



LACIM

European research network on linguistics and
languages of the Anatolia-Caucasus-Iran-
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glottothèque

languages of Anatolia, Caucasus, Iran, Mesopotamia

Kurdish

Unit 2: Word order

Geoffrey Haig

University of Bamberg

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Content of this unit:

- Introduction: Hawkins' Puzzle
- Kurdish as a predominantly head-initial, OV language
- Goals Last: OVG in Kurdish
- Summary

Hawkins (2008): An OV/VO asymmetry

- OV and VO are often considered to be essentially mirror images of each other, corresponding to a distinction between **head-final** and **head-initial**.
- However, there are reasons to doubt this assumption.
- Hawkins (2008) points to a striking asymmetry between OV and VO languages wrt to the placement of additional, non-direct objects (Hawkins refers to “obliques”), abbreviated ‘X’

Hawkins (2008): An OV/VO asymmetry

The concept of 'Oblique' (X) is intended to cover those constituents of a transitive predicate which are semantically entailed by the predicate, but are neither direct objects nor indirect objects, for example:

		V	O	X
(1)	<i>John</i>	<i>opened</i>	<i>the door</i>	<i>with the key</i>
(2)	<i>John</i>	<i>put</i>	<i>the book</i>	<i>on the table</i>

Hawkins (2008), like most of traditional typology, ignores intransitive predicates, thus no attention is paid to the clauses such as:

(3) *John drove to London*

Hawkins (2008): An OV/VO asymmetry

Combining V, O, and X yields six possible orders, three with VO, and three with OV:

Percentages of languages attested for each of the six possible combinations of O, V, X:

VO + X			OV + X		
XVO	VXO	VOX	XOV	OXV	OVX
1.5%	0	98.5%	43%	22%	35%

Hawkins (2008: 169), based on the sample of Dryer & Gensler (2005), but ignoring languages with no dominant order; N=192 (VO) and N=105 (OV)

