

# Pronominal enclitics on floating flags in Sindhi and Brahui: Making a case for language contact with Balochi

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper is the first of a series of planned studies looking at weak pronouns in Indo-Aryan and language contact centered around Balochistan. We introduce the weak pronoun inventories in Brahui, Balochi and Sindhi, discuss their historical origins, and provide a starting description of their main uses. In particular, the ability of floating case-flags to host objective pronominal enclitics in Sindhi and Brahui is emphasized and a likely origin of this construction in Balochi is suggested.

## 1 Introduction

The southern reaches of the Indo-Iranian frontier zone that runs roughly along the Sindh–Balochistan border in modern-day Pakistan is a region of great linguistic interest. Not only do the peripheries of the related but distinct Indo-Aryan and Iranian language families come into contact here through their representatives in Sindhi and Balochi, this region is also home to the divergent Dravidian language Brahui, famously isolated from the rest of its family in peninsular (and, in pockets, eastern) India. In addition, until the recent state-sponsored proliferation of Urdu throughout Pakistan, Sindhi served as a regional lingua franca and many border communities of Baloch and Brahui tribespeople speak it at near-native levels (Nazir Shakir Brahui, p.c.). Indeed, there are many Sindhi (and Saraiki) families that claim Baloch ancestry, and, conversely, several ethnic Baloch communities who speak a western variety of Sindhi called *Ĵaḍgālī* or *Ĵaṭkī*<sup>1</sup> as their mother-tongue. As such, one may naturally expect for there to be a significant amount of language contact in this region, yet the contact scenario here remains largely unexplored besides anecdotal comments here and there. The present study is an attempt to remedy this neglect and build toward a description of the extent of language contact among Sindhi, Balochi and Brahui, focusing first on the use of pronominal enclitics.

While Brahui is the only Dravidian language we know of to make use of enclitic weak pronouns side-by-side with full pronouns, Sindhi and Balochi are not as unique in their

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<sup>1</sup>The convention followed in spelling non-English linguo- and ethnonyms here is as follows: For large languages or ethnic groups, standard spellings as have appeared previously in the literature are used, thus, *Balochi*, *Brahui*, *Sindhi* and *Saraiki* instead of *Balōcī*, *B(i)rāṛvī*, *Sind<sup>h</sup>ī* and *Sarāikī*. For smaller languages and dialects, however, a modified IAST transcription is used, thus, *Ĵaḍgālī*, *Sulaymānī*, *Lārī*, *Ĵahlāvānī*, and so on. These are likely to be unfamiliar to many readers and risk being misinterpreted without diacritics, e.g., whether the “d” in an undiacriticized *Jadgali* is apical or laminal, or if the vowels are long or short. For languages with standard English names that differ from autoglossonyms, the English names are used, hence, *Persian* and *Bengali* rather than *Farsi* and *Bangla*.

respective families. Besides Sindhi, other western Indo-Aryan languages such as neighboring Saraiki and many western varieties of the Hindko-Punjabi continuum have sets of weak pronouns (enclitic or suffixal) as do Kashmiri and neighboring dialects. Within Iranian, weak pronouns are even more common, in fact, it is the lack of pronominal clitics that is outside the norm there, though the precise morphosyntax of their usage varies a great deal across languages and dialects, indeed, grammaticalizing to tense-aspect-triggered agreement markers in some cases. (West) Iranian pronominal enclitics have been studied in quite some detail, both from a comparative typological perspective (Mohammadirad, 2020) and their diachrony (Korn, 2009), as well as more probing formal analyses for specific languages, although the situation for Balochi in particular remains less explored (but see Dabir-Moghaddam (2008)). In contrast, weak pronouns in Indo-Aryan haven't received as much attention, except Kashmiri (Verbeke, 2017). They are mostly relegated to brief mentions in descriptions though some specialized studies have been inchoated (Butt, 2007; Wali & Koul, 1994; Jegorova, 1966; Khubchandani, 1969; Hook, 1987; Varyani, 1976/1977).

Despite the existence of cognate weak pronouns in languages like Kashmiri and Saraiki, we shall show in this paper that there is at least one usage of the Sindhi (objective) enclitic pronouns which is alien to other Indo-Aryan languages, but finds parallel in Brahui and Balochi. The rest of this paper is organized as follows: In §2, we begin with a working definition of what we mean by *weak pronouns* or *pronominal clitics & affixes*, and discuss their origins in the three languages under purview. The outlook is historical-comparative and fairly extensive as previous studies on weak pronouns in Indo-Aryan languages have glossed over this matter. We show that the systems have largely internal geneses and not simply borrowing of morphemes among neighboring languages. This section also provides brief language profiles to situate the study in context. §3 then describes the main uses of weak pronouns which are also shared with other western Indo-Aryan and West Iranian languages. §4 describes one specific usage of weak pronouns that set apart Sindhi from other Indo-Aryan languages and puts it closer typologically to Brahui and Balochi. We cautiously 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. Finally, §5 concludes the paper with discussion and exposition of limitations of the present study inviting further research in this area.

## 2 Weak pronouns — Form and genesis

By *weak pronouns*, we shall mean personal pronouns or pronominal possessors that are unaccented and morphologically bound, i.e., they cannot stand on their own and require (accented) hosts. These weak pronouns are, crucially, not agreement indexes, except when they have secondarily grammaticalized as such, in which case they are no longer weak pronouns synchronically speaking. Weak pronouns substitute for full pronouns in discourse and hence are usually, but not necessarily, mutually exclusive. They may be affixal or clitic. We do not dwell here on a precise criterion to disambiguate clitics from affixes, but loosely adopt the heuristic (though not every aspect of the definition) of Haspelmath (2023) that

affixes are selective of their hosts, while clitics are promiscuous, at least, on a surface level. As a consequence, both series of weak pronouns of Kashmiri are suffixes in our view, at odds with Wali & Koul (1994), who call them “clitics,” but in agreement with Verbeke (2017), see wherein for more discussion on these definitional matters. For Balochi, Brahui and the objective weak pronouns (cf. §2.3) of Sindhi, the same criterion requires analyzing them as enclitics, while the ergative weak pronouns of Sindhi are suffixes.

## 2.1 Origin of pronominal enclitics in Brahui

Brahui is a divergent Dravidian language spoken exclave away from its relatives, primarily in western Pakistan (Elfenbein, 1998), with smaller pockets in southern Afghanistan and southeastern Iran (Šeybānīfard & Zaršenās, 2020). Brahui speakers (at least males) are mostly bilingual with Balochi and possibly also in other languages depending on their location. Even in diaspora, Brahui is being passed down to children (Basu: own observation in Vancouver, Canada) and is not in any way threatened. Although it has traditionally (Krishnamurti, 2003) been classified in a “North Dravidian” node along with the closely related pair of Kurukh and Malto of eastern India, there is growing consensus among Dravidianists (Basu, 2024; Kobayashi, 2020/2021; McAlpin, 2003) that this classification is unwarranted and that Brahui forms its own subgroup in the family.

Elfenbein (1998) reports minimal dialectal differentiation in Brahui, but the most significant dialectal isogloss is reported to concern pronominal clitics. Ali & Kobayashi (2024) confirm dialectal faultlines along the use of pronominal clitics. Table 1<sup>2</sup> lists the pronominal enclitics of Brahui along with their corresponding full pronominal (oblique<sup>3</sup>) bases. Like most languages of the region, there are no dedicated third-person full pronouns in Brahui, instead, the distal demonstratives are used pronominally, but distinct third-person pronominal enclitics that cannot function as demonstratives or determiners do exist.

