Adpositional Constructions in Upper Şirvan Tat

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(Caucasian) Tat is a group of related Southwest Iranian varieties spoken mainly in the Republic of Azerbaijan. They are not to be confused with Tati, a cluster of Northwest Iranian languages spoken in Iranian Azerbaijan. Tat consists of two main dialect groups with little to no mutual intelligibility: Judaeo-Tat, written and relatively well studied, and Muslim Tat, non-written and much less studied.

For centuries, Tat has been in contact with Azeri, an Oghuz Turkic language, resulting in profound Turkic influence, as well as with East Caucasian languages. This presentation deals with a salient instance of this contact observed in adpositional constructions in Muslim Tat of Upper Şirvan (central Azerbaijan). Using data from my fieldwork, I will argue that a typological shift has taken place in the morphology of this prepositional language spoken in an area dominated by postpositional languages.

The basic prepositions in Upper Şirvan Tat all have cognates in Modern Persian. These include the ablative *ä(z)* (cf. Persian *az*), the dative-locative *bä* (variants: *bə, be, ba*, cf. Persian *be*) and the comitative-instrumental *vo* (variant: *ve*, cf. Persian *bâ*):

(1) *bə   ħäyot   ye   kärg-i   hi*
     LOC   yard   one   chicken-INDF   EXIST
     'There is a chicken in the yard.'

(2) *fürmo-re   ä   äs*
     descend-PRF2/3   ABL   horse
     'He dismounted from his horse.'

There also exists a series of grammaticalized adpositional phrases used to express more specific spatial relations. Examples include *bə sär* 'on (top of)' (*sär* 'head'), *bä zir* 'under' (*zir* 'bottom'), *bä pišt* 'behind' (*pišt* 'back'), *bə darun* 'inside of' (*darun* 'interior'). These composite adpositions can both precede and follow their head:

(3) *bə_sär   qäbr-ho   nə̄š-tond*
     on   tomb-PL   write-PRF3PL
     'They wrote on the tombstones.'

(4) *tojir   lüt_ʕüryun   taxta=rä   bə_sär=i   xisi-re*
     merchant   naked.STR   board=OBL   on=POSS3   fall_asleep-PRF2/3
     'The merchant, naked as a jaybird, is sleeping on the board (lit. of the board on its head).'

In (3), the construction is identical to that in (1–2). When postposed, as in (4), the adpositional phrase 'on the bed' has a possessive structure. The possessive in Upper Şirvan Tat is marked by the oblique clitic *=(r)ä* (cf. Persian *râ*) on the possessor and a possessive suffix on the possessee.

As the composite adpositions above are derived from nominal heads, constructions such as that in (4) are not surprising, although their being postposed is noteworthy. More unusual are cases where simple prepositions, such as *ä(z)* and *bä* become postpositional following an oblique-marked head:

(5) *in   xö=rä   äz=ü   bendäm   vogah   bi=rum*
     this   dream=OBL   ABL=s/he   at_that_moment   awake   be=AOR1
     'At that very moment, I woke up from this dream (lit. of this dream from it).'

(6) *ye   kälä   qažqun-i=rä   bö* (< *bä=ü*)   *oš   hist=i*
     one   big.ATTR   pot=OBL   LOC.s/he   cooked_rice   EXIST=3
     'There is cooked rice in one big pot.' (= 'One big pot has got cooked rice in it.')

Speakers also accept this construction for pronominal heads:

(7) *kitob=ä   ü=rä   äz=ü   usto=rum*
     book=OBL   s/he=OBL   ABL=s/he   get=AOR1
     'I got the book from him (lit.: (of) him/her from him/her).'

Constructions such as the one in (5–7) are not typologically uncommon, including in related languages. Jügel coined the term 'placeholder construction' for a similar phenomenon observed in Middle Persian: in instances such as (8), an enclitic pronoun, which appears in its usual position and is followed by a preposition marked in a third-person 'expletive pronoun' (which would in our case correspond to *=ü* in *äz=ü*). The latter does not refer to an actant but instead secures the position of the fronted pronoun after the preposition (Jügel, to appear).

(8)   *u=š*   *dām*   *dō –*   *ēk*   *merd*   *ud*   *ēk*   *zan –*   ***az=iš***   *dēs-ād*
      and=s/he   creature   two   one   man   and   one   woman   from=EXPL   build-2PL.SBJV
      'and shall form two creatures – a man and a woman – out of it' [Jügel, to appear]

Combinations such as *äz=ü* and *bö* (< *bä* + *=ü*) are not attested in Judaeo-Tat nor in most Muslim varieties. In Upper Şirvan Tat, they are not used in all sub-varieties either, but are very common in the settlements where they are found, mainly in Lahıc and a handful of villages to the north of it. Notably, some residents of Lahıc migrated westward in the early 20th c. and settled in what is now Georgia; and the postpositions under study have been unattested there. If, then, the placeholder construction is a recent development in Lahıc, it is probably not inherited from Middle Persian, but rather motivated by contact with Azeri, a language with no prepositions and a rich set of postpositions, as well as by analogy with composite adpositions which can be postposed to their heads, as in (4):

(9)   [Azeri]   *tacir*   *lüm_lüt*   *taxta-nın*   *üst-ü-ndə*   *yat-ıb*
            merchant   naked.STR   board-GEN   top-POSS3-LOC   fall_asleep-PRF3
            'The merchant, naked as a jaybird, is sleeping on the board.'

Likewise confirming my suggestion that contact influence may motivate structures such as the one in Tat is the case of Balochi. Its dialects spoken in areas dominated by postpositional Indo-Aryan languages have shifted to postpositional constructions either entirely (e.g. in Karachi Balochi) or partially, resulting in a parallel use of prepositions and postpositions (Farrell 2003: 196) but without the possessive pattern.

Elicitations and spontaneous corpus analysis so far indicate lack of any substantial semantic differences between prepositional and postpositional constructions in Tat, at least for nominal heads. Further work is needed to determine the distribution of the less common postpositional constructions with pronominal heads where focalisation may play a role.

Abbreviations

1	1st person	EXIST	existential	PL	plural
2	2nd person	EXPL	expletive pronoun	POSS	possessive
3	3rd person	GEN	genitive	PRF	perfect
ABL	ablative	INDF	indefinite	SBJV	subjunctive
AOR	aorist	LOC	locative	STR	strong adjective
ATTR	attributive	OBL	oblique		

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