

Tense and Alignment in Akoi Kurdish

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1 Introduction

Akoi Kurdish is a variety of Sorani (Central) Kurdish spoken in several regions within the Sulaymaniyah province of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including Raniyeh, Pishdar, Qaladzeh, and the Qandil mountain area. This variety (like other Sorani varieties) shows a split pattern in its alignment; that is, subject agreement is realized in two different forms.

- (1) Subject Agreement in Akoi
 - a. a morphophonological pronominal clitic in the past tense and the present perfect.
 - b. a morphophonological verbal agreement suffix elsewhere.

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(2) Subject Agreement in Akoi

a. hiwa-w nian sew-an = **jan** xwaɪ-d Past Tense
 Hiwa-AND Nian apple-PL = **3PL** eat-PST
 'Hiwa and Nian ate apples.'

b. hiwa-w nian sew-an də-xo-**n** Future Tense
 Hiwa-AND Nian apple-PL IMPF-eat-**3PL**
 'Hiwa and Nian will eat apples.'

Akoi shows overt morphology for the present tense.

(3) Present Tense in Akoi

a. dawran-u nian = **a** sew də-xo-n Simple Present
 Dawran-AND Nian = **PRS** apple IMPF-eat-3PL
 'Dawran and Nian eat apples.'

b. dawran-u nian = **a** sew = jan xwaɪ-d-u = **v** Present Perfect
 Dawran-AND Nian = **PRS** apple = 3PL eat-PST-PTCP = is
 'Dawran and Nian have eaten apples.'

Questions:

How does the split alignment work in Akoi? Is it syntactic or morphological?
 How does it interact with tense?

- We build on (Akkuş et al., 2025) to develop a case-driven account of alignment in Akoi Kurdish.
- We then propose an analysis to account for the distribution of tense and agreement morphemes in the language, adopting the Distributed Morphology framework of Halle and Marantz (1993).

1.1 Indexation in Sorani

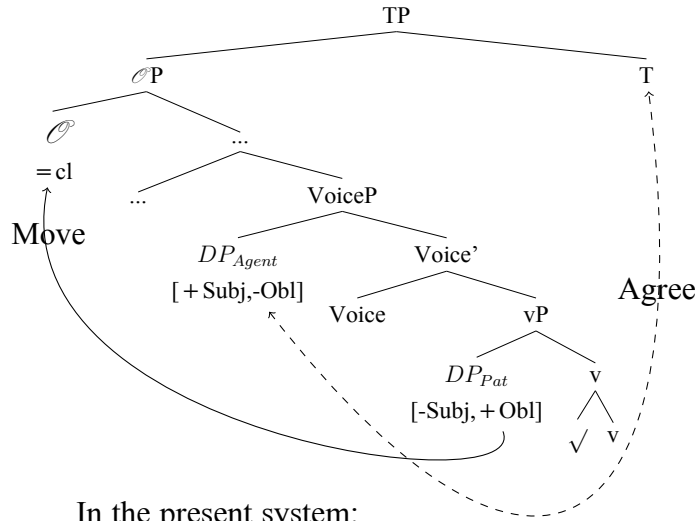
Akkuş et al. (2025, pp. 77-81) propose a system of indexation for Standard Sorani Kurdish and Garmiyani Kurdish. Their analysis introduces two distinct probes, T and \mathcal{C} .

In their analysis, the case feature distribution for the subject and the object in Standard Sorani is as shown in (4).

(4) Case features in SSK

Tense	Subject	Object
Present	[+ subj, -obl] / Nominative	[-subj, +obl] / Accusative
Past	[+ subj, +obl] / Ergative	[-subj, -obl] / Objective

