

A lexical account of Sorani (Suleymaniye) Kurdish prepositions

1. Introduction

Kurdish dialects have a rich class of prepositions and prepositional collocations with a complex syntactic behavior. This situation results from two factors. The first one involves the historical constitution of this class: the initial set of prepositions has progressively been enriched with elements borrowed from other classes, such as substantives. The latter generally combine with primary prepositions to form compound prepositions, though some of them have undergone a grammaticalization process and can function as prepositions by themselves. These “new” prepositions have nevertheless preserved a part of their nominal properties and differ with respect to their morpho-syntactic properties from primary prepositions.

The second point concerns the realization of the complement: some prepositions allow for a clitic (affixal) realization of their complement, while others do not. Furthermore, the alternation of the form of the complement can give rise to an allomorphic variation of the preposition itself. Finally, depending upon the preposition, the clitic complement is not necessarily attached to the preposition and can be realized at distance.

In order to account for these properties, this paper suggests a classification of Sorani Kurdish prepositions on the basis of two major dimensions of variation, NOMINALITY (nominal vs. Non-nominal) and ARGUMENT-REALIZATION (affixal vs. non-affixal). The clitic realization of the complement is argued to be an instance of affixation and a lexicalist account is outlined for all cases of non-local realizations of the clitic, either in terms of argument composition or in terms of constraints on the linearization of domain objects.

2. Preposition classes

2.1. Simple vs. absolute prepositions

Within the class of primary prepositions, Kurdish grammars establish a distinction between simple and absolute prepositions:

Table (1) : Simple and absolute prepositions

Simple form	Absolute form	
<i>ba</i>	<i>pê</i>	‘to, with’
<i>bê</i>	-	‘without’
<i>bo</i>	<i>bo</i>	‘for’
<i>-a</i>	<i>-ê</i>	‘to, towards’
<i>la</i>	<i>lê</i>	‘of, at, to’
<i>lagal</i>	<i>lagal</i>	‘with’
<i>tâ / hatâ</i>	-	‘until’
-	<i>tê</i>	‘to’

As it is suggested in Table (1), the relation between simple and absolute prepositions can be viewed as an allomorphic variation. This variation is triggered by clitic versus non-clitic (non-affixal) realization of the complement. Simple prepositions combine with syntactic items (NP or pronoun), while absolute prepositions take a clitic complement:

- (1) min ba Narmîn / to da-lê-m ‘I am telling to Narmin / you’
 (I) to Narmin / you AM-say.PRES-1.SG¹
- (2) pê=t/*to da-lê-m² ‘I am telling to you’
 to=2.SG/ you AM -say.PRES-1.SG

2.2. Compound prepositions and nominal prepositions

¹ Abbreviations : AM = aspect-mode, COP = copule, DEF = definite, EZ = Ezafa, INDEF = indefinite, PAS = past, PL = plural, POST = postposition, PP = past participle, PRES = present, SG = singular.

² For the sake of clarity, clitics are separated by ‘=’ from their host and are thus distinguished from ordinary head inflections.

The combination of the simple prepositions *la*, *ba* and *a* with nominal elements such as *sar* ‘head’, *pişt* ‘back’, *bar* ‘side’, *paş* ‘ahead’, etc. gives rise to ‘compound prepositions’ (Mackenzie 1961):

- (3) kitêb-aka la sar mêz-a ‘The book is on the table’
 book-DEF.SG at head table-COP.3.SG

The analysis of these sequences is problematic. On the one hand, the suppression of the simple preposition seems impossible:

- (4) * kitêb-aka sar mêz-a (putatively) ‘The book is on the table’
 book-DEF.SG head table-COP.3.SG

Furthermore, the nominal element is not marked by *Ezafe*³, while the latter is obligatory within the NP. These facts suggest that the simple preposition and the noun form a compound whose internal structure is not visible for syntax. On the other hand, as noted by Edmonds (1955) and (Mackenzie 1961), the preposition can be omitted in some cases (and in some dialects). The noun behaves then as a preposition by itself:

- (5) (la) pâş awa ‘after this’
 (at) back this

On the basis of these data, two distinct analyses are possible: 1) *sar* is a preposition by itself, in which case *sar mêz* is a PP and *la sar mêz* is a P[PP]. 2) *La sar* is a compound preposition which takes an NP complement. I will not take a stand on this issue here: further data from different dialects are necessary and it is probable that within the same dialect certain sequences must be accounted for in terms of (1) while some others in terms of (2).

