

## A syntactic repair to a clitic cluster restriction: The case of Laki split agreement

Sahar Taghipour

Arsalan Kahnemuyipour

University of Toronto

University of Toronto Mississauga

Laki (Southern Kurdish) displays a split ergative agreement system. While we take the source of this split to be aspectual as shown for other languages (Coon 2013), for illustration purposes, we use tense as the source of the split, in line with the literature on ergativity in Iranian languages (Karimi 2010, cf. Haig 2008). We take the locus of this split to be  $v$  (Legate 2008, Aldridge 2008, inter alia), where an ergative  $v$  assigns inherent case to and agrees with the subject in its specifier. Henceforth, in past transitive clauses (i.e. the ergative alignment) in Laki, there are two loci of agreement (T and  $v$ ). Meanwhile, in intransitive and present transitive clauses (i.e. the accusative alignment), there is only a single locus of agreement in T. In the accusative alignment, T agrees with the subject and there is no further agreement. In the ergative alignment,  $v$  agrees with the subject, leaving T available for further agreement with an accessible argument. When there is no accessible argument (due to locality), the agreement on T is realized as default. We show, however, that in contexts involving a clitic argument, a striking contrast arises. If the clitic can be realized in-situ, default agreement on T obtains. Crucially, however, when in-situ realization of the clitic violates a clitic cluster restriction (Arregi & Nevins 2012, Tyler 2019), this clitic raises to the edge of the phase becoming accessible to T and realized as T agreement on the verb.

In all intransitive sentences in Laki, exemplified by (1), agreement is with the subject (S), tracked by verbal suffixes in Table I (3sg shows allomorphy conditioned by present/past).

(1)  $m\text{-}\bar{a}/at\text{-}(i)n^I$ .

DUR-come.PRS/PST-2SG

‘You are/were coming.’

Table I. Agreement suffixes

1SG	2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	3PL
$-(e)m$	$-(i)n$	$-i/\emptyset$	$-(i)men$	$-(i)n\bar{a}n$	$-(e)n$

In transitive sentences, the agreement pattern

varies. In the present tense, agreement is with the subject (A), tracked by Table I suffixes (2), while in the past, agreement with the subject (A) is tracked by Table II VP second position (2P) clitics (Bonami & Samvelian 2008), shown in (3)-(4). Note that Table II enclitics are also used as objects of prepositions or possessors (e.g. (10)).

(2)  $ali\ yo\ maryam\ to\text{-}na\ ma\text{-}\bar{s}n\bar{a}s\text{-}en^I$ .

Ali and Maryam you-SPEC DUR-know.PRS-3PL

‘Ali and Maryam know you.’

Table II. Agreement enclitics

1SG	2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	3PL
$=(e)m$	$=(e)t$	$n/a$	$=m\bar{a}n$	$=t\bar{a}n$	$=(\bar{a})n$

(3)  $sif\text{-}ela=t^{II}\ w\bar{a}rd$ .  
apple-PL.DEF=2SG eat.PST

‘You ate the apples.’

(4)  $ali\ yo\ maryam\ to=n\bar{a}n^{II}\ \bar{s}n\bar{a}si$ .

Ali and Maryam you=3PL know.PST

‘Ali and Maryam knew you.’

We can see in (3-4) that there is no further agreement with the direct object when it is a full DP (3) or a strong pronoun (4). Crucially, when the object has no overt realization, its phi-features are realized as Table I suffixes on the verb (5-6). Here, Table II enclitics track subject agreement.

(5)  $di\text{-}(e)n^I=et^{II}$ .

see.PST-3PL=2SG ‘You (sg) saw them.’

(6)  $di\text{-}n^I=\bar{a}n^{II}$ .

see.PST-2SG=3PL ‘They saw you (sg).’

With verbs selecting a PP complement, Laki allows for two PP positions, post- or pre-verbal. In both contexts, when the prepositional object is a full DP (7) or a strong pronoun (8), irrespective of the PP position, there is only agreement with the subject, realized as a Table II 2P clitic.

(7)  $vet=em^{II}\ aben\ maryam$ .

tell.PST=1SG to Maryam ‘I told Maryam.’

(8)  $a\bar{z}\ owen=em^{II}\ persi$ .

from them=1SG ask.PST ‘I asked them.’

Meanwhile, when the prepositional object is not a full DP or a strong pronoun, a contrast arises between post- and pre-verbal PPs. When the PP is pre-verbal (9), the phi-features of the prepositional object are realized as Table I suffixes on the verb. Here, the subject agreement 2P clitic appears on the preposition. When the PP is post-verbal (10), the object is realized as a Table II enclitic on the preposition, with subject agreement realized as a Table II enclitic on the verb.

(9)  $aben=m\bar{a}n^{II}\ vet\text{-}in^I$ .

to=1PL tell.PST-2SG

(10)  $vet=m\bar{a}n^{II}\ aben=et^{II}$ .

tell.PST=1PL

to=2SG

‘We told you (sg).’

