Introduction

1.1 Ergativity, an Enigma in Semitic Linguistics?

Although ergativity is a well-known cross-linguistic phenomenon attested in language families such as Austronesian, Basque, Caucasian and Eskimo-Aleut, it is unexpected to encounter it in a Semitic language. In traditional terms (e.g. Dixon 1994), ergativity is defined as the arrangement where the subject (s) of an intransitive clause, such as *I* in *I died*, and the patient/object (p/o) of a transitive clause, such as *me* in *He killed me*, are treated in the same way, yet different from the agent (A) in the transitive construction, such as *He* in *He killed me*.

An example of ergative inflection in a Semitic language can be found in the Aramaic dialect spoken by the Jews of Sulaymaniyah (known to Kurds as Silêmanî) in northeastern Iraq (Khan 2007a, 154). This is illustrated by (1) below, where the noun *baxtâké* ‘the woman’ is cross-referenced using the same suffixal person form *-a* in both clauses, but it does not have the same syntactic function. In (1a), *baxtâké* is the subject of the intransitive verb *m-y-l* ‘die’ (related to *m-y-t* in other dialects), while, in (1b), it is the object of the transitive verb *q-ṭ-l* ‘kill’. Moreover, the subject of the transitive verb in (1b) is marked with an entirely different suffix, i.e. *-le*.

(1) Jewish dialect of Sulaymaniyah (NE Iraq; Khan 2007a, 154)

- a. *baxtâké mil-a*
 the.woman die_{PFV}-she
 ‘The woman died.’
- b. *gorâké baxtâké qṭl-a-le*
 the.man the.woman kill_{PFV}-her-he
 ‘The man killed (lit. her) the woman.’

This ergative marking of subject and object contrasts with the better-known accusative systems found in the most widely studied European languages such as German and Latin, but also well-known Semitic languages such as Akkadian and Classical Arabic. In these languages, the verb agrees with the subject of both the transitive and intransitive and the noun is inflected by the nominative case, while the object is singled out using the accusative case.

The ergative alignment in this example from Aramaic is expressed by means of verbal agreement (-*a*, -*le*). Moreover, it is conditioned morphologically by the inflectional base, generally referred to as the Past base, that is historically a resultative participle, e.g. **qṭil-* ‘killed’ (e.g. Khan 2007a). It is never manifested in the imperfective present (or past) constructions that do not have this historical basis.

Indeed, there is a particular transitive construction in the eastern varieties of Aramaic, known as the *qṭil-l-* or *šmiʿl-* construction, which has puzzled Semitists for a long time. The example below from the Aramaic dialect spoken by the Jews of ʿAmedia (Kurdish Amêdî, NW Iraq) may illustrate this. The first suffixal person index -*i* agrees with the object (*ʿanna gure* ‘these men’), while the suffixal index -*la* agrees with the subject.

- (2) ʿe *baxta* *šmiʿl-i-la* *ʿanna gure*
 DEM:FS woman:FS hear_{PFV}-3PL-3FS DEM:PL man:PL
 ‘The woman heard these men.’ (Hoberman 1983, 132)

At face value, this appears to be nothing special. And yet, the same suffixes occur in the corresponding clause in the present tense marking the opposite syntactic function:

- (3) *ʿanna gure* *k-šamʿ-i-la* ʿe *baxta*
 DEM:PL man:PL IND-hear_{IPFV}-3PL-3FS DEM:FS woman:FS
 ‘These men hear the woman.’ (based on Hoberman 1983, 132)

Here, the first suffix -*i* expresses the agent (*ʿanna gure* ‘these men’) and the second suffix -*la* the object. It is striking that the functions of the morphologically identical suffixes are inverted. The construction in example (2) typically expresses the perfective past, while example (3) represents the syntax of imperfective constructions. The main morphological difference between the two is the inflectional base *šmiʿ-* (perfective of *šmʿ* ‘hear’) versus *šamʿ-* (imperfective of *šmʿ* ‘hear’).

This alternation and inversion of argument encoding are reminiscent of the active and passive voice. Early grammatical descriptions treat the perfective transitive construction as a passive form with an active sense (for example, Rhétoré 1912, 83; Polotsky 1979, 208). In a passive, the patient (or undergoer) becomes the subject, the verbal form is modified, and the agent (or actor) is not expressed as the subject. To quote Polotsky (*ibid.*):

Since the inverse function of the identical suffixes concerns the roles of actor and undergoer and is contingent upon a formal difference between

the bases ... it is in these that the cause must be sought. The interchange between the suffixes must be the effect of the bases themselves contrasting with one another in respect of their Voice ... we should have to infer that the bases ... express the contrast of Active vs. Passive. The passive character ... provides the key to the whole construction.

Despite this strong language (“we should have to infer”, “the passive character” “provides the key”), such explanations have recently been abandoned in favor of the so-called concept of split-ergativity.¹ In such a split, the subject (s) in an intransitive construction is treated the same as either the agent (A) or the patient (P) in the transitive construction depending on grammatical or semantic properties such as imperfective or perfective aspect. No other hitherto known Semitic language, however, has been convincingly shown to evince ergativity (Waltisberg 2002; Hasselbach 2013, 55–65), and most of Aramaic itself unmistakably records a nominative-accusative system for three millennia, like all other Semitic languages. If ergative(-like) properties are claimed to have found their way into one of the most unlikely places, this raises fundamental questions of how and why. First, however, we need to establish a coherent framework to properly identify ergative alignment alongside other alignment types in the dialectal microvariation of modern Aramaic.

1.2 Neo-Aramaic Dialects in the Land of Rivers

Aramaic is a subbranch of the Semitic language family, closely related to Hebrew and Arabic. People may know it as one of the languages of Jesus of Nazareth and parts of the Old Testament, e.g. sections in the books of Daniel and Ezra. The language was the official *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East, reaching at its height an area stretching from Egypt into modern-day Afghanistan. Aramaic is also enshrined as a literary vehicle of Judaism and Christianity. Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, for instance, is a principal language of the Talmud and closely related to modern Aramaic. Most Aramaic literature comes to us through Syriac, the liturgical language of several Christian churches in the Middle East and beyond. Early translations of the Gospels and the Old Testament were written in Syriac—the standard Syriac Bible version is known as the *Pšitta*.

¹ See Section 2.3. on the methodology for determining alignment patterns and Chapter 3 for a definition and detailed discussion of so-called split ergativity.

The Aramaic spoken today, called Neo-Aramaic (also known as ‘Neo-Syriac’, ‘Sureth’, ‘Chaldean’, or ‘Assyrian’²), comprises pockets of an (extremely) endangered group of minority languages spoken by primarily Jewish and Christian communities originating in the Middle East. The vast majority of speakers are found dispersed around the globe.

Although the internal classification of Neo-Aramaic languages is far from problematic and presumably a dialect continuum (Kim 2008, 2010), certain clusters or subgroups can be discerned. The dialectology of Neo-Aramaic is further complicated by the speaker’s religious affiliation (Christian, Jewish, Mandaean, Muslim), partly by diglossia (higher literary vs. lower local code), and by contact with neighboring non-Aramaic languages (e.g. Noorlander 2014). Most speakers have left their traditional territory for political and economical reasons in this or the previous century. Many of these dialects are therefore endangered or have already gone extinct in the worldwide dispersion of speakers.

Scholars generally distinguish between two major groups of Neo-Aramaic languages (Hoberman 1989, 5), namely:

- **Western Neo-Aramaic** (Christian/Muslim, SW Syria)
- **Eastern Neo-Aramaic:**
 - *Central Neo-Aramaic* (Christian, SE Turkey, NW Syria)
 - *Northeastern Neo-Aramaic* (Jewish/Christian, SE Turkey, N Iraq, NW Iran)
 - *Southeastern Neo-Aramaic* or *Neo-Mandaic* (Mandaean, SW Iran)

This book concentrates on Central and Northeastern Neo-Aramaic which are typologically closest to one another. The Western group is confined to relatively small Christian and Muslim communities in Syria, of which Ma’lula in the anti-Lebanon mountain range is particularly known for its Christian Aramaic speakers. The Neo-Mandaic varieties are mainly confined to older speakers adhering to the Mandaean religion in or from the cities Ahvaz (provincial capital) and Khorramshahr in the Iranian province Khuzestan (Häberl 2009). While Western Neo-Aramaic does share certain properties with the Central varieties and Neo-Mandaic, in turn, with the Northeastern ones, both Western Neo-Aramaic and Neo-Mandaic are typologically closer to pre-modern Aramaic and, hence, will not be treated in this book.

