The development of bound person indexing in Western Iranian languages

Masoud Mohammadirad,
Université Sorbonne-nouvelle, Paris 3
masoud.mohammadirad@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

Introduction

Is there a difference between the development of person indexing for subject (A) and object (O) arguments? Evidence from past transitive constructions of western Iranian languages

Old Iranian languages had fully-fledged accusative alignment in their morphosyntax:

1) *avam* **adam** *frāišayam* *Arminam*
   3SG.DEM.DIST.M.ACC:O   1SG.NOM:A   send.PST.1SG   Armenia.ACC
   '[An Armenian named Dāḍaršiš] ... I sent him forth to Armenia.' (Old Persian _ Kent 1953: DBII, 30)

Since Middle Iranian period (2000 years ago), ergativity emerged in past transitive constructions following the shifts to the verbal system, that is, the loss of finite past tense forms and the adoption of vebal adjectives as past tense verb stems (See Haig 2008; 2017 for more details):

2) *u=t* **az** *hišt* **hēm** *sēwag*
   and=2SG:A   1SG.DRC   left   COP.1SG   orphan
   'And **you** left **me** behind as an orphan.' (Parthian _ Durkin-Meisterenst 2014:394)

Two sets of bound person indices have since been crucial in the later shifts in person indexing: **inflectional affixes**, **clitic person markers (PMs)**.

Obligatory indexing: The person index is present on the target regardless of contextual features, e.g., the presence of the local coreferent NP.

Conditioned indexing: The person index's realization on the target is contingent on the contextual factor; e.g., the presence of overt controller, animacy, definiteness, etc.

A-past indexing

Old Iranian: inflectional morphology, obligatory (ex. 1)

Middle Iranian: person clitics, conditioned (ex. 2)

New Iranian:

i) Clitics remained conditioned to the presence of overt oblique-marked subject NPs:

3) *palang-e* *čemen(*=eš)* *be-bard*
   tiger-OBL.M   1SG.OBL=3SG   PUNCT-take.PST
   'The tiger took me.' (Chali)

ii) Clitics grammaticalized as obligatory indexers of A-past NPs:

4) *me* *m=u-xārt-a*
   1SG   **1SG:A**=PFV-eat.PST-COP.3SG
   'I have eaten (them).' (Naeini)

iii) Clitics were superseded by inflectional affixes (specific to languages which agreement is now uniform accusative):

5) *zâro-ân* *nân.* *san-in*
   child-PL   bread   buy.PST-**3PL**
   'The kids bought bread.' (Bijar southern Kurdish)
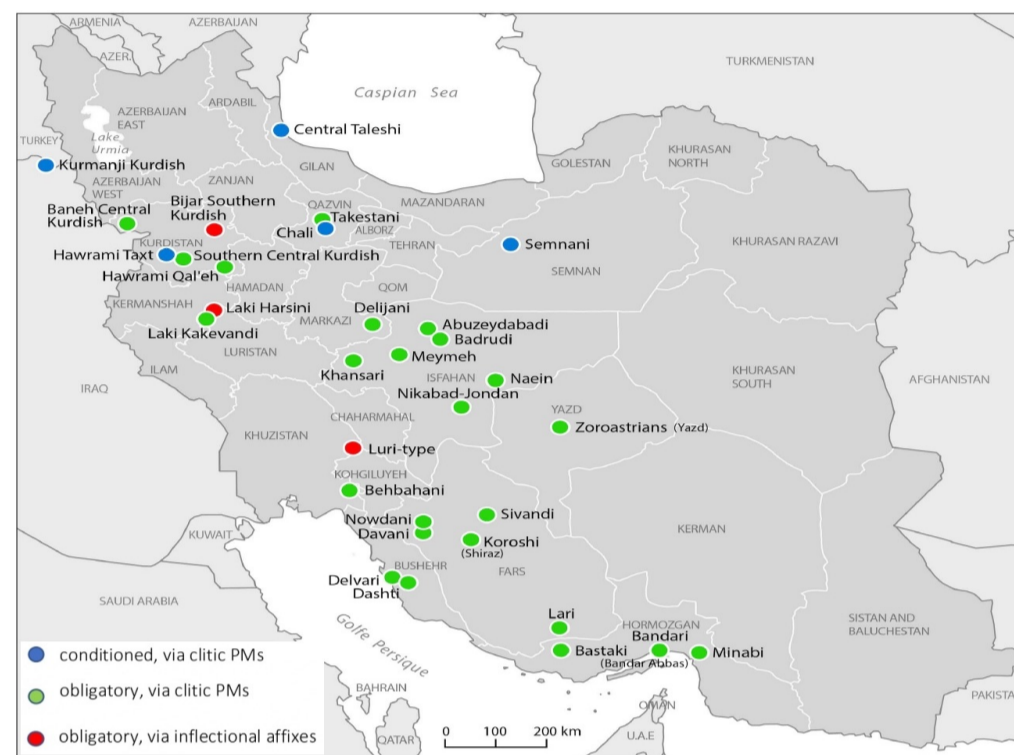
O-past indexing

Old Iranian: clitic person markers, conditioned

Middle Iranian: inflectional affixes, obligatory (ex. 2)

New Iranian:

i) The pattern of Middle Iranian is preserved:

