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# Can pattern replication be easily established? The case of the Neo-Aramaic Neo-Construct<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) dialects innovated a head-marking attributive (a.k.a. genitive) construction, functionally similar to the old Semitic construct state but morphologically marked by a suffix. It has been argued that this pattern emerged as a replication of the co-territorial Kurdish Kurmanji dialects' Ezafe construction. In the paper we present this theory, alongside some difficulties due to various structural mismatches between the Kurmanji and NENA constructions. While Kurmanji influence cannot be excluded, we conclude that the Neo-Construct construction as a whole more likely arose from a universal tendency to encliticization associated with areal preference for head-marking.

**Keywords:** *Construct State, Ezafe, Pattern Replication, North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic, Kurmanji Kurdish*

**Mots clés:** *état construit, ezafe, emprunt de structure, néo-araméen du nord-est, kurde kurmanji*

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to examine the source of a specific construction in North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) dialects (see Appendix 1) used to express attribution (a.k.a. genitive adnominal modification). Cohen (2015), analyzing this construction in the J. dialect of Zakho, argues that its source lies in pattern replication from Kurmanji Kurdish. Looking at a broader dialectal sample, we present a more nuanced picture, showing that it is difficult to establish such borrowing with certainty. While Cohen's claim is plausible, other pathways of development may complement or replace his proposal.<sup>2</sup>

Section 1 gives some general information about the NENA dialects and their contact situation. Section 2 presents Cohen's argument, while Section 3 tackles some of its limitations. Conclusions and possible alternative explanations are given in Section 4.

### 1. THE NORTH-EASTERN NEO-ARAMAIC LANGUAGE GROUP

#### 1.1. Genetic affiliation and general information

The term 'Neo-Aramaic' refers to a group of languages and dialects spoken today, which are related to the classical Aramaic language, a north-western Semitic language. Aramaic has been spoken continuously in various forms since the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE. Around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, a major split developed between the western and the eastern branches of Aramaic.

While both branches have survived until the present day, the eastern branch is much more widely represented, and can further be divided into three sub-groups. Amongst those, the most diverse language group, geographically, ethnically and linguistically, is the NENA language group. These languages (often called dialects) are spoken in northern Iraq and, to a lesser extent, in western Iran and south-eastern Turkey.<sup>3</sup> However, many speakers have by now moved to western countries (and even more so in the recent decade due to the enduring crisis situation in Iraq).<sup>4</sup> A major socio-linguistic divide exists between the languages spoken by Jews (now mostly in Israel) and those spoken by Christians, even when they are in close geographical proximity. The number of speakers is at the most around 500,000.<sup>5</sup>

Texts in NENA can be dated as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, being Christian and Jewish religious texts. Earlier strata are unknown, but we may assume that Syriac, a classical form of Aramaic spoken from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE until (at least) the 8<sup>th</sup> century, can serve as an approximation of the Proto-NENA language. Indeed, as Syriac is continuously used as a liturgical language by the Christian NENA speakers, they often see it as the classical form of their own language. This view has led to the usage of the somewhat misleading term 'Neo-Syriac' for NENA.

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<sup>2</sup> The arguments presented in this paper are discussed in greater detail in Gutman (2016, §10.3.2).

<sup>3</sup> A map of these dialects can be found in The North Eastern Neo-Aramaic Database Project, hosted by the University of Cambridge on <https://nena.caret.cam.ac.uk>.

<sup>4</sup> A short history of the speakers and their language, including their move to diaspora communities with a special emphasis on France, is given by Alichoran and Sibille (2013).

<sup>5</sup> This estimate is based on the summation of the number of speakers of North-Eastern Aramaic according to Lewis, Simons, and Fennig (2013), which yields 466,000 speakers. A slightly more conservative estimate (375,000 speakers) can be found by summing the number of speakers per country given by Poizat (2008, p. 16–18).

