

# Ergativity and the structure of complex predicates in Dari

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Conference on Complex Predicates in Iranian Languages  
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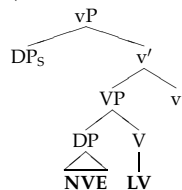
## 1 Introduction

- A central question in the literature on Iranian complex predicates: What is the structural status of the nonverbal element (NVE)?
- While it has been generally assumed that nonverbal elements contrast with direct objects in not bearing a thematic relation to the verb, the syntactic parallels between nominal nonverbal elements and nonspecific direct objects, at least in Persian, are striking:
  1. They occur in the same base position, immediately preceding the inflected verb.
  2. Both bear primary stress within their phonological phrase (Kahnemuyipour 2003, Ghomeshi and Massam 1994, Folli et al. 2005).

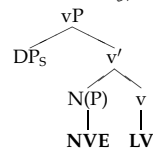
- (1) a. *sohrāb keTĀB khārid.*  
Sohrab book buy.PAST.3SG  
'Sohrab bought books.' *nonspecific direct object*
- b. *sohrāb ROSHD kard.*  
Sohrab growth do.PAST.3SG  
'Sohrab grew.' *nominal nonverbal element*

- For this reason, some authors propose to assign nominal nonverbal elements and nonspecific direct objects the same structural position (Mohammad and Karimi 1992, Ghomeshi and Massam 1994, Farudi 2005).
- Others attempt to account for the difference in argument structure by proposing different structures for the two classes (Megerdooimian 2002, Folli et al. 2005).

- (2) a. NVE = Direct object  
(Mohammad and Karimi 1992)



- b. NVE ≠ Direct object  
(Folli et al. 2005)



- The key difference between these two structures:
  - in (2a), the nonverbal element is the direct object of the 'light verb' (the complement of V), while
  - in (2b), the nonverbal element is the head of the extended verbal projection, with the light verb instantiating the functional category v.
- One of the problems in this debate is that Persian generally lacks cross-linguistically well-established diagnostics for the direct object (see Van Valin 2001:59–67):
  - Accusative case marking: It carries a semantic contribution (specificity) so that it does not appear on nonspecific direct objects (Karimi 1990).
  - Passive: There is no evidence that 'passivization' in Persian with *shodan* targets direct objects, as opposed to the patient thematic role.
- We use ergative agreement in Dari (Northwest Iranian, Central Plateau) to probe the structural status of the nominal nonverbal element.
- Ergative case/agreement tests for the direct object since it depends on the presence of a direct object (Donohue 2006:389–390).
- In the remainder of this talk, we will
  1. provide some background on split ergative agreement in Dari, and the structural theory of ergativity;
  2. consider the predictions for ergative agreement in Dari made by each of the views of complex predicates in (2); and
  3. test each set of predictions by examining a survey of Dari data, and show that ergative agreement in the language's intransitive complex predicates supports (2a) over (2b).

## 2 Background on ergativity

- Dari is a caseless, split ergative language with ergative-absolutive verb agreement in the past tense and perfect aspect.
- The same suffix that marks agreement with subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs in the nonpast tenses marks agreement with intransitive subjects and direct objects in the past tense and perfect aspect:

- (3) Nonpast
- (*mè*) *dâv-è*.  
I run.PRES-1SG  
'I run.'
  - (*mè*) *in bin-è*.  
I s/he see.PRES-1SG  
'I see her/him.'
- (4) Simple past
- (*mè*) *dâvù-è*.  
I run.PAST-SG  
'I ran.'
  - (*in*) *oš di-è*.  
s/he 3SG see.PAST-1SG  
'S/he saw me.'

• In the past tense and perfect aspect, the transitive subject is marked by a pronominal proclitic.

- (5) Agreement suffixes (intransitive subject and object in past tense)
- |   | sg. | pl. |
|---|-----|-----|
| 1 | -è  | -im |
| 2 | -i  | -id |
| 3 | -∅  | -èn |
- (6) Agreement clitics (transitive subject in past tense and perfect aspect)
- |   | sg.           | pl.       |
|---|---------------|-----------|
| 1 | <i>om, me</i> | <i>mo</i> |
| 2 | <i>od, de</i> | <i>do</i> |
| 3 | <i>oš, še</i> | <i>šo</i> |

• We adopt Bittner and Hale's (1996) view that ergative case assignment and agreement derive from the structural configurations of the DPs involved.

