Morphosyntactic Changes in Persian and their Effects on the Syntax

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The present paper deals with the origin of the *ezafe* construction in Persian. It demonstrates how in Old Persian a relative pronoun (*hya-*) ‘who/which’ in sentences with omitted copula was interpreted as a “connector”/“linker” (*ezafe* marker) coming between a noun and another noun or adjective. As a result of this reanalysis a relative clause was recast into a noun phrase. I will argue that the loss of agreement and case marking (which were present in Old Persian) has affected the syntax of the noun phrase in Middle Persian and New Persian. The emergence of the *ezafe* construction to mark the genitive and attributive constructions (which were formerly implemented by the genitive case and agreement) compensates for this loss.

Key words: Persian grammar, morphosyntax, noun phrase, *ezafe* construction.

1. Introduction

The history of the Persian language is divided into three periods:
1. Old Iranian (including Old Persian (henceforth OP), Avestan, Median and Saka). OP came down to use in cuneiform inscriptions from the time of the Achaemenid kings, who ruled ancient Persia during the 6th to 4th c. B.C. Avestan is the language in which the Avesta, the sacred book of Zoroastrians, was composed. The Avesta probably dates from about the 7th to the 5th c. B.C., but apparently was handed down orally and was not recorded in writing until much later. These languages are highly inflectional. There are no records of Median and Saka except for some words.
2. Middle Iranian (Western Middle Iranian including Middle Persian (henceforth MP) - also called Pahlavi - and Parthian; Eastern Middle Iranian including Kharazmian, Soghdian and Saka). The Middle Iranian period, dating from the 3rd c. B.C. to the 7th c. A.D., when the Sasanian empire collapsed, is characterized by reduced inflection of the noun and verb. Western Middle Iranian languages are analytic.
3. New Iranian period with New Persian (henceforth NP) as its dominant language dates from the 9th c. to the present. The NP is divided into three stages. The earliest records of NP - called Early NP - appear in the 9th cent. and the bulk of Early NP texts dates from the 10th to the 12th c. The NP texts belong to the following centuries spanning the Mongolian period to the end of the 18th c. The beginning of the Modern NP period is linked with the political, economic and literary influence of Western powers during the 19th c. (cf. Khanlari, 1998, Vol.1:359). NP is an analytic language.

Based on the structural resemblances, it is known that NP goes back to MP which in itself goes back to OP. Having this historical pathway in mind, I will describe some major syntactic and morphosyntactic changes happening in each period and their effects on the other parts of the language. On the one hand, morphosyntactic changes bring about syntactic changes. On the other hand, syntactic changes have morphological consequences. In this paper I will focus on the interplay of morphology and syntax within the language system during its long history. More specifically, I will focus on the emergence of the *ezafe* construction.

As for the *ezafe* construction, I will demonstrate that in OP in sentences with omitted copula a relative pronoun was interpreted as an article, or a linker. On the phonological side, the relative pronoun *hya* of OP changed to *i* in MP (*hya > hya > yə > i*). In MP *i* was used both as a relative pronoun and as a linker or *ezafe* marker. This form has changed to −*e* in NP. In NP the *ezafe* marker, called in Persian linguistics *kasre*-ye *ezafe*: ‘e of addition’, is an enclitic attached to a noun followed by another noun or adjective making a genitive or adjectival construction. In fact the *ezafe* marker does double duty: it can both (1) mark genitive and (2) link an adjective to its noun. Any noun phrase formed by an *ezafe* marker is an *ezafe* construction:

1. ketâb-e ali (Noun-Genitive)
   book=EZ Ali
   ‘Ali’s book’

2. ketâb-e bozorg (Noun-Adjective)
   book=EZ big
   ‘big book’

Contrary to English, the genitive marker is cliticized to the possessee not to the possessor.

Many scholars including Khanlari (1377, Vol. 3:161), Abolghasemi (1375:36) and Rastorgueva (1347:111) consider the MP /i/ as the origin of the *ezafe* marker; the MP /i/ goes back to the OP relative pronoun *hya*.

This paper attempts to show how the elliptic relative construction (of the

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1. The Arabic term *kasre* means the vowel *i* in Arabic and the vowel *e* in Persian.
type ‘Gaumata who [is] Magus’) was reanalysed as the appositive phrase (‘Gaumata the Magus’) whose former relative pronoun became the phrasal linker/connector. In a sense, a relative clause was transformed into a noun phrase. In order to show the different stages of this development, first of all in section (2) I will investigate the genitival and adjectival constructions in Old Iranian languages. In section (3) I will examine these constructions in Middle Iranian. Section (4) deals with the ezafe construction in NP and the last section provides my conclusions.