(5) The derivation of the Present System



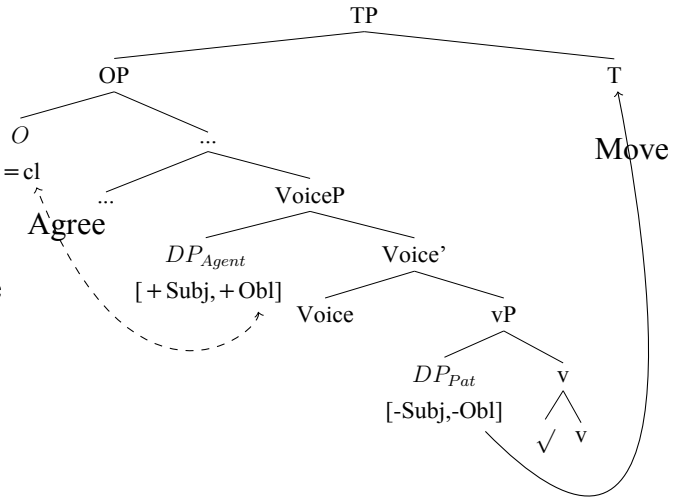
In the present system:

- T agrees with the subject bearing the [+ subj, -obl] case features (5).
- \mathcal{C} attracts the object with the [-subj, +obl] case features (5).

In the past system:

- \mathcal{C} agrees with the subject carrying the [+ subj, +obl] features (6).
- T attracts the object with the [-subj, -obl] features (6).

(6) The derivation of the Past System



2 Akoi Alignment

The alignment in Akoi is largely similar to that in Standard Sorani, with some minor differences in the morphophonological realizations of syntactic agreement. Specifically, the realization of syntactic nominative agreement and the movement of morphophonological pronominal clitics with an objective case in this variety closely align with those found in Standard Sorani, as shown in (7).

(7) Nominative agreement suffixes in Akoi

	First Person	Second Person	Third Person
Singular	-m	-i(t)	-a(t) / e(t)
Plural	-in	-n	-n

The realization of ergative syntactic agreement and pronominals (with accusative case) differs slightly in form from Standard Sorani, as shown in (8).

(8) Ergative agreement in Akoi

	First Person	Second Person	Third Person
Singular	= m	= t	= i/ = j
Plural	= na	= tan	= jan

In addition to the agreement morphemes, understanding the distribution of the present tense marker in the language is crucial for explaining the morphological distribution of these elements.

2.1 Tense in Akoi

- The present tense is overtly realized in Akoi.
- The occurrence of the tense marker is restricted to the present tense, as shown in (9).

- (9)
- a. dəw.ɪan(=a) kteb-an də-xwen-et-æwæ
Dawran=**pres** book-pl impf-read-3sg-P.
'Dawran reads (is reading) books.'
 - b. dəw.ɪan(*=a) kteb-an = i xwend
Dawran book-pl = 3sg read.pst
'Dawran read books (simple past).'
 - c. dəw.ɪan(*=a) kteb-an = i də-xwend
Dawran book-pl = 3sg impf-read.pst
'Dawran was reading books.'
 - d. dəw.ɪan(*=a) kteb-an = i xwend bu
Dawran book-pl = 3sg read.pst be.pst
'Dawran had read books.'

- The present tense marker =a behaves like a morphophonological clitic, as it can attach to different hosts (10).

- (10) a. nian = a sew də-xw-a(t)
Nian = PRS apple IMPF-eat-3SG
'Nian eats apples.'
- b. nian sew = a də-xw-a(t)
Nian apple = PRS IMPF-eat-3SG
'Nian eats apples.'