2 This term is not to be confused with the ancient, extinct Assyrian dialect of Akkadian, a distinct Semitic language.

1.2.1 *Above the Tigris: Northeastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) Dialect Bundle*

With about 150 dialects (Khan 2011), Northeastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) is by far the largest subgroup. Although the internal differentiation of NENA is to some extent comparable to that of a language family and many dialects are not mutually intelligible, it is a common practice to speak of NENA in terms of dialects. NENA constitutes a notoriously complex dialect continuum, which itself is part of a larger continuum that also includes Neo-Aramaic dialects in Tur 'Abdin (see § 1.2.2). These dialects are spoken by Jewish (J.) and Christian (C.) communities in West and Northwest Iran (Iranian Kurdistan and Iranian Azerbaijan), North Iraq (Dohuk, Arbel, Sulaymaniyyah) north of the river Tigris and in Southeast Turkey (Hakkari, Van, Bohtan), many of whom have fled the area in the previous century. They are primarily named after the town where they are or used to be spoken with the additional specification of the religious affiliations of the speakers, since the dialects of the Jewish and Christian communities from the same town could differ greatly. Map 1 below displays the locations of several towns known to have (had) NENA-speaking communities at least in the previous century, whose dialects will be discussed in this monograph. The names of the towns are generally Aramaic and do not necessarily reflect their equivalents in other regional languages.³ The Christian varieties in Bohtan (Southeast Turkey) and the Jewish varieties east of the Greater Zab river (Northeast Iraq and Northwest Iran) reveal particularly complex alignment types not found in the core NENA area.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of new nations such as Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey and the beginning of the Kurdish struggle for autonomy, the Aramaic speakers found themselves largely in the cross-fire between Kurds and central governments and left their traditional territory. Most of the Jewish community left the region in the 1950s and settled in the young state of Israel. During the First World War most Christians fled present-day Turkey, where an ethnic cleansing occurred in 1915. Since the 1960s the exodus of the Christian community began, taking refuge in Europe, the US, Canada, Australia and South America. Following the American invasion and occupation of Iraq, the instability in the area reached a catastrophic climax in the turmoil of the Syrian Civil War and Islamic State's (*Daesh's*) reign of terror in Syria and Iraq, until Islamic State was ultimately defeated in the battles of Mosul (July, 2017) and Raqqa (October, 2017). Many Christians chose to return and remain in Iraq, although the material damage alone is enormous.

Thus, due to ongoing displacement in the Middle East and beyond, the dialectology of NENA is for a large part a historical reconstruction of the once vibrant tapestry of variation before 1915.

3 See Table 1 at the end of this chapter for an overview of the placenames relevant to this book.

NENA dialects display a staggering degree of diversity on every level. Certain major clusters along the dialect continuum can be distinguished. It is most convenient to approach this in terms of core and periphery. Christian dialects reach further into the west in southeastern Turkey, while Jewish varieties beyond the Greater Zab river scatter further into the east well into western Iran.

1.2.1.1 Core and Peripheral Christian Varieties

The NENA-speaking Christian communities belong to several denominations, including the Chaldean Catholic Church (in communion with Rome) or the (Assyrian) Church of the East (independent), both East Syriac traditions of Christianity. Some of them, particularly on the Nineveh Plains, also belong to the West Syriac Church, mainly Catholic, but also Orthodox. There are also Protestant movements, especially among the migrant communities in the West. There have been numerous Protestant missions in the region since the 19th century.

The Christian Neo-Aramaic dialects are also known as Chaldean or Assyrian. Speakers themselves refer to their languages as *surəṭ* (< **surāʾī* 'Syriac') and dialectal variants thereof, i.e. the language of the *suraye* '(Syrian) Christians'. Their language is an essential part of their ethnic-religious identity.

The NENA-speaking area encompasses roughly the area north of the Tigris in Northern Iraq, with the Greater Zab river flowing in between. It stretches into the Hakkari, Van, Siirt and Şırnak provinces of SE Turkey and West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan provinces of W Iran. This includes major towns in Iraq, such as Zakho, Dohok (Duhok), Alqosh and Arbel (Arbil/Erbil, Kurd. Hewlêr), in Iranian Azerbaijan, such as Urmi (or Urmia) and in Iranian Kurdistan, such as Sanandaj (or Sena/Sine). Each town, however, used to have its own dialect, often with a tribal association. There were many villages and clans in SE Turkey, most of which left the region after 1915, including tribes such as Țyari, Tkuma (Tkhumnaye), Baz(naye), Jilu (Jilwaye), Gawar (Gawernaye), Timurnaye etc. Many of these Christian communities found refuge along the Khabur Valley in NW Syria (Talay 2008, 2009) or fled to Northern Iraq, the Caucasus or outside of West Asia. NENA used to be spoken in the Bohtan region, where Artun (Kurd. Hertevin, Turk. Ekindüzü) and Borb-Ruma alongside the Judi dialects (Sinha 2000) represent the most northwest dialects on the map. There is a southern periphery of Christian communities on the Nineveh Plains near Mosul, such as Alqosh and Baghdeda (Qaraqosh, Khan 2002a), while the city Başkale (Bashqala) constituted the northernmost outpost in Turkey.⁴

4 See also Maps 3–6 in Chapter 4 for further details.

1.2.1.2 Crossing The Greater Zab River: Trans-Zab Jewish

As far as we know, virtually all Jews have moved to Israel, where they identify as *kurdim* (lit. ‘Kurds’) speaking *kurdi* (lit. ‘Kurdish’) as Jews from the regions of the Kurds. Concerning the Jewish varieties, the Greater Zab river in Iraq functions as a natural border separating western dialects such as ‘Amedia (or ‘Amadiya in Arabic, Amêdî in Kurdish) Zakho and Dohok in the Duhok province of Iraq from the other dialects to the east.⁵ These communities generally identify themselves as speakers of *lishana deni* ‘our language’. The Jewish community in Barzan north of the Great Zab also belongs to this group (Mutzafi 2002a), so that the dividing line continues to the northeast, even though the Great Zab flows in a curve to the northwest.⁶

The Jewish dialects to the east of the Greater Zab, including Arbel, Rustaqa and Rewanduz stretching up north to Urmi and Salmas, are accordingly known as *Trans-Zab Jewish* (Mutzafi 2008b) as opposed to Western Jewish communities (*lishana deni*) lying to the west of the Greater Zab as well as the settlement Barzan (*Barzani*). The Trans-Zab Jewish dialect bundle differs greatly from the Christian and other Jewish varieties and is also internally rather diverse.

1.2.2 Below the Tigris: Dialects of Ṭur ‘Abdin

Further west one finds the dialects spoken by Syriac-Orthodox Christians from the region Ṭur ‘Abdin (Mardin province, Jastrow 1985; Ritter 1990; Waltisberg 2016), hence known as ‘Ṭuroyo’, literally ‘mountainous’ (after *ṭuro* ‘mountain’). Because of the close connection with Syriac Christianity, the language is also called *Suryoyo* or *Surayt* by speakers (lit. ‘Syriac Christian’). Ṭuroyo forms a larger subgroup called Central Neo-Aramaic together with Mlaḥsô (Lice, Diyarbakır province, Jastrow 1994), which is now extinct. Nowadays most speakers of Ṭuroyo are to be found in Northern Europe (e.g. Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands).

Mlaḥsô and Ṭuroyo share a few features that distinguish them from most of NENA.⁷ A salient phonological feature, for example, is the vowel /o/ where most of NENA would normally have /a/, as in Ṭuroyo *ḥmoro*, Mlaḥsô *ḥmorô* ‘donkey’ against NENA *xmara*.⁸ Within the dialectal variation of Ṭuroyo, the urban dialect of Midyat (*Madyoyo*) is particularly divergent from the rural dialects,

5 Much like Northern and Central Kurdish (Noorlander 2014).

6 See Map 2 at the beginning of Chapter 3.

7 See Jastrow (1985, xvii–xviii, xxi–xxiii), Kim (2008, 507–508).

8 C. Borb-Ruma (Fox 2009) and Jinnet (Noorlander field notes) are interesting exceptions in NENA, e.g. Borb-Ruma *xmora*, Jinnet *ḥmora*.

the best known of which is the more archaic dialect of Miden (*Mədwoyo*) (Jastrow 1985, 1992). This may range from subtle differences in phonology to more drastic distinctions in morphology and morphosyntax.

