Deriving Split-Ergativity in Iranian Languages

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Introduction. This paper investigates the *double-oblique* phenomenon in Iranian languages focusing on Kurdish and unstudied Zazaki varieties, thus it makes typological and theoretical contributions. I argue that the case-split and the double-oblique pattern are triggered by the added structure in past transitive clauses, extending Laka's (2006) account of *bi-absolutive* constructions (also Coon & Preminger 2012) to the opposite end of the case spectrum. The paper also shows that the term 'oblique' is non-uniform, and it covers cases ranging from structural accusative case to both inert and lexical inherent cases.

Previous Studies. Baker & Atlamaz (B&A, 2014) and Karimi (2013) claim that there is something defective about the past stems in Kurdish. For Karimi (2013), this accounts for the agreement asymmetries between present and past clauses via defective intervention. For B&A (2014), it gives rise to the passive-like nature of past stems, which they use to motivate a phase account: v_{PAST} is not a phase head, whereas v_{PRES} is. Moreover, on the basis of participles, nominalizations, quasi-passives, B&A suggest that the passive nature in the past stem allow only the theme argument to be expressed. Thus, in the past tense, they posit AuxP, between agreement bearing head F and vP, to make the clause active. Consider the structures in (1).

(1) a. $[_{\text{TP}}$ T $[_{\text{AuxP}}$ Subj $\varnothing_{\text{have}}$ $[_{\text{FP}}$ F $[_{v\text{P}}$ v_{PAST} $[_{v\text{P}}$ Obj Verb $]]]]]$ (Past)

  b. $[_{\text{TP}}$ T $[_{\text{FP}}$ F $[_{v\text{P}}$ Subj v_{PRES} (+phase) $[_{v\text{P}}$ Obj Verb $]]]$ (Present)

B&A (2014) also invoke Marantz's (1991) case hierarchy and incorporate Chomsky's agreement-assigned case, located on the hierarchy after the dependent case and before the unmarked case.

(2) Lexical case ≫ Dependent case ≫ *Agreement-assigned case* ≫ Unmarked case ≫ Default case

(2) is used to argue that in the past tense of a canonical ergative language, e.g. Adıyaman Kurdish, the object gets agreement-assigned case from F^0, and the subject receives the unmarked oblique case (3a). In a double-oblique language like Muş Kurdish, the subject receives the dependent case and the object gets the unmarked case (3b). Intransitive subjects get agreement-assigned direct case in both dialects (3c). After introducing novel data from Zazaki dialects of Mutki (MZ) and Goraf (GZ), I argue that this mechanism is problematic on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

(3) a. mı   tı   di-yi
    I.OBL you.DIR saw.2SG

    'I saw you (sg).'

  b. mın te   dit
    I.OBL you-OBL saw.3SG

    'I saw you (sg).'

  c. ez   ket-im
    I.DIR fell-1SG

    'I fell down.'

Data and Analysis. Data from MZ (first documented by Öpengin & Anuk (Ö&A, 2015, 2016)) and Goraf dialect show that there are remarkable changes also in the alignment system of Zazaki if one considers the full range of its dialects, unlike the common assumption in the literature (e.g. Todd 2002, Paul 1998, 2009, Haig 2008, Selcan 1998, Aygen 2010). (4) illustrates the case and agreement alignment in past clauses of these two dialects. I leave out the alignment paradigm in present tense since it is like other dialects.

(4)

	Case Marking		Agreement
	DIR	*OBL*	
Unaccusative	S_1	S_2	S_1
Unergative Transitive		S, A, O	—
2ⁿᵈ person (Mutki)	S, A	O	S
2ⁿᵈ person (Goraf)	S, A	O	S, A

(4) updates the empirical generalizations in Ö&A (2015, 2016), whose description contains only the S_2 for MZ, as in (5a). I show that in fact S_1 is also possible with a crucial bearing for the verbal agreement (5b) (The same alternation is observed in past nonverbal clauses, e.g. *mı neveş bi* versus *e neveş bie* 'I was sick').