2. Old Iranian

Old Iranian languages possess eight morphological cases (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative, locative, instrumental, ablative) three genders (masculine, feminine, and neutral) and three numbers (singular, plural and dual). In Old Iranian the possessor is marked by the genitive case. In the following OP example, the genitives are underlined:

(3) adam Dārayavauš, xšāya/uni04E8iya xšāya/uni04E8iyānām, Vištāspahyā
     I         Darius             king-NOM   king-GEN.PL   Hystaspes-GEN
     pussa    [DPe 1-5; Kent 1953: 136]
     son-NOM
     ‘I am Darius… king of kings…son of Hystaspes’

As is evident from the above example, the genitive may come before the noun (vištāspahyā pussa, son of Hystaspes, Genitive-Noun) or after it (xšāya/uni04E8iya xšāya/uni04E8iyānām, king of kings, Noun-Genitive). A propos this syntactic ‘freedom’ Kent (1953: 95) maintains that “a genitive used as a genitive (not in a dative use) precedes that noun or adjective, unless the genitive is attached to its noun by the article, in which instance it follows: manā pitā (my father), but kāra hya manā (my army).” According to Kent (ibid.) the postposing of the genitive in governmental and religious formulas (as in xšāya/uni04E8iya xšāya/uni04E8iyānām) is exceptional and reflects a Median ‘usage’. In the next sections, it will be shown how the structure of those phrases in which hya- acts as the article (genitive-article-noun) is reflected in MP and NP genitives.

Turning now to the adjectival construction in Old Iranian, the relationship between a noun and its adjective is shown through agreement. The noun and the adjective agree in case, gender and number. The adjective may come before or after the noun, immediately or within some distance; as in the following OP example:
In the following Avestan example, the adjective *huapō* ‘good’ agrees with the noun *nipāta* ‘guardian’ in gender, number and case:

(5) azəm vīspanam dāmanam nipāta ahmi huapō
    I all-GEN sheep-GEN.PL guard-NOM be-1SG good-NOM
    ‘I am the good guardian of all sheep’

As for the relative clauses, they are linked to the head noun by the relative pronoun *hya-. In Old Iranian languages the relative pronoun (as noun and adjective) has eight cases, three numbers and three genders. The relative clause comes immediately or within some distance before or after the noun and agrees with the head noun. In the following OP example *hya-* agrees with *Auramazdā* in gender, number and case:

(6) baga vazraka Auramazdā hya imām
    god-NOM great-NOM Auramazda-NOM REL-NOM this-ACC
    būmīm adā [DN1; Kent 1953: 137]
    earth-ACC created
    ‘A great god [is] Ahuramazda who created this earth’

But as pointed out by Abolghasemi (1375/1996: 359) in the following example *hya* does not agree with the noun in the accusative:

(7) Dārayavahum hya manā pitā avam xšāyaOīyam
    Darius-ACC REL-NOM my father-NOM him king-ACC
    akunauš [XPf 22-24; Kent 1953: 150]
    made-3SG
    ‘Darius, who was my father, him he made king’

In those clauses where the copula is omitted, *hya* is interpreted as a weak demonstrative pronoun meaning "this" or as a definite article. For example, Hudson-Williams (1963:12) translates *hya-* as ‘the’:
It is interesting that these relative constructions (or parallel English constructions) are translated into Persian by the *ezafē* construction:

(10) Gaumata the Magus
    
gumâte-y-e  moq

    Alexander the Great
    eskandar-e      kabir

    Ivan the Terrible
    Ivan-e    maxuf

According to Kent (1953:84) the original dominant use of *hya-* has been that of the relative; in attributive clauses modifying a nominative the omission of the copula has led to its understanding as an appositive marked by the article; this use has been extended to accusative antecedents, and rarely to substantives in other cases; The appositive has shifted to a mere attribute and ultimately it has been preposed to an adjective in a generic sense. In the next section, I will show how the omission of the copula in attributive clauses which is a typical feature of the OP and MP syntax, has lead to a reanalysis in MP.