## 1.2. Contact situation of NENA

NENA has been in close contact with Iranian languages, notably Kurdish dialects, both Kurmanji and Sorani. Indeed, the area covered by the NENA dialects is largely contained within the Kurdish language zone, the divide between NENA speakers and Kurdish speakers being of religious and ethnic order. Whereas Kurds, both Muslims and Yezidis, speak Kurdish, Jews and Christians of various denominations speak different dialects of NENA (the latter speak as well Central Neo-Aramaic, which is the sister branch of NENA). The close proximity of these groups, spanning possibly several millennia, has clearly led to mutual influence regarding both the language and other aspects of society. While today Aramaic is a minority language, in the past (at least until the Arabic conquest starting in the 7<sup>th</sup> century) it enjoyed a large prestige.

Another Iranian language which has been in contact with NENA is Persian. In modern times, it came into contact with NENA speakers of Iran (living in the provinces of Iranian Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan) as an official state language. The contact, however, is much longer in time.

Moreover, on some dialects, mostly those of Iranian Azerbaijan, there has been an extensive influence from Azeri (see Garbell, 1965a, who treats Azeri as a Turkish dialect).

Amongst Semitic languages, both standard and vernacular Arabic had an influence, being the state language of Iraq, and spoken in the area since the Arab conquest. Hebrew and Syriac have been used as liturgical languages by the Jewish and Christian communities respectively, and thus also had an influence on the spoken language, though this influence may be mostly lexical.

## 2. ATTRIBUTION IN NENA

We shall use the term 'attribution' to denote adnominal modification of one noun by another, following Goldenberg (1995).<sup>6</sup> Most NENA dialects express attribution by means of two variant constructions, one being head-marked and the other dependent-marked. Following classical Semitic terminology, we call the head-marking morpheme 'construct state' (glossed CST, see Appendix 2) and the construction using it the 'Neo-Construct'.<sup>7</sup> The dependent-marking morpheme, being arguably a pronominal clitic (cf. Cohen, 2010), is termed here 'linker' (LNK). The two possibilities are exemplified in the translations of the expression “the house of the king”, representing Jewish dialects from the Iraqi town of Zakho (JZax)<sup>8</sup> and its surrounding areas (Sabar, 2002, p. 38):

- (1) *bet -əd      ʰakō ma*  
house-CST    king

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<sup>6</sup> Other common terms are 'genitive' or 'possessive', but note that we do not limit our attention to the semantic domain of possession, nor to the morphological expression of a genitive case. Moreover, the same concept can be applied to adnominal modification by clauses as well as by adjectives.

<sup>7</sup> See Creissels (2009) for the usage of 'construct' as a general linguistics term. Our usage of the term 'neo-construct' differs from Mutzafi (2004, p. 3, fn. 15), who uses this term only for innovated apocopated construct state nouns.

<sup>8</sup> For a list of language abbreviations, see Appendix 1.

- (2) *beṭ a d= ḥakō ma*  
 house LNK= king

A third variant, productive in JZax, but available only in fixed idioms in other dialects, is a head-marking construction in which the construct state is expressed by means of an apocope of the head-noun, mimicking the classical Semitic construct state morphology:

- (3) *beṭ ḥakō ma*  
 house.CST king

Examples (2) and (3) represent direct reflexes of the situation in earlier strata of Aramaic. The Neo-Construct construction presented in example (1), on the other hand, is an innovation, resulting from the encliticization of the *d*- linker to the head noun. The source construction may be the one exemplified in (2) or an alternative one, frequent in Syriac, in which the head-noun is additionally marked by a possessive pronoun (see Mengozzi (2005) for a discussion of the two possibilities):

- (4) *beṭ -ē h d= malkā*  
 house-POSS.3MS LNK= king

*Syriac*

Cohen (2015) argues (regarding JZax) that this encliticization is a pattern replication (in the sense of Matras and Sakel, 2007) from Kurmanji Kurdish. In the following sections, we shall first present Cohen's argument, and subsequently raise some difficulties regarding it.

