The sensitivity of possessor raising and applicativization to tense in Laki

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Outline

- How the person and number of subjects and pronominal objects are coded
  - in the present tense
  - in the preterite
- The pattern of PN marking in a transitive clause depends on tense
- How the PN properties of pronominal possessors are coded
  - These reveal a pattern of possessor raising in the preterite
- How the PN properties of pronominal prepositional objects are coded
  - These reveal a pattern of applicativization in the preterite
- Discussion of typological and historical implications
In the Laki language (Northwestern Iranian), the person and number of a finite verb form’s subject and pronominal object arguments are, in general, expressed either as suffixes or as enclitics.

The precise manner in which these arguments’ properties are realized varies according to the verb form’s tense and valence.
Coding a subject’s person and number in the present tense

In the present tense, a verb carries a person and number (PN) suffix to express the agreement properties of its subject:

Table A. Subject-coding PN suffixes in the present tense

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SG</th>
<th>PL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-(e)m</td>
<td>-(i)men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-(i)n</td>
<td>-(i)nān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-i</td>
<td>-(e)n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   you.PL  Ali=DEF.OBJ see.PRS-SBJ.2PL
   ‘You (pl) see Ali.’

2. *mown-em=et.*
   see.PRS-SBJ.1SG=OBJ.2SG
   ‘I see you (sg).’
Coding a pronominal object’s person and number in the present tense

In the present tense, a transitive verb may carry a PN clitic expressing the properties of a pronominal object:

Table B. Pronominal object-coding PN clitics in the present tense

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SG</th>
<th>PL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>=(e)m</td>
<td>=mān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>=(e)t</td>
<td>=tān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>=i</td>
<td>=(ā)n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. *mown-em=et.*
   see.PRS-SBJ.1SG=OBJ.2SG
   ‘I see you (sg).’

   eat.PRS-SBJ.1SG=OBJ.3PL
   ‘I eat them.’
Coding a pronominal object’s person and number in the present tense

3.  mown-em=et.
    see.PRS-SBJ.1SG=OBJ.2SG
    ‘I see you (sg).’

4.  mar-em=ān.
    eat.PRS-SBJ.1SG=OBJ.3PL
    ‘I eat them.’

In (3) and (4), the subject-agreement suffix and the pronominal object clitic are adjacent. But in the case of a compound verb, the two are separated: the subject-agreement suffix appears on the finite verb, and the pronominal object clitic on the compound’s initial constituent:

5.  mearefi=tān   ma-ke-ymen.
    introduction=OBJ.2PL   HAB-do.PRS-SBJ.1PL
    ‘We are introducing you.’
Coding a subject’s person and number in the preterite (intransitive verbs)

In the preterite, an intransitive verb carries a **PN suffix** to express subject agreement:

Table C. Subject-coding PN suffixes in the preterite tenses (intransitive verbs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SG</th>
<th>PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-(e)m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-(i)n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[as in the present except in the 3sg]

6. **hat-inān.**  
   come.PST-SBJ.2PL  
   ‘You (pl) came.’

7. **Zia do aka hat arā māl ima.**  
   Zia last day come.pst to house our  
   ‘Zia came to our house yesterday.’
In the preterite, a transitive verb expresses subject agreement by means of a PN clitic:

<p>| | | |</p>
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<td>=tān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>=i</td>
<td>=(ā)n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This subject-coding clitic is hosted by the first argument constituent of VP, which may be the verb itself (as in (9)):

8. me ketew-a=m  dā  a det-al-a.
   I book-DEF=SBJ.1SG give.PST to girl-PL-DEF
   ‘I gave the book to the girls.’

   eat.PST-OBJ.3PL=SBJ.1PL
   ‘We ate them.’

But: 3sg =i is uniformly enclitic to the verb.
Coding a pronominal object’s person and number in the preterite

In the preterite, a transitive verb’s pronominal object is expressed by a PN suffix on the verb itself. These are the same suffixes as are used to code subjects in intransitive preterite clauses.

9. \textit{wārd-en=mān.}
\textit{eat.PST-OBJ.3PL=SBJ.1PL}
‘We ate them.’
Coding a pronominal object’s person and number in the preterite

9. \textit{wārd-en=mān}.
   \textit{eat.PST-OBJ.3PL=SBJ.1PL}
   ‘We ate them.’