**Analysis.** We propose that Laki agreement follows a split-ergative alignment system. In past intransitive and present clauses (1-2), subject agreement can be explained straightforwardly as Agree between T and the subject, realized as Table I suffixes. This is an accusative alignment with only T as an agreement locus. We posit that in past transitive clauses, the ergative  $\nu$  assigns inherent case to and agrees with the subject in its specifier, realized morphologically as the Table II (2P in VP) enclitics. That leaves T available for further agreement with another argument. In a past transitive clause with a full DP or strong pronominal object (3-4), we see  $\nu$  agreement with the subject realized on the object but no agreement between T and the object. We take the absence of this Agree relation to be a locality issue, with T and the object being in different phases (Chomsky’s 2001 PIC), leading to a default realization of the phi-features on T as  $\emptyset$  (3sg). The pattern in (7) with a full DP and in (8) with a strong pronoun can be explained in a similar fashion, namely  $\nu$  agreement with the subject as a 2P clitic, no T agreement and default realization as  $\emptyset$ .

Turning to the context of the past transitive clause with no overt realization of the object (5-6), we see the expected Table II subject agreement enclitic, but in addition we find a Table I verbal suffix. We take the covert object to be a deficient pronoun  $\phi P/\phi$  (a la Cardinaletti & Starke 1994) and propose that the appearance of a Table I suffix is the result of an Agree relation between T and  $\phi P/\phi$ . We see a similar pattern with a pre-verbal PP in (9). In this context too, we observe T agreement with the prepositional object’s  $\phi P/\phi$  (as a Table I verbal suffix). (The pre-/post-verbal PP contrast (9-10) is discussed below.)

The complementarity between strong pronouns (or full DPs) and Table I enclitics in the above data is reminiscent of a similar complementarity between overt subject pronouns and subject agreement in Celtic languages (McCloskey & Hale 1984, Jouitteau & Rezac 2006), where there has been a debate between an Agree vs. a clitic analysis of these phi-elements. At first glance, the complementarity seems to favor a (pronominal) clitic account. It is important to note, however, that in Laki, the phi-features of the deficient pronoun are clearly realized as agreement suffixes, as these are the same forms found in run-of-the-mill subject agreement in the present tense (1). This provides support for an Agree account of these markers.

We are left with the question of why agreement with T becomes available in the deficient pronominal contexts presented above. A closer examination of Laki data leads to this generalization: A deficient pronoun cannot be realized as a Table II enclitic on an element which already hosts one, due to a clitic cluster restriction (Arregi & Nevins 2012, Tyler 2019). We propose that when a deficient pronoun is competing for the same host with the Table II agreement enclitic, the phi-bundle cannot be realized on that host and instead moves to the edge of  $\nu P$ , becoming accessible to T for agreement. The contrast in (9-10) is very revealing. In (10) with a post-verbal PP, there is no competition for the realization of the Table II clitics. The subject agreement clitic is realized on the verb and the prepositional object as another Table II clitic on P. In (9), however, P is the host for the 2P subject agreement clitic. Due to the clitic cluster constraint, the prepositional object cannot be realized as a clitic on this host. As a result, it moves to the edge of  $\nu P$  and becomes accessible for T Agreement, leading to a Table I agreement suffix on the verb.

This account leads to a more general prediction: in potential clitic clash contexts, whenever a different host is introduced for the realization of a subject enclitic, the clitic clash should be resolved, leading to the realization of the deficient pronoun as a Table II clitic. This prediction is borne out in all such cases we have investigated (e.g. several ditransitive contexts, complex predicates, possessive constructions), which will be presented in the talk. Briefly, one such context arises with the pre-verbal PP we considered in (9). In this context, if we introduce a direct object (11), subject agreement is realized as a Table II clitic on the object ‘*secret*’, freeing up the preposition for the phi-feature realization of the prepositional object as a Table II clitic on P ‘*to*’.

(11) *rāz-a=mān*<sup>II</sup> *aben=et*<sup>II</sup> *vet. secret-DEF=1PL to=2SG tell.PST* ‘We told you (sg) the secret.’

In conclusion, this talk provides an account for recalcitrant agreement facts in Laki based on some motivated assumptions and highlights a novel case of a syntactic repair for a clitic cluster restriction, with interesting implications for our understanding of the syntax-phonology interface.

## **References**

- Aldridge, Edith. 2008. Generative approaches to ergativity. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2.5, 966-995.
- Arregi, Karlos, and Andrew Nevins. 2012. *Morphotactics: Basque auxiliaries and the structure of spellout*. Springer.
- Bonami, Olivier, and Pollet Samvelian. 2008. Sorani Kurdish person markers and the typology of agreement. In *13th International Morphology Meeting*.
- Cardinaletti Anna, and Michal Starke. 1994. The typology of structural deficiency: A case study of the three classes of pronouns. *Clitics in the languages of Europe*.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by Phase. In M. Kenstowicz (Ed.), *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*, 1-52. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Coon, Jessica. 2013. *Aspects of split ergativity*. Oxford University Press.
- Haig, Geoffrey. 2008. *Alignment change in Iranian languages: A construction grammar approach*. Walter de Gruyter.
- Jouitteau, Mélanie and Milan Rezac. 2006. Deriving the complementarity effect: Relativized minimality in Breton agreement. *Lingua* 116.11, 1915-1945.
- Legate, Julie Anne. 2008. Warlpiri and the theory of second position clitics. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 26.1, 3.
- Karimi, Yadgar. 2010. Unaccusative transitives and the Person-Case Constraint effects in Kurdish. *Lingua* 120.3, 693-716.
- McCloskey, James, and Kenneth Hale. 1984. On the syntax of person-number inflection in Modern Irish. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 1.4, 487-533.
- Moghaddam, Safieh. 2016. *Split Ergativity in Davani*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto.
- Tyler, Matthew. 2019. Absolute promotion and the condition on clitic hosts in Choctaw." *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 37. 3, 1145-1203.