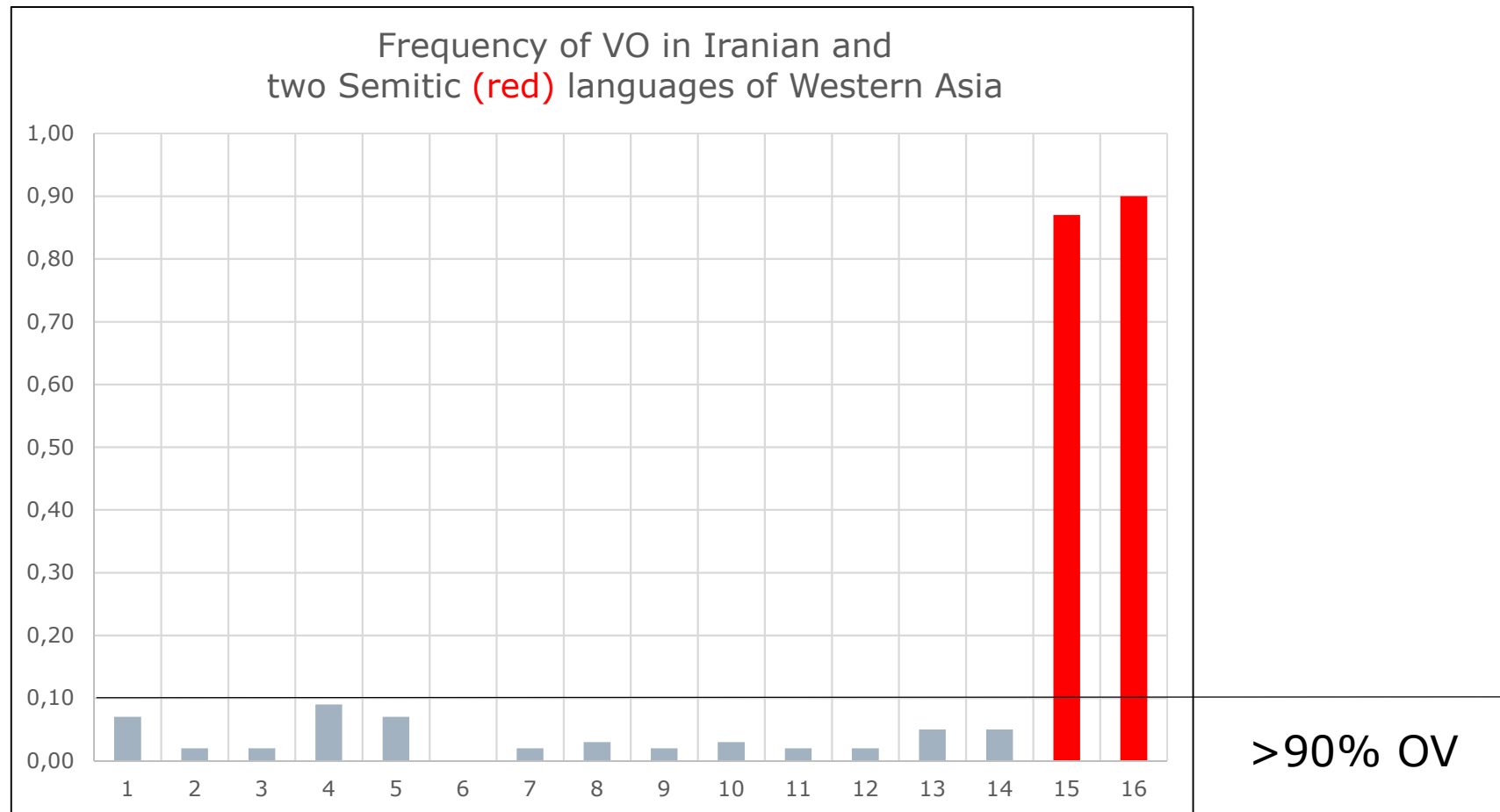
Kurdish

Predominantly head-initial, except OV:

- Noun-Adjective
 - Possessed-Possessor
 - Noun-Relative clause
 - Matrix clause-Complement clause
 - Complementizer-Complement clause
 - Aux-Verb
 - Modal-Verb
 - Mixed preposition/circumposition/postposition
 - OV
-

Is Kurdish really OV?

Data from 14 Iranian languages from WOWA (Haig et al 2021):



OVX in Kurdish

With a transitive verb (Northern Kurdish, dialect of Duhok, Haig, in print):

- (8) *min nan kir=e di firin-ê da*
1SG.OBL bread do.PST=DRCT ADP oven-F.OBL ADP
'I put the bread **into the oven**'

- (9) **min kire nan di firinê da* / **min nan di firinê da kir*

OVX in Kurdish

Cf. the position for corresponding WH elements:

- (7) *Te* *nan* *kir=e* *di* *kîve* *da?*
2SG.OBL bread do.PST=DRCT ADP where ADP
‘**Where** did you put the bread?’

Goal arguments of intransitive verbs:

- (1) *Dihî* *ez* *čû-bû-m=e* ***Duhok-ê***
Yesterday 1SG go.PST-PLPRF-1SG=DRCT Duhok-F.OBL

The Goal argument cannot be separated from the verb by the adverb (2):

- (2) **Ez* *čû-bû-m=e* *dihî* ***Duhok-ê***
1SG go.PST-PLPRF-1SG=DRCT yesterday Duhok-F.OBL

The placement of other arguments is relatively flexible (3a, 3b), but they cannot intervene between Goal and verb (3c):

- (3a) *ez* *čû-bû-m=e* ***Duhok-ê*** [*digel* *deyk-a* *xwe*]
I go.PST-PLPRF-1SG=DRCT Duhok-F.OBL with mother-F.EZ REFL
'I went to Duhok [with my mother]'

- (3b) *ez* [*digel* *deyk-a* *xwe*] *čû-bû-m=e* ***Duhok-ê***
I with mother-F.EZ REFL go.PST-PLPRF-1SG=DRCT Duhok-F.OBL