In (9), the pronominal object suffix and the subject-agreement clitic are adjacent. But in the case of a compound verb, the two are naturally separated: the pronominal object suffix appears on the finite verb, and the subject-agreement clitic in second position:

10. \textit{parvāz=em dā-n}.
    \textit{fly=SBJ.1SG give.PST-OBJ.3PL}
    ‘I flew them.’

11. \textit{mearefi=tān kerd-imen}.
    \textit{introduction=SBJ.2PL do.PST-OBJ.1PL}
    ‘You (pl) introduced us.’
Three patterns of person/number marking in Laki

In summary, Laki verbs may be said to have three ways of coding subjects and pronominal objects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Pronominal object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>PN suffix (Table A)</td>
<td>PN clitic (Table B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preterite intransitive</td>
<td>PN suffix (Table C)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preterite transitive</td>
<td>PN clitic (Table D)</td>
<td>PN suffix (Table C)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar patterns are observed in other varieties of Kurdish. Particular attention has been devoted to the Sorani Kurdish pattern in a number of places, e.g. Samvelian (2007), Bonami & Samvelian (2008), Karimi (2009, 2011), Walther (2011), Bonami & Crysmann (2013), Karimi (2013), and Bonami & Stump (2017).
The pattern of PN marking in a transitive clause depends on tense.

The distinct patterns of PN marking in transitive clauses in the present and preterite tenses may be schematized as follows:

- Present tense:
  - CAT:
  - VP
  - VERBAL HEAD:
  - SUBJECT:
  - 1 [PER: \(\alpha\), NUM: \(\beta\)]
  - OBJECT:
  - 2 [PER: \(\gamma\), NUM: \(\delta\)]

- Preterite tense:
  - CAT:
  - VP
  - VERBAL HEAD:
  - SUBJECT:
  - 1 [PER: \(\alpha\), NUM: \(\beta\)]
  - OBJECT:
  - 2 [PER: \(\gamma\), NUM: \(\delta\)]
The PN properties of pronominal possessors

When a NP has a pronominal possessor, the PN properties of the possessor are ordinarily expressed by means of a phrase-final PN clitic, as in (12).

\[
12. \textit{ketew kalen riyāziya} = m \\
\text{book big mathematic} = \text{POSS.1SG} \\
\text{‘my big mathematics book’}
\]

When a phrase such as (12) appears as a VP-initial object in a preterite sentence, it might be expected to host a second PN clitic expressing subject agreement. But this expectation cannot be fulfilled, because Laki grammar disallows adjacent PN clitics (*PNcl-PNcl).
That is, Laki morphology presents a dilemma. In the preterite, a transitive verb’s subject is coded by a PN clitic hosted by the first argument constituent of the VP. If this first constituent is a NP with a pronominal possessor, this possessor cannot be expressed in the usual way (= as a clitic) in view of the ban on successive PN clitics.

Laki resolves this dilemma in a striking way.
Ordinarily,

• **subject agreement** is expressed by a PN clitic hosted by the NP;

• the PN properties of the NP’s possessor are expressed on the verb by a PN suffix from Table C.

\[13. \text{ ketew-}a=m \quad x^{\text{wan-i-n}}. \]

book-DEF=SBJ.1SG \quad read-PST-POSS.2SG

‘I read (did read) your book.’
Thus, there is a dramatic difference in the morphosyntax of sentences (14) and (13):

14. \textit{ketew-}a=\textit{m} \quad \textit{max}^\text{wan-in}.
\textit{book-DEF=POSS.1SG} \quad \textit{read.PRS-SBJ.2SG}

‘You are reading my book.’

13. \textit{ketew-}a=\textit{m} \quad \textit{x}^\text{wan-i-n}.
\textit{book-DEF=SBJ.1SG} \quad \textit{read-PST-POSS.2SG}

‘I read (did read) your book.’
Thus, there is a dramatic difference in the morphosyntax of sentences (14) and (13):

14. \( ketew-a=m \quad max^w an-in. \)
   \[
   \begin{align*}
   &\text{book-DEF=POSS.1SG} \quad \text{read.PRS-SBJ.2SG} \\
   &\text{‘You are reading my book.’}
   \end{align*}
   \]

13. \( ketew-a=m \quad x^w an-i-n. \)
   \[
   \begin{align*}
   &\text{book-DEF=SBJ.1SG} \quad \text{read-PST-POSS.2SG} \\
   &\text{‘I read (did read) your book.’}
   \end{align*}
   \]
When a possessed NP appears as the first argument constituent of VP

Thus, there is a dramatic difference in the morphosyntax of sentences (14) and (13):

14. \( \text{ketew-}a=m \text{ max}^w\text{an}^{-}-\text{in}. \)
    book-DEF=POSS.1SG  read.PRS-SBJ.2SG
    ‘You are reading my book.’

