Case Attraction and NP-linking in Old Iranian

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1 The *ezāfe* construction

1.1 An extremely brief *aide-mémoire*

The *ezāfe* construction (from Arab. *iḍāfat* 'addition; connection') refers to a syntagma common to many West Iranian languages (e.g. Farsi, Kurmanci), whose purpose it is to further determine a (set of) NP(s). Accordingly, on the surface it consists of a NP (determinand), an enclitic particle (connector), and further (determining) XPs, most commonly another NP, AdjP, or PP; which XPs are licensed to occur within the *ezāfe* construction varies by language. The construction is obligatory for all XPs dependent on the NP in question.

(1)   *zilam=ê*   *li ber*   *derî*
       man=EZ.M   in-front-of   door.OBL
       'the man in front of the door' (Kurmanci; HAIG 2011:365)

(2)   *keçk=a*   *min=a*   *piçûk*
       daughter=EZ.F   1.SG.POSS=EZ.F   young(er)
       'my young(est) daughter' (Kurmanci; id.)

Multiple XPs can occur in sequence within *ezāfe* if determining the same NP. The semantics of the construction are not limited to appurtenance, but can express further description, location, and even more complex notions.

(3)   *tišt'=ê*   *min*   *day-av*   *hinga*
       thing=EZ.PL   1.SG.OBL   give.PST-POSTV   2.PL.OBL
       'the things I gave to you' (Kurmanci)

While the *ezāfe* marker is historically derived from a relative pronoun, proper relative clauses both in Farsi and Kurmanci are regularly introduced by COMP in addition to the NP-linker (at least in the written language; cf. HAIG 2011:366 n. 7). The *ezāfe* construction does therefore not, synchronically speaking, constitute a relative clause.

1.2 NP-linking in Western Middle Iranian

The *ezāfe* construction exists already in Western Middle Iranian (Parthian, Middle Persian) and is common in both languages. Parthian, however, prefers determining NPs by simple juxtaposition of determiner and determinand (see ex. 4; cf. DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2014:265–6).

(4) *šahrδārīft dīdēm*
'diadem of kingship' (Parthian, H/VIc/12b)

(5) *šahrestān čē bēlābād*
capital EZ Bēlābād
'the capital, (that is) Bēlābād' (Parthian, M5569/V/5–6)

(6) *ud abar dāmān=iz, ī=šan pidēnag-ān, abaxšāyišn hēb kunēnd*
and to creature.PL=EMPH EZ=3.PL.OBL meat-PL mercy PTC make.3.PL.PRS
'And even on these creatures, (that is) their meaty nourishment, may they have mercy.' (Middle Persian, MKG 2215–2218)

The *ezāfe* markers of the two languages differ: Parthian has generalised *čē* (cp. Skt. *kás* 'who?' < PIE *kʷe/o-), which simultaenously functions as REL. Middle Persian has an NP-linker *ī* (cp. Skt. *yás* 'which' < *ye/o-). The question whether early Parthian still had a *ye/o- based pronoun or particle is still open (cf. DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2014:268; BOYCE 1964:29–30). Middle Persian further has separate relative pronouns, *kē* and *čē*; yet, the NP-linker is found instead of (or together with) REL as well (cf. DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2014:415ff.). The historical connection between *ezāfe* and relative clauses is therefore a given both on a formal and syntactic level at least in Middle Persian; Parthian has innovated, but shows a similar pattern.

2 *ezāfe* in Old Iranian?

Both Avestan and Old Persian exhibit nominal relative clauses, in which the relative pronoun agrees with its pivot (or antecedent) in gender and number, but shows nominative case as the subject of an ellipsed copula (descriptively speaking).

(7) *maṯ vå padāiš yā frasrūtā īžaiiå*
1.SG.ABL 2.PL.ACC footstep.INS.PL REL.NOM.PL famous.NOM.PL Iža.GEN.SG
pairijasāi
walk-around.1.SG.PRS
'with the footsteps, which (are) famous (as those) of Iža, I shall walk around you' (Y. 50.8; OAv.)