1.2.3 *Writing a Spoken Language: Sociolinguistic Factors*

NENA dialects are mainly known to us through the documentation of spoken varieties. From the 16th century onwards, speakers across space and time have continually made efforts to commit Neo-Aramaic to writing. Both Jewish and Christian communities in Iraqi Kurdistan developed a written literary tradition during the Ottoman period. A manuscript culture emerged on the basis of oral literature. This involves Jewish literature written in Hebrew script in Nerwa dated to at least the 16th century (Sabar 1976) and Christian literature, mainly poetry, written in Syriac script in Alqosh dated to at least the 17th century and perhaps even earlier (Mengozi 2002a–b, 2011). These early written traditions primarily concern Bible translations and commentaries and other types of religious works.

Since the 19th century other written literary Christian varieties have been passed down to us in different forms and under different circumstances. Literary Christian Urmi is a case in point. In the 19th century up to the First World War a written form based on the local dialect of Urmi flourished among Christians inspired by missionary activities from various Christian denominations, producing printed publications of all sorts: not only Bible translations, but also hagiography, folktales, school textbooks, periodicals etc. It became the basis for literary developments ever since in Urmi and other Christian communities (Odisho 1988; Murre-van den Berg 1999).

Literacy among speakers increased due to migrations to larger cities. A literary revival arose among educated Christian speakers in Iraqi cities such as Kirkuk, Baghdad and Baṣra, between the 1920s and 1960s. These factors contributed to the koineization of urban Christian varieties, so that an Iraqi *koiné* based on literary Urmi emerged (Odisho 1988), which now predominates among Assyrian speakers as *lišana* ⁺*sapraya* 'literary language', which in the eyes of many is more prestigious (⁺*səpya* 'pure').

Although publications among Iraqi and Iranian Jews were also to be found on a smaller scale during these periods (e.g. Rees 2008), such supradialectal phenomena or levelling of dialectal differences up to koineization are not known for Jewish communities.

In contrast to NENA, a literary tradition did not develop among Turoyo speakers, although missionary activities did inspire writing on a small scale in the early 19th century (Heinrichs 1990) and orientalist collected sample texts in the Western Syriac alphabet in the last decades of the same century (Bellino

and Mengozzi 2016).⁹ There have been only recent attempts to commit Turoyo to writing on a larger scale using a Latin-based alphabet among communities in Sweden beginning in the 1980s. Recently, an online study program (surayt.com) has been launched under the coordination of Shabo Talay that uses both a Latin-based alphabet and the Western Syriac script.

Because of migrations, especially due to the havoc wreaked by *Daesh*, considerable dialect mixing has taken place among Christian communities in the cities. Moreover, the spread of literary varieties, increasing standardization and rising nationalistic sentiments have led to the levelling of dialectal differences. This levelling is partly inspired by a growing incentive to unify and purify the language of foreign influence. Most conspicuous is the arbitrary relexification of the language, where more authentic Aramaic lexemes from the Syriac language of the church are felt to be needed to replace those of ultimately non-Aramaic origin.

1.2.4 *Converging Neighbors: Areal Factors*

Neo-Aramaic cannot be completely disentangled from neighboring languages in the area. As a minority speech community, Neo-Aramaic speakers have faced the daily need of multilingualism. They are at least bilingual and thus, alongside their local Aramaic dialects, some of them speak not only local varieties of Arabic (including Syria and Iranian Khuzestan) and Kurdish (e.g. Kurmanji, Badini, Sorani, Mukri) but also Armenian and Azeri Turkish (e.g. Garbell 1965; Khan 2016). Also, influence from official languages can be expected, such as Persian in the east, Turkish in the west along with Arabic, permeating the area either indirectly as the cultural vehicle of Islam or more directly as the spoken language in the south (cf. Noorlander 2014) and, indirectly, also Russian and English. In particular, Kurdish-Aramaic bilingualism has been prevalent among Eastern Neo-Aramaic speakers, facilitating the recruitment and deep and lasting integration of local Kurdish elements into their Neo-Aramaic speech (Chyet 1995; Noorlander 2014). There has also been considerable influence from Arabic-Aramaic bilingualism, particularly in the cities of Iraq and Tur 'Abdin as well as Syria and the Nineveh Plains nearby Mosul—also referred to as the Mosul Plain.

Another complicating factor is that due to migrations to major cities in West Asia, Israel, the Caucasus or the West, Neo-Aramaic speakers, especially heritage speakers, regularly find themselves in situations where the dominant language may be entirely different from their original homeland. Jewish speakers

9 I hereby thank the anonymous reviewer for referring me to this publication.

(*kurdim*) in Israel, for example, are rapidly undergoing language attrition and shifting to Israeli Hebrew. Even migrations within the Middle East can result in mixing of dialects or interaction with dialects not contiguous to their original home town.

Despite these complicating factors of language endangerment and areal convergence, we will approach Neo-Aramaic somewhat artificially in isolation and mainly from an internal perspective, while leaving a complete systematic overview of the morphosyntactic parallels between Aramaic and its neighbors a future endeavor. Since contact with non-Aramaic speakers has been a daily practice for Neo-Aramaic speakers, all variation is presumed also to be potentially relevant for the relationship between Neo-Aramaic and neighboring languages, for which further documentation of especially Kurdish is required.

1.5 Previous Approaches to Alignment in Eastern Neo-Aramaic

1.5.1 *Early Scholarship: Passive or Possessive*

Previous synchronic approaches to Eastern Neo-Aramaic alignment have been enveloped in origin debates.¹⁰ Scholars have approached the *qṭil l-* or *šmi' l-* construction as illustrated in (2) at the beginning of this chapter from the perspective of voice, i.e. a passive¹¹ ('These men were heard by the woman'), or the perspective of possession, i.e. predicative possessors ('The woman has these men heard'). The development was considered parallel to the so-called *manā kartam* construction in Old Persian (e.g. Kutscher 1969) and the auxiliary HAVE combined with a perfect participle in well-known European languages such as Germanic and Romance.¹² While this book is not intended to be a diachronic study of Aramaic syntax, it is evident the typology of alignment in Neo-Aramaic is a problem that is entrenched in the evolution of the Aramaic verbal system. The historical situation for which we have indirect evidence through Late Antique Aramaic languages like Syriac, Classical Mandaic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic was considerably complex (Noorlander forthcoming). The following examples serve to illustrate the historical background and to help understand the early approaches to Neo-Aramaic clause structure. Historical hallmarks of the original constructions arguably linger on in modern

10 Cf. Doron and Khan (2010).

11 See, for example, Nöldeke (1868, 220, 317), Polotsky (1979, 1996), Khan (1999, 94–95, 2002a, 92), Mengozzi (2002b, 43). Cf. Bar-Asher (2008, 2011), Loesov (2012).

12 See, for example, Kutscher (1969), Hopkins (1989a), Goldenberg (1992), Rubin (2005, 30–31); cf. Kirtchuk (2016).

dialects.¹³ The inflection of the modern Aramaic verb as given in the beginning of this chapter has no diachronic basis in the prefix- or suffix-conjugation (e.g. *ta-ktob* ‘She writes’ or *katab-at* ‘She wrote’) as in closely related Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Arabic. Indeed, these essential components of the West Semitic verbal system have been completely replaced by originally non-finite constructions with a concomitant constructional shift at least historically conditioned by aspect and argument orientation (or diathesis). This pervasive, rigorous restructuring is without parallel among the modern Semitic languages (Hopkins 2005; Gzella 2015, 45). Periphrastic constructions already undergoing increasing grammaticalization in pre-modern Aramaic gave rise to entirely new inflectional paradigms.¹⁴

Historically, verbal inflection comprises the direct reflexes of active and resultative participial predicates of the apophonic pattern **CāCiC*, such as **kātib-* ‘writing’ and **C(a)CīC* such as **k(a)tīb-* ‘written’ in pre-modern Aramaic, which served as the basis for the imperfective and perfective verbal forms in Neo-Aramaic respectively. The variation in alignment is first and foremost morphologically conditioned by this particular verbal inflectional base¹⁵—which we can refer to as *qṭil-* after the verb *q-ṭ-l* ‘kill’—that is historically a resultative participle—e.g. **qṭil-* ‘killed’. The distinct morphosyntax in a given dialect is ultimately a reflex of the diachronic development of this resultative participle.