OVX in Kurdish: Summary

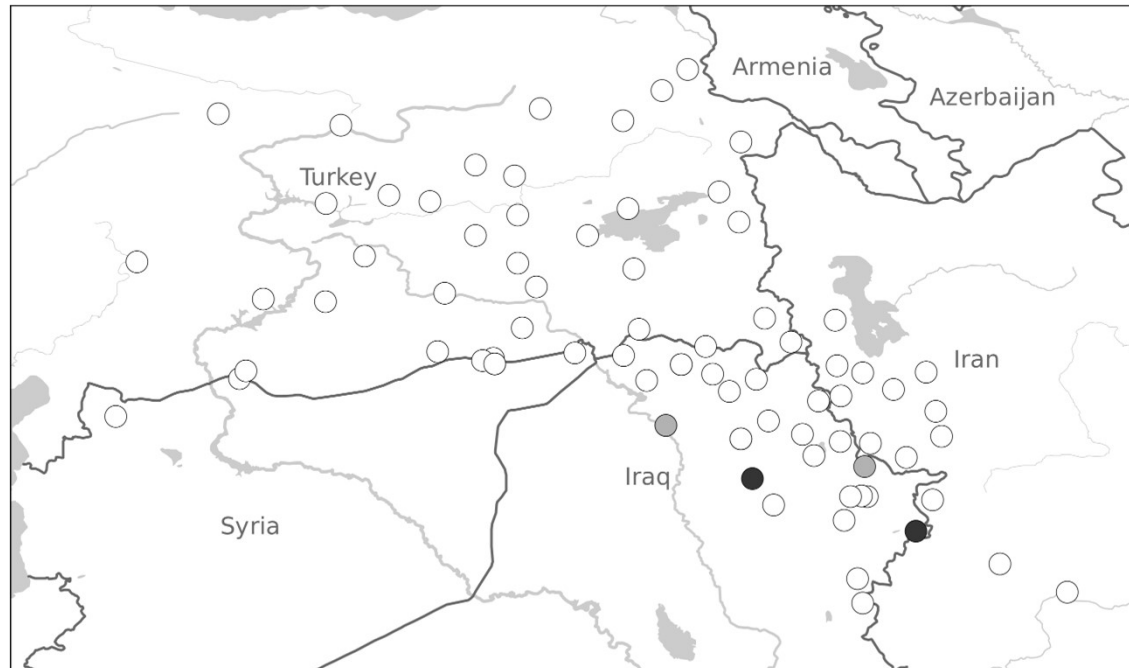
- Applies consistently to arguments indicating the endpoint of motion, or metaphorical extensions thereof: Recipients, Addressees of verbs of speech, final states of change-of-state predicates (inchoatives: ‘become, turn into’ etc.)
- Transitivity is irrelevant; semantics of the argument concerned are decisive
- Post-verbal position for goals cannot be accounted for in terms of ‘afterthought’ or ‘anti-topic’, or ‘non-focal’ etc.
- No strong evidence for an effect of syntactic weight
- A structural position in the core syntax of the clause

OVX in Kurdish: Questions

- Is it really restricted to goals, or does it also apply to e.g. other locatives?
- What other evidence is there for the semantic approach?