### 3. PARALLELS BETWEEN KURMANJI AND NENA ATTRIBUTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Kurmanji Kurdish uses the Ezafe construction to express attribution.<sup>9</sup> The Ezafe morpheme (glossed EZ) can be suffixed to the head noun (example (5)) or appear as an independent morpheme, when it does not directly follow the head noun (the morpheme in bold in example (6)). Following Samvelian (2008), but contrary to Haig (2008; 2011, p. 209), we treat the two markers as separate morphemes, the first being morphologically head-marking, and the latter being syntactically dependent-marking.<sup>10</sup> We note that the Kurmanji Ezafe inflects for gender and number.

Furthermore, it exhibits different forms following the indefinite suffix *-ek*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A detailed description of attribution in Kurmanji and role of the Ezafe can be found in Schroeder (1999).

<sup>10</sup> Samvelian (2008) gives examples of the suffixed Ezafe appearing phrase-finally (rather than directly on the head), in line with her analysis of the Ezafe as a phrasal affix, but these seem to be rather exceptional (cf. Samvelian, 2007 for a more formal approach, covering however only the Persian Ezafe). Even these cases can be treated as head-marking, if we allow the notion of "head" to cover phrases as well.

<sup>11</sup> Examples are taken from Thackston, who terms the Ezafe as 'Construct'.

- (5) *kitê b-ê n*      [*keç-a*      *mirov*]  
 book-EZ.PL      girl-EZ.FS      man  
 ‘the man’s daughter’s books’

*Kurmanji* (Thackston, 2006, p. 13)

- (6) [*hejmar-ek-e*      *nû*]      *ya*      *kovar-ê*  
 issue-INDF-EZ.FS      new      EZ.FS      journal-OBL.MS  
 ‘a new issue of the journal’

*Kurmanji* (Thackston, 2006, p. 15)

Cohen argues that the independent Ezafe morpheme acted as a *pivot* in the pattern replication of the Neo-Construct construction. The proclitic pronominal *d-* was matched to the independent Ezafe, and consequently was *encliticized* to the construction’s head and reanalyzed as a head-marking suffix in analogy to the suffixed Ezafe.<sup>12</sup>

A further piece of evidence given by Cohen is the fact that both in Kurmanji and in NENA a head-marked noun can precede a clausal attribute:

- (7) *tişt-ên*      [*min*      *nivisîbûn*]  
 thing-EZ.PL      1SG.OBL      written  
 ‘the things I had written’

*Kurmanji* (Thackston, 2006, p. 77)

- (8) *xabr-it*      *mîr-rê-la*  
 word-CST      said-A3MS-DAT3FS  
 ‘the word(s) he told her’

*JZax* (Cohen, 2012, p. 97) (24)

#### 4. MISMATCHES BETWEEN THE KURMANJI AND NENA CONSTRUCTIONS

Notwithstanding the appeal of the above explanation of the source of the NENA Neo-Construct construction, there is no perfect match between the Kurmanji construction and the parallel NENA construction. In some respects, the NENA construction is in fact more similar to the Sorani Ezafe construction. While these mismatches cannot preclude an imperfect pattern replication scenario, they may indicate that the Kurmanji Ezafe construction is not necessarily the sole or main source of this linguistic change.

<sup>12</sup> From a diachronic perspective, also within the Iranian language family, the suffixed Ezafe arose from the encliticization of an independent element (Haig, 2011). Haider and Zwanziger (1984) claim more specifically that it arose from a relative pronoun, which was later reanalyzed as a complementizer and subsequently became the Ezafe.