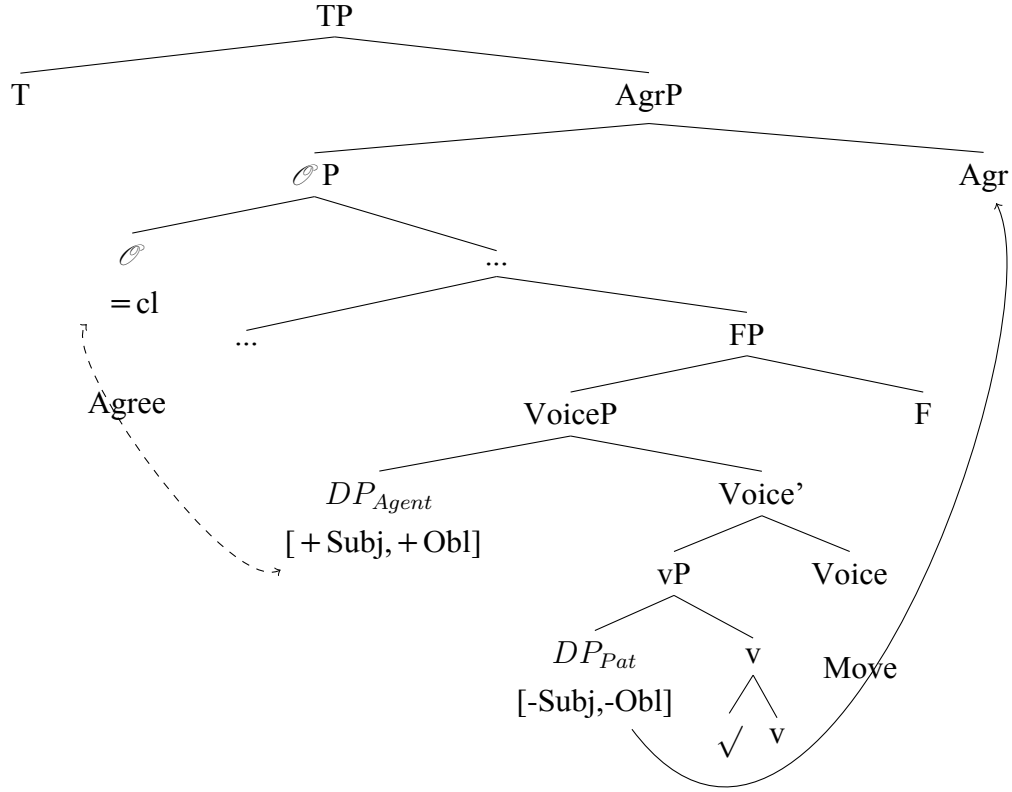
Argument!

The tense head in Akoi has an independent distribution from the verbal nominative agreement. Thus, Tense and Agreement reside in different syntactic heads.

Our Proposal:

- (11)
-
- TP
- T AgrP
- P Agr
- =cl
- ...
- VoiceP
- DP_{Agent} [+Subj, -Obl]
- Voice'
- vP Voice
- DP_{Pat} [-Subj, +Obl]
- v
- ✓ v
- Agree
- Move

- (12)



2.2 Tense in Akoi

- The present tense marker attaches to the subject in the unmarked reading, as shown in (13).

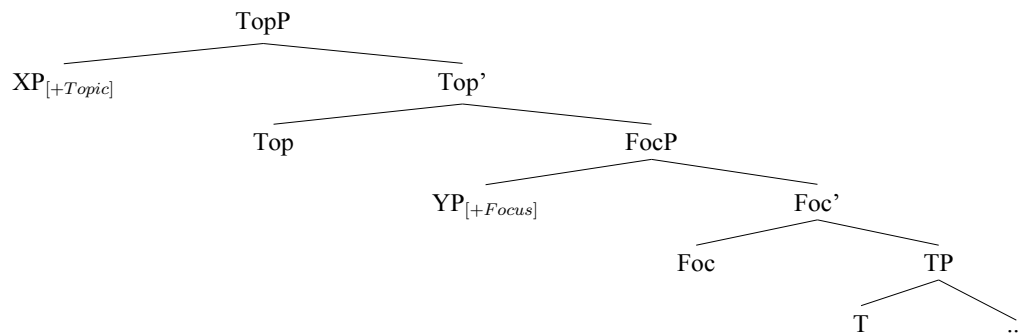
- (13) nian-u rodʒin=**a** kteb-i də-xwen-in-æwæ
 Nian-and Rojin=**pres** book-m impf-read-3pl-P.
 'Nian and Rojin read (are reading) the book.'

- When a focused element is present, it is the focalized element that serves as the host for the tense marker, as shown in (14).

- (14) a. nian-u rodʒin kteb-i=**a** də-xwen-in-æwæ
 Nian-and Rojin book-m=**pres** impf-read-3pl-P.
 'Nian and Rojin read (are reading) the BOOK (not the newspaper).'
- b. *nian-u rodʒin=**a** kteb-i də-xwen-in-æwæ
 Nian-and Rojin=**pres** book-m impf-read-3pl-P.
 Int. 'Nian and Rojin read (are reading) the BOOK (not the newspaper).'