13. \( \text{ketew-}a=m \text{ } x^w\text{an}^{-}-i^{-}-n. \)
    book-DEF=SBJ.1SG  read-PST-POSS.2SG
    ‘I read (did read) your book.’
Thus, there is a dramatic difference in the morphosyntax of sentences (14) and (13):

14. *ketew*-a=*m* \( \max^w wan\)-*in*.

- book-DEF=POSS.1SG  read.PRS-SBJ.2SG
- ‘You are reading my book.’

13. *ketew*-a=*m* \( x^w wan\)-*i*-*n*.

- book-DEF=SBJ.1SG  read-PST-POSS.2SG
- ‘I read (did read) your book.’
As these examples show, a preterite verb whose direct object has a pronominal possessor inflects exactly like a preterite verb with a pronominal direct object. In other words, Laki exhibits a kind of **possessor raising**, by which the PN properties of a direct object’s possessor come to serve as those of the direct object itself.
Restrictions on possessor raising in Laki
Restrictions on possessor raising in Laki

If the possessed NP is modified by a relative clause,

- **subject agreement** is expressed by a PN clitic appearing at the end of the relative clause;

- the PN properties of the NP’s possessor are expressed on the NP’s head by a PN clitic.

15. *ketew*-a=*t ke pāraka=*m sani*  
    *book-DEF=POSS.2SG that last.year=SBJ.1SG buy.PST*  
    ‘your book which I bought last year’

Here, the relative clause allows the two PN clitics to avoid violating the *PNcl-PNcl constraint.*
Possessor raising is not in general observable in present-tense sentences.

16. har ruž rafix-a=tān a mown-em.
    every day friend-DEF=POSS.2PL OBJ see.PRS-SBJ.1SG
    ‘Every day I see your (pl) friend.’
The PN properties of pronominal prepositional objects

When a PP has a pronominal object, the PN properties of this object are ordinarily expressed by means of a phrase-final PN clitic, as in (17).

17. aben=em
to=OBJ.1SG
‘to me’

When a PP such (17) appears as a VP-initial argument in a preterite sentence, the possibility that it will host a second PN clitic expressing subject agreement is again excluded by the *PNcl-PNcl constraint.

Laki avoids this outcome in a manner analogous to the possessor-raising solution.
Ordinarily,

- **subject agreement** is expressed by a **PN clitic** hosted by the preposition;

- the **PN properties of the preposition’s object** are expressed on the verb by a **PN suffix** from Table C.

18.  

\[
\text{aben}=\textit{em} \quad \textit{vet-in}.  \\
\text{to}=\text{SBJ.}\textit{1SG} \quad \text{tell.PST-OBJ.}\textit{2SG}  \\
\text{‘I told you.’}
\]
When a PP with a pronominal object appears VP-initially in the preterite

Thus, there is a dramatic difference in the morphosyntax of sentences (19) and (18):

19. $aben=m\ a\ m-uš-in$.  
    to=OBJ.1SG OBJ HAB-tell.PRS-SBJ.2SG 
    ‘You (sg) tell me.’

18. $aben=em\ vet-in$.  
    to=SBJ.1SG tell.PST-OBJ.2SG 
    ‘I told you.’
Thus, there is a dramatic difference in the morphosyntax of sentences (19) and (18):

19. \textit{aben=m a m-uš-in.}
   \begin{align*}
   \text{to=OBJ.1SG OBJ HAB-tell.PRS-SBJ.2SG} \\
   \text{‘You (sg) tell me.’}
   \end{align*}

18. \textit{aben=em vet-in.}
   \begin{align*}
   \text{to=SBJ.1SG tell.PST-OBJ.2SG} \\
   \text{‘I told you.’}
   \end{align*}
Thus, there is a dramatic difference in the morphosyntax of sentences (19) and (18):

19. $aben=m\ a\ m-uš-in.$
   to=$OBJ.1SG\ OBJ\ HAB-tell.PRST-SBJ.2SG$
   ‘You (sg) tell me.’