#### 4.1. Non inflection of the NENA construct state marker

In contrast to the Kurmanji Ezafe, the NENA linker *d-* or the construct state suffix *-əd* do not inflect. Thus, any pivot matching between the two morphemes is partial at most.<sup>13</sup> In fact, in early Neo-Aramaic we find inflecting demonstrative determiners agglutinated to the *d-* linker, presenting a better parallel to the inflecting Ezafe:<sup>14</sup>

- (9) *šəḅ ū 'a, 'ay-d mō m-ax-lux*  
oath(FS) DEM.FS-CST put.PST-P1SG-A2MS  
'the oath, which you put us under'

*Early Neo-Aramaic* (Sabar, 1976, p. 43 [4:3])

Although such inflecting linkers are conserved in some NENA dialects such as Barw (Khan, 2008, p. 493; 2009a, p. 77) or Arb (Khan, 1999, p. 388), they are never encliticized as such to the head-noun.

The NENA neo-construct state suffix is thus more similar to the Sorani Kurdish uninflecting Ezafe, which is always a fixed *-ī ~y*:

- (10) *sar-ī binī ā dam*  
head- man  
EZ  
'men's heads'

*Sul* (MacKenzie, 1961, p. 63)

The Sorani Ezafe, however, cannot appear as an independent morpheme, except in those few cases in which it is not preceded by any nominal head at all:

- (11) *ī bā xawā n-aka-y*  
EZ gardener-DEF-OBL.MS  
'the gardener's'

*Bin* (MacKenzie, 1961, p. 59)

For this reason, the Sorani Ezafe is less likely to have served as a pivot morpheme comparable to the Aramaic *d-* linker.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, while some of the NENA dialects in the Sorani speaking area, such as Arb, make use of the Neo-Construct construction (Khan, 1999, pp. 168-), others, such as JSul or JSan, hardly use the Neo-Construct construction at all, but rather use juxtaposition for expressing

<sup>13</sup> A reviewer pointed out to me that such a development is expected, due to the general tendency of the languages of the area to evolve towards morphological simplification and loss of nominal inflection. Yet, Kurmanji is one of the exceptional languages that have conserved a relatively rich nominal morphology, as attested also by the conservation of its case system. Thus, one may wonder whether Kurmanji is the best candidate for pivot matching in this respect.

<sup>14</sup> The following example is from "Pəšaṭ Wayəḥî Bəšallah", a J. homily written in the city of Nerwa around the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>15</sup> Due to its pronominal nature, the *d-* linker itself can appear without a nominal antecedent preceding it, but such cases are not so frequent, so it is less likely that they are the source of a language change scenario.

the attributive relationship, or simply borrow the Iranian Ezafe ending (Khan, 2004, pp. 191–192; 2009b, p. 198).

#### 4.2. Clausal attributes and the usage of a subordinating particle

In Kurmanji, clausal attributes tend to follow the subordinating particle *ku*:<sup>16</sup>

- (12) [wî                      zîman-ê]                      ku                      [li=ber mir-in-ê                      ye]  
 DEM.DIST.OBL                      language-EZ.MS                      REL                      before die-INF-OBL.FS                      COP.3SG  
 ‘this language, which is on the verge of dying.’

*Kurmanji* (Thackston, 2006, p. 75)

The relativizer can in general only be omitted when the Ezafe-marked head of the NP acts as the object of the clausal attribute such as in example (7) (Thackston, 2006, p. 77).

Most NENA dialects, on the other hand, do not have a dedicated relativizer at this position, but rely either on the construct state ending or on the linker *d-* (or derivative forms of it), example (8) being typical. One dialect which does mimic completely the Kurmanji pattern is JUrm, situated at the eastern periphery of the Kurmanji speaking area, which has borrowed the Kurdish particle:

- (13) *naš-it*    [ki                      ló ka                      wélu]  
 people-CST    REL                      there                      COP.PST-3PL  
 ‘the people who were there’

*JUrm* (Garbell, 1965b, p. 55)

Another dialect which borrowed the particle is JSan, located in the southern limit of the Sorani speaking area. In this dialect, however, we find no construct state *-əd* suffix:<sup>17</sup>

- (14) *xá =*                      ‘əd□                      *našé*                      *ke =*                      *ga =*                      *xá*                      *meydā́n*                      *smix*                      *=èn*  
 INDF=                      few                      people                      REL=                      in=                      INDF                      square                      stood.RES                      =COP.3PL  
 ‘a group of people who were standing in a square’

*JSan* (Khan, 2009b, p. 380)

With the exception of these dialects, we see that most NENA dialects do not in fact replicate the typical clausal attribution construction available in Kurmanji.