- The fact that (14-a) (and not (14-b)) is a valid answer to the question “What are Nian and Rojin reading?” further supports this, indicating that the tense marker cliticizes to the focalized element. Compare (13) in the unmarked form with the examples in (14).
- We propose the structure in (15), following Rizzi (1997) and Karimi (2005).
- We assume that the subject moves to the specifier of TopP in the unmarked reading.

(15)



- In (15), T cliticizes to the phrase to its left after the structure is linearized.

An Alternative Analysis

This morpheme is (part of) the indicative marker, similar to what has been observed in Laki (Mohammadirad, 2020, p. 222) and also (Taghipour, 2024, p. 22).

Data from Laki:

- (16) xās tamis = ān-ā ma-ke
 well clean = 3PL.O-IND IND-do.PRS.3SG
 ‘He cleans them well.’ (Mohammadirad, 2020, p. 222)

- (17) (owen) beland = a ma-xan-en
 (they) loud = PRS.IND DUR-laugh.PRS-3PL
 ‘They laugh loudly.’ (Taghipour, 2024, p. 22)

- This morpheme, although similar in form to the tense marker in Akoi, has a different distribution. It can occur in the past tense, as shown in (18).

- (18) daft-im sef-æ mæ-wai-d-im
 have-1SG apple-IND IMPF-eat-PST-1SG

‘I was eating apples.’

- When the arguments are not present overtly (presumably as *pro*), the tense marker in Akoi is realized as an independent phonological word, as shown in (19). In contrast, the (presumably) indicative marker in Laki is not.

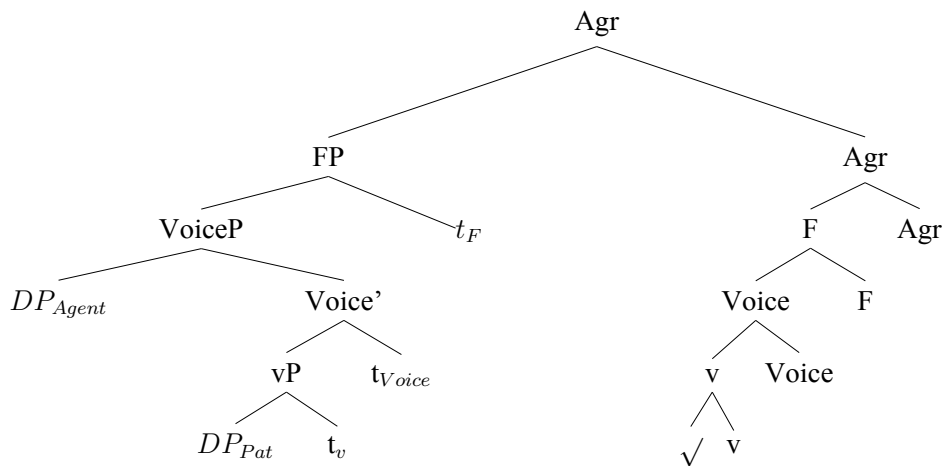
(19) ?a də=jan-bin-im
 PRS IMPF = 3PL-see-1SG
 ‘I see them.’

(20) *?æ mə-wæɪ-im
 IND IMPF-eat-1SG
 Int. ‘I am eating.’

