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Debonding of inflectional morphology in Kurdish and beyond

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Abstract: The history of case marking across Iranian languages is often described in terms of a grammaticalization cycle, involving the erosion and loss of inherited case markers and their subsequent replacement by innovated case markers via grammaticalization. In this paper I point to certain phenomena in inflectional morphology of Northwest Iranian languages which are difficult to account for within a cyclic view of erosion and replacement. I note unexpected morpheme orderings in Southern and Central Kurdish, and in Gorani (definiteness preceding both case and plural), and the agglutinative nature of the Genitive case in Balochi and Gilaki, both of which are difficult to account for within traditional grammaticalization theory. I conclude that inherited inflectional morphology is not automatically doomed to erosion and loss, but may in fact extend its distributional possibilities and loosen its morphological integration with the base, a process referred to as debonding. I also discuss a cross-linguistically unusual source for the grammaticalization of definiteness marking, which contributes to the unexpected sequences of inflectional morphology in Southern and Central Kurdish, and in Gorani.

1   Identifying the problem

In Northern Kurdish, there is a single overtly-marked case, which is the so-called Oblique. Within Kurdish in its broadest sense (Haig & Öpengin 2014), the Oblique case is also found in Gorani, Zazaki, and in some dialects of Central Kurdish. In Northern Kurdish, there is also a suffix marking indefinite singular, *-ek*, to which the Oblique case marker may attach, as in (1).

(1)   N. Kurdish, Muş Dialect

*em ê   ji   te   ra   fal-**ek-î**   ve-k-in*
1PL FUT ADP 2S.OBL ADP fortune-**INDEF-OBL** PRV-do.PRS.SUBJ-PL

'We will read a fortune for you.' (Haig et al. 2019: muserz01, 0014)

In some varieties of Central Kurdish, and in Gorani, an Oblique case marker may follow a **definiteness** suffix. The latter has approximately the form *–aka*, transcribed *-eke* in some sources (in the examples below, I maintain the transcriptions of the sources cited; the resultant orthographic inconsistencies are irrelevant for the arguments at hand); the initial vowel of the definiteness suffix is generally elided following vowel-final stems. When the noun concerned is plural, the definiteness suffix precedes the plural suffix *-ān*, and the final vowel of the definiteness suffix is generally assimilated to the plural suffix. Examples of definiteness markers followed by a singular Oblique case marker are provided in (2) and (3), while (4) illustrates a definite plural noun:

(2)   Central Kurdish, Mukri dialect

*nāme=ī   dā   be kuř-**eke-ī***
letter=3SG:A give.PST.3SG to boy-**DEF-OBL**

'He gave the letter to the boy.' (Öpengin 2016: 60, glosses adapted)

(3)   Hawrami, Luhon dialect

*kɪteb-**aka-y**   bāra*
book-**DEF-OBL** bring.IMP.SG

'Bring the book!' (MacKenzie 1966: 16)

(4)   Gorani of Gawrajū

*masan   pīyā-**k-ān**   [...] eǰāza   ni-ma-tī-ya*
for.example man-**DEF-PL**   permission NEG-INDIC-give.PRS-3SG

'For example the men [...] don't allow (it).'
(Mahmoudveysi et al. 2012: 143, 7:11)

The morpheme sequence of (in-)definiteness suffix followed by case suffix (1–3), or a plural suffix (4), poses something of a puzzle for historical morphology. If we assume that the indefiniteness marker and the definiteness marker are innovations in these languages (grammaticalized suffixes for indefiniteness and definiteness are not attested in Old Iranian), while the Oblique case suffix and the plural suffix are reflexes of Old Iranian inflectional morphology, then we would expect the older suffixes (case and plural) to occur closer to the base than the supposedly more recent additions (definite and indefinite markers). In other words, we might expect definiteness marking to follow case, or number, as in Swedish, illustrated in (5).

(5) *en   stol*   *stol-**en***   *stol-ar*   *stol-**ar-na***
     INDF chair   chair-**DEF**   chair-PL   chair-**PL-DEF**

     'a chair'   'the chair'   'chairs'   'the chairs'

But in Kurdish, the order is the other way round, with case and number **outside** of (in-)definiteness. According to a widely-accepted consensus in the literature, the most frequently attested source of definiteness marking is via the grammaticalization of an erstwhile independent deictic element (pronoun or demonstrative; cf. De Mulder & Carlier 2012, and discussion below). The relative position of definiteness marking in Kurdish, however, is hardly compatible with this scenario, because it would imply that the more recently grammaticalized suffixes have somehow intervened between inherited morphology (case and plural) and the base, thus violating the morphological integrity of the word. Furthermore, the order in Kurdish (base-definiteness-number) runs counter to the predictions of Bybee's Relevance Principle (1985: 13), which suggests that morphology with higher relevance will be closer to the stem. Number has higher relevance than definiteness because it impacts on the notional semantics of the base, while definiteness marking signals information status of an NP in a particular discourse context. The more natural order, at least on the predictions of Bybee (1985), would therefore be base-number-definiteness, as in Swedish (5).