Whatever the adopted analysis would be, it could be accommodated by the classification adopted here: a distinction is established between nominal and non-nominal prepositions. The latter include simple and absolute prepositions. The exact extension of the former class depends on the analysis adopted for sequences such as *la sar*. Either the whole sequence is considered as a compound, and then *la sar* is registered as a *nominal* preposition, or *sar* is considered as a nominal preposition by itself.

3. Absolute prepositions and their clitic complement

The clitic realization of the complement is not specific to absolute prepositions. Nominal (or compound) prepositions can also take a clitic complement:

- (6) la tanîşt=**it** ‘beside you’
 at side=2.SG

What distinguishes the two types of prepositions is the fact that with nominal prepositions the clitic has a local realization within the PP and is attached to the head. With respect to this point, nominal prepositions behave like nouns. By contrast, in the case of absolute prepositions, the clitic is not necessarily attached to the preposition and can have a non-local realization (i.e. outside the PP), as illustrated by the following examples:

- (7) har wuşa-yak=**î** **pê** a-lê-m ‘I am telling only one word to him’
 only word-INDEF.SG=3.SG to AM-say.PRES-1.SG
- (8) êwa awa=**tân**⁴ **pê** zor wut=**im** ‘You have often told me this’
 you this=2.PL to often say.PAS=1.SG

It should however be noted that the non-local realization is subject to strict constraints and is limited to two cases: the clitic is either attached to the verb (ex. 8) or to the right edge of the constituent immediately preceding the preposition (ex. 7). The first type of attachment occurs

³ *Ezafe* is realized as an enclitic vowel on the head noun within the NP and links the latter to its single NP complement.

⁴ The clitic *-tân* realizes subject-verb agreement. Although Sorani dialects have lost oblique case-marking, the subject-verb agreement pattern is still reminiscent of split ergativity: in the present tenses of all kinds of verbs and in the past tenses of intransitive verbs, the subject agreement is realized by a personal verbal ending and the direct object, if realized as a clitic, attaches to the first constituent of the VP. With the past tenses of transitive verbs, the agreement pattern is reversed: the personal affix corresponding to the object attaches to the verb, while subject-verb agreement is realized by a clitic.

only with transitive verbs in the past tenses. The significant fact is that, contrary to what would be expected, the complement of the preposition is not realized as a clitic in this case, but as a verbal personal ending:

- (9) a. rojbâş=yân îê kird-î⁵ ‘They wished us good morning’
 good-morning =3.PL to do.PAS-1.PL
 b. * rozbâş=yân îê kird=**mân**
 good-morning =3.PL to do.PAS=1.PL

Thus, in the past transitive construction, the complement of an absolute preposition displays two different forms depending on whether it is attached to the preposition or to the verb. In the latter case, it has the same shape as a verbal argument (i.e. direct object). In other words, the verb inherits the clitic complement of the preposition. The metamorphosis of the clitic in a verbal ending further provides evidence in favor of an affixal analysis of the clitic. Consequently, the difference between simple and absolute prepositions can be reinterpreted in the following way: the former have a *non-affixal* argument in their ARG-ST list, while the single member of the ARG-ST of an absolute preposition is of type *affixal*.

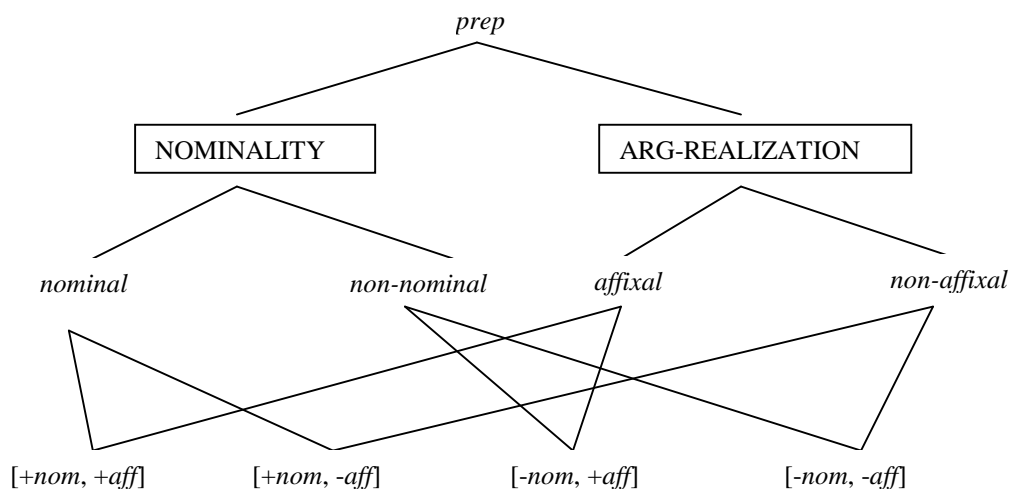
4. A lexicalist account within HPSG

4.1. Classification and multiple hierarchy

Two binary dimensions of variation are sufficient to produce all lexical entries for different types of prepositions: A) NOMINALITY, B) ARGUMENT REALIZATION.