#### 4.3. Marking of prepositions with construct state suffix

In NENA, many prepositions can be optionally marked by the construct state suffix. This could be readily explained for prepositions of nominal origin, but it also holds true for "pure" prepositions

<sup>16</sup> Haider and Zwanziger (1984) and Haig (2011) treat *ku* as a complementizer, while Thackston (2006) regards it as a relative pronoun. Since we are dealing here only with cases where *ku* is followed by a relative clause, we will treat it as a relativizer (glossed REL), without committing to its general status.

<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, nominal attribution is marked in general by mere juxtaposition in JSan. Alternatively, JSan makes occasional use of a borrowed Persian Ezafe suffix *-e*, which can co-occur with the relativizer following some conjunctions. In fact, the relativizer *ke* may be borrowed directly from Persian rather than Kurdish.



which cannot be related to any noun, yielding variant forms such as *'abb-əd~b-* 'in', *'əll-əd~'əll-~l-* 'to', *mənn-əd~m-* 'from' (Goldenberg, 2000, p. 79). Mengozzi (2005) explains this construction as emerging from the following Syriac construction, once again due to the encliticization of the *d-* linker:

- (15) *'amm-ē h*                      *d=*                      *malkā*  
with-POSS.3MS                      LNK=                      king  
'with the king'

*Syriac* (Mengozzi, 2005, p. 377)

This construction is parallel to example (4), with the difference that it is headed by a preposition rather than a noun. This explanation, however, is not enough for the construct state forms of the prepositions *l-* and *b-*, which were never observed in the above construction in Syriac (Mengozzi 2005, p. 371).<sup>18</sup> Rather, in this case, a further process had to take place, most probably analogy across prepositions or, possibly, semantic levelling with a near-synonymous preposition, such as the preposition *'el-* (extant in Classical Hebrew but not in Syriac), which may have been used in the source construction.

Cohen claims that apart from some Kurmanji temporal conjunctions, namely *dema*, *gava*, *çaxê* and *wexta*, which could be analyzed as nouns denoting time inflected with the Ezafe, other prepositions and conjunctions are not marked by the Ezafe. To this short list we could in fact add some other prepositions of nominal character, which take invariably the suffix *-ī*. This suffix, which MacKenzie (1961, p. 161) terms the 'Generic Ezaf'e, can be analyzed as a frozen masculine form of the Ezafe. Nonetheless, its relation to the inflecting Ezafe is somewhat obscure, since this form normally follows the indefinite suffix *-ek*.

- (16) *nē zī k-ī*                      *ḥ ā kim-i*  
near-EZ.MS                      judge-OBL.MS  
'near the judge'

*Ak* (MacKenzie, 1961, p. 161)

- (17) *pišt-ī*                      *hingī*  
back(F-EZ.MS)                      then  
'after that'

*Am* (MacKenzie, 1961, p. 161)

Moreover, in contrast to NENA, basic Kurdish prepositions, such as *di* 'in' (taking part in circumpositional expressions) never take an Ezafe ending.

<sup>18</sup> Pat-El (2012, p. 112), citing Nöldeke, gives such an example headed by *b-* in Classical Mandaic, an Eastern Aramaic language related to Syriac. It appears though in a special syntactic context, as the preposition itself follows a linker.

- (18) *di gund-an*                    *de*  
in village-PL.OBL            in  
‘in the villages’

*Kurmanji* (Thackston, 2006, p. 13)

We can conclude that in NENA, construct state marking on prepositions is more readily available than in Kurmanji. Moreover, this marking is morphologically more transparent.

