

The Syntax of Sorani Kurdish Prepositions
A Lexical Account within the framework of HPSG

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This paper presents a lexical account of the syntax of Sorani Kurdish prepositions within the framework of Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG).

Kurdish dialects have a rich class of prepositions and prepositional collocations with a complex syntactic behavior (Edmonds 1955, Mackenzie 1961). This situation results from several factors. The first one involves the constitution of this class: the initial set of prepositions has been enriched with elements borrowed from other classes, such as substantives. The latter generally combine with primary prepositions (ex. 1) to form compound prepositions (ex. 2), 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. Furthermore, apart from prepositions, Kurdish dialects have also postpositions. The latter combine with primary prepositions, which have a rather poor semantics, in order to express more precise semantic values (ex. 3).

The second point concerns the realization of the complement: some primary prepositions allow for a clitic (affixal) realization of their complement, while others do not (ex. 4, 5). Furthermore, the alternation of the form of the complement generally gives rise to an allomorphic variation of the preposition itself. Primary prepositions are thus divided into two subclasses, simple vs. absolute prepositions (Table 1).

Finally, depending upon the preposition, the clitic complement is not necessarily attached to the preposition and can be realized at distance, preceding or following the preposition. However, the non-local realization is subject to strict constraints and is limited to two cases: the clitic is either attached to the verb (ex. 7) or to the right edge of the constituent immediately preceding the preposition (ex. 6). The first type of attachment occurs 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 (ex. 8a,b). 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 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 lexical entries are systematically organized in an inheritance hierarchy with respect to these two dimensions (Tseng 2005). The clitic realization of the complement is argued to be an instance of affixation (Crysmann 1997, 2000), and a lexicalist account is outlined for all cases of non-local realizations of the clitic, either in terms of argument composition (Abeillé et al. 1998, Hinrichs & Nakazawa 1994, Miller & Sag 1997) or in terms of constraints on the linearization of domain objects (Kathol 2000).

- (1) **La** pârîs dost-akân dît ‘She/he met her/his friends in Paris’
 in Paris friend-DEF.PL meet.PAS
- (2) kitêb-aka **la** **sar** mêz-a ‘The book is on the table’
 book-DEF.SG at head table-COP.3.SG
- (3) **la** cêgâ-ka=m=**dâ** ‘in my bed’
 at bed-def.sg=1.sg.=PP
- (4) min ba Narmîn / to da-lê-m ‘I am telling to Narmin / you’
 (I) to Narmin / you AM-say.PRES-1.SG¹
- (5) pê=t/*to da-lê-m² ‘I am telling to you’
 to=2.SG/ you AM -say.PRES-1.SG
- (6) 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
- (7) êwa awa=tân³ **pê** zor wut=**im** ‘You have often told me this’
 you this=2.PL to often say.PAS=1.SG
- (8) a. rojbâş=yân **lê** kird-**în**⁴ ‘They wished us good morning’
 good-morning =3.PL to do.PAS-1.PL
 b. * rojbâş=yân **lê** kird=**mân**
 good-morning =3.PL to do.PAS=1.PL

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’

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

² For the sake of clarity, clitics are separated by ‘=’ from their host.

³ 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.

⁴ N.B. *-în* is a verbal ending (word-level affix) and not a clitic.