The first dimension separates nominal prepositions from both simple and absolute prepositions. The second dimension allows for the distinction of simple prepositions from absolute prepositions.

(10) (Partial) Lexical Hierarchy for Prepositions



This hierarchy generates (at least) four lexical types. Combined with specific lexemes, it produces fully specified lexical entries (Tseng 2005). Here are some examples for each type:

- (10) a. (*la*) pişt : [+nom, -aff]⁶ *la pişt Narmin-awa* ‘behind Narmin’
 b. (*la*) pişt : [+nom, +aff] *la pişt-it-awa* ‘behind you’
 (11) a. *ba* : [-nom, -aff] *ba Narmin* ‘to Narmin’
 b. *pê* : [-nom, -aff] *pê-tân* ‘to you’

It can be noted that ‘absolute’ and ‘simple’ labels become superfluous on this account.

4.2. ‘Non-local’ realization of the clitic complement

⁵ N.B. -îⁿ is a verbal ending (word-level affix) and not a clitic.

⁶ The features [+aff] et [-aff] stand respectively for [ARG-ST list(non-aff)] and [ARG-ST list(aff)] .

- The affixal argument is realized as a verbal ending

In this case the complement of the preposition is ‘reanalyzed’ as an argument of the verb. This analysis can be considered as an instance of ‘argument composition’ (Hinrichs and Nakazawa 1994, Miller and Sag 1997, Abeillé et al. 1998), handled by the following lexical rule:

(12) Argument composition rule

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD } \textit{verb, past} \\ \text{ARG-ST } \boxed{1} < \dots \text{PP}[-\textit{nom}, \text{COMPS } \boxed{2} (\textit{aff})] \dots > \end{array} \right] \rightarrow [\textit{verb} [\text{ARG-ST } \boxed{1} + \boxed{2}]]$$

This rule applies only if the affixal argument of the absolute preposition is not realized as a clitic on the preposition:

(13) Argument realization *prep*

$$\textit{prep} \Rightarrow \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SUJ } < > \\ \text{COMPS } \boxed{1} \\ \text{ARG-ST } \boxed{1} + \textit{list}(\textit{non-affixal}) \end{array} \right]$$

- The clitic complement precedes the preposition

This attachment possibility occurs either with intransitive verbs or with transitive verbs in the present tenses. In line with Crysmann (1997 and 2000), the ‘clitic’ is introduced in the lexical entry of the preposition, and thus the clitic and the preposition constitute a morphological unit of some sort. It is further assumed that the preposition and the clitic are not strictly ordered and that the latter can precede or follow the former, though being an enclitic, the ‘clitic’ must have a host to its left. A mismatch arises then when the ‘clitic’ is placed before the preposition: from a morphological point of view, the clitic belongs to the preposition, though it is phonologically attached to a preceding element. In line with Kathol (2000), Crysmann (1997 and 2003), I will assume that word-level signs can contribute more than one domain object into syntax.

(14) Clitic affixation

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{word} \\ \text{DOM} \left\langle \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PH } \boxed{1} \oplus \textit{list} \\ \boxed{3} \text{SS} | \text{LOC} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD } \textit{nom} \\ \text{CONT } \textit{ppro} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \circ \left\langle \left[\text{HEAD } \boxed{2} \right] \right\rangle \\ \text{MORPHS} \left\langle \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{clitic} \\ \text{PHON } \boxed{1} \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \circ \textit{list} \\ \text{SS} | \text{LOC} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD } \boxed{2} [\textit{non-nom-prep}] \\ \text{VAL} | \text{COMPS } < > \\ \text{ARG-ST } < \boxed{3} > \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

This rule introduces the clitic and registers its effect on the COMPS list of the absolute preposition. The following constraint provides the two linearization possibilities:

- (15) Linearization constraint
 $[DOM \langle \dots [HEAD \textit{non-nom-prep}] [clitic] \dots \rangle] \vee$
 $[DOM \langle \dots [clitic] [HEAD \textit{non-nom-prep}] \dots \rangle]$

Finally, the following linearization constraint restrict the contexts in which the clitic can precede the preposition:

- (16) Linearization constraint
 $\boxed{1} [DOM \langle \dots [clitic] [HEAD \textit{non-nom-prep}] \dots \rangle] \rightarrow$
 $\boxed{1} [DOM \langle \dots [HEAD \textit{verb present} \vee \textit{verb intransitive}] \dots \rangle]$

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