

## Ergativity and the structure of complex predicates in Dari

Much of the debate on the structure of complex predicates in Iranian has focussed on the syntactic status of nominal nonverbal elements (NVEs). Some authors have treated nominal NVEs (1a) as nonspecific direct objects (1b) (Mohammad & Karimi 1992, Ghomeshi & Massam 2001, Farudi 2005), while others have argued that the two should be kept structurally distinct (Megerdooomian 2002, Folli et al. 2005). Here, we explore the interaction between ergativity and complex predicates in Dari (Northwest Iranian, Central Plateau: Yazd, Iran) and its consequences for this debate. Assuming the core of Bittner & Hale's (1996) theory of ergativity, we argue that both approaches are correct, but only for a subset of complex predicates.

Dari is a caseless, split ergative language, with ergative-absolutive verb agreement in the past tense and perfect aspect. The verb bears a suffix that cross-references the person/number of absolutive arguments: i.e. intransitive subjects (2a) and objects (2b). Transitive subjects—the ergative argument—are marked by a pronominal clitic (2b). Following Bittner & Hale (1996), we assume that ergative case/agreement is licensed through case competition: the highest of two DP coarguments in a clause is the ergative argument. In transitive clauses, this means that the agent DP in Spec-vP triggers ergative agreement (in Dari, a pronominal clitic), while the patient DP inside VP triggers default absolutive agreement (a suffix). In intransitive clauses, the single DP argument, whether agent or patient, does not compete with anything, thus triggering absolutive agreement.

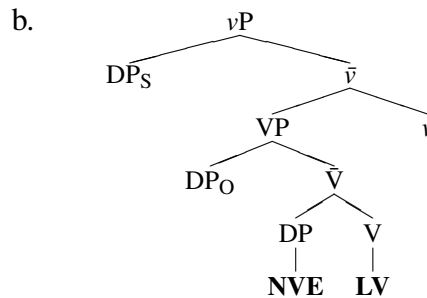
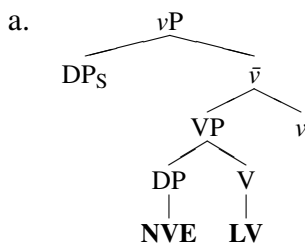
This theory of ergativity makes different predictions for the two views of complex predicates outlined above. Under an account in which nominal NVEs are structurally identical to direct objects, the subject of an intransitive complex predicate should trigger ergative agreement—just like the subject of a transitive complex predicates—since, as illustrated schematically in (3a), it asymmetrically c-commands the NVE, a legitimate competing coargument. We also perhaps expect that both the direct object and the NVE should be able to trigger absolutive agreement (3b). But under an account where nominal NVEs are distinct from direct objects, the NVE should be transparent to agreement. The subject of an intransitive complex predicate will always trigger absolutive agreement, since the NVE is not its coargument and thus not a legitimate case competitor (4a). Similarly, for transitive complex predicates (4b), the NVE should not trigger absolutive agreement.

Neither account is completely successful in accounting for the agreement patterns found in Dari. Unsurprisingly, when the complex predicate is semantically transitive, e.g. *tarif kârtvun* 'praise' (lit. 'description' + 'do') in (5b), the subject is marked with a pronominal clitic. The verb agrees via a suffix with the direct object, as predicted by the structure in (4b). The fact that it does not agree with the NVE suggests that (3b) is incorrect. In semantically intransitive complex predicates like *xarm kârtvun* 'sleep' (lit. 'sleep' + 'do') in (5a), the subject is cross-referenced with a pronominal clitic—behaving as if it were a transitive predicate. This provides support for the structure in (3a), as opposed to (4a), since the nominal NVE appears to count for the purposes of determining agreement.

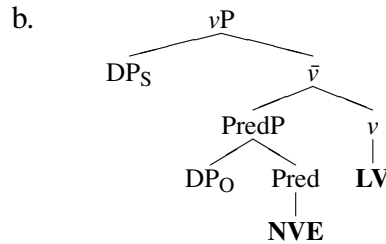
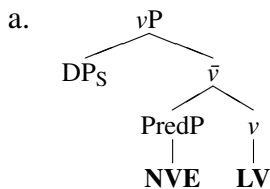
We therefore conclude that the ergative agreement patterns found in Dari's complex predicates are best accommodated by two different structures for complex predicates.

- (1) a. sohrāb **zamin** xord.  
Sohrab ground ate.3SG  
'Sohrab fell down.' *nominal NVE + light verb*
- b. sohrāb **ketāb** xarid.  
Sohrab book bought.3SG  
'Sohrab bought books.' *nonspecific direct object + verb*
- (2) a. mē dāvū-è.  
I run.PAST-1SG  
'I ran.' *intransitive simplex verb*
- b. tâ=**d** di-è.  
you=2SG see.PAST-1SG  
'You saw me.' *transitive simplex verb*

(3) NVE = DIRECT OBJECT



(4) NVE ≠ DIRECT OBJECT



- (5) a. mē xarm=**om** kâ.  
I sleep=1SG do.PAST  
'I slept.' *intransitive complex predicate*
- b. mē tarif=**om** kârt-èn.  
I description=1SG do.PAST-3PL  
'I praised them.' *transitive complex predicate*

**Bittner, M. & K. Hale.** 1996. The structural determination of case and agreement. *Linguistic Inquiry* 27:1–68. **Farudi, A.** 2005. Complex verbs in Persian: Towards a nonderivational approach. M.Phil. thesis, Oxford University. **Folli, R. et al.** 2005. Determinants of event type in Persian complex predicates. *Lingua* 115:1365–1401. **Ghomeshi, J. & D. Massam.** 1994. Lexical/syntactic relations without projection. *Linguistic Analysis* 24:175–217. **Megerdooian, K.** 2002. Beyond words and phrases: A unified theory of predicate composition. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California. **Mohammad, J. & S. Karimi.** 1992. 'Light' verbs are taking over: Complex verbs in Persian. *Proceedings of WECOL*, 195–215.