Table 1: Brahui pronominal enclitics and independent pronominal bases.

	enclitic	full pronominal base		enclitic	full pronominal base
1.SG	= <i>ka</i>	<i>kan-</i>	1.PL	(= <i>nan</i> )	<i>nan-</i>
2.SG	= <i>nā</i> ~ = <i>nē</i>	<i>n(ē)-</i>	2.PL	(= <i>num</i> )	<i>num-</i>
3.SG	= <i>ta(n)</i> ~ = <i>tē</i>	—	3.PL	= <i>tā</i>	—

The first- and second-person plural enclitics are reported by Andronov (1971) from Bray (1909), but the latter author explicitly notes they are only used in “some dialects” with examples from the speech of the “Niharis.” Later studies do not replicate these, which is why they have been parenthesized here. According to Elfenbein (1998), the first-

<sup>2</sup>Glossing conventions and abbreviations in examples adhere to the Leipzig Glossing Rules. Clitics are attached to their hosts by “=” and affixes by “-” as conventional. For consistency, we have taken the liberty of modifying — thus uniformizing — transcriptions of examples taken from other publications without distracting the reading with a warning each time.

<sup>3</sup>This caveat is only relevant for the 1.SG where the oblique stem *kan-* differs from the nominative *ī*.

and second-person singular enclitics only occur in the Ĵahlāwānī dialect. Ali & Kobayashi (2024) restrict only the first-person singular to Ĵahlāwānī. In their text corpus, no instance of =*ka* occurs,<sup>4</sup> but =*nā* ~ =*nē* is amply attested. Notably, in the Iranian Brahui texts published by Barjasteh Delforooz (2020), a few occurrences of =*ka* do occur, showing its usage is alive in that variety, at least in possessive function. The third-person enclitics are abundantly used in all dialects.

The Brahui pronominal enclitics of the first- and second-persons are transparently derived from the corresponding pronominal stems. The origin of the far more commonplace third-person clitics are more mysterious. Already Bray (1909) had suggested derivation from the reflexive pronominal stem *tēn-*. Particularly relevant here is that Brahui shows an abnormal vowel in the form of the reflexive. From all other Dravidian languages, one obtains a reconstructable reflexive base \**tan-* (NOM \**tān*) in the singular and \**tam-* (NOM \**tām*) in the plural (Krishnamurti, 2003). The singular enclitic =*ta(n)* could, then, reflect an archaism in the modern language carrying the implication that grammaticalization of the expected base \**tan-* as a pronominal enclitic happened before the irregular vowel-change. In fact, the existence of the variant =*tē* may even imply grammaticalization while the vowel-change was in effect. This still, however, leaves the plural enclitic =*tā* in need of an explanation.<sup>5</sup> One possibility is that it comes from the genitive-plural ending *-tā* latched onto the singular clitic, thus, older \*=*ta-tā* =ENCL.3.SG-GEN.PL which got haplogitized to =*tā*, becoming formally homophonous with the bare genitive-plural ending. An analogous coinage of plural pronominal enclitics did take place in much of Iranian — though, notably, not including Balochi — at the onset of the Middle Iranian period as we shall see shortly.

## 2.2 Origin of pronominal enclitics in Balochi

Balochi is an Iranian language spoken in all the areas Brahui is, i.e., in a continuous band across western and southwestern Pakistan, southeastern Iran and southern Afghanistan, as well as a small outlying population in the Merv oasis of Turkmenistan.<sup>6</sup> Actually, the Brahui-speaking areas are enclaved within the larger Balochi-speaking zone, though Brahui is the predominant language in some areas within that zone, e.g., in northern Balochistan close to Quetta (Maryam Jamali, p.c.). Unlike Brahui, Balochi exhibits incredible dialectal variation throughout its vast home-range. The differences are so great across all facets of phonetics, morphology and syntax that it cannot be compactly summarized here (nor is it yet adequately documented). Traditionally, up to six dialect groups are recognized (Elfenbein, 1989), three of which — Makurānī, Raḫšānī and Sulaymānī — are common knowledge among speakers themselves. But one can easily make a case for a much more fine-grained

<sup>4</sup>Brahui native-speaker and linguist Dr. Liaquat Ali confirms (p.c.) that =*ka* does exist in the Brahui of Pakistan despite its absence from his co-edited text corpus compiled from published stories.

<sup>5</sup>A derivation from the proximal demonstrative base *dā-* seems unlikely. Typically, it is not the proximal, but the distal demonstrative in *ō-* that is more commonly used pronominally, and, moreover, this choice makes it no easier to etymologize the plural in any case.

<sup>6</sup>There is also a significant Baloch presence in Oman (Collett, 1983), and, reportedly, smaller enclaves in other parts of Arabia and in eastern Africa.

dialectological analysis as done by Elfenbein (1980). The distinct far-western variety of the Koroš (Nourzaei et al., 2015) in southern Iran also deserves mention, as does Southern Bashkardi (Barbera, 2023), probably the closest relative of Balochi.

The internal classification of Iranian is fraught with unresolved complications, and especially so as far as the position of Balochi is concerned. The frequent reference in the literature to Balochi as “Northwest Iranian” belies the immense uncertainty surrounding not just the classification of Balochi as part of that group, but indeed the existence of such a genetic grouping in the first place. Nonetheless, the precise dialectological position of Balochi within Iranian will not matter for us here.

The Balochi pronominal enclitics are, for the most part, inherited from Proto-(Indo-)Iranian, but with significant changes to the syntax of their use. They are, thus, not recent innovations from full pronouns as in Brahui. In this, Balochi keeps with most other Iranian languages, where, too, the historical pronominal enclitics survive to varying extents.<sup>7</sup> However, one significant point of archaism in Balochi compared to most other western Iranian languages is that Balochi retains the inherited plurals which have been replaced by secondary pluralization of the singular enclitics by reflexes of the Old (Indo-)Iranian *a*-stem genitive-plural ending *\*-ānām* in languages like Persian, Kurdish et c. Of course, *-ān* had already become the default oblique-plural marker in much of the family by the Middle Iranian period, including probably in Balochi, so, the extension to the clitic pronouns, which are necessarily oblique, is not surprising. Here we see a typological parallel to the situation hypothesized for the Brahui 3.PL enclitic pronoun in §2.1, but we have no reason yet to ascribe the development to contact of any sort. If anything, the exception of Balochi from this development within Iranian speaks against looking at language contact for an explanation.

This innovation began before attested Middle Iranian, as shown already by Middle Persian and Parthian, and progressed partway into eastern Iranian languages of the central steppes, including Sogdian, Chorasmian, Bactrian and Pashto.<sup>8</sup> The spread was not, however, as thorough as in Iran, and steppe languages like Ossetic and Hotanese conservatively keep the old paradigm, as do Ormuri and, partly, the Pamiri languages. The cases of Parachi and Yaghnobi are more complicated (and unclear).

Tables 2 and 3, respectively, show pronominal clitics across some Balochi dialects and in a few other western Iranian languages along with Avestan and Old Persian for historical reference. As mentioned before, note that Balochi inherits (cognates of) the plural clitics seen in Avestan, while in most other western languages, they have been supplanted by secondary plurals of the singular clitics. Unfortunately, the 1.PL and 2.PL clitics are not attested in the Old Persian corpus. We assume that the original plural enclitics were still preserved at the time and that the replacement by secondary plurals happened later. This seems true because Korn (2009) tables that *=n* existed for the 1.PL enclitic as a rare variant

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<sup>7</sup>The languages in Turkic-dominated regions (viz., Zazaki and Kurmanji Kurdish in Turkey, and Tat and Northern Talysh in Azerbaijan) have largely lost the inherited pronominal clitic system; likewise Yidgha in far northern Pakistan whose speakers are fast shifting to Indo-Aryan Khowar (Haroon ur-Rasheed, p.c.).