18. $aben=em\ vet-in.$
   to=$SBJ.1SG\ tell.PST-OBJ.2SG$
   ‘I told you.’
Thus, there is a dramatic difference in the morphosyntax of sentences (19) and (18):

19. *aben=m a m-uš-in.*
   to=OBJ.1SG OBJ HAB-tell.PRS-SBJ.2SG
   ‘You (sg) tell me.’

18. *aben=em vet-in.*
   to=SBJ.1SG tell.PST-OBJ.2SG
   ‘I told you.’
As these examples show, a preterite verb whose VP-initial PP complement has a pronominal object inflects like a preterite verb with a pronominal direct object. In other words, Laki exhibits a kind of **applicativization**, by which the PN properties of the pronominal object of a verb’s PP complement affect the verb’s inflection in just the same way as those of a pronominal direct object.
Restriction on applicativization in Laki
Restriction on applicativization in Laki

Applicativization only affects VP-initial prepositional phrases:

20. \( aben=em \) \( \text{vet-in.} \)
    to=\(1\text{SG.SBJ} \) tell.PST=\(2\text{SG.OBJ} \)
    ‘I told you.’

21. \( \text{vet}=m \) \( aben=et. \)
    tell.PST=\(1\text{SG.SBJ} \) to=\(2\text{SG.OBJ} \)
    ‘I told you.’
What is striking in all of this is that the observed patterns of possessor raising and applicativization are restricted to the preterite tenses. These are the very tenses in which a subject-agreement clitic risks violating the *PNcl-PNcl ban.

On one hand, a subject-agreement clitic in VP-second position risks following a PN clitic expressing a direct object’s pronominal possessor.

On the other hand, it also risks following a PN clitic expressing the pronominal object of an argument PP.
The incidence of possessor raising and applicativization in such cases heads off the possibility of any violation. It is as though in Laki, possessor raising and applicativization are a remedial presence motivated specifically by the *PNcl-PNcl ban.

“Relation-changing operations” have, of course, been routinely attributed to the need to avoid violations of universal or language-specific constraints. But it is unusual for the incidence of such operations (however these are to be formalized) to correlate with the choice of tense.
In Laki, this correlation seems to be purely indirect. The contrasting patterns of PN marking in the present and preterite tenses are the vestige of a stage of split ergativity in the prehistory of Laki; many Iranian languages either retain split ergativity (as in Pashto) or have vestiges of it (as in Sorani Kurdish), though some have abandoned even these vestiges.
If Laki (like Persian) had simply abandoned the contrasting patterns of PN marking observed in the present and preterite tenses, it would thereby have avoided possible violations of *PNcl-PNcl. Having preserved these contrasting patterns, it has instead apparently employed the innovations of possessor raising and applicativization to avoid such violations.
As a consequence, the exponents of person and number in the inflection of Laki verbs exhibit a high degree of polyfunctionality. Consider, for example, the sentences in (22)-(25), in which the verbs’ 1sg PN suffix codes four underlying grammatical relations.

(22) -em codes subject:
Zia o Ali  mown-em.
Zia and Ali see.PRS-SBJ.1SG
‘I see Zia and Ali.’

(23) -em codes direct object:
  di-m=nān
see.PST-OBJ.1SG=SBJ.2PL
‘You (pl.) saw me.’

(24) -em codes indirect object:
  Zia o Ali  aben=ān  vet-em.
Zia and Ali to=SBJ.3PL  tell-PREP.OBJ.1SG
‘Zia and Ali told me.’

(25) -em codes possessor:
  Zia o Ali  dečarxa-ʔa=n  di-m.
Zia and Ali bicycle-DEF=SBJ.3PL  see.PST-POSS.1SG
Zia and Ali saw my bicycle.’
We look to future research for insights into the choice of an apparent complication (innovative possessor raising and applicativization) over an apparent simplification (innovative leveling of the patterns of PN marking across the present and preterite tenses).
Tašakora makam!
References

Berman, R.A, 1982. Dative marking of the affectee role: Data from Modern Hebrew.