• The presence of ergative agreement is dependent on there being a legitimate case competitor—or, in other words, a structurally inferior argument:

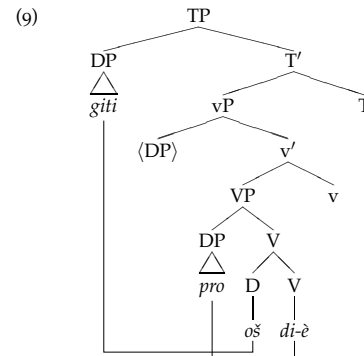
- (7) *Licensing requirement on agreement clitics (past tense and perfect aspect)*  
A pronominal clitic agrees in  $\phi$ -features with a DP  $\alpha$  iff
- $\alpha$  asymmetrically c-commands a distinct DP  $\beta$ , and
  - $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are arguments of the same verb.

• Our formulation is essentially identical to that of Bittner and Hale (1996) and Marantz (2000). The differences have to do with different theoretical assumptions (Government and Binding for Bittner and Hale and Distributed Morphology for Marantz).

• Absolutive agreement (the agreement suffixes in the past tense and perfect aspect) is the default. Whatever doesn't get a pronominal clitic, i.e. direct objects and intransitive subjects, shows absolutive agreement.

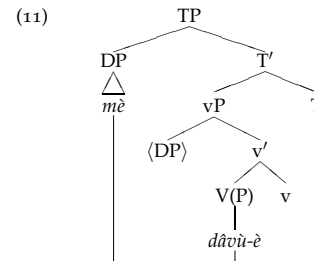
• This principle ensures that the pronominal clitic agrees with the subject of a transitive verb. We assume that the pronominal clitic is head-adjoined to the verb in order to derive its position between the verb and the direct object.

- (8) *giti oš di-è*.  
Giti 3SG see.PAST-1SG  
'Giti saw me.'



• This also means that it does not agree with the subject of an intransitive verb:

- (10) *mè dâvù-è*.  
I run.PAST-1SG  
'I ran.'



• Only syntactic arguments count for the purposes of determining ergative agreement:

- (12) *vachegun-e zomoz-om di sho-èn o múhi sho graft...*  
children-EZ bridegroom-1SG PTCL go.PAST-3PL and fish 3PL get.PAST  
'The children of my son-in-law went and got fish...' (narrative, YD1-4-t1,39)

• Adjunct DPs do not count as case competitors:

- (13) *ya do yogâ mênzèl mo kârtâ, shâv e-khoptoz-im, o sobi râv*  
one two place residence 1PL do.PERF night CONT-sleep.PERF-1PL and morning way  
*e-kâpt-im...*  
CONT-fall.PAST-1PL  
'At one or two places we stopped (rested) and slept for the night, and in the morning started off...' (narrative, YD1-4-t1,4)

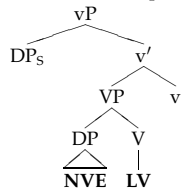
- An alternate view of ergativity: Woolford (1997) treats ergative case as an inherent case assigned with the agent  $\theta$ -role, which under more recent analyses means to the DP in Spec-vP (Woolford 2006, Legate 2008).
- There are two reasons we cannot adopt this approach for Dari:
  1. It's not clear what it would mean for agreement to be 'inherent'.
  2. Not all agents agree via a pronominal clitic in Dari. Crucially, the subjects of unergative verbs like *davùzvun* 'to run' (which are also agents) trigger absolutive agreement via the series of suffixes in (5):

- (14) a. (*mè*) *dāvù-è*.  
 I run.PAST-1SG  
 'I ran.'  
 b. \*(*mè*) *om dāvù*.  
 I 1SG run.PAST

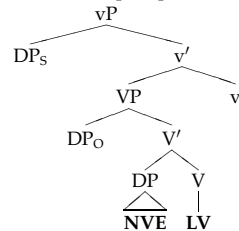
### 3 Consequences for the analysis of complex predicates

#### 3.1 Analysis 1: NVE = Direct object

(15) a. Intransitive complex predicate



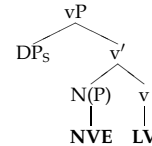
b. Transitive complex predicate



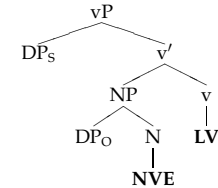
- The subjects of both intransitive and transitive complex predicates asymmetrically c-command another DP argument. For (15a), this is the nonverbal element, which is sister of V.
- Therefore, this analysis predicts that subjects of intransitive *as well as* transitive predicates should trigger ergative agreement with a pronominal clitic, since the nonverbal element qualifies as a legitimate case competitor.
- In the case of transitive predicates, it is unclear whether we expect the nonverbal element or the direct object DP to trigger suffixal agreement on the verb. Something more must be said about how absolutive agreement is determined.