In what follows, I attempt to resolve this puzzle, looking at similar phenomena in other West Iranian languages, and exploring the implications for grammaticalization theory. I will actually suggest two solutions. One is what I term here 'debonding', by which I mean that inherited inflectional morphology, in some Iranian languages at least, appears to have weakened its bond with the base and acquired an unusual degree of paradigmatic freedom. Examples of debonding can be found for the category of case (at least

in the singular), and for gender marking. Debonding in itself runs counter to the unidirectionality assumed for much of grammaticalization theory, and is thus of considerable interest. For the Kurdish examples illustrated in (1–4), however, another explanation is more plausible, which does not necessarily involve debonding. Instead I will suggest that the attested morpheme order has arisen through a very unusual grammaticalization path of definiteness morphology in these languages,[1] rather than the debonding of case morphology. It should be emphasized that given the limited time-depth of historical attestation of Kurdish, much of this paper relies on indirect evidence and the conclusions are correspondingly tentative. To my knowledge, the topic has not previously been investigated, and it is hoped that these preliminary thoughts will stimulate further interest. While the main focus of this paper is case morphology, I will also consider examples involving both number, and gender.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, I outline general assumptions on the grammaticalization of case in Iranian, and introduce the notion of debonding. In Section 3, putative examples of debonding are introduced from a range of West Iranian languages. Section 4 takes up the initial puzzle posed by morpheme ordering around the definiteness markers, while Section 5 considers more general conclusions in the light of the data presented.

2   The grammaticalization cycle of case in Iranian

According to Windfuhr (1992), the history of the case system in Iranian can be viewed in terms of a cycle of loss and renewal: the Old Iranian fusional case morphology undergoes phonetic erosion, and ultimately complete loss. The resultant lack of overt case morphology is compensated for by the use of adpositions, which themselves subsequently undergo various processes of phonological reduction and fusion with their complements. Windfuhr (1992: 26) suggests that "each of the many Iranian languages of today represents various stages in that cycle". This view dovetails with widespread assumptions on the grammaticalization of case, which assumes that case affixes develop from erstwhile syntactically independent elements (verbs, nouns, ad-

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[1]Since first presenting this paper in 2016, I have become aware of similar processes in other Iranian languages, in particular Balochi (see e.g. Nourzaei et al. 2015). The process, or related ones, have evidently occurred in different Iranian languages beyond Kurdish; this is a topic of ongoing research.

verbial particles, or adpositions), which then fuse with a nominal base to yield case affixes, and ultimately zero (e.g. Heine 2009: 460; Reinöhl 2016).

Although the 'cyclic grammaticalization' approach to the history of case systems remains very influential, a number of phenomena are difficult to reconcile with it. For example, innovated case markers can enter the system **prior** to the complete loss of an inherited system, leading to layered systems. This is widespread in e.g. Indo-Aryan (Reinöhl 2016), or in Nakh-Daghestanian, where various local case suffixes attach to a so-called Oblique stem, often (near) identical with an inherited case marker (e.g. an ergative case in Tabasaran (Comrie & Polinsky 1998), or a genitive in Lezgian (Daniel & Ganenkov 2009: 671)). In other words, the addition of new case markers is not necessarily filling a gap left by the loss of older case marking. Another possibility is that ancient case markers need not erode away to zero, but may in fact "re-vitalize", extending to different host-classes (Haig 2008: 144–152, see also Stilo 2009: 711, and end of Section 3.1 below). None of these developments are readily compatible with the cyclic take on the grammaticalization of case. However, neither do they lend themselves to a uniform explanation, and most researchers are content to provide a taxonomic list of miscellaneous anomalies (e.g. Kulikov 2009). But exceptions to the assumed continuous cycle of loss and renewal are well-attested, and any theory of morphological change surely needs to consider the alternative scenarios (see Kim 2012 for steps in this direction, based on Indo-European).

In this paper I will focus mainly on the fate of the Oblique singular case marker in West Iranian. Although in several languages, including Persian, the history of this case marker accords well with the cyclic view outlined above, in other West Iranian languages, the Oblique case has undergone unpredicted developments. Some of these processes can be seen as examples of **debonding**, following Norde (2009: 186). Debonding involves a weakening of the morphological bond between an inherited inflectional morpheme and its base, and consequently, a gain in prosodic and paradigmatic autonomy of that morpheme. Such a development runs counter to the predictions of grammaticalization theory, which assume that change in inflectional morphemes (there is of course no inevitability in change) will primarily be phonological erosion, and ultimately complete loss. Debonding, on the other hand, yields a case marker that has **greater** positional freedom than its ancestor, and which may spread onto other host categories (e.g. from nouns to pronouns). This kind of development represents a sub-type of those discussed in Norde (2009) under the rubric of degrammaticalization (for more recent discussion of degrammaticalization, see also Ylikoski 2016).

2.1   Inherited versus innovated case

I will assume that in modern Iranian languages, the morphological exponents of structural case can generally be divided into two types: (i) inherited case markers, the reflex of the Old Iranian case inflections; (ii) innovated case markers, historically derived from the grammaticalization of erstwhile adpositions or other items. The distinction was originally sketched in Haig (2008: Ch. 4), but is refined here for the present purposes.

With regard to (i), the inherited case system, the Old Iranian system of inflectional case marking involved complex rules of allomorphy, determined by declensional class, gender, and number. In the transition to Western Middle Iranian, some of the non-nominative cases syncretized, yielding a single marked Oblique case, etymologically a continuation of the old Genitive, but covering a wide range of functions, including adpositional complements, possessors, direct objects, and subjects in the ergative construction (Haig 2008: Ch. 4). In some languages, this Oblique case has been retained, while in others it has disappeared completely, for example in Southern Kurdish, or Persian, which have lost all trace of inherited case marking.[2] In some languages where the inherited Oblique case has been retained, we find a binary opposition between the Oblique, and an unmarked form referred to as the Direct, echoing two-term systems in e.g. Romance (Barðdal & Kulikov 2009), and Indo-Aryan (Reinöhl 2016).

In contemporary Iranian languages, this inherited Oblique case has **approximately** the forms shown in (6). Notably, it generally has distinct forms for singular and plural, and in some languages also for gender (in the singular only), e.g. Northern Kurdish (Haig & Öpengin 2018: 172), or Vafsi (Stilo 2004: 223).