(8) *miθrəm ... yō nōiṯ kahmāi aiβi.draoxδō*
Mithra.ACC.SG REL.NOM.SG NEG INDEF.DAT.SG deceive.VBADJ.NOM.SG
'Mithra ..., who (is) not to be deceived by anyone' (Yt. 10.17; YAv.)

(9) *adam Bardiya amiy haya Kūrauš puça Kabūjiyahyā*
1.SG.NOM Smerdis be.1.SG.PRS REL.NOM.SG Cyrus.GEN.SG son.NOM.SG Cambyses.GEN.SG
brātā
brother.NOM.SG
'I am Smerdis, who (is) the son of Cyrus, the brother of Cambyses'(DB I.39; OP)

Next to this fairly ordinary type of elliptic relative clause, there is a second type. Here, the relative pronoun agress with its pivot in all three categories: number, gender, and case. It is 'attracted' into the pivot case. In contrast with the non-attracted type (cp. ex. 8), the relative pronoun immediately follows or precedes its pivot, and in Avestan is restricted to pivots in ACC or INS (not so in Old Persian; cp. DPe 3–4: *dahyūnām tayaišām parūnām*).

(10) *tāiš* *šiiaoθanāiš* *yāiš* *vahištāiš*
DEM.INS.PL deed.INS.PL REL.INS.PL best.INS.PL
'with the best (of) deeds' (Y. 35.4; OAv.)

(11) *miθrəm* *yim* *vouru.gaoiiaotīm*
Mithra.ACC.SG REL.ACC.SG wide-pastured.ACC.SG
'Mithra with wide pastures' (Yt. 10.1; YAv.)

(12) *adam* *...* *avam* *Gaumātam* *tayam* *magum* *avājanam*
1.SG.NOM DEM.ACC.SG Gaumata.ACC.SG REL.ACC.SG magus.ACC.SG slay.1.SG.PST
'I ... slew that Gaumata, the magus.' (DB I.56–7; OP)

It is worth noting that case attraction does not otherwise occur in Avestan (verbal) relative clauses (the examples in SKJÆRVØ 2009:157–8 are best explained differently). Furthermore, Young Avestan and Old Persian show instances of nominal relative clauses linked with a generalised relative particle Av. *yaṯ*, OP *taya* (both REL.NOM/ACC.SG.N), homonymous with COMP which is related to REL (cf. LÜHR 2008:153). A construction of this kind is likely to be the origin of NP-linking in later Iranian.

(13) *puθrəm* *yaṯ* *pourušaspahe*
son.ACC.SG COMP Pourušaspa.GEN.SG
'the son of Pourušaspa' (Yt. 5.18; YAv.)

(14) *ustacanām* *taya* *aθagainām*
staircase.ACC.SG COMP of-stone.ACC.SG
'(this) stone staircase' (A²Sc; OP)

Note that in ex. 13, the innovative form with COMP *yaṯ* encroaches on the older, 'attracting' construction. Old Iranian must therefore already have had an *ezāfe*-style construction. How can its development, and that of its Middle and Modern Iranian successors, be explained in view of the existence of proper and case-matching nominal relative clauses? Why was COMP / REL.NOM/ACC.SG chosen as the NP-linker?

3 Previous approaches

3.1 Functional differences

REICHELT (1909:§§735, 749) mentions that the copula in relative clauses is frequently missing; this has been taken to suggest that nominal relative clauses are a development from original, verbal ones by ellipsis. Case agreement of relative pronoun and pivot is the result of re-analysis of the nominal relative clause as an apposition.

This suggestion is countered by SEILER (1960:67) on the basis that copulative relative clauses do still exist in Young Avesstan; HAIDER AND ZWANZIGER (1984:142) add that in instances where the copula occurs, it is not semantically vacuous, expressing e.g. a possessive relation.

(15) *xᵛarənō* *mazdaδātəm* *yazamaide* *...* *yaṯ* *asti*
glory.ACC.SG mazda-created.ACC.SG worship.1.PL.PRS REL.NOM.SG be.3.SG.PRS
ahurahe mazdå
Ahura-Mazda.GEN.SG
'We worship the mazda-created glory ... which belongs to Ahura Mazda' (Yt. 19.9)

While the co-existence of copulative and nominal relative clauses is undeniable, their criticism is to be rejected. Copula deletion / addition (?) may have been a syncrhonically productive process (esp. in metrical texts); similarly the expression of possessive relations is not unique to verbal relative clauses, since such and other relations can also be expressed in nominal relative clauses.