(5) a. mi   ginê-y   er
       1SG.OBL fall.PAST-3SG ground

    b. e   gin-a   erd
       1SG.DIR fall.PAST-1SG ground

    'I fell down.' (Ö&A, 2016: 6a)   'I fell down.'

The paper also introduces data from Goraf which is identical to MZ in relevant aspects, but differs in 2nd person. The Goraf dialect can be characterized as having acquired a nominative-accusative pattern as the dominant contact-language Turkish. MZ, on the other hand, still maintains the ergative alignment.

The data also raise issues for B&A's (2014) case-competition approach. The dependent case approach could explain the oblique case on the subjects of unergatives and transitives, but the issue persists unaccusative subjects. Given that there is only one NP in the unaccusative structure, the case-competition for *dependent* oblique would not apply. The unusual behavior of 2nd person in MZ is also not expected by the same approach. Without further qualifications, the case-hierarchy in (2) expects the direct case on an argument NP to be the result of F agreeing with that NP. As such, the verb should display agreement with the sole NP in question, which holds for intransitive subjects (6a). However, it fails to capture the mismatch between the morphological form of the case on an argumental NP and the agreement on the verb, as in (6b). Such sentences show that not every direct-case bearing NP derives from the Agree operation.

(6) a. ti   şiy   kêye?
       2SG.DIR go.PAST.2SG house

    b. ti   mi   çarsu-ye di nî-dî
       2SG.DIR I.OBL market-at in saw-3SG

    'Did you go home?'   'I saw you at the market.'

Due to these considerations (among others to be discussed), I will interpret the passive-nature towards a restriction on the number of arguments allowed in a domain given the bifurcated clause, not necessarily as a requirement for the realization of the theme argument. As such a boundary for the calculus of arguments gets to be in effect (7a), in line with crosslinguistic approach to bi-absolutive constructions. The other component I use is the inherent case approach.

(7) a. $[_{TP}$ T $[_{AuxP}$ Subj $\varnothing_{have}$ $\left(\left([_{vP} \ v_{PAST} [_{VP} \text{Obj Verb}]]]\right]\right]$ (Past)

    b. $[_{TP}$ T $[_{vP}$ Subj $v_{PRES} [_{VP} \text{Obj Verb}]]]$ (Present)

Given these tools, the alignment patterns and the observed variations fall through: In the past transitive clause of Adıyaman Kurdish, **O** receives direct case through agreement with T, whereas the subject is assigned inert inherent case (McGinnis 1998) in Spec,AuxP. Note that since inert case-marked, the subject is not an intervener for the agreement between T and a lower DP. Moving on to Muş Kurdish, which exhibits the double-oblique pattern, the subject again receives the inert case. For the object, the passivization test shows that it is the structural accusative case since the promoted object receives direct case (8b) (Woolford 2006), thus it will be assigned accusative case from the v.

(8) a. te   mın   kuşt
       2SG.OBL 1SG.OBL killed-3SG

    b. ez   hat-im   kuşt-in
       1SG.DIR came-1SG killed-NMLZ

    'You killed me.'   'I was killed.'

In the case of Mutki Zazaki transitive clauses, the subjects also get inert case. Crucially, although it also manifests the double-oblique pattern, the object behaves differently in passivization. The promoted object retains its case (9b), unlike its counterpart in Muş Kurdish, which indicates that it is assigned lexical inherent case, not structural accusative case.

(9) a. ti   mı   güe
       2SG.DIR 1SG.OBL like-3SG

    b. mı   güe
       1SG.OBL like.3SG

    'You liked me a lot.'   'I was liked.'

Conclusion. I have argued that a clausal bifurcation due to the added structure in the past transitive clauses (with an inherent case approach) explains the split ergativity and the double-oblique pattern in Iranian languages. I also argue for a split of the term 'oblique' similar to the absolutive (Legate 2006).