3. Middle Iranian

This section deals with the adjectival construction (noun - adjective), genitival construction (possessee - possessor) and relative clauses in
Western Middle Iranian languages (Parthian and MP). These languages have lost their case system, so we expect them to mark their genitival/adjectival constructions differently.

3.1 Parthian

a. Genitives:
In most instances, the head noun comes before the genitive modifier and če acts as a linker coming between the noun and the genitive. As can be seen in (11) and (12), the inflections are gone so neither ‘happiness’ nor ‘Saturday’ is marked for the genitive. In this ‘new’ construction če indicates possession. The Parthian examples which follow show the double function of particle če:

(11) srod če šadīft [Rezayi 1381/2002: 56]
    song LINKER happiness
    ‘song of happiness’

(12) šab če šambat [ibid.]
    night LINKER Saturday
    ‘Saturday night’

Since če is a free morpheme, other elements may come between the head noun and če:

(13) rošnīft ay če-mān [ibid.]
    light be-2SG LINKER us
    ‘you are our light’

It should be mentioned that sometimes the head noun comes before or after the genitive without a linker:

(14) ādur Ardaxšīr [ibid.]
    fire Ardaxšīr
    ‘fire of Ardashir’

(15) maran žamān [ibid.]
    death time
    ‘time of death’

b. Adjectives:
In adjectival constructions, the adjective may precede or follow the noun. If a linker is used it will be če:

(13) rošnīft ay če-mān [ibid.]
    light be-2SG LINKER us
    ‘you are our light’

It should be mentioned that sometimes the head noun comes before or after the genitive without a linker:

(14) ādur Ardaxšīr [ibid.]
    fire Ardaxšīr
    ‘fire of Ardashir’

(15) maran žamān [ibid.]
    death time
    ‘time of death’
(16) wažan čē šahrdār kirbag [Abolghasemi 1375/1996: 36]
speech LINKER king good
’speech of the good king’

c. Relativizer:
čē also acts as a relativizer. In most cases the term relativizer refers to a
relative pronoun, but in some cases it may refer to a relative conjunction:

(17) abžīrwānag išnohrag hēm čē az bābil zamīg
thankful student be-1SG who from Babil land

wisprixtēm [ibid. 104]
rise-PP.1SG
‘I am a thankful student who rose from Babil’

As it can be seen, čē functions as both a linker and a relativizer. The
Parthian examples are discussed here just to show the double function of
čē. There is no etymological connection between OP hya- and čē (< PIE
*syos and *kwe). What is of importance for the discussion is the MP state
of affairs.

3.2 Middle Persian:

In MP the relationship between the head noun and the genitive modifier
or the adjective is the same as in Parthian except that the linker is ī or īg,
which is derived from the OP hya-:

(18) kanīg ī hučihr [ibid. 36]
maiden LINKER beautiful
‘beautiful maiden’

(19) (gumbad ī ātaxšān) ī wahram [Shayest; Mazdapur
1369/1990: 21]
dome LINKER shining LINKER Bahram
‘the shining dome of Bahram’

Here gumbad is the head noun, ātaxšān is the adjective and Wahram is the
genitive modifier for the preceding adjectival construction. If the adjective
or the genitive modifier comes before the head noun, the linker does not
appear.
(20) abāg dušāgāh mard hamrāz mabāš [Abolghasemi1375/1996: 63]
with silly man sharing secret NEG=be-IMP.2SG
‘Do not share your secrets with silly men’

In MP ī also acts as a relativizer:

(21) če ast dēn ī āwarē? [ibid. 105]
what be-3SG religion which bring-2SG
‘What is the religion that you bring?’

(22) pahrēz ud šnāyēnišn ī ēn haft amahraspand ī avoidance and admiring of this seven amharaspand which
goft [Shayest; Mazdapur 1369/1990: 218]
you say-P.1SG
‘Avoidance and admiring this seven amharaspand which I told you about’

Here the first ī is a linker, the second one is a relativizer.

To sum up, ī in MP, as hya- in OP, had a double usage. The difference is that in OP hya-‘s function as a relativizer dominated, but in MP its dominant use was that of a linker; even in late Pahlavi texts ī rarely acted as a relativizer. It seems that the origin of the reinterpretation of a relativizer as a linker should be sought in those sentences in which the copula was omitted and the relativizer connected the adjective to the head noun. We should remind ourselves that in Parthian če also acted as both a linker and as a relativizer. This reanalysis changes a clause to a noun phrase.