There are two sets of person markers that are crucial in Neo-Aramaic morphosyntax. They occur at least in perfective past constructions similarly to the imperfective present. Their usage differs significantly across Neo-Aramaic languages. These two sets of person affixes that provide the finite morphology for these historically verbal adjectives have distinct origins. The first set will be referred to by the term ‘E-suffixes’ in the present study. It continues diachronically both participial agreement in number and gender (e.g. fsg. *-ā* and mpl. *-īn*) and enclitic personal pronouns (e.g. 1sg. *-nā*, 1pl. *-ḥnan*). We can still observe, to some extent, in Neo-Aramaic that person markers were added to declined participles through enclitic pronouns (cp. Mlaḥso *domx-o-no* ‘I (f.) sleep, am sleeping’ and Syriac *dāmḵ-ā-nā* ‘id.’), which are ultimately phonetically reduced forms of post-predicate independent pronouns (Syriac *dāmḵ-ā-nā* < **dāmik-ā*

13 See Coghill (2016) and Noorlander (forthcoming) for more detailed discussions regarding the diachronic development of alignment in Neo-Aramaic. Cf. Fassberg (2018).

14 Cf. Noorlander and Stilo (2015).

15 On this point, see already Polotsky (1979, 208). Haig (2008, 9) makes a similar remark regarding Iranian.

ʾanā a variant of *ʾanā dāmīk-ā). Being verbal adjectives, the participles used to inflect for gender and number like predicative adjectives (e.g. *šappīr-* ‘beautiful, pleasant’, fsg. *šappīr-ā*, mpl. *šappīr-īn* etc.). Synchronically, however, such participles have lost all characteristics of adjectives in Eastern Neo-Aramaic.

The second set, generally designated ‘L-suffixes’, continues diachronically enclitic dative person markers characterized by the originally dative preposition *l-* denoting recipients, beneficiaries, possessors, experiencers and other indirectly affected participants as well as subject coreferential arguments. A historically stronger link between the preposition *l-* and the L-suffixes as well as its usage as a dative may also be observed in Neo-Aramaic. Synchronically, the L-suffixes are not prepositional in nature and behave like verbal affixes, but they may still interact with the preposition.¹⁶

By way of illustration, the active participles ʾazel ‘going’ of ʾzl ‘go’ in (4a) and ʾākel- ‘eating’ of ʾkl ‘eat’ in the Syriac example (4b) below inflect like predicative adjectives and take agreement with the subject and agent. The ending *-īn* in (4b), for instance, expresses masculine plural agreement with the agent *kalbē* ‘dogs’. It is the precursor of the E-suffix *-i* in Neo-Aramaic. The dative person form *l-hōn* ‘them’ in (4b) expresses the pronominal object, related to the L-suffixes in Neo-Aramaic. Full nominal objects could also be differentially marked by this preposition *l-*.

(4) Syriac (Aramaic, Northwest Semitic)¹⁷

a. *l-aykā* ʾazel-Ø-way-t mār-Ø
to-where going-MS-were-2SG master.of:MS-my
‘Where were you_{sg} going to, my lord?’ (3rd c. Wright 1871, 289.23)

b. ʾākl-īn l-hōn kalbē
eating-3MPL DAT-MPL dogs:MPL
‘Dogs eat them.’ (3rd c. Drijvers 1964, 50.24–25)

Intransitive subject-oriented resultative constructions are treated indistinctly from this. The resultative participle ʾazil- of the verb ʾzl ‘go’ in example (4c) below takes feminine singular agreement *-ā* with the subject.

16 See Noorlander (2021) for a detailed discussion of the use of L-suffixes and the preposition *l-* in Neo-Aramaic to mark possessors and experiencers.

17 For the sake of a uniform transcription of Syriac, I follow Beyer’s transcription of the *Odes of Solomon* in Lattke (2005, XIII–XXXVII).

- c. *l-aykā ʿazīl-ā mārāt-kōn*
 to-where gone-FS mistress.of:FS-your_{MPL}
 ‘Where is your_{MPL} mistress gone to?’ (3rd c. Wright 1871, 262.16)

Several agent-oriented resultative constructions are found in Syriac and other Late Aramaic languages (Noorlander forthcoming). Although scholars¹⁸ widely recognize the primary resultative function of verbal adjectives of belonging to the pattern of *qīl-*, the traditional notion of ‘passive participles with an active sense’ persists in the literature. In Noorlander (forthcoming), I argue that such paradoxical circumlocutions ‘active passive participles?’ rather show the participle is, in fact, not a passive participle, but properly a *resultative* participle conforming to linguistic typology of resultatives, including the typology of agent-oriented resultatives in Nedjalkov and Jaxontov (1988, 23) and Nedjalkov (2001, 932). In typology, they are also known as possessive resultatives because these verbs often have a connotation of someone holding an item near themselves, a semantic property of predicative possession (Stassen 2009, 15, cf. Heine 1997, 38–39). The verbs like *ʿhd* ‘hold’, *šql* ‘take’, *ṭʿn* ‘carry’, *lbš* ‘wear, put on’, *šr* ‘gird’ and so forth are cross-linguistically common in agent-oriented resultatives. The Latin verb *habere* was originally combined with resultative of such verbs that typically have a possessive connotation. These verbs follow the same morphosyntax as the active participle in pre-modern Aramaic, where the pronominal object is prepositional. One finds examples like

- šqīl -īn l-eh kalbē*
 taken -PL DAT-3MS dog:PL
 ‘Dogs are carrying it.’

which effectively means literally ‘They keep it taken on’. This is the agent-oriented resultative that developed into the perfect in Western Neo-Aramaic,¹⁹ as illustrated below:

- (5) **Western Neo-Aramaic** (Maʿlula; Arnold 1990)
 a. *mōn šqīl-Ø l-ann dahb-ō*
 who taken-3MS DOM-DEM:MPL gold-DEF:MPL
 ‘Who has taken the money?’ (Bergsträsser 1915, 13.31)

18 Cf. Nöldeke (1904, 220, §280), Nöldeke (1875, 379–380, §262), Goldenberg (1992, 118). See also Kirtchuk (2016) who emphasizes that aspect is primary, not voice.

19 But also in other varieties, see in particular §4.3.1. and §4.4.3.2.; Noorlander (forthcoming) discusses the development of resultatives in Neo-Aramaic.

- b. *šqil-il-le* (** < šqil-in-le*)
 taken-3MPL-3MS
 ‘They_M have taken it_M.’

The original dative agent resultative construction found in Eastern Aramaic seems similar to these constructions, and yet with inverted role marking. Its emergence ultimately inaugurated completely new constructional splits within Aramaic. The possible breakthrough of non-accusative alignment in the Neo-Aramaic perfective hinges on the development of this new type of perfect (later preterit), based on the resultative participle together with the preposition *l-* in pre-modern Aramaic, for example:

- (6) **Jewish Babylonian Aramaic** (Talmud, *Eruvin* 66b(3); Sokoloff 2002, 1159a)
 a. $\langle l' \text{ } \check{s}my^{\circ} ly h' \text{ } \check{s}m^{\circ} t' \rangle$
lā šmī-ā l-ī hā šma'tā
 NEG heard-FS DAT-1SG DEM:FS hearing:FS
 ‘I have not received²⁰ (lit. Me is not heard) this legal tradition.’

The resultative participle *šmī* of the verb *šm'* takes feminine singular agreement with the patient-like argument, but while the prepositional person marker *l-eh* denotes the agent-like argument. Since its first manifestations typically involve experiencer predicates, such as *šm'* ‘hear’,²¹ it seems that it did not mark typical agents from the outset, but indirect affectees of which the coding was extended to unaffected agents²² and intransitive verbs.²³ Vestiges of such *šmī* *l-*constructions already surface in Imperial Aramaic in the 5th century BC and its development into alignment splits is considered by most scholars to be ultimately due to convergence with Iranian.²⁴ *l-* can also mark possessors, beneficiaries, goals and recipients, such as *l-rā'ayā* ‘for the shepherd’ below:

20 *šmī* *l-* typically expresses orally imparted information and, thus, what someone has rumors about, knows by report or understands from an authoritative religious tradition (cf. *šem'ā* ‘hearing; sound, report’, Sokoloff 2009, 1574).
 21 Cf. Schlesinger (1928, 45, § 30); Sokoloff (2002, 327b).
 22 See Noorlander (2012); Bar-Asher (2014); Coghill (2016). Cf. Haig (2008) on Iranian.
 23 See Van Rompay (1999) for examples.
 24 See among others Friedrich (1957), Kutscher (1969), Mengozzi (2002b, 37–49), Gzella (2004, 184–194, 2015, 348), Khan (2004b).