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[2]If one analyses the clitic pronouns as suppletive case forms of the free pronouns, then Persian has retained inherited case. In what follows, I will be dealing solely with case marking as it applies to prosodically independent nouns and pronouns, and hence ignoring the clitic pronouns; see e.g. Jügel & Samvelian (2016) for recent discussion of clitic pronouns in contemporary Iranian.

(6)   The inherited West Iranian Oblique in the modern languages (nouns; pronouns may differ)[3]

SINGULAR: suffix, consisting of a front, unrounded vowel, phonetically e.g. [-æ, -e, -i, e:, i:]
PLURAL: suffix, consisting of -ā(n), with a rounded vowel in some languages.

A couple of clarifications are in order before we proceed: first, what is referred to here as the 'Oblique' is a morpheme in a given Iranian language for which we assume a common origin (the outcome of syncretisms across the Old Iranian case system). Second, this morpheme may now be associated with different functions in the relevant languages; in other words, 'Oblique' as used here is not a label defined in terms of function, but etymology. Third, descriptions of individual languages may in fact use the label 'Oblique' to refer to a case marker that does not match my usage of the term, rendering comparison across different languages very difficult; see especially the discussion of Tatic and Caspian in Section 3.2.

We turn now to innovated cases. These have a variety of forms, depending on their origins, and may be either en- or proclitics (see Stilo 2009). They can generally be traced to the grammaticalization of syntactically independent items, typically adpositions, or body-part terms like 'head', cf. Gilaki -sər 'on(to)' (Rastorgueva et al. 2012: 176). Innovated case markers are an extremely heterogeneous group, so the following definition is couched in negative terms: any case marking used to flag core arguments (direct objects, possessors, or ergative subjects) that cannot be identified with the inherited Oblique, is termed here 'innovated case'.

Over time, innovated case markers may erode to the extent that they become superficially difficult to distinguish from the inherited Oblique. How-

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[3]Ignoring the kinship Oblique forms of Middle Iranian (Skjærvø 1983) and their reflexes in e.g. Zazaki (Paul 1998: 22). Likewise, I ignore the suppletive pronominal paradigms here (see Haig 2008: 162–171, 195–197). Note that I have assigned this case system to the earliest form of what is traditionally termed "Western Iranian", although the drawbacks of the traditional East vs. West distinction are well known. Korn (2016) proposes a new sub-grouping of Iranian, involving a previously unidentified group "Central Iranian". The case system that she identifies for "Proto-Central Iranian" (Korn 2016: 421) is basically identical to what I am suggesting here. If Korn's revised classification is validated, this would not affect the argumentation of this paper, except that we could assign languages with vestiges of this assumed inherited case system to the postulated Central Iranian group. Regardless of the outcome of the higher-level classification, there is little doubt regarding the overall shape of the inherited case system.

ever, the phonological properties of innovated markers are not the only clues to their histories. There are in fact distributional diagnostics for distinguishing inherited from innovated case. These are summed up in Table 1 below. For ease of exposition, I have taken the inherited Oblique of Northern Kurdish Oblique (*-ī /-ē/-ān*) as a typical example of inherited Oblique, while the Persian accusative clitic *=rā* illustrates a typical innovated case marker.

Having spelled out the fundamental difference between inherited and innovated case, we can now proceed to some examples of debonding of inherited case, and related phenomena in a selection of West Iranian languages.

Table 1: Diagnostics for distinguishing innovated case markers from the inherited Oblique in West Iranian

Criterion	Inherited Oblique	Innovated Case
Allomorphy	Allomorphy depending on class of base: plural bases have different Obl. to singular; masculine and feminine singular Obl. may differ; pronouns may have suppletive rather than suffixal Obl.; in some dialects of Northern Kurdish masculine singular Obl. is expressed through Ablaut rather than suffix (Haig & Öpengin 2018: 209–210)	Uniform exponence (barring low-level phonetic processes), i.e. single form across different classes of base
Bondedness	Affix (inseparable from noun, but see Section 3 below), may assimilate stem-final vowels (e.g. Northern Kurdish *li ser masê* < *mase+ê* on the table-OBL')	Clitic (phrasal rather than nominal host, freedom of host selection)
Fusion with other inflectional categories	Yes (with plural number, see allomorphy above)	No
Sensitive to information structure	Uncommon	Very common with innovated case on direct objects, which generally exhibits DOM
May be added to an existing inherited Oblique	No	Yes (in other Iranian languages at least, though not in Persian)
Suspended affixation in coordinated NPs	Uncommon, but see below	Yes

3   Debonding in West Iranian

3.1   The Genitive case marker in Balochi and Gilaki

Balochi is a geographically and structurally very diverse group within north-western Iranian. The case system is more complex than in Kurdish, and different researchers have adopted different analyses. As Jahani & Korn (2009: 651) point out, there is "no agreement in grammatical descriptions of Balochi on the number of cases and what they should be called [...]". In this section I will briefly consider the nature of the Genitive case in Balochi, a suffix which can be identified across most dialects of Balochi, and is variously transcribed with -*ī*, -*ē*, -*e*, -*a*, or -*ay* depending on the dialect, and the source (Jahani & Korn 2009: 651; Nourzaei 2017: 37–38, 43, 55, 61). Given the contentious nature of the case system, and the range of dialectal variation across Balochi, my comments remain tentative. However, I believe the Genitive in Balochi provides us with a potentially fruitful window on the nature of historical change in the case systems of Iranian. I will also discuss a very similar suffix in another northwest Iranian language, Gilaki, and in Tatic, which I believe shed further light on the history of this case.

Throughout Balochi, the main function of the Genitive is to mark prenominal possessors, as in (7).