#### 3.2 Analysis 2: NVE ≠ Direct object

(16) a. Intransitive complex predicate



b. Transitive complex predicate



- The nonverbal element of both intransitive and transitive complex predicates is asymmetrically c-commanded by the subject (satisfies 7i), but it is *not* an argument (does not satisfy 7ii).
- Therefore, this structure predicts that the nonverbal element never counts as a legitimate case competitor.
- The subject of an intransitive complex predicate will always trigger absolutive agreement.
- In the case of transitive complex predicates, only the direct object—and not the nonverbal element—should trigger absolutive agreement.

#### 3.3 Testing the two analyses

- The predictions each of these analyses make are summarized below:

	Analysis 1		Analysis 2	
	Intransitive	Transitive	Intransitive	Transitive
Subject	<b>Ergative</b>	Ergative	<b>Absolutive</b>	Ergative
Nonverbal element	Absolutive	?	—	—
Direct object	n.a.	?	n.a.	Absolutive

- To test these predictions, we surveyed the agreement patterns exhibited by a sample of semantically intransitive and transitive complex predicates with nominal nonverbal elements in Dari.

### 4 Complex predicates in Dari

#### 4.1 Data

- We elicited from two native speakers all possible agreement patterns for 32 complex predicates, gathered from two dissertations (Firuzbakhsh 1997 [1376], Puladi-Darvish 2000), one dictionary (Keshāvarz 1993), and our own texts and elicitation.
- We restricted our scope to complex predicates with *nominal* nonverbal elements and the light verb *kārtvun* 'to do', as exemplified in (17). (A summary of all our data is included in the appendix.)

- (17) a. *chēm kārtvun*  
 eye do  
 'to look at'

*transitive*

- b. *xarm kârtvun*  
 sleep do  
 'to sleep' intransitive

- We focussed on nominal nonverbal elements because only DP/NPs receive case and trigger agreement.
- We only looked at complex predicates with *kârtvun* 'to do' in order to keep the survey size reasonable and to maintain as uniform results as possible.

#### 4.2 Results: Transitive complex predicates

- The subject of a semantically transitive complex predicate is always marked with a pronominal clitic, and the verb agrees optionally with the direct object via a suffix.

- (18) a. *mè me chèm kârt-èn.*  
 I 1SG eye do.PERF-3PL  
 'I looked at them.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
- b. *ya do yogâ mènzèl mo kârtâ...*  
 one two place residence 1PL do.PERF  
 'At one or two places we stopped (rested)...' (narrative, YD1-4-t1,4)

- This pattern is unsurprising since there are (at least) two DP arguments (subject and direct object) in each of the clauses in (18).
- We can't tell whether the nonverbal element or the direct object is responsible for licensing ergative pronominal agreement. As we concluded in the previous section, both of the above analyses predict ergative agreement with transitive complex predicates, but for different reasons:
  - Analysis 1: ergative agreement triggered by nonverbal element or direct object.
  - Analysis 2: ergative agreement triggered by direct object (DP sister of nonverbal element)

⇒ Transitive complex predicates won't allow us to tease the two analyses apart. To isolate the predictions of each, we need to focus on the agreement patterns exhibited by *semantically intransitive* complex predicates.

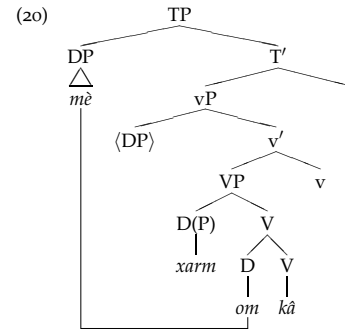
#### 4.3 Results: Intransitive complex predicates

- Subjects of intransitive complex predicates in Dari, just like subjects of transitive complex predicates, exhibit ergative agreement.
- The subject is cross-referenced with a pronominal clitic:

- (19) a. *mè xarm om kâ.*  
 I sleep 1SG do.PAST  
 'I slept.' (elicited, DF-t8)
- b. *mè sha om kâ.*  
 I crying 1SG do.PAST  
 'I cried.' (elicited, DF-t9)

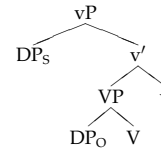
- c. *zun-e onè ji she kârtâ.*  
 wife-EZ there also 3SG do.PERF  
 'He married a woman from over there.' (narrative, YD1-3-t1,37)

- This pattern can only be accounted for under Analysis 1, since it is only under this analysis that the nonverbal element qualifies as a case competitor.