It must be added that Western Middle Iranian languages had other relativizers. Abolghasemi (1996: 104) lists the following: kē/ čē (Parthian) and ī (g), kē and čē (MP). In both Parthian and MP kē and čē would also function as interrogative pronouns.

In the following example ī and kē are used as relativizers:

(23) ātaxš ī pad ān xānag andar barēnd kē nō fire which in that house in take.3PL which nine

šabag ud māh... [Shayest; Mazdapur 1369/1990: 21]
night and month...
‘fire which they take in that house which nine nights and months [is necessary for its purification]’
In (23), both ī and kē are relativizers, but in MP ī is mostly used as a linker. The usage of ī as a relativizer decreases so that in Modern NP (ī >) -e is only a linker and (kē>) ke is the relativizer (relative pronoun or relative conjunction).

Although ī in MP is a free morpheme, its place within the noun phrase is fixed and in most cases it is the only element that comes between the head noun and the adjective or the genitive modifier. This fixing of word order prepares the ground for the change of ī to the enclitic -e in NP (unlike in OP ī/i is a single vowel). The following examples show that in MP ī/i is a free morpheme:

1. In Pahlavi orthography ī is written separately.
2. In some cases, another element comes between ī and the head noun:

   (24) sag-iz ī kōr [Shayest; Mazdapur 1369/1990: 9]  
   dog too LINKER blind…
   ‘blind dog too’

3. In NP the indefinite marker and the ezafe marker do not co-occur, while in MP the ezafe marker ī/i appears after the indefinite marker:

   (25) šamšer –ē i handuk (the copula is omitted)  
   [Kārnâme; Farahvashi 1378/1999: 30]  
   sword –INDEF LINKER Indian  
   ‘An Indian sword’

In cases where ī appears after the indefinite marker, it is possible to interpret it as a relative clause whose copula is omitted. In fact, as mentioned before, it seems that these ambiguous structures could be interpreted as the ezafe construction:

   (26) ud ka ēdōn tuwān kardan kū az āb-ē  
   and if such could do which from water-INDEF  
   ī meh [omitted copula] o āb-ē ī  
   LINKER small [omitted copula] to water-INDEF LINKER  
   keh [omitted copula] barēd …[Shayest; Mazdapur 1369/1990: 32]  
   big [omitted copula] take-3SG  
   ‘and if [one] can take [something] from a small [amount of] water to a big [amount of] water…’
In this example one can interpret $\ddot{a}b\-\ddot{e} \ i \ meh$ as ‘water which [is] small’ instead of ‘a small water’.

4. The appearance of an intrusive consonant [y] before the indefinite marker -ē to avoid vowel hiatus and its lack before ī indicates the independence of ī. The independent ī is claimed to begin with a glottal stop not shown here, thus preventing the hiatus between –ē and ī in (27.a) and ā and ī in (27.b):

(27) a. nasā-y-ē    ī sag – ne – did [Shayest; Mazdapur 1369/1990: 26]  
carcass-[y]-INDEF LINKER dog-not-seen  
‘a carcass not seen by a dog’

(27) b. nasā    ī sag –ne-dīd [ibid.]  
carcass LINKER dog-not-seen  
‘carcass not seen by a dog’

As mentioned before, ī / i is used mostly as an ezafe marker rather than a relativizer. The analysis of a portion of a Pahlavi text “Shayest Nashayest” (Mazdapur, 1990) shows that out of 122 cases of ī, in 94 cases it is an ezafe marker and in 28 cases it is a relativizer. The analysis of a later Pahlavi text “Kārnāmeyē Ardašire Babakan” (Farahvashi, 1999: 2-24) shows that only in 4 out of 64 cases it is a relativizer.

4. New Persian

Before dealing with the ezafe construction in NP, it must be pointed out that the phonetic form of the ezafe marker and the indefinite marker in NP has changed, so that the ezafe marker has become -e (from MP ī ) and the indefinite marker has become -i (from MP ē ). Records from Early NP show the overlap stage preceding this change. Considering the pronunciation of the ezafe marker, Khanlari (1998, Vol 3: 163) makes the point that in Persian orthography in some Early NP texts the ezafe marker (kasreye ezafe) is written as $\ddot{a} [i]$, which apparently indicates that its pronunciation was very close to [i] (the pronunciation of the indefinite marker). On the other hand, in some other Early NP texts the indefinite marker is written as kasreye ezafe, again showing the closeness of their pronunciation. This closeness of kasreye ezafe to -i shows its affinity with ī/i in MP. The different stages of this change are shown below:
In NP the *ezafe* construction is very common. It can act as a head for a chain of *ezafe* constructions (tatâbo’-e ezáfât ‘chain of *ezafe*’). The following examples are from Modern NP:

