



Verbal Agreement in Laki

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1 Introduction

Most western Iranian languages, despite their broad differences, show a common quality when it comes to the verbal agreement of past transitive verbs. Dabir-moghaddam (2013) and Haig (2008) discuss it as a grammaticalized split-agreement to encode S(ubject), A(gent), and P(atient), which is sensitive to tense and transitivity and uses split-ergative constructions for its past transitive verbs. This is also evident in Laki (Figure 1). Although Laki has already lost the main part of its ergative constructions, the case of the {3 sg} marking is yet another sign that this language is in the process of absolute de-ergativization. The Iranian languages are unique for the alignment studies because of their diachronic and synchronic properties, where alignment shifts from accusative to ergative, and back to accusative.

FIGURE 1. Laki-speaking area



2 Vestigial Split Ergativity

... in some languages with an ergative-absolute case-marking system, the verb-agreement is determined equally on an ergative-absolute basis. ... There are even some languages that have verb-agreement on an ergative-absolute basis but have no overt case-marking of noun phrases. (Comrie 1978)

$V_{PST.INT}$ -**suff.SUBJ** V S

$V_{PST.TRN}$ -**suff.OBJ=clt.SUBJ** V P A

(1) owo dowa-**n**
3PL run.PST-**3PL.SUB**
They ran.

(2) āword-**en=on**
bring.PST-**3PL.OBJ=3PL.SUB**
(They) brought them.

Considering the internal structure of the verb and in the absence of any overt argument, the patterns represented in the following tables show different markers on the verb:

LAKI VERBAL RULE BLOCKS

PRESENT & INTRANSITIVE			PAST		
Mood/Neg	Aspect	Stem	Aspect	SUBJ Agr	OBJ Agr
-2	-1	S	1	2	3
Neg /Imp /Sub	Imperf		Prec	SUFF	Perf
ne(u) / be(u)	ma		-u		-a

(3) ma-[nas-**im=to**
IMPERF-know.PRES-1PL=2PL
(We) know you.

TRANSITIVE PAST	
OBJ Agr	SUBJ Agr
2	3
SUFF	Perf
	-a

(4) di-**m=et**
see.PAST-1SG=2SG
You saw me.

(5) di-**n=em**
see.PAST-2SG=1SG
I saw you.

3 Agreement Markers

The Laki agreement system includes both pronominal enclitics and suffixes. These markers are used in different places in order to mark person and number. We can classify these agreement markers into three groups, which are distinct with regards to tense, or more specifically their stem (either present or past) and the transitivity of the verb (i.e., whether the verb is transitive or intransitive).

	PRESENT	PAST	
		INTRANSITIVE	TRANSITIVE
1 SG	em/m	em/m	im/m
2 SG	in/n	in/n	it/t
3 SG	i/e/y	-	i/e/y
1 PL	im/men	im/men	imon/mon
2 PL	inon/non	inon/non	iton/ton
3 PL	en/n	en/n	won/on
	(me) mafrof- em (to) mafrof- in (ov) mafrof- e	(me) hat- em (to) hat- in (ov) hat	(me) sazi= m (to) sazi= t (ov) saz- e

4 Discussion: Suffixes or Clitics?

Considering the Zwicky-Pullum (1983) criteria and the discussions presented in Miller and Sag (1997), I examine the degree to which we can consider Laki verb markers as either suffixes or clitics. My hypothesis is that the markers of the first and the second groups are suffixes, while the members of the third group are clitics. I could find three main criteria relevant to the discussion of Laki markers:

✓ Host non-selectivity of the past transitive markers

The markers of the present and the intransitive past attach only to the end of the verb. But the past transitive verbs show their markers attached to one of the following elements:

-- direct object (6) nomæ=mon da a owen
letter=1PL give.PAST to 3PL
We gave the letter to them.

-- indirect object (7) ima a owen=mon nomæ da
3PL to 3PL=1PL letter give.PAST
We gave the letter to them.

-- nonverbal part of a complex predicate (8) mēšuræt=mo kerd-en-a
advise=1PL do.PAST-3PL-PERF
We have advised them.

-- verb (9) da=mon a owen nomæ
give.PAST=1PL to 3PL letter
We gave the letter to them.

✓ Idiosyncrasy in {3 sg} of the intransitive past tense

✓ **Ordering** - Clitics can attach to material already containing clitics, but affixes cannot. According to 'Laki Verbal Rule Blocks', all those instances of clitics are the same as the markers for the transitive past.

5 The Case Of Third Person Singular

The patterns discussed so far are not working the same way for the third person singular. The {3 sg} of Laki verbs uses the same agreement marker in all tenses and with all verb types. The marker for {3 sg} can be considered -e, with adjustments according to its phonological context. I use the same criteria as in (5) to show that {3 sg} marker is a suffix regardless of the tense and transitivity of the verb.

(10) homa downa a non=ton-a hovard?
2PL yesterday that food=2PL-DEF eat.PST
Did you eat that food yesterday?

(11) o downa a non-a hovard-e?
3SG yesterday that food-DEF eat.PST-3SG
Did s/he eat that food yesterday?

(12) āword-**e-y=on**
bring.PST-3SG-[y]=3PL
(he) brought them.

$V_{PST.TRN}$ -**suff.SUBJ=clt.OBJ**

{3 sg} marker is a suffix, because:

- ✓ Very selective in choosing its host
-- only attaches to the end of the verb
- ✓ Idiosyncratic in the intransitive past
- ✓ Ordering

(13) næ-h^ward-e-y-æse
NEG-eat.PST-3SG-[y]-COP
(s/he) hasn't eaten.

6 Conclusion

The verbal markers of Laki constitute a complex mixture of affixes and clitics, with possible form-content mismatches. The patterns of agreement discussed show the vestigial split-ergative constructions of this language.

The exception is the third person singular marker, which as discussed here, is a suffix all through the Laki verbal paradigm.

This observation along with Hopper and Traugott's cline of grammaticality (2003) suggests that the {3 sg} marker is being grammaticalized as an inflectional suffix:

Content word → grammatical word → clitic → inflectional affix

- ✓ If we are right and the {3 sg} marker is a suffix:
 - Laki is replacing the vestiges of split-ergative system by a nominative-accusative or neutral system, so that:
 - all subject agreement markers suffixes
 - all object agreement markers: clitics

- ✓ If {3 sg} is a clitic:
 - not a second position clitic => a verbal clitic
 - contradict previous data on proposed Wackernagel second position for clitics in Indo-Iranian languages.

7 References

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