<sup>8</sup>The case of Pashto is somewhat dubious. The syntax of Pashto pronominal enclitics is very conservative, but some of their forms are difficult to etymologize. We will not have reason to address Pashto in this paper.

alongside more common  $=m\text{-}\bar{a}n$  in early Middle Persian implying that the two strategies were in competition centuries after the Achæmenid period.

Table 2: A sampler of Balochi pronominal clitics across dialect-groups.

	Southern Bashkardi	Korošī	Makurānī	Raχšānī	Avestan <sup>9</sup>
1.SG	$(=o)m=$	$=om$	$=un$	$=un$	$=m\bar{e}$
2.SG	$(=e)t=$	$=et$	$=it$	$(=it)$	$=t\bar{e}$
3.SG	$(=e)h=$	$=\bar{i}$	$=\bar{i}$	$=\bar{i}$	$=h\bar{e} \sim =\check{s}\bar{e}$ <sup>10</sup>
1.PL	$(=a)n=$	$=en$	$=in$	$(=in)$	$=n\bar{o}$
2.PL	$(=o)\chi=$	$=\bar{o}$	$=\bar{o}$	$(=\bar{u})$	$=w\bar{o}$
3.PL	$(=e)\check{s}=$	$=e\check{s}$	$=i\check{s}$	$=i\check{s}$	(OPrs. $=\check{s}\bar{a}m$ )

Table 3: A sampler of western Iranian pronominal clitics.

	Gīlakī	Sorani Kurdish <sup>11</sup>	Zoroastrian Dari	Mīnābī	Persian	Old Persian
1.SG	$=\bar{o}m$	$=m$	$(=)m=$	$=om$	$=am$	$=ma\bar{i}$
2.SG	$=\bar{o}t$	$=t$	$(=)d=$	$=et$	$=at$	$=ta\bar{i}$
3.SG	$=\bar{o}\check{s}$	$=y (< *=\check{h}a\bar{i})$	$(=)\check{s}=$	$=i(\check{s})$	$=a\check{s}$	$=\check{s}a\bar{i}$
1-PL	$=\bar{o}m\text{-}an$	$=m\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$(=)m\text{-}o=$	$=m\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$=am\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$*=\textit{na}$
2-PL	$=\bar{o}t\text{-}an$	$=t\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$(=)d\text{-}o=$	$=t\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$=at\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$*=\textit{wa}$
3-PL	$=\bar{o}\check{s}\text{-}an$	$=y\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$(=)\check{s}\text{-}o=$	$=\check{s}\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$=a\check{s}\text{-}\hat{a}n$	$=\check{s}\bar{a}m$

Within Balochi, there seems to be a consensus in the literature (with which we impressionistically agree) that the more west a variety is, the more productive is the use of pronominal clitics (Jahani & Korn, 2009), but we are not aware of any precise survey. In the far western variety Koroshi, clitics of all persons and numbers seem to be in use (Nourzaei et al., 2015). For the dialects of the Iranian Makurān coast, at least in the dialectal basis of what Jahani (2019) calls “Modern Standard Balochi,” likewise, all clitics are in use. However, in the Afro-Balochi variety of coastal Iran studied by Korn & Nourzaei (2018, 2019), only the first and third-person enclitics are mentioned. In Sulaymānī Balochi (Elfenbein’s “East Hill Balochi”), while older texts (Dames, 1922) attest at least the third-person clitics, we were unable to elicit any example from the modern speaker one of us is working with. The Balochi dialects of Afghanistan and Türkmenistan are (self-)identified within Raχšānī.

<sup>9</sup>Only the Younger Avestan GEN/DAT clitics are given here. Avestan and Old Persian (and Sanskrit) have separate ACC clitics as well, most completely in Elder Avestan, the cognates of which are reflexed distinctly from the GEN/DAT clitics in (at least some chronolects of) the eastern Iranian language Sogdian (Yosida, 2022).

<sup>10</sup>The variants here are phonologically determined according to the famous RUKI rule in Indo-Iranic and Balto-Slavic languages. In several later languages — already in Old Persian — the  $\check{s}$ -variants got generalized, but not everywhere, e.g., Xūrī, Kurdish and Balochi.

<sup>11</sup>The Akoi sub-variety of Central Kurdish seemingly retains the old first-person plural enclitic as  $=n\hat{a}$ , though the other two plurals are as in Standard Sorani (data in Meihami & Barzanji (2025)).

In his brief sketch of the former, Nawata (1981) only mentions third-person clitics. The dialect of the Merv oasis in Türkmenistan has been far better documented, where the latest description of Axenov (2006) reports only the third-person clitics in use. Sokolov (1956), half a century before Axenov, found also a first-person singular =*un*, but it was already very rare (“očenj redko”) in his time. A full paradigm for this dialect cluster can, nonetheless, be salvaged from other sources (Jahani & Korn, 2009), but the exact distribution within the Raḡšānī zone, as indeed elsewhere, is in need of precise mapping.

### 2.3 Origin of pronominal enclitics and suffixes in Sindhi

Though perhaps not to the same extent as Balochi, Sindhi too exhibits substantial dialectal variation within its territory.<sup>12</sup> Sindhi proper is spoken in the Pakistani province of Sindh, but the language spreads into the Rann of Kutch of northwestern Gujarat, India, as Kutchi (Kač<sup>h</sup>ī).<sup>13</sup> Over on the western side, the Laṣī dialect of Sindhi spills over into southeastern Balochistan, and continues in patches as Ĵaḍgālī throughout coastal Balochistan and into eastern Iran (Barjasteh Delforooz, 2008). Within Sindh, Jetley (1964) recognized four dialects (and Kutchi outside of Sindh): the Sirōlī dialect of northern Sindh, the Vičōlī dialect of central Sindh, which has been referred to as “standard” by Jetley (1964) and Khubchandani (2007), the Lārī dialect of the Indus delta, including the city of Karachi, and the Laṣī dialect of Las Bela covering western Sindh and southeastern Balochistan.

Jetley (1964) also considers <sup>h</sup>aṭkī spoken in the Thar desert a dialect of Sindhi, but despite at least one crucial sound-change in common (*tr*; *dr* > *t*, *d*), a quick look at the data presented by Bhawnani (1979) suggests it is probably linguistically closer to Marwari.

In addition to Ĵaḍgālī, another outlier Sindhi variety whose precise genealogical position within the Sindhi-continuum is difficult to ascertain without detailed study is Luwātī or K<sup>h</sup>ōjkī in Oman. A preliminary phonological sketch of this variety is by Salman & Kharusi (2012). Finally, there is Kholosi in southern Iran, which also appears to be “Sindhic,” but separated from the Sindhi-continuum fairly early. It cannot be labeled a dialect of Sindhi, at least not in the current form. This language was discovered to scholarship by Anonby & Bahmani Hassan (2016) and currently being extensively documented (Rezaei, 2020; Arora, 2020–, 2022; Nourzaei, 2024, in prep.).

Despite promising early start during the British Rāj, Sindhi is the least studied of all major Indo-Aryan languages. Most primary studies are over half a century old at this point, if not more, and newer sketches are largely recycled off of those. For our purposes, weak pronouns (in the Vičōlī dialect) have been the focus of dedicated studies by Jegorova (1964);

<sup>12</sup>Of course, in the case of both languages, what dialectal variation is included under standard language labels and what excluded is largely a socio-cultural matter, not strictly linguistic.

<sup>13</sup>Kutchi lacks the characteristic Sindhi change of *tr*; *dr* > *t(r)*, *d(r)*, thus resembling Gujarati in this one trait at least. Preliminary data on the language also suggests that it has developed a clusivity contrast akin to Gujarati (Gujarati INCL *āpne* v. EXCL *ame*, Kutchi INCL *pā* v. EXCL *asī*), but this is still just a conjecture at this stage, and perhaps not in all dialects. The Jadeja dialect described by Mukherjee (1992) has no clusivity identified. Nonetheless, Kutchi is unambiguously closer to Sindhi in morphology and lexicon than to Gujarati, and mostly intelligible to Sindhi speakers (Riaz: own observation).