#### 4.4. *Adjectival heads*

In NENA, adjectives can stand as heads of an attributive construction, and consequently be marked by the construct state suffix. Such constructions can have several functions, such as marking the adjective as superlative or as *emotive* (cf. Hopkins, 2009). Another usage, not necessarily the most frequent, is the specification of the adjectival lexeme itself:

- (19) *gó ra xwá r-əd*            *kó sa*  
man white-CST            hair  
‘a white-haired man’

*Qar* (Khan, 2002, p. 281)

This usage is typical of Semitic languages, and has been labelled in Semitic grammatical tradition "impure annexation".<sup>19</sup> It appears also in Syriac, in which we find the adjective in the original construct state forms.

- (20) *'at*    =*u*        *mā ryā*    *ngir*        *ruḥā*    *wa=*    *mraḥmā nā*    *w=*        *saggi*  
2MS    =3MS    Lord       long.CST    spirit    and=    merciful    and=    great.CST  
*ḥnā nā*  
compassion

‘You are the Lord, long-suffering and merciful and of great compassion’

*Syriac* (Gutman and Van Peursen, 2011, p. 217)

In Kurmanji, however, such a construction is not found. Adjectives do not inflect in Kurmanji, and cannot receive an Ezafe suffix. It is rather in Sorani that we find a similar construction, in which adjectives are head-marked by the Ezafe:

<sup>19</sup> See Goldenberg (2002) for an analysis of the phenomenon in Arabic, and Doron (2014) for an analysis of the phenomenon in Modern Hebrew, cast in formal semantics terminology.

- (21) *tū š-ī*                      *am*    *dard-a*  
 afflicted-EZ                      DEM    trouble-DEF  
 ‘afflicted by this trouble’

*Sul* (MacKenzie, 1961, p. 65)

We note, however, that the corresponding NENA construction (example (19)) occurs also in dialects which are in contact with Kurmanji dialects.

#### 4.5. *Adjectival attributes*

Another challenge for the pattern borrowing theory is the fact that, while adjectives follow the Ezafe in Kurmanji (see example (6)), this is not the case in most NENA dialects. Adjectives in these dialects never follow a construct state noun. Rather, they stand in apposition with a free (non-construct) head noun, while agreeing in number and gender features.

- (22) *xa*                      *xamsa*                      *sqəl-ta*  
 INDF                      maiden(FS)                      beautiful-FS  
 ‘a beautiful maiden’

*JZax* (Cohen, 2012, p. 214)

This is even more surprising, considering that in an earlier stratum of Aramaic, namely in Syriac, adjectives in absolute state (glossed ABS) could follow the *d-* linker:

- (23) [*ruh-ē h*                      *d=*    *nā šā* ]    *da=*    *tbirā*  
 spirit(FS)-POSS.3MS                      LNK=    man                      LNK=    broken.ABS.FS  
 ‘the broken spirit of the person’

*Syriac* (Van Peursen, 2007, p. 232)

The absolute state of adjectives in Syriac is typical of their usage in predicative position, and consequently the adjectival attribute in Syriac is normally considered to be a reduced (or elliptical) nominal clause without an explicit subject argument. Be that as it may, from the perspective of the overt constituents, such examples are parallel to the following Kurmanji pattern:<sup>20</sup>

- (24) [*nav-ê*                      *wî*                      *mirov-î* ]    *yê*                      *rastî n*  
 name-EZ.MS                      DEM.DIST.OBL                      man-OBL.MS                      EZ.MS                      real  
 ‘that man’s real name’

*Kurmanji* (Thackston, 2006, p. 15)

This situation parallels exactly the pivot matching Cohen describes for adoption of the Neo-Construct construction with nominal and clausal attributes. However, in most dialects it does not occur with adjectives. An exceptional dialect in this respect is the J. dialect of Arbel which has cases like the following:

<sup>20</sup> Note that the internal structure of the NP qualified by the adjective is not entirely parallel to the Syriac example, as it uses a suffixed Ezafe rather than an independent one.