- b. ⟨'yzy dmsyrn lrw'h⟩
 'izz-ē di-msīr-īn l-rā'ayā
 goat(F)-PL SUBR-handed.over-3MPL DAT-shepherd:MS
 'Goats which are handed over to a shepherd.' (BB 36a(33); Sokoloff
 2002, 692a–b)

Early grammatical descriptions of Neo-Aramaic can be taken as an example of the original passive analysis of the *šmi'*-*l*-construction. Nöldeke (1868, 317; tr. mine), for instance, indicates that the “preterit is actually a passive expression whose grammatical subject is the apparent object”. Maclean (1895, 85) states

When the object, as it would be in English, (which is really the subject), is feminine, we should expect the participle to agree with it.

The patient-like argument *baxta* ‘women’ in Jewish ‘Amedia clauses like *šmi'-a-li baxta* ‘The woman was heard by me’, they argue, is only apparently an object in a logical sense, not in a grammatical sense. On this view, the E-set *-a* marks the agreement with the subject and L-suffix *-li* an agent complement. Although the sense is indistinct from the active, the grammatical structure is said to be that of a passive. The viewpoints of these early scholars indicates they analyzed the L-suffixes as the agent complement of an originally passive construction. Similarly, while they differ as to the exact interpretation, both Bar-Asher (2014, 78) and Coghill (2016, 181–197) argue that the initial lexical distribution of the *šmi'-l*-construction in Late Aramaic, particularly two-argument experienter state verbs like ‘hear’ and ‘see’, indicates that the dative complement (‘It was heard to me’) was reanalyzed as an agent (‘It was heard by me’).

Others have compared the L-suffixes to their use in predicative possession, such as *l-kōn* in (7) below, which continues in Neo-Aramaic.

- (7) Syriac
 kmā *laḥm-īn* ʾūt *l-kōn?*
 how.many bread-MPL EXST DAT-2MPL
 ‘How many loaves do you_{PL} have?’ (5th c. Matthew 15:34, *Pšitta*)

Advocates of the possessive view²⁵ have argued that the L-suffixes function similarly to the auxiliary HAVE in Romance and Germanic languages.

In Noorlander (forthcoming), I show that the situation is more complex. Late Antique Aramaic had two types of agent-oriented resultatives at its disposal,

²⁵ See Kutscher (1969), Cohen (1984, 515), Hopkins (1989), Goldenberg (1992).

which both could be characterized as ‘possessive’. One that is morphosyntactically like the active participial construction (and reminiscent of the BE-perfect in Indo-European), the other patient-oriented that is morphosyntactically like the predicative possessor (and reminiscent of the HAVE-perfect):

<i>ʾasīr-Ø -nā b-ḥaṣṣay hemyānā</i>	(direct affectee)
<i>ʾasīr-Ø l-ī b-ḥaṣṣay hemyānā</i>	(dative affectee)
‘I have a belt girt around my loins.’	

Noorlander (forthcoming) demonstrates how these two types of ‘possessive’ resultatives were involved in the diachronic development of perfects in Aramaic. They are only characterized by possession in so far as that they occur with a verb that has a possessive connotation. Locative-existential possessive constructions have been repeatedly connected with the development of so-called tense-aspect-sensitive types of splits between accusative and ergative alignment, such as the one found in Indo-Iranian languages where the ergative pattern is confined to what can be traced back to patient-oriented resultatives with an oblique agent.²⁶

This does not rule out interaction with the passive voice or with experiencer predicates. The various source constructions, ranging from passive, possessor to experiencer have all been contended for individually. While there is no space to go into details here, Noorlander (forthcoming) provides further arguments why they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The historical situation was more mixed and complex due to the versatile nature of resultative constructions (e.g. Nedjalkov 1988, 2001) and the preposition *l-* encroaching on other prepositions. Both experiencers and possessors can ultimately be subsumed under the expression of A in the typology of non-canonical subjects from historical datives (e.g. Noorlander 2021).

In conclusion, Neo-Aramaic alignment has most likely been unstable from the very beginning due to the inherent versatile orientations of the resultative participle that all alignment splits are based on. Prepositional affectees denoting possessors and experiencers had syntactic properties of the subject in Syriac (Noorlander 2018). It is plausible such non-canonical subject marking influenced the grammaticalization of other prepositional subject-like arguments such as the *šmīʿ l-* construction. In the end, there has been a strong emphasis on the diachronic origins of the preterit in analyzing the synchronic modern Aramaic data in relation to Syriac, the better known literary Aramaic language. Later approaches to Neo-Aramaic alignment are more synchronic, grounded in contemporary verbal person and nominal marking typology.

26 See Benveniste (1966), Trask (1979), Bynon (2005), Haig (2008), Jügel (2015).

1.5.2 *Recent Typological Approaches*

More recent typological approaches consider the Neo-Aramaic verbal system an instance of ‘split-ergativity’, albeit from diverging perspectives. Some question the validity of typological terminology like ‘ergative’ (Hemmauer and Waltisberg 2006) or adopt it only for practical reasons (Jastrow 1996, 52–53). Mengozzi (2002b, 37–49), Khan (2007a; 2017), Doron and Khan (2012), Barotto (2015) and Coghill (2016) all compare ergative and accusative alignment properties typologically, but have different approaches and hence diverging conclusions. Several other scholars have also taken generative approaches, such as Hoberman (1989, 95–122) and Kalin and van Ur (2015). The differences among these various approaches as well as the one adopted in this book would require too much detail to fully appreciate here. As will be made clear in the following chapters, they stem from different viewpoints as to how one identifies an alignment pattern. Nonetheless, the following common threads can be discerned in the literature.

Khan (2007a) discusses the ergativity in Southeastern Trans-Zab Jewish varieties and Doron and Khan (2010, 2012) are the first to present an alignment typology of NENA data from recent documentation projects aimed to counter generalizations made in transformational generative grammar. In light of the morphosyntax of the perfective past in the Trans-Zab Jewish dialects, they distinguish three types of Neo-Aramaic dialects (see further below) based on their major morphological alignment pattern in the perfective past: split-s dialects, dynamic-stative dialects and extended ergative dialects. Recently, Khan (2017) expanded on this, adopting a similar typology. Following a view introduced by Khan (2008, 72–75) and later summarized in Khan (2013), Doron and Khan (2010, 2012)’s, main argumentation is that the morphosyntax in these dialects represents different diachronic stages in which the ‘ergative L-suffixes’ were gradually extended to all intransitive verbs. Thus in taking the expression of the A as the ergative subject by means of L-suffixes to be the defining characteristic of ergativity in NENA, Doron and Khan (2012) consider all NENA dialects to display a type of ergativity.

A few classes of intransitive verbs take ‘ergative L-suffixes’ instead of ‘absolute E-suffixes’ (e.g. *mwəx-la* ‘It_F barked’ vs. *twir-a* ‘It_F broke’) in the Jewish dialects such as Sulemaniyya that display the ergative pattern exemplified in (1) at the beginning of this chapter. Since the variation in intransitive subject marking is conditioned by lexical verbal semantics,²⁷ they refer to this as split-s dialects.

27 More details will be given in Section 3.5; see also Khan (2007a) and Coghill (2016, 71f.).

In what they call the dynamic-stative type, illustrated by example (8) from Jewish Urmi below, the intransitive subject marking differs depending on grammatical aspect: resultative (stative) or present perfect, marked by the ‘absolute E-suffixes’, as opposed to perfective past (dynamic), marked by the ‘ergative L-suffixes’. Example (8) below illustrates how the Jewish dialect of Urmi distinguishes between the E-set and L-set in the marking of the subject for the same verb: ⁺*dmix-a* ‘She has gone to sleep’ (stative) as opposed to ⁺*dməx-la* ‘She went to sleep’ (dynamic).

- (8) J. Urmi (NW Iran; Khan 2008b)²⁸
- a. *xəzy-a-le* (transitive perfective)
 see_{PFV}-P:3FS-A:3MS
 ‘He saw her.’
 - b. ⁺*dmix-a* (intransitive ‘stative’)
 sleep_{PFV}-S:3FS
 ‘She has gone to sleep.’
 - c. *xəzy-a-le* (transitive perfective)
 see_{PFV}-P:3FS-A:3MS
 ‘He saw her.’
 - d. ⁺*dməx-le* (intransitive ‘dynamic’)
 sleep_{PFV}-S:3MS
 ‘He went to sleep.’

