Adpositions Derived From Nouns In Iranian Languages

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to explore the noun-derived adpositions in Persian language and other living Iranian Languages in the light of the relevant literature. To accomplish that, first the existing works that deal this type of grammaticalization will be discussed. Next, seven languages from the Iranian language family will be examined to reveal how adpositions develop out of nouns.

Keywords: adposition, noun, grammaticalization, Iranian Languages, Persian

1. Introduction

The present study deals with the adpositions in Iranian Languages that have been derived from nouns. There is significant research on the theoretical aspects of grammaticalization of nouns into adpositions as a phenomenon that pervades human languages, which will be reviewed in the first part of this paper. Yet, as will be discussed, Iranian Languages have not been paid due attention by the researchers of this pathway of grammaticalization. Thus, the second part of the paper is an attempt to find out whether noun-derived adpositions in Iranian Languages adhere to the rules observed in other human languages. To this end, instances of nouns grammaticalized into postpositions or prepositions in seven Iranian Languages will be scrutinized. The languages that will be reviewed are Balochi, Pashto, Mazandarani, Talysh, Zaza, Kurdish and Persian.

2. Literature Review: The Grammaticalization of Nouns into Adpositions

There is no clear-cut definition of an adposition that all linguists agree on and making such a definition will not be attempted here. However, to make the subject matter clear, it should be stated that the term adposition in this paper is seen from a functionalist perspective. Svorou (1994) developed a classification based on function and grouped adpositions, affixes and case inflections with spatial functions altogether as "spatial grams". While Svorou's findings on the grammaticalization of adpositions are key for the theoretical framework of this paper, her delineation of the function of adpositions as limited to the expression of spatial relations does not work for all the instances that will be discussed below. A more comprehensive approach that is adopted in this study is that of DeLancey (2005) who noted that adpositions "show a range of rather distinct semantic functions" while adding that one of their major functions is to express "spatial and temporal relations" (p. 187).

In human languages, adpositions are continuously grammaticalized from other parts of speech. Verbs and adverbs are two antecedents for new adpositions but nouns provide the main source (Heine & Kuteva, 2007). The process of change from nouns to spatial

adpositions was studied by Svorou (1986). According to her, new spatial expressions are derived not only through the combination of nouns with existing adpositions or case markers but also with the help of genitive constructions. During the genitive construction phase, which Svorou (1986) showed to be a step of grammaticalization that was common in many languages, the prospective adposition acts as the head noun. The semantic motivation here is to create a part-whole relation between two words where the part actually means the location beyond the limits of the part. The following desemanticization and phonetic erosion are the key components of the grammaticalization process and once the noun loses its original form and meaning to become a true adposition, further grammaticalization into categories such as case marker is also possible (Heine & Kuteva, 2007).

Svorou's (1994) comprehensive account of the grammaticalization of adpositions and other spatial grams based on a broad sample of genetically unrelated languages showed that nouns do not become adpositions randomly. Instead, clear semantic patterns common to all languages are observed in the choice of the nouns, from which adpositions are derived. Body part names, for instance, constitute the noun group most frequently grammaticalized into adpositions and more often than not, languages adhere to what is called "the anthropomorphic model" concerning the semantic connection between the source nouns and the derived adpositions. In the antropomorphic model, the spatial meaning of the noun-derived adpositions correspond to the location of the source body-part noun in relation to the rest of the human body. For example, as shown by Svorou (1994), in several languages nouns that mean "head" have become adpositions that mean "on". Common paths for deriving adpositions from human body parts also include nouns that mean "back" becoming adpositions that mean "behind" and nouns that mean "heart" becoming adpositions that mean "inside" or "in". Other noun groups that have a habit of giving rise to adpositions are body parts based on a zoomorphic model, environmental landmarks such as "field" or "doorway" and relational object parts such as "top" or "front".

In addition to the abovementioned comparative accounts, the grammaticalization of nouns into adpositions has also been scrutinized in works that deal with specific language groups such as Esseesy's (2010) detailed study of the Arabic prepositions. As for Iranian Languages, Svorou (1994) did use examples from the Persian language but some of the most illustrative instances of nouns grammaticalized as adpositions in this language were not covered by her, not to mention the mistaken identification of *dar* "in" as indicating the exterior region (p. 258). Also, Persian is only part of the picture when it comes to the rich inventory of prepositions and postpositions found in various Iranian Languages.