(7)   Balochi of Turkmenistan

    *gis-**ay**   wāund mēmān-**ay** abar-ā   uškit*
    house-**GEN** owner guest-**GEN** word-OBJ hear.PST.3SG

    'The owner **of the house** heard the words **of the guest**.'
    (Axenov 2006: 79)

The origin of this suffix remains to be established with certainty. One possibility is that it is a continuation of the inherited Oblique discussed above. In favour of this position we can note that the modern Balochi Genitive is usually the case assigned by postpositions, e.g. *ē mulk-**ay** tā* 'this country-GEN in = in this country' (Sistani Balochi, Delforooz 2010: 151). Furthermore, it can occur between a noun or pronoun and another case marker, variously referred to as Oblique II, or Locative (Jahani & Korn 2009: 652). It also exhibits some allomorphy, for example in Sistani and Koroshi Balochi, it has the form -*ī* after pronouns, but -*ay* after nouns (Nourzaei 2017: 55); a similar pattern obtains for Balochi of Turkmenistan, where the genitive marker is -*ī* with pronouns

and proper nouns, and after the plural suffix, but -*ay* for other nouns (Axenov 2006: 72). These facts lend support to an analysis as an inherited case marker, and a connection to the inherited singular Oblique discussed in the preceding section. We can also note that another Iranian language, Bashkardi, has a sporadically-used -*ī* suffix, which also marks possessors. Korn (2017: 11) considers the Old Iranian genitive (the primary source of the inherited Oblique) to be a possible candidate for the origins of the Bashkardi suffix; see also the discussion on Tatic below. Finally, I am unaware of any more convincing alternative explanation (i.e. some kind of innovated case marker, from an earlier postposition?) that would account for both the form of the Balochi Genitive, some of its distributional properties, and the evident commonalities across the otherwise fairly diverse group of Balochi dialects.[4] My provisional conclusion, then, is that the Balochi Genitive is cognate with the singular form of the inherited Oblique in other West Iranian languages.

However, the Balochi Genitive also exhibits a number of properties that are difficult to reconcile with the inherited singular Oblique case. First of all, as already mentioned above, it occurs outside of the plural marker, i.e. in a position where the singular Oblique was historically never attested, see (8).

(8)   Balochi of Sistan

    ges-ān-ī   *dapā*
    house-**PL-GEN** in_front_of

    'in front **of the houses**' (Nourzaei 2017: 690)

Not only does it occur outside the inherited plural marker -*ān*, widely attested throughout west Iranian, but it also occurs outside of the innovated plural suffix -*obār*, which is found in Koroshi Balochi. I am unaware of any convincing etymology for this suffix, which appears to be unique to Koroshi, and is presumably an innovation:

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[4]One difficulty remains with the claim of a historical link to the inherited Oblique, namely the fact that the Balochi Genitive is not used to mark the subject of an ergative construction, whereas in other Iranian languages that have maintained the inherited Oblique, it is typically the case used for this function. However, examples of innovated case, rather than Oblique case, being used for the subjects of ergative constructions are attested elsewhere in Iranian, see Haig (2008: 167) for discussion.

(9)   Koroshi Balochi

> **negahbān-obār-ay** basāb   jāh   xālī   bod-a
> **watchman-PL-GEN** actually place empty become.PST.3SG

> 'You know, **the watchmen's** place was empty [...]'
> (Nourzaei 2017: 630)

Again, this is difficult to reconcile with the view that the Genitive is an inherited case marker. Furthermore, the Genitive case is also regularly attached to personal pronouns, and to the reflexive pronoun, e.g. Coastal Balochi *man-ī* '1SG-GEN', *ta-ī* '2SG-GEN', etc. (Nourzaei 2017: 55), or Sistani Balochi *wat-ī* 'REFL-GEN' (Delforooz 2010: 221).

Another northwest Iranian language, Gilaki, also has a case labeled "Genitive" (Rastorgueva et al. 2012: 56–57), with the form -*ə*.[5] As in Balochi, the Gilaki Genitive marks adnominal possessors, and the complements of postpositions. Both functions are illustrated in (10), where the Genitive is glossed as a clitic, following the conventions of the source:

(10)   Gilaki

> ašk məryəm=**ə**   čašm=**ə** dor   [...]
> tear Maryam=**GEN** eye=**GEN** around [...]

> 'Tears [...] around Maryam's eyes'
> (Rastorgueva et al. 2012: 420, glosses as in original)

The Gilaki Genitive is regularly attached outside the plural suffix of a noun (*gul-ón-ə* 'flower-PL-GEN', Stilo 2018: 692, Table 5A; Rastorgueva et al. 2012: 56) and also to a plural pronoun, as in the following. Note that the form of the demonstrative is paralleled in Balochi, where the demonstrative pronoun can likewise take the Genitive case, cf. Balochi *ēšān-ī* DEM.PL-GEN (Korn 2005: 334).

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[5]The Gilaki genitive takes the form -*i* with pronominal stems (Rastorgueva et al. 2012: 91), and -*e* in some other environments, underscoring the similarity to the Genitive in Balochi. These details of allomorphy can hardly be coincidence.

(11) Gilaki

ušán-ə   xånə šimi   *[...]*
DEM.PL-GEN house go.PRS.1PL

'(that) we are going to **their** house [...]'
(Rastorgueva et al. 2012: 226, glosses supplied)

Rastorgueva et al. (2012: 56, fn. 3) claim that the genitive is etymologically the continuation of the Old Iranian Genitive, i.e. an inherited Oblique case. As in Balochi, in Gilaki too the Genitive case marker also precedes postpositions, including benefactive *=re* (Rastorgueva et al. 2012: 64).