- (25) *brā́t-it*                      *rubtá*  
 daughter-CST      big.FS  
 ‘the eldest daughter’

*Arb* (Khan, 1999, p. 229)

Note that similarly to the Syriac construction, but unlike the Kurmanji one, the adjective agrees with the head noun. This is expected, since adjectives in Kurmanji cannot inflect.

Acknowledging the exceptional case of Arb, how can the absence of this construction in the majority of dialects be explained? A possible explanation may lie in the above mentioned claim that the adjectival attribute in Syriac is a minimal nominal clause, marked as predicate by the absolute state. In NENA, however, the absolute state is no longer productively used, and in general reduced clauses are not possible any more, due to the innovation of a mandatory copula paradigm (Goldenberg, 2000; 2005). Thus, rather than following a pattern replication scenario, it seems that an internal development blocks this construction in most NENA dialects.

### CONCLUSIONS AND ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

The pattern replication hypothesis has merit in its simplicity and apparent elegance, but it raises some issues in that the Kurmanji pattern is not exactly replicated in most NENA dialects. Indeed, taking a broad cross-dialectal perspective, we can establish parallels with various aspects of the Kurmanji pattern (such as the use of adjectives in Arb, or the relativizer in JUrm), but no single dialect seems to replicate entirely the Kurmanji pattern. While pattern replication is never expected to be perfect, it raises the question of whether Kurmanji is indeed the sole source language. In some respects, as we saw, the NENA pattern is in fact more similar to the Sorani pattern.

Clearly, there is a functional similarity between the Ezafe marking and the construct state marking, in that both are head-markers of attribution, and a diachronic similarity in that both rose out of encliticization.<sup>21</sup> Cohen (2015) attributes the functional similarity to a specific Kurmanji pivot matching and pattern replication, but a viable alternative is to relate it to a more general phenomenon of areal linguistic convergence favoring head-marking of attributive constructions. From the latter perspective, one may propose tentatively that the head-marked Iranian construction may have its source in the original construct state construction of Classical Aramaic, which was a language of high prestige in the region at antiquity.<sup>22</sup>

As for the replication of the encliticization process, clearly an innovation in NENA, this may be attributed to universal tendency of encliticization of functional elements to preceding hosts, as proposed by Lahiri and Plank (2010, p. 395).

In contact situations like the one discussed here, we cannot in fact reliably rule out one explanation in favor of the other. We concur with Cohen that the Kurmanji pattern may have played a role in the formation of the NENA Neo-Construct. Notwithstanding, it could also have risen out of internally motivated developments. It seems that a reasonable medial position would be to relate the

<sup>21</sup> The functional similarity has been noted before, for instance by Mengozzi (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Construct state head marking is also present in Arabic, which is spoken in the area.

Neo-Construct construction to a linguistic feature present in the NENA/Kurdish *Sprachbund*, namely the preference to head-mark attributive constructions, without relating its source to any specific language. Such a position can explain the partial similarities with Kurmanji, Sorani, as well as ancient Aramaic strata.

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1: List of abbreviations*

We cite the following dialects of North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA):

Arb = the J. (= Jewish) dialect of Arbel (Khan, 1999);  
Barw = the C. (= Christian) dialect of Barwar (Khan, 2008);  
Qar = the C. dialect of Qaraqosh (Khan, 2002);  
JSul = the J. dialect of Sulemaniyya and Ḥalabja (Khan, 2004);  
JSan = the J. dialect of Sanandaj (Khan, 2009b);  
JUrm = the J. dialect of Urmi (Garbell, 1965b);  
JZax = the J. dialect of Zakho (Cohen, 2012).

Kurdish Dialects cited from MacKenzie (1961):

Kurmanji: Ak = Akre;  
Sorani: Bin = Bingrid;  
Sul = Sulemaniyya.

### *Appendix 2: Glosses*

Glosses follow the Leipzig rules with the following additions:

ABS = Absolute State (in Syriac);  
CST = Construct State;  
EZ = Ezafe;  
LNK = Linker.

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