(28) ( hame-y-e (deraxtân-e (jangalhâ-y-e (şomâl-e (kešvar-e irân))))
all of trees of forests of north of country of Iran
‘all of the trees of the northern forests of Iran’

(29) ( in ketâb-e (dastur-e (zabân-e fârsi))
this book of grammar of language of Farsi
‘this grammar book on Farsi language’

In Modern NP the order Noun-Genitive, Noun-Adjective and Noun-Relative has become fixed. If the adjectival modifier is preposed, *ezafe* is omitted and the resulting form becomes a compound, behaving as a unit ready to enter another *ezafe* construction.

a. Noun-Adjective:
(30) nâm-e bad > badnâm > mard-e badnâm
name-EZ bad badname man-EZ badname
‘bad name’ ‘infamous’ ‘infamous man’

(31) bu-y-e xoš > xošbu > gol-e xošbu
smell-EZ good goodsmell flower-EZ goodsmell
‘good smell’ ‘good smelling’ ‘good smelling flower’

b. Noun-Genitive:
Preposing a genitive modifier to the head noun and omitting the *ezafe* marker is a strategy for making new compounds:

(32) dâruxâne < xâne-y-e dâru
medicine room room-EZ medicine
‘pharmacy’ ‘medicine room’

(33) ketâbxâne < xâne-y-e ketâb
book room room-EZ book
‘library’ ‘book room’
As is evident, the order of elements (within a phrase) determines their function. In the first instance a noun phrase was recategorized as an adjective and in the second a noun phrase was recategorized as a compound noun. In some frequent combinations the ezafe marker is omitted, but the order of constituents does not change. As shown in (34) these words tend to become a compound:

(34) mādar-e zan > mādarzan (lit. mother of wife: ‘mother-in-law’)
xāhar-e šovhar > xāharšovhar (lit. sister of husband: ‘sister-in-law’)
šovhar-e xāhar > šovharxāhar (lit. husband of sister: ‘brother-in-law’)

In adjectival constructions, if the head noun is indefinite and the indefinite marker is attached to the noun, the ezafe marker can not be added:

(35) ketāb-i bozorg
book-INDEF big
‘a big book’

But if the indefinite marker is added to the noun phrase containing an adjective, the ezafe marker has to be used:

(36) (ketāb-e bozorg)-i
book-EZ big-INDEF
‘a big book’

Similarly, in the genitival construction, the indefinite marker -i appears only after the noun phrase:

(37) (divār-e xāne)-y-i
wall-EZ room-[y]-INDEF
‘wall of a room’

As we saw above, in MP the ezafe marker (ī /i) could be separated from its head noun by the indefinite article, as in (25): šamšer –ē i handuk
In Farsi, however, no element can intervene between the ezafe marker and its phonological host (= possessee). As shown in (36) the indefinite article can only be attached to the noun phrase; alternatively, the ezafe marker has to be omitted and the indefinite article is hosted by the head noun of the noun phrase as in (35).
5. Conclusions

In this paper I described and explicated how the elliptic relative construction (of the type ‘Gaumata who [is] Magus’) was revamped as the appositive phrase ‘Gaumata the Magus’. Its former relative pronoun was reanalysed as the phrasal linker / connector. In a sense, a relative clause was transformed into a noun phrase. This change is reminiscent of Givón's famous slogan that: "Today's morphology is yesterday's syntax" (Givón, 1971: 394, in Campbell and Janda, 2001: 96).

It seems that the motivation for this change is to compensate for the loss of grammatical morphology. Old Iranian languages were inflectional and the relationship between the head noun and the genitive/adjective was marked by inflection and agreement. With the gradual loss of inflectional morphology, the language had to develop another device to mark this relationship. The loss of case system at the end of OP is compensated in MP and NP in two ways: (i) The use of adpositions to mark grammatical relationships and (ii) The fixation of phrasal word order to mark these relationships. In the emergence of the ezāfe construction these two mechanisms are at work. My emphasis in this paper has been on the order of elements within the noun phrase. As the language moves from OP to MP, Early NP and Modern NP the word order becomes more and more rigid.

References