It seems reasonable to assume that the Genitive of Gilaki and Balochi are cognate,[6] but whether they should be considered reflexes of an inherited Oblique, or of some as yet unknown shared innovation in Gilaki and Balochi, is not yet settled. Suggestive evidence in favour of the former position is available from another group of northwest Iranian languages, Tatic, which I will briefly sketch here. In Tatic, just like Balochi and Gilaki, we find prenominal possessors marked by a suffix variously transcribed with *-i, -í*, and *-e* in Stilo (2018: 698–699), e.g. *hæsæn-i kætæb* 'Hasan's book' (Harzani dialect).[7] In one sub-group of Tatic languages (including e.g. Vafsi), the form of this case suffix varies in the singular according to the gender of the noun (Stilo 2018: 694), while in other Tatic languages (including the Talyshi group) gender is lost, and this suffix has an invariable form in the singular. In some dialects of Tatic, there is a suffix that marks pre-nominal possessors, which may also occur after the plural suffix, and with pronouns. This is illustrated in (12a–12c):

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[6]Note that the assumed shared proto-morpheme would have had at least two distinct allomorphs, depending on the gender of the noun to which it attached. It is therefore possible that the daughter languages may have continued either of the two allomorphs, making it difficult to regularly reconstruct a single phonological form for the suffix (in this case: a particular vowel quality). My suggestion of cognacy is therefore primarily based on a very gross measure of phonological similarity, and the overwhelming functional and distributional equivalence.

[7]Comparison across Gilaki (part of Stilo's (2018) Caspian group), and Tatic, are rendered more difficult due to differences in terminology. What Rastorgueva et al. (2012) refer to as the "Genitive" in Gilaki is called by Stilo the "Possessive". What I consider etymologically the same morpheme in Tatic is referred to as the "singular Oblique", or the "Reverse Ezafe" in Stilo (2018).

(12)   Tāleqāni: Orāzāni dialect of Tatic

    a. *pa-i   bon*
       foot-GEN bottom

       'sole of the foot'

    b. *boz-an-i   šir*
       goat-PL-GEN milk

       'the goats' milk'

    c. *mən-i   xanæ*
       1SG-GEN house

       'my house' (stressed vowel in *mən*)

   (Stilo 2018: 700, glosses modified)

Stilo (2018: 700) glosses this suffix as the "Reverse Ezafe", which he considers distinct from the Oblique suffix of Tatic. My own view is that it is the reflex of the old Oblique, which has lost gender differentiation, yielding a uniform phonetic form. Consequently it may debond, yielding exactly the same kinds of morpheme sequences that are attested in Gilaki and Balochi. As part of this general re-structuring of nominal inflection, the plural suffix becomes a general marker of plural number (rather than a composite morpheme expressing Oblique and plural), and then permits combinations with the debonded Oblique marker.

To return now to our point of departure, the Genitive suffix in Balochi and Gilaki, we note that it can be indiscriminately attached to hosts of different categories, and follow other inflectional morphology in a manner typical for agglutinative morphology. This is not what we expect of an inherited case marker in an Indo-European language. I have nevertheless argued that the source of the Genitive in these languages is an inherited case marker, rather than an innovation. If these claims are correct, then we need to accept that inherited case morphology (or more generally, inflectional morphology) is not necessarily doomed to erode to zero. Rather, under conditions which are yet to be specified, an inherited case suffix may actually increase in productivity, extending to additional form classes with which it was previously not associated (e.g. nouns to pronouns, or from singular nouns to plural nouns). When this happens, we find morpheme sequences of e.g. PLURAL-CASE, which are historically unattested with the original morpheme.[8] This is

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[8] It is worth noting that it is also the genitive case in Germanic which has undergone unexpected developments with certain parallels to those outlined here for Balochi and Tatic (see Norde

presumably linked to some minimal threshold of phonological saliency and uniformity of the original morpheme, and perhaps to the nature of the functions with which the original morpheme is associated; this requires more research. I refer to this process as debonding, following Norde (2009), but other terms would be equally appropriate. Stilo (2009: 711), for example, refers to a process of "agglutinative analogy" in connection with the Balochi Genitive, which aptly highlights the nature of the resulting structures. Once gender distinctions are lost, leaving a uniform oblique singular suffix, it seems that it may be interpreted as an all-purpose genitive marker, and attached to, for example, plural marked nouns or pronouns. Interestingly, this process also seems to depend on the presence of some form of innovated case marker that takes over the direct object function of the inherited Oblique; this requires more research.

3.2   Related examples of debonding

Another example of debonding of case morphology comes from the Tatic dialect of Dikin Marāqei of Alamut. Here, the Oblique suffix may follow a pronominal clitic:

(13)   Tatic of Dikin Marāqei of Alamut

    sær=t-i   *me-jæn-én*
    head=**2SG.POSS-OBL.M** ASP-hit-1SG

    'I'll hit your head (m.)' (Stilo 2016 and personal communication)

   However, it is only the **masculine singular Oblique**, and possibly the feminine Direct suffix (of uncertain origin), which allow displacement as in (13). With the feminine singular Oblique (going back to an old kinship Oblique), and with the plural Oblique, the possessive clitic occurs outside the case marker. This is shown in (14), where the feminine Oblique marker precedes the possessive clitic:

2009, among others). Whether this is pure coincidence, or whether genitive cases are generally more prone to debonding than other case markers remains an open question.