6) *min=eš* *na-xard-on*
   1SG=3SG:A   NEG-eat.PST-**1SG:O**
   'he (The wolf) didn't eat me.' (Badrudi)

ii) Independent oblique pronouns index O-past argument, but do not trigger agreement on the verb (ex. 3)

iii) Inflectional affixes are in complementary distribution with overt object NPs, thus resembling pronouns rather than agreement:

7) *gorg* **oš**=*xārd-en*   *vs.*   *gorg* **anīe** **oš**=*xārd*
   wolf   **3SG:A**=eat.PST-**3PL:O**   wolf   3PL:O   **3SG:A**=eat.PST
   'The wolf ate them.' (Lari)

iv) Clitic person markers supersede degrammaticalized inflectional affixes:

8) *gorg* **eš**=*xa=šu*
   wolf   **3SG:A**=eat.PST=**3PL:O**
   'The wolf ate them.' (Nodani)
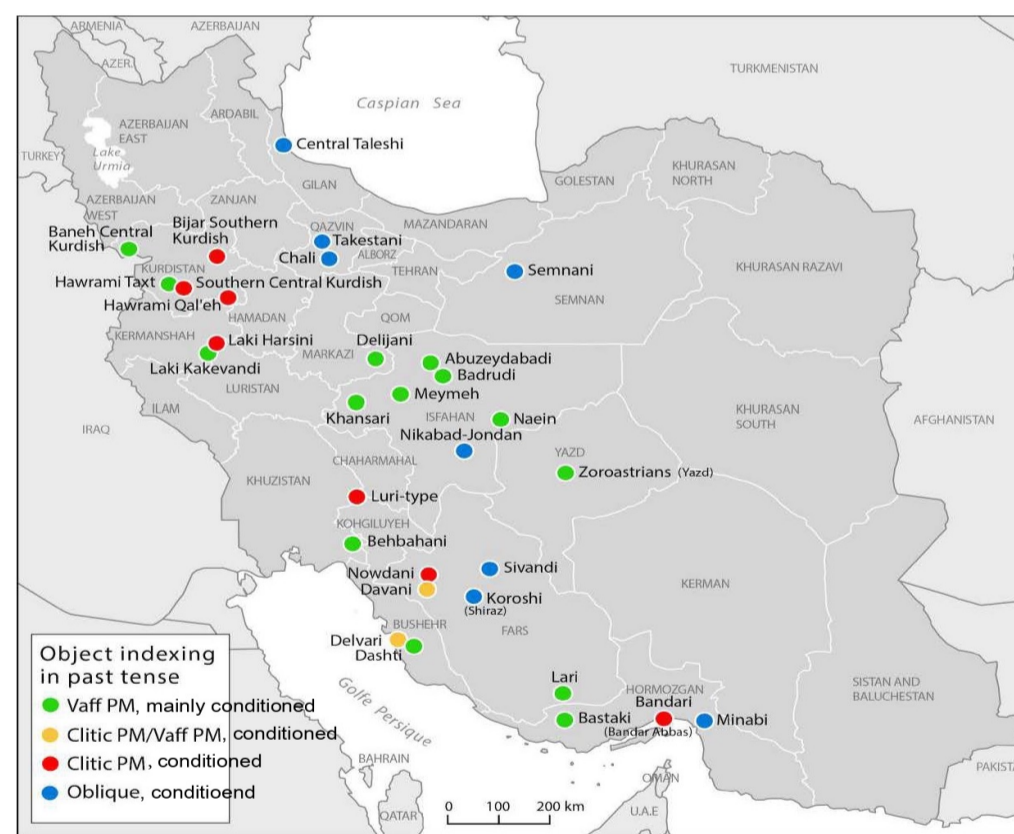
Discussion

In the course of 2000 years, A-past indexing and O-past indexing have developed through inverse stages:

A-indexing has moved toward obligatory indexing, in accordance with predictions of grammaticalization theory.

Obligatory O-indexing (O-agreement) via inflectional affixes degrammaticalized into conditioned indexing and further has been superseded by clitic pronouns (through analogy with the indexing pattern in present tense constructions), illustrating thus the deinflectionalization of O-indexing since Middle Iranian period.

The inverse indexing preferences for A and O could be related to the general tendency for subject agreement cross-linguistically (see Siewierska 1999; Haig 2018).

Why does O-indexing develop less into obligatory indexing than A-indexing? "The category of person is relatively uninformative in the object role; speakers can fairly reliably predict that around 90% of objects will be third person" (Haig 2018: 811)

Old Iranian
A-past: affix, obligatory
O-past: clitic/oblique, conditioned

Middle Iranian
A-past: clitic, conditioned
O-past: affix, obligatory

Modern western Iranian

Kurmanji, Zazaki
A-past: No bound indexing (clitics were lost)
O-past: affixes, obligatory

Some Kurmanji, Gorani
A-past: clitic, conditioned
O-past: affix, obligatory

Tatic dialects (Chali, Taleshi, Semnani, etc.)
A-past: clitic, conditioned
O-past: oblique, conditioned

Central Kurdish, Central plateau dialects
A-past: clitic, obligatory
O-past: affix, conditioned

Some Tatic, e.g. Takestani
A-past: clitic, conditioned
O-past: oblique, conditioned

Minabi, Sivandi, Koroshi
A-past: clitic, obligatory
O-past: independent pronoun, conditioned

Bandari, Nodani, Southern CK, Some Gorani
A-past: clitic, obligatory
O-past: clitic, conditioned

Persian, Southern Kurdish, Luri-type
A-past: affix, obligatory
O-past: clitic, conditioned