(16) *ahūm*   *yə̄*   *vaŋhə̄uš*   *manaŋhō*
      life.ACC.SG   REL.NOM.SG   good.GEN.SG   thought.GEN.SG
      'the life which is of / belongs to good thought (Y. 53.5)'

(17) *fravašayō*   ...   *yazamaide*   *yąm=ca*   *āθrō*   ...   *yąm=ca*
      fravaši.ACC.PL   worship.1.PL.PRS   REL.ACC.SG=and   fire.GEN.SG   REL.ACC.SG=and
      sraošahe   ...
      obedience.GEN.SG
      'We worship the *fravašis*, (the one) who is of / belongs to fire, and (the one) who is of / belongs to obedience' (Yt. 13.85)

While this is not to say that one form must have developed from the other (cp. GONDA 1954), it speaks against assuming an aprioristic difference between both types.

SEILER (1960:194–201) remarks that nominal relative clauses which show case attraction are limited in a number of ways: they must occur right after/before their pivot (only few exceptions: Yt. 13.1, V. 13.2); they can only specify a member of a class (e.g. ex. 11, 13); they are syntactically limited (no Ø pivot; no correlatives; etc.). Unfortunately, no aetiology for this differentiation, which is still under development in Old Avestan, is provided.

This strict semantic and functional separation between 'appositive' (verbal and non-attracting) and 'attributive' (attracting) relative clauses is, however, a questionable criterion, since epithets can express more than a class–selector relationship. Conversely, such a relationship also occurs in 'appositive' relative clauses.

(18) *miθrəm*   *vouru.gaoiiaoitīm*   *yazamaide*   *arš.vacaŋhəm*   *viiāxanəm*
      Mithra.ACC.SG   wide-pastured.ACC.SG   worship.1.PL.PRS   truth-telling.ACC.SG   eloquent.ACC.SG
      ...   *yō*   *āsunąm*   *āsuš*
            REL.NOM.SG   swift.GEN.PL   swift.NOM.SG
      'We worship Mithra of wide pastures, truth-telling, eloquent, ... (who is the) swift(est) of the swift' (Yt. 10.64–5)

(19) *āiiese*   *yešti*   *raϑβō*   *bərəzatō*   *yō*   *ašahe*
      receive.1.SG.PRS   worship.VBNOUN   judge.GEN.SG   high.GEN.SG   REL.NOM.SG   truth.GEN.SG
      'I wish to worship the high judge who (is the one of) truth' (Y. 3.19)

This functional-semantic divide may well exist, but is clearly a secondary development; attraction (and later NP-linking with COMP) only developed under specific conditions (see below), rather than being primary, and was developed in analogy to agreeing AdjPs.

3.2 Re-analysis

In opposition to SEILER, HAIDER AND ZWANZIGER (1984) assume copula ellipsis as the basis of nominal relative clauses. The apparently unmotivated, and thus opaque case-assignment of the relative pronoun leads to its replacement with *yaṭ*. Subsequently, case attraction occurs in structural cases, viz. ACC, INS

(for INS as a structural case, see OETTINGER 1986); this can only have occured after a re-analysis of such clauses as attributive, non-sentential phrases (since in their framework case-agreement cannot cross sentential boundaries; HAIDER AND ZWANZIGER 1984:154).

This argument is problematic in many respects:

a) case attraction even in verbal relative clauses is clearly attested in other Indo-European languages, and does not require a strucutrally different category of clauses (cf. BIANCHI 2000; cf. exx. 20, 21 below);

b) the historical primacy of COMP-linking with *yaṯ* over 'regular' attraction is not borne out by the data (*yaṯ* takes this function only in Young Avestan, attraction is already attested for Old Avestan; cp. the Old Persian evidence);

c) their analysis requires two inherently different structures (sentential with *yaṯ* as COMP; REL as phrasal attribute).