(14)   Tati, Dikin Marāqei of Alamut

æz *das-**ær**=et*   *mi-n-ɪn*
1SG hand-**OBL.F=2SG.POSS** TAM-see.PRS-1SG

'I see your hand (f.)' (Stilo 2016 and personal communication)

A related phenomenon occurs in Gorani when the Oblique suffix attaches to a phrasal (NP) host, rather than a lexical one (N). Thus the marker concerned is no longer a nominal, but a phrasal affix, showing the typical distributional properties of an innovated rather than an inherited case marker. In (15), it occurs on an adjectival host, presumably because this is the rightmost boundary of the NP (and in fact the same phenomenon occurs with the definiteness suffix in this example):

(15)   Awroman dialect of Gorani

   a. *kitéb-aká*
     book-DEF

     'the book'

   b. *kitéb-a siāw-aká*
     book-IZ black-DEF

     'the black book'

   c. *[kitéb-a siāw-aká]-y*
     book-IZ black-DEF-**OBL**

     'the black book' (direct object)

   (MacKenzie 1966: 17–18, cited in Haig 2008: 145–146, transcription follows original)

The final example comes from gender morphology in Tatic. In a number of Iranian languages, gender is maintained as a grammatical category, systematically reflected in various parts of the grammar. As far as I can ascertain, gender in western Iranian is always a two-term system (traditionally labeled masculine and feminine), and gender is only relevant in the singular; gender distinctions are neutralized in the plural. It seems evident that gender in Iranian, where it is found, is an inheritance from Old Iranian, rather than an innovation.

In Tatic languages, gender is found in about half of the group (Stilo 2018). A fairly typical system is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Gender marking on nouns, Karani dialect of Tatic (Yarshater 2009: 555)

		Masculine	Feminine
Singular	DIRECT	-ø	-a (unstressed)
	OBLIQUE		-e (stressed)
Plural	DIRECT		-e (stressed)
	OBLIQUE		-ān (stressed)

Gender is also reflected in agreement with certain kinds of predicate, for example the present tense of the copula:

(16) Karani dialect of Tatic

    a. *Hasan dalú-e*
       Hasan crazy-COP.PRS.MASC

       'Hasan is crazy (m.).'

    b. *Zeynab-a   dalu-ā*
       Zeynab-FEM crazy-COP.PRS.FEM

       'Zeynab is crazy.' (Yarshater 2009: 555, glosses added)

Remarkably, the feminine singular direct suffix *-a* on a noun can be separated from its base by a clitic, i.e. can be debonded. This happens in clauses containing a past transitive verb, when a clitic pronoun indexes the transitive subject, and the rules of clitic placement conspire to leave a feminine singular noun as the landing site for the clitic. This is shown in (17), where the third singular subject-indexing clitic is *=eš*, which separates the feminine suffix from the direct object 'wild-goat'. The feminine gender of the direct object is indexed on both verbs by a corresponding agreement suffix; in the second clause, the feminine agreement marker on the verb is also displaced by a clitic pronoun:

(17) Karani dialect of Tatic

    *em naccira_bez=**eš-a**   bezzi-ā   bard=eš-ā   de:*
    this wild_goat=**3SG-FEM** shoot.PST-FEM bring.PST=**3SG-FEM** village

    'He shot (f.) this **wild goat** (f.) and brought (f.) to the village.'
    (Yarshater 2009: 555, glosses added; see also Yarshater 2009: 565 for
    further examples)

See also Öpengin (this volume) for examples from Kurdish of clitic pronouns indexing a past transitive subject, and displacing what appears to be an inflectional suffix. It is worth noting that the so-called 'feminine suffix' that we have considered here has undergone a functional shift from a gender marker towards becoming a marker of definiteness and individuation. To what extent this functional change can be linked to its debonding, is an open question.

4   The case-after-definiteness puzzle

Let us return now to the question posed at the outset of this paper, namely how indefiniteness and definiteness markers in Kurdish, presumably innovations, should nonetheless occur inside inherited case and number morphology, cf. examples (1–4) above. Given what I have claimed above regarding debonding of inherited morphology, an obvious solution would be to assume a debonding scenario in Kurdish, leading to a loosening of the bond between case-suffix and base and the possibility of morpheme re-ordering. However, there are reasons why this may not be the correct solution, at least with regard to the relative positioning of the definiteness suffix.

If we consider first the indefinite suffix, we know that a suffix for singular indefinites is extremely widespread throughout West Iranian, often alternating, or combining, with a pre-posed indefinite article, generally transparently related to the numeral 'one'. The Kurmanji indefinite suffix *-ek* appears superficially to be related to the numeral *yek* 'one', a typical source of indefinite singular markers cross-linguistically. If that is the source for the Kurmanji indefiniteness suffix, then it is presumably a later development, which occurred after the Old Iranian period. On that assumption, the ordering of the Oblique suffix outside the indefiniteness suffix would be a clear example of case debonding. However, given the widespread presence of indefiniteness suffixes in West Iranian (in various forms), it is not impossible that the Kurmanji indefiniteness marker could be an older layer of morphology, rather than the product of later grammaticalization. A second possibility would be that the suffix *-ek* arose through the univerbation of, perhaps, an appositional postposed *yek*, which could have been Oblique-marked itself, and later fused with the noun. But as long as the history of the indefiniteness suffix itself remains unresolved, it is difficult to decide on the source of this morpheme sequence.

With regard to the definiteness suffixes of central and southern Kurdish, and Gorani, the problem is somewhat different. Systematic marking of definiteness is not historically attested in Old Iranian. Within Kurdish, it is only found in Central and Southern Kurdish, but not in Northern Kurdish. An initial assumption would be, then, that it represents an innovation in Central and Southern Kurdish. Cross-linguistically, the grammaticalization of definiteness markers is one of the best-known topics in grammaticalization theory. The widely-cited case-studies involve an origin from some kind of independent deictic element (often a demonstrative or pronominal element) that loses deictic force and prosodic independence, finally becoming a general marker of discourse identifiability (De Mulder & Carlier 2012; Himmelmann 2001). If the same kind of development were behind the Central Kurdish definiteness marker *-aka*, then the position of Oblique case and plural number **outside** of this suffix would be difficult to account for without assuming debonding of case and number morphology.

