may you have much seed (offspring)’ (lit: ‘and may your seed be much/to you may be much seed’) (Kent 1953: DB IV,75)

(19) **Agent-phrase as clitic**

avaθā=šām hamaranam kartam
thus=3PL:GEN battle do:PTCPL

‘thus **by them** battle was done’

On the basis of these parallels, Benveniste suggests that the m. k. construction is essentially possessive in nature. He draws further parallels to comparable structures in other Indo-European languages (e.g., the Latin *mihi est* type), concluding that the m. k. construction is “un parfait *actif* d’expression *possessive*” (Benveniste (1952/1966: 180), original emphasis).

Note that in Benveniste’s formulation the term ‘active’ already occurs, and this leads us to Benveniste’s second claim: (ii) the m. k. construction is not a passive. The argumentation in support of this claim runs as follows: according to Benveniste, a construction can only be considered ‘passive’ if the verb form is clearly marked morphologically as a passive. In fact, Old Persian did have such verb forms:

(21) *upariy avām θikām hadiš frāsaḥya*

on that rubble palace construct:PASS:PST

‘On that rubble the palace **was constructed.**’ (Kent 1953: DSf,27)

In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to passive verb forms of this type, i.e., finite verb forms with overt passive morphology distinguishing them from the active forms of the same verb lexeme, as **synthetic passives**. These are to be distinguished from participles, which are not (originally at least) finite verb forms. Now when Old Persian synthetic passives occur with an overt Agent-phrase, they are marked with the preposition *hacā*. According to Benveniste,