3 Deriving the Morpheme Order

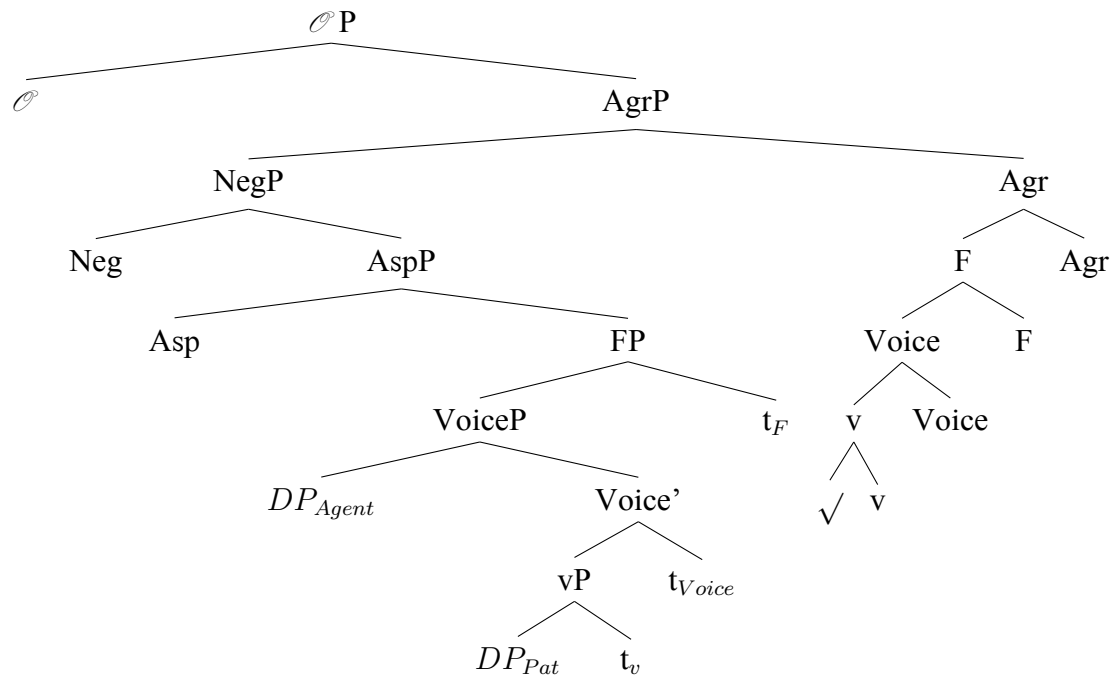
To derive the correct morpheme order, we propose a cyclic syntactic head movement: *v* to Voice, to *F*, and then to *Agr*, which is mainly inspired by Harley (2013). The structure in (21) is provided for clarity.

(21)