For Central Kurdish *-aka*, however, there is no obvious demonstrative or pronominal element that could have provided the historical source for such a grammaticalization. Furthermore, it turns out that there are candidate suffixes attested in Old and Middle Iranian that might have provided the source.[9] If these are indeed the origins of the definiteness marker, then we are not dealing with a typical example of the grammaticalization of definiteness (e.g. demonstrative to definiteness marker), but rather with some kind of re-analysis or functional shift of existing morphology to yield a definiteness suffix. A detailed investigation of the origins of the definiteness suffix in Kurdish is beyond the scope of this paper (and is the topic of ongoing research). The following remarks nevertheless provide a working hypothesis for explaining the otherwise puzzling ordering of definiteness inside of case and number in Central and Southern Kurdish, and in Gorani.

For Old Iranian, Ciancaglini (2012) discusses the reflexes of an Indo-European derivational suffix **-ko-*, which yielded **-ka-* in Old Iranian. It seems to have been remarkably productive and could apply to a variety of bases, including personal pronouns. Its semantics were vague, but included relationality (e.g. with pronouns: 'you' > 'yours'), but also a diminutive sense, or one of endearment. Ciancaglini (2012: 92) also notes that it occurs in contexts

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[9]I am extremely grateful to Johnny Cheung for bringing these possibilities to my attention, and to Thomas Jügel for providing additional references and material. Neither bear any responsibility for my interpretation of this material. A reviewer drew my attention to Jahani (2015), who independently suggests the same development for Central Kurdish, and indeed for the colloquial Persian definiteness marker *-e*.

where it appears to add no particular semantic content at all. In Old Persian, the main attested functions are in combination with thematized stems, and the resulting meaning is something like 'the one characterized by X', thus Old Persian *banda* 'bond, fetter' > *bandaka* 'subject, vassal, servant'. She further notes that it is very frequent with "toponyms and ethnonyms designating non-Iranian peoples, or peoples geographically distant or little known to the Persians" (2012: 95). Interestingly, in this context the suffix appears to add nothing to the denotational semantics, but fulfills evidently some kind of emphatic or contextually determined role. In Avestan, and in other ancient Indo-European languages, words with this suffix are often linked to informal registers, occurring in "imprecatory, pejorative, or affective and familiar contexts" (Ciancaglini 2012: 95). This may explain why this kind of usage is concentrated in Young Avestan, but is scarce in the Gāthās and the Old Persian inscriptions, with their more formal and ritualized character.[10]

For western Middle Iranian, a suffix *-ag* is noted as "one of the most productive" suffixes (Durkin-Meisterernst 2014: 155). It is evidently related to the *-ka/-aka* complex of Old Iranian just discussed, and has a similarly varied functional spectrum. It could create adjectives, or add a sense of diminution or endearment to a noun, among diverse other functions noted by Durkin-Meisterernst (2014: 156–158). It also occurred with phonological variants *-ak* or *-k*.

Although we lack historical records of the direct Middle Iranian predecessors of Central Kurdish, it seems reasonable to assume that an inherited suffix, with this degree of productivity in Parthian and Middle Persian, would also have been present in the precursors of Kurdish. The more pressing question is whether a suffix of this nature could have developed into a marker of definiteness? Within the grammaticalization literature, diminutives have not figured as possible sources of definiteness markers, but recently Pakendorf & Krivoshapkina (2014) point to an interesting parallel in Ėven, a Tungusic language of Siberia. The authors note that suffixes with evaluative semantics (traditionally termed 'diminutives') have developed into markers of discourse identifiability, approximately comparable with the function of definite articles in languages of northwestern Europe. A recent cross-linguistic survey of diminutives (Ponsonnet 2018) points to the broad range of semantic types regularly associated with so-called diminutives. It is clearly not the

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[10]However, some of the examples noted by Ciancaglini are arguably reflexes of a deverbal suffix *-aka*, or result from a thematic *-a* attached to a stem-final *-k*. In other words, we must reckon with a certain amount of opacity and reanalysis in the interpretation of the relevant forms.

case that diminutives are primarily markers of 'small size'; rather, they regularly express speakers' subjective evaluations, often indicating endearment and familiarity, but also ridicule or contempt. From this perspective, a development along the lines of endearment > familiarity > identifiability, definiteness, as suggested in Haig (2018a), does not seem implausible. A link from inherited diminutive marking to definiteness marking has been suggested for northwest Iranian Balochi (Koroshi dialect, Nourzaei et al. 2015: 32).

Whether the Central and Southern Kurdish definiteness suffix[11] can indeed be traced back to the Middle and Old Iranian 'diminutives' remains an open question. But it nevertheless remains a plausible theory that would neatly account for the suffix ordering puzzle outlined at the outset of this section. The present account assumes that definiteness in Kurdish arises not through the grammaticalization of some previously independent morpheme, but via excrescence: a former derivational suffix (with vague and as yet not fully understood semantics, but apparently involving endearment and familiarity) is re-analysed to become an inflectional suffix indicating information status of the noun phrase concerned. Given that the suffix was historically part of the base, then the current position of case markers outside of this suffix is quite natural, and we need not invoke a process of case debonding. The same applies to the combination of definiteness suffix and plural marking (4), which again would reflect the historical sequence of these suffixes, rather than any kind of debonding.

Thus, for the combination of definiteness and case, what appears at first glance to be the result of debonding in may in fact have a different historical explanation, namely the development of the definiteness marker from an old derivational suffix. This possibility has largely remained obscured due to the lack of comparable examples in the grammaticalization literature on definiteness.