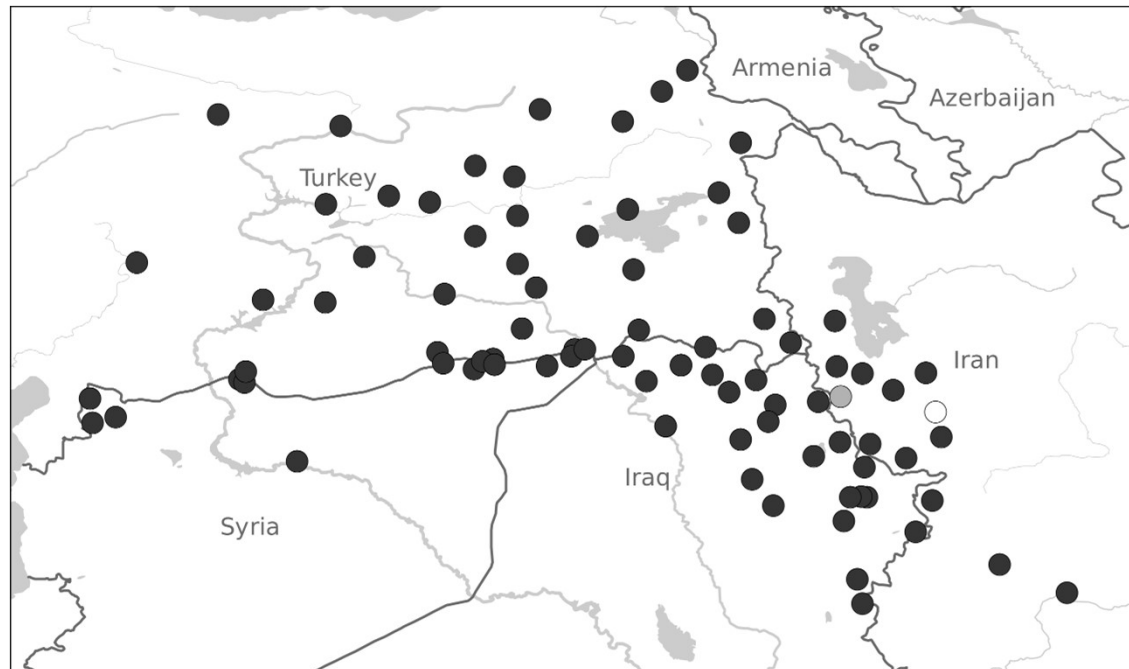
OVX in Kurdish: Goals vs. Place (static location)

Post-verbal PLACE constituents in the Manchester Database of Kurdish Dialects (Matras et al 2016; Haig, in print)



OVX in Kurdish: Goals vs. Place (static location)

Post-verbal GOAL constituents in the Manchester Database of Kurdish Dialects (Matras et al 2016; Haig, in print)



OVX in Kurdish: Semantic effects (1)

State vs. change of state, Northern Kurdish:

- (15) *Ez li 2010ê bû-m=e mamosta*
1SG in 2010.F.OBL become.PST-1SG=DRCT teacher
'In 2010 I became a teacher' (e.g. I graduated, began working as a teacher)

- (16) *Ez li 2010ê mamosta bû-m*
1SG in 2010.F.OBL teacher be.PST-1SG
'In 2010 I was a teacher' (e.g. I was working at that time as a teacher)

OVX in Kurdish: Semantic effects (1)

Telic vs. atelic verbs of speech, Northern Kurdish:

K-020 Zakho

- (47) *min* *gel* *wî* *ne-axift*
to with 3SG.OBL.M NEG-speak.PST.3SG
'I didn't speak **with him**'

K-020 Zakho

- (48) *min* *got=e* *wî*
to say.PST.3SG=DRCT 3SG.OBL.M
'I said **to him**'

Summary

- Kurdish is not a ‘free word order’, or disputed OV/VO language (cf. Russian, German, Georgian, Warlbiri etc.); it is, even in natural discourse, rather strictly OV (>90% in spoken corpora). But it is OVX.
- Kurdish confirms Hawkins’ (2008) observation that OVX is most frequently encountered in ‘OV’ languages with a high number of verb-initial features
- But Kurdish (and some other West Iranian languages) differ from all other cases of OVX attested to date in that ‘X’ appears to be restricted to arguments representing the endpoints of a verb of (caused) motion, or final states of a change-of-state predicate

Summary

- In Kurdish, the concept of 'Goal' extends to include recipients of verbs of transfer ('give'), and in some dialects, addressees of telic verbs of speech
- Post-verbal X in Kurdish is independent of transitivity, hence equally found with verbs of motion ('go'), or of caused motion ('put').

Summary

- See Gündoğdu (2019) for an attempt to formalize this in terms of lexically specified argument structure
- Post-verbal goals may also be motivated by the avoidance of two identically case marked NPs (Oblique) in the preverbal position, in the spirit of Richards (2010:5) distinctness condition (“If a linearization statement $\langle \alpha, \alpha \rangle$ is generated, the derivation crashes”)
- But this account fails to explain post-verbal placement of intransitive goals

references (selection)

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this lecture

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