3. The Iranian Languages

The Iranian language family is a major part of the Indo-European language family and includes several languages descending from the unattested Proto-Iranian and are currently spoken in Iran and neighboring countries. They are further divided into Eastern, South-Western and North-Western Iranian sub-groups that represent a genealogical divide rather than a geographical one. The development of Iranian languages can be examined in three historical stages namely Old, Middle and New Iranian. One of the most noticable changes in grammar that occured through these stages is the demise of the case declensions in the

Middle Iranian period, which left adpositions as the only means to express cases and other semantic relations. Consequently, in the New Iranian period, Iranian Languages have developed many prepositions and postpositions.

In the following part of this paper, examples of adpositions derived from nouns in seven living Iranian languages namely Balochi, Pashto, Mazandarani, Talysh, Zaza, Kurdish and Persian languages will be presented. Though making an exhaustive list of every noun-derived adposition in every living Iranian language is beyond the scope of this study, the seven languages reviewed here reflect the geographical distribution as well as the linguistic diversity of Iranian Language family and adpositions derived from cognate words in different languages are paid due attention to present an explanatory overview of the grammaticalization of adpositions in Iranian Languages as a whole.

3.1 Balochi

Balochi is a North-Western Iranian language spoken in Southeastern Iran and Western Pakistan. Though prepositions do exist in Balochi, they are usually incorporated into circumpositional phrases where the postposition is the true vessel of meaning (Elfenbein, 1989). Postpositions can also be used alone. There are a number of Balochi postpositions that are actually oblique forms of body-part nouns:

(1)   čukh-ē   dēm-ā   (Jahani & Korn, 2009, p. 657)
       child-GEN   face-OBL
        "in front of the child"

As seen, the preceding noun is in the genitive case, which creates a possessive relationship with the postposition. The oblique case in Balochi can express the locative so the above phrase literally means "in the face of the child". Two other examples of noun-derived adpositions in Balochi are *sar-ā* "on" derived from *sar* "head" and *phušt-ā* "behind" derived from *phušt* "back". As for *phad-ā* "behind" derived from *phad* "foot", the semantic motivation is probably "in the footsteps of" i.e. "in the wake of" (Jahani & Korn, 2009).

3.2 Pashto

Pashto is an Eastern Iranian language primarily spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan. David (2014) estimated a speaker population between 25 and 50 millions. Although dialects do exist, their differences are superficial and they are mutually intelligible according to Tegey and Robson (1996), who regarded Pashto a conservative language because it has retained some archaic linguistic features.

In Pashto, the particle *ki* is employed as part of a circumposition to express the interior location:

(2) pə   koṭ-a   ki (David, 2014, p. 310)
       in…   room-F.DIR   …in
       "in the room"

ki essentially goes back to **kašē*, which was the locative form of the Avestan word *kasa-* "armpit", literally meaning "in the armpit" (Hewson & Bubenik, 2007, p.150). In this case, the grammaticalization has reached its final phase where the particle can no longer be used

outside the adpositional phrase and its origin is only discernible to linguists. The source noun is also unique as there is no other known instance of this particular body-part name evolving into a locative particle.

The circumposition *pə … ki* can be combined with several other adpositions to express more complicated spatial relations. One such adposition apparently derived from a noun is *məkh*:

(3) də   sinf   pə   məkh   ki   (David, 2014, p.340)
      of   class   in…   face-M   …in
       "in front of the class"

When used as a noun, *məkh* means "face", perfectly conforming with the antropomorphic model discussed earlier. Note that in some dialects of Pashto, we also come across *sar* "head" in a similarly combined form that means "at the top of, above" (David, 2014, p.315).

3.3 Mazandarani

Mazandarani is a member of the Caspian Languages sub-family of North-Western Iranian Languages. Its speakers are concentrated in Iran's Mazandaran Province and number over 3 millions. Although urbanization and proximity to Iran's cultural and political center have led to the recent weaking of Mazandarani language by an influx of Persian vocabulary and grammatical forms, certain elements of Mazandarani resist being replaced such as the placement of adpositions. (Borjian, 2004) Mazandarani is a postpositional language so the adpositions follow the noun, which optionally gets an oblique marker. Two postpositions in Mazandarani have evident nominal origins:

(4) nɛfãr   sar (Borjian & Borjian, 2007)
      shed-DIR   head
       "on the shed"
(5) kɛlum-e   dele   (Borjian & Borjian, 2007)
      stable-OBL   heart
       "in the stable"

Example (4) shows another instance of a consistent practice across the Iranian language family whereby *sar* "head" and its cognates are adopted as adpositions that mean "on top of". The case of *dele* in (5) is not unique to Mazandarani either. Creating a semantic analogy between "heart" and "interior" is a widespread practice in human languages and as will be shown, Iranian languages are no exception.