Khubchandani (1969); Varyani (1976/1977), and also the grammar of Jetley (1964). In addition, they find brief mentions elsewhere, e.g., in standard grammars and sketches like Jegorova (1966); Zograf & Kogan (2011); Khubchandani (2007). For their use in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. and in compositions prior to that, see Trumpp (1872). Much of this older literature, however, is formulaic in the sense that paradigms are filled without a whole lot of analysis of the syntax and pragmatics of use, though occasionally gaps in paradigms are noted. Our elicited data is from the native Lārī dialect of one of the authors (Riaz) as spoken in Karachi. Lārī differs from Vičōlī in a few respects, such as the direct form of the first-person singular pronoun:<sup>14</sup> Lārī  $\tilde{a}\tilde{u}$  (< Sanskrit 1.SG.NOM *ahám*) against Vičōlī  $m\tilde{a}$  (developed from the Sanskrit oblique stem *ma-*). More specific morpho-syntactic differences haven't yet been identified, but they do not impede mutual intelligibility (Riaz: own observation).

Sindhi, like other Indo-Aryan languages with comparable morphology and unlike Iranian languages,<sup>15</sup> has at least two distinct sets of weak pronominal morphemes, though with some formal homophony across the paradigms. We call them *objective* and *ergative* weak pronouns and leave justification of these labels for the next section, where their uses are demonstrated. To these two may be added a *possessive* set used primarily with kinship nouns and partly similar to the objective clitics. The objective set in Sindhi is clitic, while the ergative set is affixal. We list the weak pronouns of Sindhi, along with comparanda from other Indo-Aryan languages in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Western Indo-Aryan OBJ and ERG weak pronouns compared to Sanskrit and Prakrit DAT/GEN pronominal clitics. Sanskrit and Prakrit ACC clitics not shown.

	Sindhi	Sarāiki	Kashmiri	Poguli	Prakrit	Sanskrit
1.SG.OBJ	= <i>m</i>	= <i>m</i>	- <i>m</i>	- <i>m</i>	= <i>mē</i>	= <i>mē</i>
1.SG.ERG	- <i>m</i>	- <i>m</i>	- <i>m</i>	- <i>m</i>	×	×
2.SG.OBJ	∅ ~ = <i>y</i>	=( <i>h</i> ) $\tilde{i}$	- <i>i</i>	- <i>t</i>	= $\delta\tilde{e}$ ~ = $t\tilde{e}$	= $t\tilde{e}$
2.SG.ERG	∅ ~ - <i>y</i>	- $\tilde{o}$	- <i>t</i>	- <i>t</i>	×	×
3.SG.OBJ	= <i>s</i>	= <i>s</i>	- <i>s</i>	- <i>s</i> ( $\tilde{a}$ )	= $s\tilde{e}$	(= $\tilde{e}na-$ )
3.SG.ERG	- $\tilde{i}$	×	- <i>n</i>	- <i>ni</i> , - <i>n<sup>y</sup>e</i>	×	×
1.PL.OBJ	=( <i>h</i> ) $\tilde{u}$	= $s\tilde{e}$	×	- <i>n</i>	= $\eta\tilde{o}$	= <i>nah</i>
1.PL.ERG	- $s\tilde{i}$ ~ - $s\tilde{u}$ -	- $s\tilde{e}$	×	- <i>n</i>	×	×
2.PL.OBJ	= <i>v</i>	= $v\tilde{e}$	- <i>v</i>	- <i>v</i>	= $v\tilde{o}$	= <i>vah</i>
2.PL.ERG	- <i>v</i>	- $v\tilde{e}$	- <i>v</i>	- <i>v</i>	×	×
3.PL.OBJ	= <i>n</i>	= $n\tilde{e}$	- $k^h$	- <i>nan</i> , - <i>n<sup>y</sup>ən</i>	=( $\tilde{e}$ ) <i>na-</i>	= $\tilde{e}n\tilde{a}-$
3.PL.ERG	- $\tilde{u}$	×	- $k^h$ ~ - <i>h-</i>	- <i>ne</i> , - <i>n<sup>y</sup>e</i>	×	×

The objective sets have fairly clear origins.<sup>16</sup> In all languages, they mostly continue

<sup>14</sup>Lasī and Kutchi agree with Lārī in having  $\tilde{a}\tilde{u}$ , while Sirōlī goes with Vičōlī and has  $m\tilde{a}$ , cf. Sarāikī  $m\tilde{a}$ .

<sup>15</sup>Ossetic has multiple series of related pronominal clitics, but the system works very differently from the western Iranian enclitics we are concerned with in this paper.

<sup>16</sup>Among the Kholosi pronominal enclitics reported by Nourzaei (2024), which are objective and possessive, only the third-person forms are directly cognate to the rest of western Indo-Aryan.

the Sanskrit and Prakrit GEN/DAT enclitics, though some points need clarifying. All of the languages considered unambiguously reflex the 1.SG and 2.PL enclitics. Also reflexed consistently is the Prakrit 3.SG enclitic =*sē*, which doesn't occur in Sanskrit and Pali. According to some scholars, like Bubeník (1992), it is a conservatism in the Prakrits and later Indo-Aryan (lost by chance in dialects of Sanskrit attested), formally being cognate to Elder Avestan =*hōj* and Younger Avestan =*hē*, and further to Hittite =*še*, Luwian =*si* and Greek =*hoj* (all 3.SG.DAT). However, a more realistic etymology is of secondary genesis in Middle Indo-Aryan, coinciding only by accident with the expected inherited cognate, as reported by Kümmel (to appear) following Scheller (1967) and von Hinüber (2001).

Although strengthened in various ways, the second-person singular objective enclitics transparently descend from Sanskrit =*tē*, via the intervocalically weakened Prakrit =*ḍē*. In the Prakrits, there was positional allomorphy between =*ḍē* and =*tē* owing to well-known Middle Indo-Aryan sound changes, and this pattern likely continued into the New Indo-Aryan period, followed by leveling one way or the other. Poguli, with its conservative-looking *-t*, may be the single language that favored =*tē* in the leveling process, but it may also be brought over from the ergative paradigm (compare the Kashmiri ergative).

For the first-person plural, Kashmiri notably has a hole in its paradigm there, and Saraiki (as well as western Punjabi and Hindko varieties that have weak pronouns) has brought over the ergative suffix into objective use. Poguli is the only one that retains a reflex of Sanskrit =*nah*, while Sindhi's =(*h*)*ũ* has, in all likelihood, arisen from the Sanskrit first-person plural oblique stem *asmá-*; cf. attested Apabhramsha 1.PL.DAT/GEN *amha*.

Finally, the widespread *n*-forms of the third-person plural objective weak pronouns have long been known to continue the Sanskrit enclitic pronominal paradigm of =*ēna-*; already Trumpp (1872). They continue (contracted) in Pali and the Prakrits as =*na-*. In the older stages, it has a full paradigm (though defectively attested) across cases, numbers and genders. In the modern languages, however, it only survives in plural usage, probably because the singular slot had competition from =*sē*. The gender distinction uniquely maintained in Poguli no doubt carries forward the older system, but without further documentation of Poguli, nothing certain can be said of their exact history. The success of the *n*-forms here may have played a rôle in the ouster of the expected *n*-forms for the first-person plural in all languages save Poguli. Kashmiri *-k<sup>h</sup>* is unexplained, although, notably, its allomorph in ergative use when followed by an objective suffix is *-h-*.