Khan (2008b, 74, 2013) argues that this dynamic-stative variation is ultimately derived from the lexical semantic variation displayed by the aforementioned split-s dialects. He presupposes the increasing extension of the L-suffixes to intransitives is already manifested in the split-s dialects (*nwəx-la* ‘It_F barked’, *bde-la* ‘She began’). He maintains this extension resulted in a shift from preterit to present perfect or resultative of the original form expressing the subject by the E-suffixes (*qim-a* ‘She rose’ > ‘She has/is risen’), yielding the basis for the dynamic-stative opposition exemplified in (8) above (⁺*dməx-la* ‘She rose’ vs. ⁺*dmix-a* ‘She has gone to sleep’).

The extension is completed in the dialects they refer to as ‘extended ergative’ where the L-suffixes are used to express the subject for all intransitive

28 The symbol + indicates suprasegmental pharyngealization of the following word.

verbs, such as the *s* of ‘sleep’ in (9a) just like the *A* of ‘kill’ (9b) below. Following Dixon (1994), Doron and Khan’s (2012) use the term ‘extended ergative’ to describe this pattern, primarily because they believe the ‘ergative L-suffixes’ have been extended to all intransitive verbs and replaced the original ‘absolutive E-suffixes’ (Khan 2008b, 74).

- (9) J. ‘Amedia (NW Iraq; Hoberman 1989, Greenblatt 2011)
- a. *dmix-le* (intransitive)
 sleep_{P_{FV}-S:3FS}
 ‘He went to sleep.’
 - b. *q̄til-a-le* (transitive)
 kill_{P_{FV}-P:3FS-A:3MS}
 ‘He killed her.’

Recently, Khan (2017) reached a different conclusion regarding the historical relationship of the dialectal microvariation that is similar to my own.²⁹ Nevertheless, his synchronic treatment of the dialects continues the typology he set forth with Doron and he does not explicitly abandon his earlier views. Since the L-suffixes are treated as ‘ergative markers’, presumably because of their prepositional origin, Doron and Khan (2012) subsume all dialects under ergativity.

A similar viewpoint is explored by Mengozzi (2002b, 49, 2005, 2011) and partly also Barotto (2014, 2015) who concentrate on relevant variation in early written sources. They study the phenomena in Neo-Aramaic in light of a so-called “decay of ergativity” in the spirit of a comparable loss of ergativity in Kurdish (Dorleijn 1996). This decay of ergativity is viewed as a symptom and the deviations from the ergative type represented by the Southeastern Trans-Zab Jewish varieties as “antidotes”; cf. “repair mechanisms” in Khan (2017, 897). Barotto considers the ‘extended ergative’ type to be a transition phase towards accusative alignment, under which she subsumes the strategies serving as alternatives to the inverted *šmi’-a-le*-forms (Barotto 2014, 91; 2015, 239–244). The ‘extended ergative’ is viewed as post-ergative by Mengozzi (2002b, 45, fn. 144) and ‘marked nominative’ by Barotto (2015).³⁰ The so-called ‘absolutive E-suffixes’ are gradually replaced by ‘accusative L-suffixes’.

29 This view is further discussed in Subsection 6.1.2. See Noorlander (forthcoming) for more details.

30 See Section 4.2. for a definition and discussion of marked nominative systems.

The views represented by Mengozzi (2005, 2011), Doron and Khan (2010), Barotto (2014, 2015) have in common that the synchronic variation points to a gradual departure from an originally coherent ergative prototype to various constructions that are less typically ergative and/or accusative through the intermediary stage of the dynamic-stative split. The *šmiʿ-a-le*-form is taken as an ergative construction by definition, and wherever this form is lost, also ergativity is said to be lost.

A general fall of ergativity and rise of accusativity also features in Coghill (2016)'s recent, impressive monograph, where her main focus is on the emergence of ergativity and its gradual loss. Her synchronic approach to the data in both Northeastern and Central Neo-Aramaic is comparable to the one adopted here, but there are notable differences. She provides a detailed study of split subject marking from both a typological and areal perspective. Her main argumentation (Coghill 2016, 250–286), however, is similar to the aforementioned authors in that the synchronic variation represents a development away from the ergative alongside an ergative-accusative continuum via the type that corresponds with dynamic-stative in Doron and Khan's (2012) typology. Coghill, however, makes some additional nuances. She (ibid. 61–62) subsumes the 'extended ergative' under accusative alignment, because of the identical marking of the S and A. She (ibid. 55, 250) emphasizes the ergative marking, while apparent, is rather restricted, and while the historical situation betrays "some kind of ergative alignment", she maintains it was not ergative "in the most precise sense" (ibid. 293).

By contrast, although Jastrow (1996, 52–53) believes no ergative inflection is found in Neo-Aramaic languages, he (1985, 120) uses "ergative Flexion" for the L-set against "prädikative Flexion" for the E-set in describing Turoyo and Mlaḥsô. Talay (2008, 2011) applies the same terminology to his description of NENA dialects from the Khabur valley. Hemmauer and Waltisberg (2006) argue that the perfective past in Turoyo is only superficially ergative, since they believe certain constructional splits point to an underlying accusative pattern similar to the (imperfective) present. Waltisberg (2016)'s recent detailed study of the syntax of Turoyo, marking an impressive advance in research, denies (pp. 20, 176)) any manifestation of ergativity whatsoever in Turoyo.³¹

³¹ See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of ergativity in Turoyo.

1.6 Aims and Scope of This Book

Despite the aforementioned literature on alignment in Eastern Neo-Aramaic, a detailed, systematic overview that takes into account more fine-grained morphosyntactic microvariation is still needed. Moreover, the characterization of this dialectal microvariation in the literature requires a thorough revision. A comprehensive typological approach also includes alignment patterns that are less common, without presupposing they are inherently unstable and in the progress of developing along an ergative-accusative continuum. The main aim of this book, therefore, is to compare the typological microvariation in subject, agent and object coding in intransitive and transitive constructions within and across Northeastern Neo-Aramaic and Central Neo-Aramaic.

In addressing this central issue within a Semitic language, a more general goal is to contribute to the typology of argument marking across languages of the world and make Neo-Aramaic not only accessible to Aramaicists or Semitists, but also linguists in general. By the same token, this book aims to highlight the value of linguistic typology for the study of Semitic languages and thereby bridge a gap between traditional Semitic and general descriptive approaches. Hence, this book provides detailed glossing of examples and refers to comparative data in non-Semitic languages.

Chapter 2 is a general introduction to Neo-Aramaic and its overall typology. It not only presents an overview of the main morphosyntactic features common to the respective languages, but also the primary tools that come with the typological approach taken in this book and how it differs from that found in previous literature. Some scholars take the ergativity of the *šmiʿl*-construction simply for granted. Nevertheless, when do we speak of ergativity and when not? And what other types of alignment occur, even beyond the accusative alternative? In what respect are the alignment types different and similar from one another within Eastern Neo-Aramaic? Two chapters are devoted to NENA divided dialectologically and one to Central Neo-Aramaic. Chapter 3 discusses the alignment typology in the Trans-Zab Jewish varieties of NENA, focusing on ergativity in particular. Chapter 4 concentrates on the Christian and other Jewish varieties of NENA. Chapter 5 compares these findings with the alignment variation in Turoyo and Mlaḥsô.

Secondly, in what way do different coding strategies interact and what would we expect typologically? Chapter 2 presents the main verbal morphology, the pronominal inventory and prepositional marking of arguments in Neo-Aramaic from a typological perspective. Chapter 3 to 5 include sections on the interaction between prepositional marking and verbal person marking. Chapter 3 in particular relates the general expectations for ergativity found in

the functionalist typological literature. To what extent is the ergativity found in Neo-Aramaic typical? Related to this are the conditions for when arguments, if any, are expressed prepositionally and/or expressed by verbal person marking. What conditioning factors can be identified relating to grammatical categories, such as tense, aspect, mood and referential properties, such as animacy, definiteness and person? These observations contribute to the cross-linguistic study of such phenomena and our understanding of argument encoding in general.

Indeed, a more general question is to what extent alignment matters at all to the constructions and their properties that have been conventionalized in these dialects. Can we establish correlations between the properties of the constructions and their occurrence in a particular alignment type? The present study argues that much of the variation is independent of ergativity, or alignment in general, and that the alignment patterns in Eastern Neo-Aramaic need not have sprung from a coherently ergative source construction, contrary to what has been widely accepted.³² It analyzes recent documentation of both Northeastern and Central Neo-Aramaic in a typological perspective to reveal important dialectal microvariation.