(20) πρὸ   οὖν   τῶν   κακῶν   ὧν   οἶδα
     instead PRTC DET.GEN.PL   evil.GEN.PL REL.GEN.PL   know.1.SG.PRS
     'Instead of the evils that I know …' (Plato, *Apology* 29b)

(21) sie   gedâht'   ouch maniger   leide,   der   ir
     3.SG.NOM.F recall.3.SG.PST PRTC INDEF.GEN.PL misfortune.GEN.PL REL.GEN.PL   3.SG.DAT.F
     dâ héimé   geschach
     at home.DAT.SG happen.3.SG.PST
     'She recalled some misfortunes that happened to her at home' (*Nibelungen* 1391.14)

With this information in mind, how can the development of the *ezāfe* construction best be accounted for?

4 Relative attraction and Common Iranian

To reconstruct the development of *ezāfe*(-like) constructions throughout the history of Old Iranian, the following aspects need to be taken into account:

1. our oldest attestations (OAv.) only show a very limited number of nominal relative clauses with case attraction (at most 9, at least 2 instances according to KELLENS AND PIRART 1988–91:II.62–3, cf. ex. 10); *yaṯ* is not yet used as generalised connector for oblique-case NPs (but occurs as a regular REL.NOM/ACC.SG.N);

2. similarly, the oldest layer of Old Persian (DB, etc.) only shows attraction, not COMP connection (cf. ex. 12); this is remarkable since the OP relative pronoun is a more recent innovation, OP *haya* < *so- + *yo- (cf. STRUNK 1969, and ADIEGO LAJARA 2000 concerning case attraction in the univerbation process);

3. in both Old and Young Avestan, attraction is restricted to ACC, INS; these are explained by HAIDER AND ZWANZIGER (1984:151) as 'structural cases', by SEILER (1960:160–1) as 'Nennkasus' – is the Iranian DAT (indirect object) not a structural case?

4. in Young Avestan, attraction of ACC, INS continues; all other cases (whose RELs are polysyllabic) instead use *yaṯ* (but cf. ex. 13 – not exclusively oblique cases);

5. there are a few examples in late Old Persian of a comparable construction with *taya* (cf. ex. 14), which also functions as COMP – but may be mistakes (A²Sc and AsH are late inscriptions).

Given the occurrence of parallel phenomena in both attested Old Iranian languages, it is not implausible to assume that their development may have started already in Common Iranian.

Relative clauses with ellipsed copula (vel sim.), viz. nominal relative clauses, show optional agreement of REL with their pivot, if immediately following or preceding (Common or early Old Iranian).

The absence of a finite verb has made REL case-assignment opaque. Only a specific subset of relative clauses occurs naturally in this position ('restrictive'; thus SEILER's analysis); the occurrence of non-attracted relative clauses suggests that attraction is optional (rather than *a priori* attributive re-analysis); relative attraction is only later re-analysed as attributive case-agreement, in analogy to AdjPs (thus between early and late Old Iranian).

By Young Avestan and late Old Persian times, respectively, *yaṯ* as COMP has begun encroaching on REL's domain.

5 Remaining Questions

Why 'attract' in the first place?

Case attraction to resolve unclear case-assignment is a plausible option; since the ellipsed copula cannot provide case-assignment, the constituent which determines the other agreement features (number, gender) takes on this function. This further assists discourse accessibility (cf. MEYER ftc).

Why is attraction in Old Avestan limited to ACC, INS?

This could be chance (corpus size; semantic environment). Alternatively, a case hierarchy may be in place in Old Avestan (as in Greek; cp. KEENAN AND COMRIE 1977:66, GROSU 1994:108).

Why is COMP generalised?

An appeal to diminishing language competence or metrical restrictions seems unwarranted.

COMP likely developed from relative clauses with incorporated antecedent already in Proto-Indo-Iranian (cf. LÜHR 2008:153), wherefore a connection to relative clauses and sentential subordination is not implausible; compare the rise of *that* as a relative marker in Middle English (cf. ROMAINE 1982:59–61). Owing to the spread of 'restrictive' relative clauses beyond ACC, INS, the lack of motivation for agreement (esp. in instances like ex. 13), COMP is further employed for NP-linking (amongst other uses; cf. BENVENISTE 1947–8) – the beginning of *ezāfe*?!

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