Since the objective paradigms of weak pronouns are well-explained by the Old and Middle Indo-Aryan GEN/DAT enclitics, it may be tempting to try and derive the ergative paradigms from the ACC enclitics. However, this doesn't quite work because, being very similar formally, they would yield identical outcomes in later languages.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the *s*-forms of the first-person plural ergative suffix in both Sindhi and Saraiki have to have origins

<sup>17</sup>In fact, the accusative and genitive-dative paradigms started being partly leveled out in the early period itself. Only Elder Avestan maintained a full paradigm; Sanskrit and even Younger Avestan merged GEN/DAT and ACC for the plural enclitic pronouns. Besides, an origin of the modern ergative suffixes from the old accusative set would be highly unexpected in any case as ergativity itself arose (or at least fully established itself in the grammatical system) only toward the end of the Middle Indo-Aryan stage.

in the full pronouns, cf. 1.PL.DIR *asĩ*, 1.PL.OBL *asã*. The exact syntactic condition that led to *asĩ* becoming bound is not clear, nor is the fact that the shape of the suffix *-sĩ* resembles the direct *asĩ* rather than the oblique *asã*, which functions as the full ergative pronoun. The origin of the third-person ergative suffixes *-ĩ* and *-ũ* are even more perplexing.

Finally, Sindhi has a partial series of suffixal pronominal possessors having no equivalent in neighboring languages like Saraiki and Punjabi, nor in Kashmiri or Poguli. These partly resemble the objective clitics and mostly used to possess certain close kinship terms, though in the language of a couple generations ago, possession of a small class of other inalienables, like body-parts, was also possible (Khubchandani, 1969).<sup>18</sup> Possessive pronominal suffixes that exclusively possess close kinship items are an areal feature of the Indo-Aryan and Nuristani languages of the Hindukush, as noted by di Carlo (2008/2011), though certainly not all of them, e.g., not Khowar or Prasun, but there is reason to believe those are later innovations in mutual contact, unrelated to the Sindhi morphemes, at least directly.<sup>19</sup>

### 3 Functions of weak pronouns

Weak pronouns fill oblique rôles in Brahui, Balochi and Sindhi (and elsewhere). This means they can mark a variety of different kinds of objects, occasionally adjuncts, possessors, and also ergative agents if the language permits, but they can never stand in for direct-case full pronouns. In Brahui, alignment is always nominative-accusative, so, no agent or subject can be marked by pronominal clitics. In Sindhi and Balochi, ergative agents can be. However, cross-dialectally, Balochi shows such incredible diversity in alignment types, that uniformly applying this general principle there becomes tricky. Recall that, barring some minor phonological allomorphy, in Balochi and Brahui, there is just one set of weak pronouns each, while Sindhi has three, though with some formal overlap across paradigms.

In all three of Sindhi, Balochi and Brahui, weak pronominal when attached to nouns serve as their possessors. In Sindhi, this is more restricted than the other two as only certain kinds of inalienable possessions can be directly possessed by weak pronouns. In our data from the Lārī dialect, there are only cases of possession of close kinship terms, though older data in the literature also show possession of certain body parts. In Brahui (1) and Balochi (3), there seems to be no restriction on what is possessable, though in many varieties only the third-person clitic possessors are fully active.

#### (1) Brahui

- a. Iranian Brahui (Barjasteh Delforoos, 2020, The parrot and the maina: 1)  
*dāsā, rĩš=ka pĩun mass.*  
 now beard=1.SG.OBL white become.PRS.PFV.3.SG

<sup>18</sup>We interpret the difference between Khubchandani’s (and earlier) description and ours as one of chronology, but it needn’t be so. As stated before, Khubchandani’s account was of his own Vičōlī dialect, while ours is of Riaz’s Lārī dialect. A thorough comparison between these two (and other) Sindhi dialects with regards to the use of weak pronouns cannot be attempted at this point. (Kutchi seems to lack weak pronouns altogether.)

<sup>19</sup>The possessive suffixes of Pashai are used much more generally, not restricted to kinship terms, inalienables, or any other semantic class, though even there kinship nouns behave somewhat special (Lehr, 2014).

‘Now, my beard has turned white.’

- b. Raχšānī Brahui (Kobayashi & Ali, 2022–, 12 (šōhan-nā rāg: 18’53))

*pučč-ē hat-p-ēs-a, liχ-ē=nā*  
clothes-OBJ bring-NEG-PRS.2.SG-IPFV neck-OBJ = 2.SG.OBL  
*χal-ēv-a.*  
strike-PRS.1.SG-IPFV

‘(If) you don’t bring the clothes, I shall decapitate you (... strike your neck off).’

(2) shows that even in possessive phrases with seemingly lexicalized meaning, clitic-possession is valid.

- (2) Sarāwānī Brahui (Ali & Kobayashi, 2024, khuriyā-nā bōḍ-ak: 4’56)

*harāng ki ust=nā kašš-ē, čirrēng.*  
whither.REL COMP heart=2.SG.OBL pull-PRS.3.SG wander

‘Roam wherever you feel like (... your heart pulls).’

In Balochi, pronominal clitics are active more in Iranian dialects than elsewhere. Nonetheless, all dialects still seem to have at least the third-person clitics to whatever degree of productivity, some even the first-person ones. The second-person enclitics are the rarest (in contrast to Brahui where the first-person is rarest). The Koroshi example (3b) is interesting because it shows both clitic-possession and a clitic subject in one sentence.

- (3) Balochi

- a. Iranian Makurānī Balochi (Jahani, 2019, pg. 88)

*zōr=on ča tāi-g-ā gēš=ent.*  
strength=1.SG.OBL from 2.SG.GEN-PRED-OBL more=COP.PRS.3.SG

‘I am stronger than you (My strength is greater than yours).’

- b. Koroshi (Nourzaei et al., 2015, pg. 56)

*marō zahr=eš rētk-a mā χorāk=at.*  
today poison=3.PL.OBL pour.PST-PFV.PTCP into food=2.SG.OBL

‘They have poured poison into your food today.’

- c. Afghanistani Raχšānī Balochi (Nawata, 1981, nakl)

*zāg-ān=ē āi-rā gōr kurt-ant.*  
child-PL = 3.SG.OBL DIST.DEM.OBL-OBJ grave do.PST-3.PL

‘His children buried him.’

Jahani (2019) reports that pronominal clitics in Balochi cannot possess nouns marked by the oblique case suffix *-ā* except as objects of postpositions, which are all oblique-marked nouns, at least etymologically. This may be true for the Makurānī varieties she bases her standard on, but in Turkmenistani Raχšānī, at least, that seems allowed according to Axenov (2006), even productive.

In Sindhi, possessive weak pronouns sometimes trigger interesting stem-changes to the possessee. Kinship terms, at least, admit a stem-extension *-ŋ-*, e.g., *b<sup>h</sup>āu* ‘brother’, but *b<sup>h</sup>āñũ-s* ‘his/her brother’; likewise, *sas* ‘mother-in-law’, but *sasũñ-hē* ‘your mother-in-law’ (both examples from Lārī, but reproducible in Vičōlī and probably Lasī).<sup>20</sup> Since there’s at least some variants of the possessive morphemes that don’t fully coincide with the ergative or objective sets, we treat them as a distinct paradigm of suffixes. As the notation in (4) implies, our analysis sees the weak pronominal possessors as suffixes rather than clitics.

(4) Vičōlī Sindhi (Rahman, undated)

*puṭũ-m*            *ač<sup>h</sup>-ē*            *t<sup>h</sup>-ō.*  
son-1.SG.POSS come.IPFV-3.SG COP.PRS-M.SG

‘My son comes.’