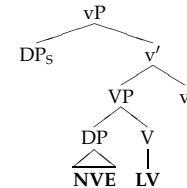


- Assuming that agreement is syntactically determined, this finding provides a clear diagnostic with which to group nominal nonverbal elements with direct objects.
- Note that we can't use the (im)possibility of absolutive agreement with the nonverbal element as evidence, since the third person singular absolutive suffix is null (16).
- We therefore conclude that intransitive complex predicates with nominal nonverbal elements in Dari are syntactically identical to transitive verb phrases with a nonspecific direct object. That is,
  - the light verb is a lexical V head, and
  - the nominal nonverbal element is sister to V.

(21) a. Transitive simplex predicate



b. Intransitive complex predicate



## 5 Conclusion and issues for further investigation

⇒ We conclude that intransitive complex predicates in Dari should be analyzed as identical to transitive verb phrases with a nonspecific direct object (Analysis 1).

- This raises the issue of transitive complex predicates: Analysis 2 in which the nonverbal element is not an argument seems intuitively satisfying.

- If absolutive agreement is diagnostic of direct objects, then transitive complex predicates in Dari are best accommodated by Analysis 2, since the verb agrees by a suffix with the direct object, not the nonverbal element:

(22) *mè me chèm kârt-èn.*  
 I 1SG eye DO.PERF-3PL  
 'I looked at them.' (elicitation, DF-t9)

⇒ We may have to be open to the possibility that the syntax of complex predicates is not uniform, even within a single language.

- Accounts in the spirit of Folli et al. (2005) are appealing since they seem to offer a syntactic analysis that reflects the semantics of complex predicates (see also Toosarvandani, to appear). But in the end, arguments for syntactic structure must come from syntactic phenomena. Agreement is such a phenomenon.

- Interestingly, this seems to be a syntactic pattern that is well-attested cross-linguistically:

(23) a. *Miren-ek ni jo n-au.*  
 Miren-ERG me.ABS hit 1SG-have.3SG  
 'Miren hit me.' *transitive simplex predicate*

b. *Miren-ek hitz egin du.*  
 Miren-ERG word done have.3SG  
 'Miren spoke.' *intransitive complex predicate*

c. *Miren erori da.*  
 Miren.ABS fallen 3SG.be  
 'Miren fell.' *intransitive simplex predicate*  
 (Basque; Bittner and Hale 1996:27)

(24) a. *Aaz cisjk louza-du.*  
 1SG.ERG cat(D) play-D.CAUS  
 'I play with the cat.' *transitive simplex predicate*

b. *Aaz nab ju.*  
 1SG.ERG sleep(I) J.do  
 'I sleep.' *intransitive complex predicate*

c. *Cisjk louzazh dy.*  
 cat(D) playing D.be.PRES  
 'The cat is playing.' *intransitive simplex predicate*  
 (Ingush; Nichols 2007:5–6)

## Acknowledgments, abbreviations, and orthography

The data presented comes from the dialects of Dari spoken in the Yazd city center (*mahlati*) and in the village of Qāsemābād (*qūsemāvūi*). We thank Daryush Farudi, Katayoun Salamati, and our other consultants for teaching us about their language. Dari is also called Behdināni, Yazdi, or Gabri (the latter being derogatory).

We use the following abbreviations: 1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person; ABS = absolutive; CAUS = causative; D = Ingush gender; CONT = continuous; ERG = ergative; EZ = *ezāfe* suffix; J = Ingush gender; PERF = perfect aspect; PL = plural; PRES = present; SG = singular. In the orthography we use for Dari, *ê* represents a mid-low front unrounded vowel, *a* a low front unrounded vowel, *û* a mid-high back rounded vowel, and *â* a low back unrounded vowel. All other symbols have their standard values.