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[11]It needs to be pointed out that the Central Kurdish "definiteness" suffix is not functionally equivalent with the English definite article, despite the recent claims to this effect in Zahedi & Mehrazmay (2011). The naturalistic texts available for Central Kurdish include numerous referential NP's with unambiguously discourse-identifiable referents, which translationally would require a definite article in English, yet which lack the so-called definiteness suffix. On the assumption that the source morpheme was a diminutive, this kind of "optional definiteness" is actually not surprising, see Haig (2018a).

5   Summary and outlook

The point of departure for this inquiry was the unusual sequence of definiteness marking inside of the Oblique case and number morphology in Central and Southern Kurdish, and in Gorani. This led to an investigation of the history of case marking in west Iranian, and in particular, to the history of the inherited Oblique case marker (most likely the continuation of the Old Iranian Genitive), and to a more general considerations regarding the processes of morphological change. I will first summarize the main conclusions regarding the history of case marking in Iranian, before taking up some of the broader issues at the end of this section.

According to widely-held views on the history of inherited case marking in much of Indo-European (Kim 2012), the expectation is that it gradually erodes, finally yielding zero, and may then be subsequently replaced by various kinds of innovated case markers through the process of grammaticalization. Any comparative discussion of case marking in Iranian therefore needs, at least in principle, to distinguish between the exponents of inherited case on the one hand, and innovated case markers on the other. In Section 2.1, I laid down a set of criteria for this purpose, and for many of the case markers of Iranian, the distinction can readily be maintained. I then went on to investigate the Genitive suffix in Balochi and Gilaki, which looks in many respects like an inherited case marker (and some authors have claimed it is), yet it exhibits agglutinative distributional properties that were not attested in its assumed ancestor morphemes, and which would be more typical of innovated case marking. I investigated the assumed cognates of this case marker in Tatic, where in some dialects it exhibits properties more or less typical of inherited Oblique case (gender and number determined allomorphy, use in other functions outside of adnominal Genitives), while in others it resembles the Genitive of Gilaki and Balochi. My suggestion is that in origin, the Genitive of Balochi and Gilaki is indeed the inherited Oblique, but it has debonded, and extended to additional environments where its ancestor was never attested. If this analysis is correct, then the history of inherited case is not a one-way path to zero. Instead, case markers may be involved in paradigm restructuring, loosen their bond to the base, and extend to related form classes (nouns to pronouns, for example). The result of this process actually ends up looking more like an innovated case marker than an inherited one.

The odd ordering of case and definiteness in Southern and Central Kurdish could in principle also have involved debonding of case marking. However, I

suggest that the morpheme ordering puzzle in these languages is related to the history of the definiteness suffix, rather than to the case suffix. My suggestion is that the definiteness suffix goes back to an old derivational morpheme, traditionally (and somewhat misleadingly) termed a 'diminutive'. On that account, then the attested morpheme order is quite natural. But notice again how this account involves a process of reanalysis and extension of an existing suffix, rather than grammaticalization of previously independent lexical, or less grammatical material.

I also noted further examples of presumably inherited morphology showing symptoms of debonding, for example the separation of case marking (14), or gender marking (17) from the noun stem in Tatic. Notably, both these instances involve the intrusion of a clitic between inflectional morphology and stem; a similar kind of phenomenon is attested with verbal morphology in Central Kurdish, see Öpengin (this volume). While these may appear to be fairly isolated, they do raise serious questions regarding our understanding of morphological change, and the adequacy of the grammaticalization paradigm for addressing them. Similar examples of paradigm restructuring and replacement processes within inflectional morphology have been discussed by several authors, drawing on data from a wide range of languages (e.g. Janda (1996) on Slavic, Heath (1997) on languages of Australia; see also Reinöhl & Himmelmann (2017) for critical discussion). Willis (2016) is an attempt to unite some of these observations into a more coherent theory, drawing on the assumed obsolescence of the morphology concerned, and the process of exaptation. However, I am not fully convinced that this can be applied to the Iranian examples, because it is not at all evident that, for example, the inherited Oblique case marker is devoid of function. For the time being, I will simply note that the familiar clines of grammaticalization do not simply run on seamlessly into the realm of inflectional morphology; the creation and organization of inflectional morphology do not arise through the continued application of the forces of grammaticalization, see Haig (2018b: 813) and also Enger (2013) on the autonomy of morphology.

In closing, two final points are noteworthy. First, in several northwest Iranian languages, including Northern and Central Kurdish, Balochi, Gilaki and generally Caspian, we find the emergence of agglutinative structures in nominal morphology, involving the categories of case, number and definiteness. This is a major change when compared to Old and Middle Iranian languages, where inflectional morphology tended to be fusional, rather than agglutinative. This is presumably one of the outcomes of debonding. Viti (2015) points to a predominance of agglutinative structures among the attested cases of

degrammaticalization, and this would tie in well with the overall findings here. Second, the inherited Oblique case has undergone very divergent developments across West Iranian: (i) complete loss, without replacement, as in Southern Kurdish; (ii) complete loss, but with replacement via innovated case (e.g. Persian); (iii) maintenance (Northern Kurdish, Zazaki); maintenance, with debonding and extension (Balochi, Gilaki?). These variant outcomes may be a reflection of the status of case as an intermediate category in the scale of the retention of morphology identified by Roberts & Bresnan (2008), who locate case between number (most likely to be retained) and gender (most likely to be lost). This would also fit well with what is known regarding these two categories in Kurdish: inherited plural morphology is generally retained, and if it is lost, it is always replaced by innovative morphology (cf. the Balochi plural in (9) above); inherited gender morphology is sometimes retained, and often lost; if lost, it is never replaced.

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