

Pronominal enclitics on floating flags in Sindhi and Brahui

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Sindhi (Indo-Aryan), Balochi (Iranic) and Brahui (Dravidian) are languages spoken in the southern half of Pakistan and adjoining regions that all use encliticized pronouns to index certain kinds of core verbal arguments (1–3)¹ and possessors of pronominal possessors. Such use of pronominal clitics is fairly widespread among Iranian languages though there is much variation in the precise morphosyntax of their usage [Mohammadirad, 2020]. Within Indo-Aryan, pronominal clitics are much rarer, confined largely to the western languages, viz., Sindhi, and the dialect continuum of Saraiki, Hindko and Punjabi [Bashir *et al.*, 2019]. But even in the latter languages, pronominal clitics have fairly limited syntactic freedom, encliticizing primarily (with a few exceptions) to finite verbs, thus resembling the better-studied pronominal suffixes of Kashmiri except that these only index arguments, never possessors [Verbeke, 2018].

Sindhi [Khubchandani, 2003] (1)

amb-ũ ði.n-ō=mã=y

mango-M.SG.DIR give:PRF-M.SG=1.SG.ERG.CLIT=2.SG.OBL.CLIT

‘I gave you a mango.’

Brahui [Elfenbein, 1998] (2)

χal.k-us=ka

strike:PST-2.SG=1.SG.OBL.CLIT

‘You hit me!’

Balochi [Jahani, 2019], gloss added (3)

čukk=in har-ā suwār kur.t

child=1.PL.OBL.CLIT donkey-OBL rider do:PST

‘We put the child onto the donkey.’

The Sindhi pronominal enclitics, however, are the most robust system within the Indo-Aryan family. In addition to the above-mentioned rôles as arguments and possessors, in Sindhi, pronominal enclitics can be hosted by Layer 2 and 3 flags [Masica, 1993; Haspelmath, 2019] which, only in this environment, occur without a preceding nominal host (4).²

Sindhi [Jegorova, 1966], gloss added (4)

muhiñ.ĵ-ō k^hat-ũ k^hē=sī āritvār-ā ðīh-ā pahu.t-ō hū-nd-ō

1.SG.POSS-M.SG.DIR letter-M.SG.DIR DAT=3.SG.OBL.CLIT Sunday-M.SG.OBL day-M.SG.OBL

reach:PRF-M.SG be-FUT-M.SG

‘My letter would, apparently, have reached him/her on Sunday.’

¹List of abbreviations used in glossing of examples in this abstract: BEN ‘benefactive’, CLIT ‘enclitic pronoun’, DAT ‘dative’, DIR ‘direct’, ERG ‘ergative’, FUT ‘future’, IMP ‘imperative’, INDEF ‘indefinite’, OBL ‘oblique’, M ‘masculine’, PL ‘plural’, PRF ‘perfective’, PST ‘past’, SG ‘singular’, and numbers 1, 2, 3 for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd persons.

²For context, as will be clear from (4), a Hindi-Urdu analog of this would be if the dative-marker *-kō* or the ablative-marker *-sē* could occur independently without a noun or pronoun before to host it.

This typologically rare phenomenon is also found in the neighboring, but otherwise unrelated, Dravidian language Brahui. In Brahui, case-marking flags are bound suffixes that cannot truly occur hostless unlike in Sindhi. Instead, Brahui uses a *dummy pronoun* [Ali and Kobayashi, 2024] which is semantically empty but serves as the nominal host to the case-suffixes to which further attach the enclitic pronouns, effectively making the system similar to Sindhi (5).

Brahui [Ali and Kobayashi, 2024] (5)

bādšāh pār-ē — tar-bō ī-kin=ta χar-as

king say:PST-3.SG — butcher-IMP.PL **DUMMY-BEN=3.SG.OBL.CLIT** ram-INDEF

‘The king said, “Slaughter a ram for him.”’

In this study, accumulating both existing data as well as new elicited material, we explore the parallels and differences between the systems of pronominal encliticization in Sindhi and Brahui, beginning with a diachronic discussion of the origin of clitic pronouns in these two languages and in Balochi. In Sindhi and Balochi, they are mostly cognate to Sanskrit and Avestan Wackernagel clitic pronouns, while in Brahui their genesis is more recent, being transparently related to full pronouns except in the third person. We then show that not all person-number combinations of the clitic pronouns are equally favored, and state precisely which θ -rôles they are compatible with and which not. We also study the syntactic constraints on where in a clause the enclitic pronouns are allowed to be, and highlight some of the main differences among the three languages in purview. Finally, we suggest a likely pathway wherein a (historical) calquing of a seemingly unremarkable Balochi construction may have led to the clitic-hosting floating flags in Sindhi and Brahui.

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