In all three languages, a possessive interpretation of pronominal clitics or suffixes is allowed by direct postposition to the possessee. External possession of the kind attested in western Punjabi and Saraiki (5) is generally not allowed in Balochi and Brahui. Punjabi and Saraiki, on the other hand, do not allow direct nominal hosts of their clitics. Attachment seems to be obligatorily to the finite verbal complex,<sup>21</sup> though there are some exceptions when finite verbs are ellipped as in (5a).

(5) Punjabi

a. Sargodha Punjabi (Bashir et al., 2019, from Wilson, 1999)

*g<sup>h</sup>ar kitt<sup>h</sup>ē=nē?*  
house where=3.PL.OBL

‘Where is their house?’

b. Saraiki (Shackle, 1976, from Lashari, 1971)

*ḍūhē d<sup>h</sup>i.y-ã*            *āi.y-ã*            *hān=is.*  
both daughter.OBL-F.PL come.PST-F.PL COP.PST.3.PL = 3.SG.OBL

‘Have both of his daughters come?’

In Brahui and Balochi, possessive use is entirely restricted to suffixing or encliticizing the possessor pronoun directly to the possessee, and this is mostly the case in Sindhi too.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Transcription of Sindhi is slightly modified from existing sources. In our experience, final *ultra-short* vowels are no longer pronounced except in western dialects spoken by the Baloch and Brahui. Sindhi is, thus, the latest (and last) Indo-Aryan language to lose old final vowels that were still alive well into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> c. In certain inflections, these vowels come back and we write them there with a breve.

<sup>21</sup>There is no study yet on the exact attachment patterns of pronominal enclitics in Punjabi and neighboring languages. In our cursory look, the obligatory host appears to be the first word of the prosodic domain of the finite verb, provided it exists. Thus, Butt (2007) cites an example ((2) in her paper) where it is the bound pre-verbal negator *nē=* to which the 3.SG enclitic *=s(u)* latches on to.

<sup>22</sup>Two instances in the corpus, one line apart in the same story (tuṣ: 90 & 91) and identical context, show that Brahui may require the (clitic) copula to be ordered before a clitic pronoun even if it means breaking up the possessive phrase: *aenō musittamīkō dē=ē<sup>?</sup>tē/nā* ‘Today is his/your third day (waiting here).’

In the latter, post-verbal affixation with possessive interpretation is attested as well, but not in our data so far. The Balochi pattern is also what obtains in other western Iranian languages where enclitic possessors exist, but strikingly different to how the construction ancestral to this worked in Old and Middle Indo-Iranic, and still continued in Pashto. In the older stages, the GEN/DAT enclitics (and the ACC clitics as well) attached to whatever was the first constituent (the so-called *Wackernagel position*). In possessive constructions, attachment could be to the possessee itself, if the first constituent, or the possessee could follow it, or be completely disconnected.

Besides marking possessives, one of the chief uses of enclitic pronouns is marking oblique arguments and some kinds of adjuncts. Being a strictly nominative-accusative language, in Brahui, the subject or agent is never oblique and thus cannot be marked by a clitic pronoun, but it is the sole controller of verb-agreement. Objects, direct and indirect, do not trigger agreement, and may be cliticized to finite verbs as in (6).

(6) Brahui

- a. Jahlāwānī Brahui (Elfenbein, 1998, 40a)

*χal-k-us=ka!*  
strike-PST-2.SG = 1.SG.OBL  
'You hit me!'

- b. Raχšānī Brahui (Ali & Kobayashi, 2024, mēhr-anā kaedī-k: 61)

*dā=tō kan-ā mehr=ē. num-ē*  
PROX.DEM = TOP 1.SG-GEN love = COP.PRS.3.SG 2.PL-OBJ  
*ti-f-ar-a=ta. padī d-ēv-a=ta.*  
give-NEG-PRS.1.SG-IPFV = 3.SG.OBL back take-PRS.1.SG-IPFV = 3.SG.OBL  
'She is my love. I will not give her to y'all. I will take her back.'

Typically, once a participant has been introduced in a conversation, subsequent references are by enclitics (provided they exist) unless there is need to focus, in which case, full pronouns or demonstratives are used. In elicitation, at least, co-occurrence of a full pronoun and an enclitic with the same referent within a clause is strongly dispreferred (Liaquat Ali, p.c.), but we did find one rare instance in a publication, reproduced here as (7).

(7) Kalātī Brahui

(Shazia et al., 2022, viii)

*ō-t-ē iray ēt-in-a=tā. yā*  
DIST.DEM-PL-OBJ bread give-PRS.1.PL-IPFV = 3.PL-OBL or  
*ma-t-av, ōχa pad čāe ēt-in-a=tā.*  
become-NEG.PST-3.SG that \_much after tea give-PRS.1.PL-IPFV = 3.PL-OBL

'We shall give them bread. Or if not, after that much, we shall give them tea.'

Attachment to non-finite nominal verb-forms are more difficult to interpret since they may be arguments or possessors. In the examples in (8), alternative "possessor" reading of each sentence is provided in parentheses. Indeed, in (8a), that might be the only valid underlying interpretation since otherwise the clitic would have to stand for a subject.

(8) Brahui

- a. Sarāwānī Brahui (Ali & Kobayashi, 2024, lāl malūk: 9'35)

*kun-ing=nā=tō* *mur mass.*  
eat-INF = 2.SG.OBL = TOP far become.PRS.PFV.3.SG

‘You are safe from being eaten (now). (Your being eaten is far for now.)’

- b. Sarāwānī Brahui (Ali & Kobayashi, 2024, šōhan-nā rāg: 8'59)

*bass-ur* *hall-ing-kin=ta.*  
come-PST.3.PL take-INF-BEN = 3.SG.OBL

‘They came to arrest him. (They came for his taking.)’

Sindhi agrees with Brahui in that argument uses mostly require attachment to finite verbs. However, since Sindhi has ergative-absolutive alignment in the perfect tenses like many Indo-Aryan languages, besides (oblique) objects (9a), agents may also be marked by weak pronouns under the right tense-aspect conditions (9b). The two uses are, however, morphologically distinct. As mentioned in §2.3, Sindhi distinguishes objective pronominal enclitics from ergative pronominal suffixes. This also means that both can occur on verbs simultaneously, in which case, object clitics follow the ergative suffixes (9c).

(9) Sindhi

- a. Lāṛī Sindhi

*mũ=vaṭā* *k<sup>h</sup>at pāhut=as.*  
1.SG.OBL=from letter reach.PFV = 3.SG.OBJ

‘He received a letter from me.’

- b. Lāṛī Sindhi

*k<sup>h</sup>ād<sup>h</sup>-ay,* *yā kōn<sup>h</sup>ā k<sup>h</sup>ād<sup>h</sup>-ay?*  
eat.PFV-2.SG.ERG or not eat.PFV-2.SG.ERG

‘Have you eaten or not?’

- c. Lāṛī Sindhi

*sūf* *ḍin-am=ās.*  
apple give.PFV-1.SG.ERG = 3.SG.OBJ

‘I gave him/her an apple.’

The functional distinction between the ergative weak pronouns and objective weak pronouns is clear. Ergative weak pronouns stand in for strong pronouns as agents of transitive verbs in the perfect tenses, while objective weak pronouns are used for objects and adjuncts, including, as we shall see, postpositional arguments. The reason we interpret the ergative set as suffixes is because they necessarily attach to the finite verb, and, as far as we have checked, cannot be separated from it, while the objective set is more loosely bound accepting potential non-verbal hosts as well. In addition, the ergative set appears to be bound more tightly to the verbal stem compared to the objective set even if we compare them solely by

how they attach post-verbally. In Sindhi, like in Hindi, in ergative constructions, there is object-agreement with the verb unless otherwise blocked by a flagged object. Presence of an ergative suffix, interestingly, is also a trigger for blocking of agreement, but this doesn't amount to default agreement; agreement morphology is simply dropped.