3.4 Talysh

Spoken as the native language by about 1 million people in the Northern part of Iran's Gilan province, Talysh belongs to the Caspian group of North-Western Iranian Languages. It is divided into southern and northern dialects, which have a low level of mutual intelligibility. One of the key differences between Talysh dialects are the adpositions. The southern dialect employs postpositions whereas the northern dialect has a plethora of prepositions, postpositions and circumpositions that bring together multiple adpositions in complicated phrases. The selection of Talysh adpositional phrases provided by Stilo (2009) allows for the

detection of several items that have discernible nominal origins, two of which are shown in the following examples:

(6) kœ-y   dïl-œdœ
     house-OBL   inside-in
     "in the house"

(7) zœmin-í   sœ
     land-OBL   on
     "on the land"

In (6), *dïl* is simply a reinterpretation of the Talysh noun that means "heart". As for *sœ,* Paul (2011) showed that it is a phonetically eroded version of the word *sar* "head" and is endemic to the Anbarani i.e. Northern dialect. Stilo (2009) also reported about adpositional phrases that contain the word *düm* "tail" with the spatial meaning "behind".

3.5 Zaza

A North-Western Iranian language indigenous to eastern Turkey, Zaza is also called Dimili, a name that is thought to reflect its origin in Iran's Daylam region that goes back to 12th century. This language is related to the Caspian Languages that include Mazandarani and Talysh but it has been geographically isolated from them for centuries (Astarian, 2011).

In Zaza, postpositions dominate as far as spatial and temporal expressions are concerned:

(8) kitabî   sero   (Malmisanij, Uzun & Espar, 2001, p. 464)
     book-OBL   on
     "on the book"

In the above example, *sero* is an adposition that has been derived from the noun *sere* "head". Noun-derived adpositions in Zaza, are occasionally used in combination with other postpositions that complement the meaning:

(9) derse   ra   pey
     Lesson   from   after
     "after the lesson"

The phonetic similarity between *pey* "after" and *pa* "foot" may not be clear at first look. However, considering that the cognates of *pa* have formed adpositions that mean "behind, after" in at least two other Iranian languages namely Balochi and Persian, it becomes evident that the same relationship must also be valid for Zaza. Another postposition in Zaza that means "after" is *dima*, which is apparently connected with the noun *dim* "tail". Finally, similar to what is seen in Mazandarani and Talysh, the Zaza noun *zərri* "heart" has provided the basis for the emergence of the adposition *zərə* "inside", which usually precedes the postposition *di* for greater semantic precision:

(10) čente   zere   di (Todd, 2008, p. 81)
      bag-OBL   inside in
      "inside the bag"

3.6 Kurdish

Kurdish belongs to the North-Western Iranian Languages and is spoken in Eastern Turkey, Northern Iraq and Western Iran. The northern dialect spoken mainly in Turkey and known as Kurmanji, is the most widely spoken dialect. McCarus (2009) claimed Kurmanji is hardly intelligible with the Central and Southern dialects and went so far as to call Kurdish "a cover term" for a large group of languages.

As Bedir Khan and Lescot's (1970) study of Kurmanji grammar showed, Kurdish has a rich inventory of adpositions. In Kurdish, there are a number of fully grammaticalized primary adpositions that appear alone or in combinations to carry out a variety of case-like functions. Noun-derived adpositions work together with these primary adpositions to form adpositional phrases that describe complicated semantic relationships. A noun-derived adposition that is pervasive in Iranian Languages, namely *sar* "head" is also one of the widely used adpositional elements in Kurdish:

(11) di   ser   dîwêr   re   (Bedir Khan & Lescot, 1970, p. 257)
      DI   head wall-OBL   RE
      "over the wall"

In the above phrase, *di* is a primary adposition with a locative undertone while *re* implies motion through or towards something. Their union with a noun creates a new spatial meaning.

Further instances of adpositions derived from body-part nouns in Kurdish can be found in adpositional phrases that mean "behind" such as *di pişt ... da* and *li duv*. As a noun, *pişt* means the human back and *duv* is a tail. There is also *du* that is obviously an eroded version of *duv*. Another Kurdish body-part noun turned into an adposition is *kelek* that was originally a word for the side of the human torso and it has formed the phrase *li keleke* "next to".

One of the main comitative adpositional phrases in Kurdish has also developed out of a noun. The noun *gal* means folk or people. It has formed the prepositional phrase *li gal* "together with". The semantic motivation is apparently "in the group of".