Finally, while this study of microvariation is not intended to investigate linguistic universals or areal language features, it contributes to wider cross-linguistic research projects and can offer a starting point for further areal and diachronic studies. A split between accusative and ergative alignment conditioned by tense and/or aspect is not altogether uncommon in languages of the world. In fact, a similar tense-sensitive alignment split occurs in Iranian languages with which Aramaic has been in contact for at least two millennia,³³ and similar constructional splits occur in languages of the Caucasus (e.g. Stilo 1981, Meyer 2016) and Indo-Aryan (Verbeke 2013b). In addition, this synchronic study is to serve as a fruitful starting point for further diachronic studies. Aramaic has been documented for a remarkably long period, while little is known about spoken Aramaic before the 16th century. Thus, the modern vernaculars are indispensable for the study of the linguistic evolution of Aramaic.³⁴ As we will see, each dialect (group) may 'do its own thing' and sometimes even in opposite ways. This is a fascinating fact about a language where alignment has otherwise been stable for millennia.

32 See Noorlander (forthcoming) for the debate of the possible source constructions with references.

33 See, for instance, Stilo (1981, 2004a), Haig (2001, 2008), Kapeliuk (2004), Khan (2004b, 2007b), Noorlander (2014, 2017), Noorlander and Stilo (2015), Stilo and Noorlander (2015).

34 See Beyer (1986, 54), Hopkins (1989a, 413), Jastrow (2008, 1).

1.7 Sources and Transcription Conventions

The various existing grammars, texts and studies serve as a basis for the data cited in this book. Table 1 at the end of this chapter shows which sources were consulted for the relevant dialect. Apart from the sources mentioned in the table, Talay (2008; 2009) includes a vast amount of data on a densely populated dialect bundle in SE Turkey (and NW Iraq), whose speakers took up residence along the Khabur Valley in Syria after WWI. In his extensive grammatical description of these dialects, it is not always clear when he makes general statements about dialects whether this applies to all of them and to what extent this has also been attested in his corpus. Khan's grammars and especially his comparative excursuses³⁵ offer valuable data and cross-dialectal comparisons. When the source of the data is left uncited, the data have been personally collected in the field often in together with G. Khan and/or D. Molin in Northern Iraq as well as among migrant communities in Israel, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Khan (2011) estimates there are about 150 NENA dialects, some, of which several are still undocumented or only poorly documented. A large number of them are listed on the website of the NENA Database³⁶ at the University of Cambridge, currently under the coordination of G. Khan, D. Molin and the present author. This online website was consulted in 2016 and 2018 for unpublished data collected by G. Khan, R. Borghero, E. Coghill and L. Napierkowska over the past two decades. Several recordings can also be found in the Semitic Sound Archive (SemArch)³⁷ hosted by the University of Heidelberg.

A methodological issue of fieldwork practice that one should be aware of is that grammatical descriptions and especially data entries in the NENA database often rely on elicited data that do not occur in narrative texts. Elicitation via questionnaires and text collection can show radically different aspects of language usage. When a particular paradigm can or cannot be elicited, this does not always reveal whether a speaker uses this or not. A linguist may well not be able to elicit a particular form, but then it suddenly pops up in a text, or *vice versa*. Moreover, when speakers become puzzled during elicitation, this does not always mean they cannot deal with such forms in a context in a more routine-driven fashion of speaking. Language attrition may also affect comprehension and production. In addition, since data collection also serves to

35 Khan (2008b, 2–7, 73–75, 146–148; 2009, 5–9, 77–78, 327–329). But also, occasionally, Hopkins (1989a), Israeli (1998), Golbenberg (1992), Pennacchietti (1994) and Mengozzi (2002b, 36–49).

36 nena.ames.cam.ac.uk.

37 semarch.uni-hd.de.

preserve the speakers' heritage, most of the narratives deal with life in the town in the past, customs, anecdotes and folklore. Unfortunately, its use in everyday conversations without interviewers being present has generally not been recorded. Furthermore, some of the grammar sketches published in articles do not contain texts at all. Thus when a particular construction is mentioned as (im)possible, this does not always provide us with the complete picture. Moreover, grammars do not always completely discuss all morphology and syntax in detail, not to mention alignment typology. Grammatical descriptions may contain general statements about object marking without giving actual examples and without making clear what types of objects are in view.

The sources also have different conventions for transcriptions and sometimes authors change them over time. For convenience sake, examples from Neo-Aramaic dialects are made uniform as follows. The variable practice of representing the reduced centralized vowel by means of the letters ⟨i⟩, ⟨i⟩, ⟨ī⟩, ⟨e⟩ or ⟨ə⟩ are all unified in the single grapheme ⟨ə⟩ ranging in pronunciation between [ɪ] ~ [ə] (~ [u]). Consistent with practices in Semitics, the voiceless and voiced interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are marked by ⟨t̤⟩ and ⟨d̤⟩, respectively, and the pharyngeal /ʕ/ and glottal stop /ʔ/ by the half rings ⟨ʕ̤⟩ and ⟨ʔ̤⟩ respectively. Long vowels, if indicated, are distinguished by a macron, e.g. *ā* instead of a colon /a:/. Moreover, I have taken the liberty to adjust Ritter's (1967–1971; 1979; 1990) detailed phonetic transcription of ʔuroyo to a phonological transcription, comparable to Jastrow (1992).

The symbol + indicates suprasegmental pharyngealization of the following word or syllable. I have simplified the detailed transcription of Younansardaroud (2001). Following Khan (2016), the threeway system of emphasis is reduced to a binary one with the symbol + indicating the pharyngealization and a circumflex ̈ below or above the segment indicating unaspirated/glottalized articulation, but for ease of comparison the post-velar unvoiced stop (k̤) will be transcribed as the uvular one in other dialects, thus

t̤	[t̤]	t	[tʰ]
p̤	[p̤]	p	[pʰ]
q	[k̤]	k	[kʰ]

Front rounded vowels will also be indicated using the umlaut diacritic, thus J. Urmi *bróna* and *xalunta* in Khan (2008b) correspond to:

<i>bröná</i>	/brø'na/
<i>xaliüntá</i>	/xalyn'ta/

Unless otherwise specified, stress is on the penultimate syllable. Intonation group boundaries and secondary stress are omitted in citation.

Using these sources, the alignment patterns are identified, compared and analyzed in this book according to the principles outlined in Chapter 2. The material from the respective source will be presented with morpheme-by-morpheme glossing following the Leipzig Glossing Rules.³⁸ The glossing in examples cited from non-Semitic languages is taken from the respective source, unless indicated otherwise. Finally, throughout this book, when a word or phrase is emphasized in quoted examples, the emphasis is always mine unless indicated otherwise.

1.8 Outline

This book is a journey through the Neo-Aramaic landscape from East to West, from Jewish into Christian communities, investigating the morphosyntactic alignment in their dialects. Chapter 2 starts off with a brief overview of the coding strategies in NENA and Central Neo-Aramaic. It explains the theoretical preliminaries of clause structure and how alignment types can be identified from different angles. A considerable part is devoted to the expression of pronouns and verbal inflection in the imperfective aspect based on the so-called *qaṭal*-base common to all of Neo-Aramaic. This can be taken as a frame of reference for the study of argument marking in other more complex and cross-dialectally diverse constructions.

Chapter 3, 4 and 5 examine the basic morphosyntax of a particular dialect group. The typological background is introduced directly where and when they are of immediate relevance to core issues in the relevant chapter. Chapter 3 concentrates on ergativity and its typology within the Trans-Zab Jewish subgroup. This is not to say that ergativity plays no role in subsequent chapters, but it is part of the two main questions addressed in this chapter, namely to what extent are the properties found for ergativity in this dialect group unexpected typologically, and secondly, to what extent is there a direct correlation between these properties and ergativity in one such group of dialects?

This discussion continues in Chapter 4 with an examination of the remainder of NENA dialects, namely the Jewish varieties west of the Great-Zab river

38 The glossing deviates from the Leipzig rules in the following ways: (a) I adopt subscript PFV and IPFV as labels for the different inflectional bases perfective (e.g. *qṭil*-) and imperfective (e.g. *qaṭal*-) respectively and (b) I employ a colon instead of a period to separate abbreviations.

and all the Christian dialects of NENA. The focus here, however, is on the relationship between the verbal person marking in the perfective past and the rest of the system. These dialects may have several transitive perfective past constructions at their disposal that are in competition. Each construction seems to converge to an increasing extent with the dominant morphosyntax of *qaṭəl-*.

Chapter 5 deals with Central Neo-Aramaic, the Neo-Aramaic varieties of Ṭur ‘Abdin in particular. There are notable differences between NENA and Ṭuroyo, including the richer system of verbal derivation as well as the special verbal base *CaCiC-*. In other respects, our findings for NENA do have parallels in Ṭuroyo and Mlaḥsó, and similar constructions end up differently in each group.