(10) Sindhi

a. Lāṛī Sindhi

*mũ*      *sũf*      *k<sup>h</sup>āḍ<sup>h</sup>-ō*.  
1.SG.OBL apple {M.SG} eat.PFV-M.SG

*sũf*      *k<sup>h</sup>āḍ<sup>h</sup>-am*.  
apple {M.SG} eat.PFV-1.SG.ERG

'I ate an apple.'

b. Lāṛī Sindhi

*mũ*      *māk<sup>h</sup>ī*      *k<sup>h</sup>āḍ<sup>h</sup>-ī*.  
1.SG.OBL honey {F.SG} eat.PFV-F.SG

*māk<sup>h</sup>ī*      *k<sup>h</sup>āḍ<sup>h</sup>-am*.  
honey {F.SG} eat.PFV-1.SG.ERG

'I ate honey.'

Notice that the verb-forms in the second in each pair of sentences (10a & 10b) are identical, not indexing  $\phi$ -features of the object, while in the absence of the ergative weak pronoun, we see clear object-agreement. As (11) shows, however, objective clitics do not suppress agreement morphology.

(11) Vičōlī Sindhi

(Jetley, 1964, pg. 300)

*hal-and-u=v*.  
go-FUT-3.M.SG = 2.PL.OBJ

'He will go with y'all.'

On the surface, in Balochi, it too looks like pronominal clitics marking oblique arguments attach to finite verbs at first glance. But careful probing shows that attachment is to the first element of the verbal complex, as in (12).

(12) Türkmenistani Raḡšānī Balochi

(Axenov, 2006, 88)

*āy-rā*      *nazzīk-ēn*      *āp-ā*      *nišān=ī*      *dāt*.  
DIST.DEM-OBJ near-ATTR water-OBL sign = 3.SG.OBL give.PST.3.SG

'He showed him the nearby water.'

This is still different than the pattern common in some Iranian languages of Iran where attachment is to the first element of the verb phrase (Mohammadirad, 2020), but one has to

reserve judgment for all of Balochi until there is available better cross-dialectal data, especially for the dialects in Iran. Interestingly, in some of the latter, Dabir-Moghaddam (2008) presents data showing the clitics are grammaticalizing as agreement markers akin to what is seen in some varieties of Laki and Sorani Kurdish (Taghipour & Kahnemuyipour, 2019; Akkuş et al., 2025) and in the Pamiri languages.

In neither Balochi nor Brahui is there pronominal stacking on verbs the way it is possible in Sindhi and other Indo-Aryan languages like Saraiki and Kashmiri (though, of course, the stacked weak pronouns belong in different sets). Nor can pronominal clitics on verbs mark anything besides their direct and indirect objects in Brahui. However, Brahui does have a strategy to mark benefactive, comitative, allative and other pronominal adjuncts in a strategy shared with Sindhi that allows clitics to be hosted on case-flags. This is the subject of the next section.

#### 4 Pronominal enclitics on floating flags

Without recourse to the theoretical complexities of a precise definition, in this paper, we use the term *flag* following Haspelmath (2019) for case-markers, whether they are analyzed as affixes or clitics or independent phonological words (adpositions), as long as they can license pronominal arguments. As we shall see, the morphemes in question are suffixes in Brahui and cannot stand on their own without a preceding host from which they cannot be split, clitics in Sindhi, and partially grammaticalized denominal postpositions in Balochi. *Flag* is, thus, a convenient cover term to refer to them all together, which we shall have need for. For Sindhi, we will also make use of *layering* terminology for the three diachronically<sup>23</sup> distinct *layers* of flags in Indo-Aryan languages identified by Masica (1993).

Unknown to other Indo-Aryan languages nearby with weak pronouns, in Sindhi, certain Layer 2 flags can host objective pronominal clitics and this is the only scenario when these flags do not need a substantival host preceding them. Thus, in (13), the second sentence has the same meaning as the first, but uses a pronominal enclitic on the dative flag =*k<sup>h</sup>ē*, which now needs no preceding host. Contrast, for example, Hindi =*kō*, which can never occur without a preceding host, or even Punjabi =*nū* and Saraiki =*kū* in languages with enclitic pronouns, but still do not support this construction.

(13) Lārī Sindhi

*hună*=*k<sup>h</sup>ē*                      *sūf*    *ḍin-am*.  
DEM.DIST.SG.OBL = DAT apple give.PFV-1.SG.ERG

*k<sup>h</sup>ē*=*s*                      *sūf*    *ḍin-am*.  
DAT = 3.SG.OBJ apple give.PFV-1.SG.ERG

<sup>23</sup>The distinction between layers is both diachronic and synchronically morphological, e.g., Layer 2 clitics show suspended affixation to (conjoined) noun phrases, while Layer 1 suffixes directly attach to the stem (and in languages like Hindi, effectively forming the stem). We don't go into any more discussion on this here as the layout is well-known to (at least) Indo-Aryanists from the influential book of Masica (1993), in Chapter 8 of which those unfamiliar may look.

‘I gave him/her an apple.’

Recall that these sentences are also equivalent in meaning to (9c), where the same objective clitic attaches to the verb. In that case, (=)*k<sup>h</sup>ē* doesn’t occur at all. The position of *k<sup>h</sup>ē=s* in the above sentence is not fixed and may be scrambled, but the crucial point is that it can occur utterance-initially.

The pragmatic consequences of word-order variation, or the difference between using *k<sup>h</sup>ē=s ... d̄in-am* (13) versus *d̄in-am=ās* (9c) are not yet clear, nor indeed the discursal frequency of use of each construction. Native-speaker intuition (Riaz) suggests these are equivalent, but subtle pragmatic differences, if any, are best studied from a diverse enough spoken corpus, which is currently non-existent for this language.

In our Sindhi data from the Lārī dialect, the most widely attested in this behavior is the dative (=)*k<sup>h</sup>ē*. Jetley (1964) and others note objective pronominal enclitics also attached to (=)*k<sup>h</sup>ā* ABL, (=)*sāṇ* COMM as well. The literary possessive *sand-* is unique in that its postpositional equivalent looks very different, =*ǰ-*.

(14) Vičōlī Sindhi (Jetley, 1964, pg. 320)

*sāṇǰ=n vañ!*  
COMM = 3.PL.OBJ go.IMP.2.SG

‘Go with him!’

In Brahui, case-marking flags cannot stand without a preceding host. They are true suffixes. However, there is still a parallel to the Sindhi construction. Brahui uses what Ali & Kobayashi (2024) call a *dummy pronoun*, *ī-*, which serves as the host for nominal case-markers to which then attach the pronominal enclitics (15).

(15) Brahui

a. Sarāwānī Brahui (Ali & Kobayashi, 2024, lāl malūk: 17’06)

*valdā dē tamm-ā yā šām tamm-ā, harārē ki*  
then day fall-PST.PFV.3.SG or night fall-PST.PFV.3.SG where.REL COMP  
*pā-s bar-ēn-a ī-ā=nē.*  
tell-SBJV.2.SG come-PRS.1.PL-IPFV DUMMY-ALL = 2.SG.OBL

‘Whether day breaks or night falls, wherever you tell us, we shall come to you.’

b. Sarāwānī Brahui (Ali & Kobayashi, 2024, lāl malūk: 17’06)

*kasar-ā ilum-k halk-ur ī-kin=ta*  
road-ALL brother-NOM.PL take-PST.PFV.3.PL DUMMY-BEN = 3.SG.OBL  
*hullī-s.*  
horse-INDF

‘The brothers acquired a horse for him on the way.’

c. Sarāwānī Brahui (Ali & Kobayashi, 2024, šōhān-nā rāg: 10’37)

*rāg-vālā*      *ambal=ham tudd=ē*  
drama-PROPR friend=too together = COP.PRS.3.SG  
*ī-tō=tā.*  
DUMMY-COMM = 3.PL.OBL

‘The drama man was also with them.’