Interestingly, Kurdish *ji ... der* literally means "out of", in contrast to the Persian *dar* "in". It should be noted that the two are essentially different words. While the Persian *dar* is a descendant of Old Persian *antarə* "between", the Kurdish adposition *der* has developed out of the noun *der* "place" that also means "door". According to Svorou (1994), the creation of adpositions that describe the outside location from nouns that mean "field" or "doorway" is one of the common paths of grammaticalization and the Kurdish *dar* fits this model.

3.7 Persian

Persian is a major member of the South-Western branch of Iranian language family and it not only enjoys a substantial speaker population of 110 million (Windfur & Perry, 2009, p.418) but also has the oldest written tradition that goes back to the 10th century, not to mention the pre-Islamic period. In addition to Iran, it is the official language of Afghanistan under the name "Dari" and of Tajikistan under the name "Tajik".

Modern Persian is an almost exclusively prepositional language and has two types of prepositions. What could be called "genuine prepositions" (Hewson & Bubenik, 2007) essentially perform case functions. The secondary prepositions, which need the assistance of a genuine preposition or a genitive construction called "ezafe", are used to express a broad

range of spatial, temporal and semantic relations. Two of the secondary prepositions that refer to the posterior region have been derived from nouns:

(12) pošt-e   derakht
       back-GEN   tree
      "behind the tree"

(13) donbāl-e   māšīn
       after-GEN   car
      "after the car"

The Persian noun *pošt* can mean the back of any object but its original meaning is anatomical. As discussed above, the cognates of the Persian *pošt* in Kurdish and Balochi are also employed as adpositions that mean "behind". As for *donbāl*, it has been derived with the derivational affix *–āl* that adds a meaning of affinity from *donb* "tail" (Donbāl, n.d.), which is a rare alternative form of the noun *dom*. The cognates of Persian *dom* in Talysh, Zaza and Kurdish have also become adpositions that do the same job. Another preposition with a similar meaning is *pay* "in the wake of" linked to the noun *pā* "foot". This noun is attested in some Early New Persian texts as *pay* allowing for the conclusion that the adposition *pay* evolved out of this alternative form.

A Persian preposition that is unique concerning its source noun is *jalū* "in front of". It developed from the Turkish word *jilav* that means a horse halter, a gear that is located in front of the animal.

Although nouns that mean "face" often give rise to adpositions that mean "in front of" in other languages (Svorou, 1994), Persian *rūy* "face" has experienced a different semantic expansion:

(14) *rūy-e māšīn*
       face-EZ car
      "on the car"

Together with the genuine adposition *bar* "on", *rūy* provides the means for reference to the space over an object, leaving little need for *sar* "head", which still has some adpositional functions. The spatiotemporal connotation of *sar* in Persian appears to be more about the edge or the beginning of something than with the top of it as seen in *sarāsar* "from one end to the other".

In colloquial Persian, the use of the noun-derived preposition *tū* (inside) to express the locative case is more common than the use of the primary preposition *dar* (in). As a noun, *tū is* attested more in the medieval poetry than in modern language and means a layer or a curtain. The declining use of *tū* as a noun and its tendency to replace *dar* as the main locative preposition presents an interesting case of ongoing grammaticalization.

4. Conclusion

The above examples from seven Iranian Languages reveal that the grammaticalization of adpositions from nouns in this language family has followed a path that is quite similar to what research shows to have happened in other languages. First of all, the types of nouns that enter such a process of grammaticalization is in line with Svorou's (1994) findings. Body-part nouns, for instance, contribute the most to the creation of new adpositions in Iranian

Languages just as they do in other human languages. In addition, the semantic motivation in many of the noun-derived adpositions in the languages examined in this paper fit the universal patterns such as the antropomorphic model. This is exemplified in the widespread use of *sar* "head" as an adposition that means "on". Finally, the way nouns start off as adpositions in Iranian Languages verifies Svorou's (1986) theory about the transition phase during which the newly derived adpositions are combined with older adpositions or found in genitive structures as this was the case in several of the above examples.

An additional point revealed by this study is the pervasiveness of cognate adpositions that fulfill the same semantic role in different Iranian Languages. Concerning that the languages in question have separated more than two milennia ago and that some of the widespread cognate adpositions such as *sar* "head" appear rather new and at an early stage of grammaticalization, not every similarity can be ascribed to genetic relationship. In other words, there must have been some form of contact induced grammaticalization at work during the historical development of the adpositions in Iranian Languages, the details of which require further research to be uncovered.

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