

## Ergative and verb agreement in Jowsheqani

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### Abstract

Jowsheqani is a central Iranian language, spoken in the city of Jowsheqan in the northern Isfahan. Jowsheqani is ergative with respect to verb-agreement since the past transitive verb agrees with object in person, number and gender. The purpose of this article is to investigate how past transitive verbs agree with object in ergative construction, and how the split ergative is conditioned. The findings of this article show that the past transitive verb in the ergative construction agrees with object in gender when object occurs as a noun or pronoun. With respect to person and number, it agrees with the object that occur as independent or enclitic pronoun. But also the past verb can mark an object that has not a reference in the sentence. Jowshaqani, generally, exhibit what is known as split ergativity, since the ergative construction is found only in clauses using tenses based on the past stem of the verb.

**Keywords:** ergative, verb agreement, Jowshaqani, Iranian languages

### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

Ergative, which is one of the characteristic features of most Iranian languages, is a construction in which the subject of an intransitive verb is marked the same as the object of a transitive verb, while the agent of a transitive verb is marked differently. Ergative in Iranian languages has two forms, case marking and verb agreement. If the Ergative involved is a case, then the subject and object are typically described as being in an absolute or direct case, while the agent is in an oblique or ergative case. Verb agreement Ergative appears with the past tenses of transitive verbs, where the verb agrees with its object in terms of person, number, or gender. In Iranian languages, the ending that shows such agreement is often removed, and the past transitive verbs are often used without any ending. But in some Iranian languages including Jowshaqani, past transitive verbs retain an ending that agrees with the object. This article examines how the

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transitive verbs agree with objects in Jowshaqani and how it is used in terms of splitness of ergativity.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Ergative is used to describe a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from a transitive subject. Ergative is thus complementary to the familiar grammatical pattern of accusativity, in which one case (nominative) marks both intransitive and transitive subjects, with another case (accusative) being employed for transitive objects. Many languages have a largely ergative nature, but there always seem to be some traces of accusative organization, while yet other languages show quite a mix of ergative and accusative characteristics. The split between ergative and accusative patterning can be organized along a number of dimensions, and it can span both morphology and syntax. In general, languages with ergative case marking patterns are actually split between ergative and accusative. There is a continuum: some use nearly entirely ergative case marking, whereas in others ergativity is much more limited. A dimension of variation is what conditions the split. Another very common form of a split is between nominal case marking and verbal co-referencing. Split ergativity can also be viewed historically as an intermediate point in a historical evolution. Languages are not statically ergative or accusative. There are fairly well-examined cases of languages changing their features from ergative to accusative and vice versa.

## **3. Methodology**

This article examines the features of ergative in the Jowsheqanii, a central Iranian language spoken in the Jowsheqan City central Iran. The data used in this article are taken from a corpus of Jowsheqani archived at the 'Endangered Languages Archive' ([www.elararchive.org](http://www.elararchive.org)). The data are transcribed based on the APA phonetic transcription and glossed in a semi-Persian way of glossing which the meanings are in Persian, while the grammatical features are shown in English.

## **4. Result and Discussion**

As there is no case system in Jowsheqani, the language only uses ergative as verb agreement. It means that the ending of a transitive verb agrees with the object of the sentence in terms of person number or gender. Agreement with gender like: *šūa jan-eš babarda šahr* 'The husband took his wife to the city'. In addition to gender, present conjugation in ergative construction can also mark the number and person of the object, if the object appears as pronoun: *dast-e man bagat o ba-š-bard-am* 'He took my hand and took me'. But the ending can

also mark an object that has no reference in a sentence: *nona ke šoam ba-šuhosnâ-am* ‘Where I went, they put me to sleep’. It should be noted that Jowsheqani exhibits what is known as split ergativity. It is generally said that in Iranian Languages the ergative is used only in sentences that have a past tense, while the data in the corpus show that in Jowshaqani ergative is also used with distant future: *pâyiz ke bae iyeye-mun komi kašt* ‘When autumn comes, we will plant barley’, and irrealis: *aga kâmâ-mun zunâ ke ba-mun vâta kom bâ* ‘If we had known, we would have said’.

### **5. Conclusions and suggestions**

Considering that Jowsheqani marks the gender of the verb only in the third person singular, the verb can only mark the singular object. This subject can be a feminine noun that is mentioned in the sentence, or a feminine pronoun. But sometimes the female subject does not have a formal reference in sentence, but it is a semantic characteristic that the verb of the sentence agrees to. In addition to gender, verb agreement in ergative construction can also mark the number and person of the object. That is, the ending of the verb agrees to the object. But such agreement is done when the object itself is not mentioned as a noun in the sentence, because person and number are features of the pronoun, and the ending of the verb agrees to the object that occurs in the form of a free or enclitic pronoun. The ending may not have an object reference and the ending itself marks the pronominal object of the verb without being co-referenced. Regarding the splitness of the ergative, and how is conditioned by tense or aspect or voice, considering the use of the ergative in the future and irrealis which is formed by past stem, it cannot be said that the ergative in Jowsheqani is used on the past tense. The correct expression is that it is used in all constructions that are made with the past stem.

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