## Appendix: Dari complex predicates in *kârtvoun*

Verb	Gloss	No. Arg.	Pattern	Example
<i>aziat kârtvoun</i>	'to bother'	2	ergative	<i>mè aziat om kârtèn.</i> 'I annoyed them.' (elicitation, DF-t8)
<i>borun kârtvoun</i>	'to give away (in marriage)'	1	ergative	<i>mè az sizda sāleqi bzârt, danû bale, borūnom sho kârtâ.</i> 'When I had finished my thirteenth year, they gave me to my fiancé.' (narrative, YD1-3-t1,1)
<i>buz kârtvoun</i>	'to smell (tr.)'	2	ergative	<i>mè gol me buz kâ'.</i> 'I smelled the flowers.' <i>mè buz kârtèn.</i> 'I smelled them.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>chash kârtvoun</i>	'to stare, give the evil eye'	2	ergative	<i>vuchcha chash me kârtâ.</i> 'I stared at the child.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>chèm kârtvoun</i>	'to look at'	2	ergative	<i>mè me chem kârtèn.</i> 'I looked at them.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>dèm kârtvoun</i>	'to brew (tr.)'	2	ergative	<i>mè dèm om kârtèn.</i> 'I warmed up some things.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>drun kârtvoun</i>	'to reap, harvest'	2	ergative	<i>mè me drun kârtèn.</i> 'I harvested them.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>ejorâ kârtvoun</i>	'to rent (out)'	2	ergative	<i>mè kâ' ejorâ me kârtâ.</i> 'I rented (out) a house.' (elicitation, DF-t8)
<i>ejro kârtvoun</i>	'to execute'	2	ergative	<i>om ejro kârtèn.</i> 'I executed those things.' (elicitation, KS-t1)
<i>etioj kârtvoun</i>	'to need'	1	ergative	<i>mè be pul etioj om kâ.</i> 'I needed money.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>gozarun kârtvoun</i>	'to look past'	1	ergative	<i>az mi gafe yanog gozarun mo kârtâ.</i> 'We have looked past the woman's talk.' (elicitation, DF-t8)
<i>huli kârtvoun</i>	'to explain'	2	ergative	<i>dūna dūna shè huli kârtâ.</i> 'Point by point he explained it.' (DF-t7,4)
<i>kza kârtvoun</i>	'to stop off, to rest'	1	ergative	<i>kza mo kâ.</i> 'We stopped.' (elicitation, DF-t8)
<i>mènzal kârtvoun</i>	'to stop off, to rest'	1	ergative	<i>yu do yogû mènzal mo kârtâ.</i> 'At one or two places we stopped (rested) and slept for the night...' (narrative, YD1-4-t1,4)
<i>mina kârtvoun</i>	'to get married (for woman)'	1	ergative	<i>mīna om kâ.</i> 'I got married.' (elicitation, DF-t8)
<i>mundobosh kârtvoun</i>	'to stay'	1	ergative	<i>... shūv di shāim o onè mundobosh mo kârtâ.</i> '... at night we went there and we stayed together.' (narrative, YD1-4-t1,47)
<i>rosht kârtvoun</i>	'to grow'	1	ergative	<i>vuchegun che qadr zi rosht sho kârtâ.</i> 'How quickly the children grew.' (elicitation, DF-t8)
<i>rīsh kârtvoun</i>	'to light'	2	ergative	<i>mè rush om kârtèn.</i> 'I lighted them.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>sar kârtvoun</i>	'to put on one's head'	2	ergative	<i>mè sar om kârtèn.</i> 'I put them on my head.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>sha kârtvoun</i>	'to cry'	1	ergative	<i>mè sha om kâ.</i> 'I cried.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>shru kârtvoun</i>	'to start'	2	ergative	<i>mī safar mo shru kârt.</i> 'We started the journey.' (elicitation, KS-t2)
<i>tarif kârtvoun</i>	'to praise'	2	ergative	<i>tarif om kârtèn.</i> 'I praised them.' (elicitation, DF-t8)
<i>tav kârtvoun</i>	'to run a fever'	1	ergative	<i>mè tav me kârtâ.</i> 'I was running a fever.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>tazim kârtvoun</i>	'to bow down'	2	ergative	<i>tazim om kârtâ.</i> 'I bowed down to you.' (elicitation, KS-t1)
<i>teka kârtvoun</i>	'to tear (tr.)'	2	ergative	<i>mè teka om kârtèn.</i> 'I tore them.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>vuz kârtvoun</i>	'to swell'	1	ergative	<i>puom vuz osh kâ.</i> 'My feet swelled up.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>vuz kârtvoun</i>	'to blow air into'	1	ergative	<i>vuz tu pūkat om kâ.</i> 'I blew air into the bag.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>xarm kârtvoun</i>	'to sleep'	1	ergative	<i>mè xarm om kâ.</i> 'I slept.' (elicitation, KS-t2)
<i>yû kârtvoun</i>	'to finish'	2	ergative	<i>kārom me yû kâ.</i> 'I finished my work.' <i>mè yû kârtèn.</i> 'I finished them.' (elicitation, DF-t9)
<i>zendegi kârtvoun</i>	'to live'	1	ergative	<i>bohēm miyè hīma zendegi mo kârtâ.</i> 'We all lived together.' (narrative, YD1-3-t1,12)
<i>zunâ kârtvoun</i>	'to get married' (for man)	1	ergative	<i>zūne onè ji she kârtâ.</i> 'He married a woman from over there.' (narrative, YD1-3-t1,37)
<i>kza kârtvoun</i>	'to fall'	1	ergative	<i>mè kza kârtèn.</i> 'I turned them off.' (elicitation, DF-t9)

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