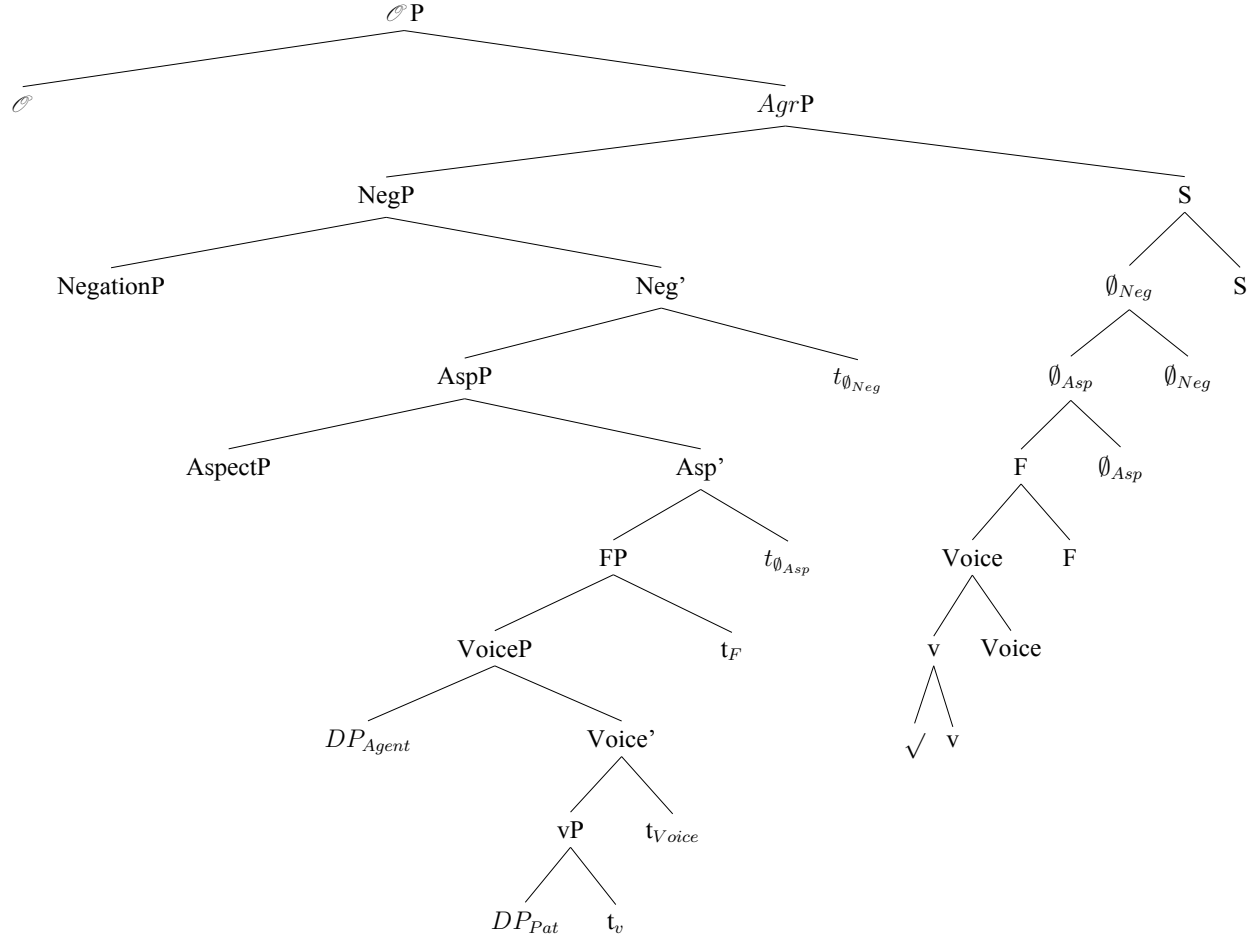
- What about the negation and imperfective aspect markers? (22)

(22) Head Movement Constraint violation



- Following (Van Gelderen, 2008; Haegeman, 1995), we take negation and aspect to be head-final phrases with null heads. The morphological realizations of negation and aspect are in the specifiers of these heads, as shown in (23).

(23) Head Movement through Neg and Asp



3.1 \emptyset Cliticization

To explain the distribution of the morphophonological pronominal clitics that occupy the \emptyset head as a result of syntactic agreement and/or movement, we employ Weisser (2024)’s account. This account utilizes a definition of structural adjacency proposed by Bobaljik (2012), as shown in (24).

- (24) Structural Adjacency: An element X is adjacent to an element Y if X c-commands Y and there is no element W such that X c-commands W and W c-commands Y.

Weisser (2024)’s proposal is shown in (25).

- (25) Integration: An element X that is adjacent to an element Y can be adjoined to an element Z within Y if there is no element within Y that is adjacent to Z.

However, a closer look at (23) reveals that applying the rule in (25) results in the cliticization of

\mathcal{O} to Agr. To address this, we suggest tweaking the definition of structural adjacency by using the asymmetric c-command definition in Kayne (1994). Thus, we propose (26).

- (26) An element X that asymmetrically c-commands element Y can be adjoined to an element Z within Y if there is no element within Y that asymmetrically c-commands Z.

Using the rule in (26):

- \mathcal{O} cliticizes to NegationP.
- In the absence of NegationP, it attaches to AspectP.
- When neither of these elements is present in the derivation, it attaches to *Agr*P, which occurs after the linearization of the hierarchy (i.e., [x] [y] can turn into [y + x] under the morphological merger proposed by ?).
- We assume that the DO/IO moves to a position higher than NegP and lower than *Agr*P, making it the closest possible host for \mathcal{O} .

4 Remaining Issues

- Adverbs
- Attaching the tense marker to the DO following the subject agreement on it, as in (27).

- (27) dawran-u nian sew = jan = a xwar-d-u = e
 Dawran-AND Nian apple = 3PL = PRS eat-PST-PTCP = is
 ‘Dawran and Nian have eaten apples.’

Acknowledgments

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