In one example, the dummy is attested with a full pronoun, but this is likely a secondary extension by analogy as this variety lacks first-person plural enclitics. It doesn’t look like this pattern is at all widespread among native-speakers.

(16) Sarāwānī Brahui (Ali & Kobayashi, 2024, *lāl malūk*: 17’05)

*nan-ā*      *laškar jaṅg kē-k*      *ī-tō*      (=)*nan-ā.*  
1.PL-GEN troop fight do-PRS.IPFV.3.SG DUMMY-COMM (=)1.PL-GEN

‘Our husbands will scold us (... fight with us).’

Given that attachment of pronominal enclitics to flags detached from nominal cases isn’t attested in other Indo-Aryan (nor Dravidian) languages, we speculate it may be a contact feature arising in the region, but details of this contact needs sketched out. Before suggesting a possible pathway, we briefly look at a surface parallel elsewhere in Dravidian. The family-wide situation in Iranic and Indo-Aryan was already briefly touched on in §2.

No Dravidian language other than Brahui has a system of pronominal clitics, but object-indexing on verbs is famously known in the Kūic<sup>24</sup> subgroup of the South-Central Dravidian languages. In these languages, the presence of any first- or second-person non-nominative clausal participant, including direct and indirect objects, possessors (17), experiencers and postpositional complements (even if ellipted), obligatorily triggers agreement on the clause-heading finite verb by a suffix Steever (1993) labels *transition particle* (TP).

(17) Pengo (Steever, 1993, from Burrow & Bhattacharya, 1970)

*āneṅ*      *nī*      *keydiṅ mrīn-ja-t-aṅ.*  
1.SG.NOM 2.SG.GEN hand press-TP-PST-1.SG

‘I pressed your hand.’

Although one of the many allomorphs of this suffix is *-ta*, resembling the Brahui third-person pronominal enclitics, they index other persons, and Steever (1993) has shown that the present-day transition particle arose from contraction of a compound verb construction with *\*tar-/tā-* ‘give to 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person’ accounting well for the observed distribution.<sup>25</sup> Historically, this was the finite verb in the clause and, therefore, inflectional material today follow the transition particle. It was never a clitic to the entire verbal complex.

To explain the shared pattern in Sindhi and Brahui with regard to pronominal enclitics attaching to floating flags, we turn to Balochi. In Balochi, both pre- and postpositions

<sup>24</sup>This is the group made up of dialects of Kūi, Kūvi, Maṅḍa and Pengo, all spoken in eastern India.

<sup>25</sup>This verb continues in Brahui as *tir-/ēt-* but means ‘give’ without any person-restriction.

exist, but the postpositions are etymologically oblique-marked nouns while prepositions are an older layer mostly continuing Indo-Iranic Lokalpartikeln, as in other modern Iranic languages except Ossetic (Şahingöz & Basu, 2025). The general pattern is that Balochi varieties in Iran show more active use of prepositions while Pakistani varieties have more extensive use of postpositions.<sup>26</sup> In the Makurānī varieties represented in the standard of Jahani (2019), pronominal enclitics are allowed as objects of postpositions, but not of prepositions.<sup>27</sup> E.g., *poštā* is etymologically the oblique case of *pošt* ‘back (body-part),’ but used postpositionally, it means ‘behind,’ and governs a noun or pronoun in the genitive, and in (18), its complement is a pronominal enclitic postposed to it.

(18) Iranian Makurānī Balochi (Jahani, 2019, pg. 90)

*pošt-ā=eš*                      *čēr bay!*  
back-OBL = 3.PL.OBL hide become.IMP.2.SG

‘Hide behind them!’

Whatever the situation with prepositions may be, attachment to postpositions is simply a natural extension of the possessive usage since postpositions hosting pronominal clitics are etymologically (oblique) nouns possessed by their complements. In Sindhi, this is not so (at least not currently) since Layer 2 case-flags are purely functional, they have no lexical content of their own. In Brahui, this is even more so because case-markers are true suffixes there. Even for possession, clitics attach after case- and number-suffixes. Thus, it is in Balochi that postpositional attachment arises most naturally. Sindhi and Brahui possibly calqued this construction. In the case of Sindhi, oddly, detaching the otherwise bound case-flags from needed substantive hosts and in Brahui compensated by the use of a dummy pronoun to latch the case-endings to.

Of course, this diachronic trajectory is but hypothetical at this stage. There is no historical record of Brahui before the present-day, and its isolated position within Dravidian means that even comparative analyses are unlikely to yield any clue. We are more fortunate with Indo-Aryan, however, and there is need to examine pre-modern texts in Sindhi (and Saraiki) to determine how pronominal clitics, if attested, behaved historically. Also needed is more cross-dialectal data from both Balochi and Sindhi in order to clearly map out language-internal differences in weak pronoun usage.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented a preliminary study on the diachrony and usage of weak pronouns in Sindhi, Brahui and Balochi, and suggested plausible evidence of a micro-

<sup>26</sup>Native-speaker Maryam Jamali informs us that in her (southern) subvariety of the Sulaymānī dialect, even inherited prepositions like *až* ‘from’ have started being used postpositionally within the last 3 generations.

<sup>27</sup>In Koroshi, attachment to both postpositions and prepositions is attested. An example of the latter is given by Nourzaei et al. (2015) on pg. 35. However, the preposition in question, *az* ‘from,’ is borrowed from Persian, and whether this is truly prepositional hosting or special behavior attributable to the non-native origin of the host requires more data to judge.

Sprachbund centered at the Sindh–Balochistan border. Needless to say, this is hardly the last word on this topic and much more needs to be done. In particular, we have only pointed out in broad terms the main functions of weak pronouns in these languages. A thorough exploration of the pragmatics of usage of weak pronouns vis-à-vis their full counterparts remains a desideratum, as does an understanding of exact attachment parameters. This is especially true of Sindhi where multiple permutations of cliticization are possible with as-of-yet unknown difference in meaning. A sizable spoken corpus is sorely needed for such a study, however. Also needed is research on person-number restrictions on co-occurrence of the different weak pronoun sets. Indeed, in our estimation, some of the weak pronouns are falling out of use. This attenuation, no doubt, varies by dialect as well, and cross-dialectal variation needs to be taken into account for all languages, especially Balochi, where it is significant, but also Sindhi, where, in spite of a little more uniformity otherwise, one of the main variables of regionalism is in the use of weak pronouns.

The problem of language contact also needs more attention. One of the limitations of the present study is that Balochi, Sindhi and Brahui data from different dialects are pooled together to make an argument for contact, while a stronger case can be made by primarily looking specifically at regions of high multilingualism. This, for example, is the case of Sulaymānī Balochi, on which ongoing work with native-speaker Maryam Jamali has already revealed heavy influence of Sindhi, including direct morphological copying.

We hope that the present study serves to invite further attention to this region, hitherto largely ignored in both Indological and Iranistic linguistic research. Sindhi remains the least studied of the larger Indo-Aryan languages despite having features seen nowhere else in its family, of interest to each of descriptivists, theoreticians and diachronicists.

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<sup>28</sup>Other data sources (primarily for tables) include Barbera (2005) for Mīnābī, Barbera (2023) for Southern Bashkardi, Gholami & Pouladi (2024) for Zoroastrian Dari, Hook (1987) for Poguli, Nourzaei et al. (2015) for Koroshi, Bashir et al. (2019) for Saraiki. The rest of the tabled data are either cited in-text, or (re)produced from memory (Sanskrit, Avestan).

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