Finally, Chapter 6 brings all these threads together in a cross-dialectal synopsis with the major conclusions for alignment typology, and Chapter 7 provides a general conclusion and an outlook towards future areal and historical studies with a taxonomy of main alignment types and their properties in Central and Northeastern Neo-Aramaic languages.

TABLE 1 Table containing most of the dialects investigated for this book and their sources

J./C.	Dialect	Location	Other names	Sources
C.	Alqosh	NW Iraq		Coghill 2003
J.	‘Amedia	NW Iraq	‘Amidya, ‘Amadiya, Amêdî	Hoberman 1989; Greenblatt 2011
C.	‘Ankawa	NE Iraq		Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	‘Aqrah	NE Iraq	Akre	Al-Zebari 2018; Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Aradhin	NW Iraq		Krotkoff 1982
J.	Aradhin	NW Iraq		Mutzafi 2002b
J.	Arbel	NE Iraq	Arbil, Erbil, Hewlêr	Khan 1999
C.	Artun	SE Turkey	Hertevin, Ekindüzü	Jastrow 1988; Noorlander field notes
C.	Ashitha	SE Turkey	Aşute, Çiğli	Borghero 2006
C.	Azakh	NW Iraq	Aḏeḥ	Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
J.	Başkale	SE Turkey	Bashqala	Garbell 1965
C.	Baṛeṭla	NW Iraq	Baṛṭella	Al-Saka 2018

TABLE 1 Table containing most of the dialects investigated for this book and their sources (*cont.*)

J./C.	Dialect	Location	Other names	Sources
C.	Barwar	NW Iraq	Barwari (Berwari) Bala, incl. En-Nune, Dure, Dereške, Besh- miyaye, Iyyet, Maye	Khan 2008a
J.	Barzan	NW Iraq		Mutzafi 2002a, 2004c
C.	Baz	SE Turkey	Maha khtaya, Doğan	Mutzafi 2000
C.	Bebede	NW Iraq	Bebadi	Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Bedyal	NE Iraq		Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Beşpen	SE Turkey	Bêşpən, Bespina, Görümlü	Sinha 2000
J.	Betanure	NW Iraq		Mutzafi 2008a
C.	Billin	SE Turkey		Borghero field notes (NENA Database)
C.	Bne-Lagippa	SE Turkey	Țyari	Borghero field notes (NENA Database)
C.	Borb-Ruma	SE Turkey	Bohtan (Ruma, Borb, Shwata)	Fox 2009
J.	Challa	SE Turkey	Çukurca	Fassberg 2011
C.	Challa	SE Turkey		Talay 2008, 2009
J.	Cizre	SE Turkey	Gzira	Nakano 1973
C.	Dehe	NW Iraq	Dehi	Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Derabun	NW Iraq	Dayr Abuna	Borghero field notes (NENA Database); Coghill 2009
C.	Dere	NW Iraq		Borghero field notes (NENA Database)
C.	Diyana- Zariwaw	NE Iraq	Soran	Napiorkowska 2015
J.	Dobe	NE Iraq		Mutzafi 2004b
J.	Dohok	NW Iraq	Duhok	Molin 2021; Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Gawar	SE Turkey	Yüksekova	Talay 2008, 2009
J.	Gawar	SE Turkey		Garbell 1965
C.	Gaznakh	SE Turkey	Geznex, Cevizağacı	Gutman 2015

TABLE 1 Table containing most of the dialects investigated for this book and their sources (*cont.*)

J./C.	Dialect	Location	Other names	Sources
J.	Ḥalabja	NE Iraq		Khan 2004a
C.	Hamziye	NW Iraq	Hamzik	Coghill field notes (NENA Database); Coghill 2009
C.	Harmashe	NW Iraq		Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Haşsan	SE Turkey	Hassane, Köşreli	Damsma forthcoming
C.	Hawdiyan	NE Iraq		Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Harbole	SE Turkey	Aksu, Şırnak	Khan field notes
C.	Jinnet	SE Turkey	Cinet, Bağpınar	Noorlander field notes
C.	Jilu	SE Turkey	Çilu, Yeşiltaş (Hakkari)	Fox 1997; Talay 2008, 2009
C.	Karamlesh	NW Iraq	Karemlash	Borghero 2008
J.	Kerend	W Iran		Hopkins 1989a, 2002
C.	Koy Sanjak	NW Iraq	Koy Sanjak	Mutzafi 2004b
J.	Koy Sanjak	NE Iraq	Koy Sanjak	Mutzafi 2004a
C.	Lewen	SE Turkey		Talay 2008, 2009
C.	Mangesh	NW Iraq		Sara 1974
C.	Mar Yaqo	NW Iraq	Mar Ya'qob	Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Marga	SE Turkey	Yemişli, Uludere	Khan and Noorlander field notes
C.	Mlaḥsó	SE Turkey	Lice (Diyarbak.)	Jastrow 1994, 1996
C.	Bne-Matha	SE Turkey	Mne-Matha, T̥yari	Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Kharjawa	NW Iraq	Nargezine-Kharjawa	Coghill field notes (NENA Database)
J.	Naghada	NW Iran	Solduz	Garbell 1965; Hopkins 1989b
C.	Nerwa	NW Iraq	Narwa	Talay 2001; Noorlander field notes
J.	Nerwa	NW Iraq	Narwa	Sabar 1976
C.	Peshabur	NW Iraq	Faysh Khabur	Coghill 2013
J.	Qarah Ḥasan	W Iran		Khan 2009
C.	Baghdeda	NW Iraq	Qaraqosh	Khan 2002a
C.	Qodchaneş	SE Turkey	Koçanis/Konak, Hakkari	Talay 2008, 2009
C.	Rekan	NW Iraq		Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
J.	Rewanduz	NE Iraq	Ruwanduz	Khan 2002b; Mutzafi 2004b

TABLE 1 Table containing most of the dialects investigated for this book and their sources (*cont.*)

J./C.	Dialect	Location	Other names	Sources
J.	Rustaqa	NE Iraq		Khan 2002b
C.	Salmas	NW Iran	Salamas	Polotsky 1991; Mutzafi 2015; Khan 2016
J.	Salmas			Duval 1883; Mutzafi 2015
C.	Sanandaj	W Iran	Sena, Sina	Panoussi 1990; Khan 2009; Kalin 2014
J.	Sanandaj	W Iran		Khan 2009
C.	Shaqlawā	NE Iraq		Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
J.	Shaqlawā	NE Iraq		Mutzafi 2004b
J.	Saqez	W Iran	Saqqiz, Saqiz	Israeli 1998
C.	Sardarid	NW Iran	Sardrud	Younansardaroud 2001
C.	Sat	SE Turkey	İliyaka	Mutzafi 2008c; Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Shemsdin	SE Turkey	Şemdinli; Bne Şammesdin, a.o. Azran Gargarnaye, Nochiya, Iyyəl, Mar-bisho	Napiorkowska and Borghero field notes (NENA Database)
C.	Sulemaniyya	W Iran	Sulaymaniyya, Silê-manî	Khan 2004a
J.	Sulemaniyya	NE Iraq		Khan 2004a; including Ḥalabja
C.	Ṭal	SE Turkey		Talay 2008, 2009
C.	Telkepe	NW Iraq	Tall Kayf	Coghill 2010, 2014
C.	Ten	NW Iraq		Coghill field notes (NENA Database)
C.	Tella	NW Iraq		Khan, Molin and Noorlander field notes
C.	Tisqopa	NW Iraq	Tall Asqaf	Rubba 1993
C.	Ṭyari	SE Turkey	Upper and Lower Ṭyari	Talay 2008, 2009
C.	Tkhuma	SE Turkey	Tḫuma, incl. Mazṛa, Matha, Gudektha, Gessa, Berejnaye, Gawaye	Talay 2008, 2009

TABLE 1 Table containing most of the dialects investigated for this book and their sources (*cont.*)

J./C.	Dialect	Location	Other names	Sources
C.	Ṭuroyo	SE Turkey	Surayt, Suryoyo	Jastrow 1985, 1992; Ritter 1967–1971, 1990
C.	Umṛa	SE Turkey	Dera, Dereköy	Hobrack 2000; Noorlander field notes
C.	Umra d-Shish	NW Iraq		Borghero field notes (NENA Database)
C.	Urmi	NW Iran	Urmia, Ārumiye	Murre-van den Berg 1999; Khan 2016
J.	Urmi	NW Iran		Garbell 1965; Khan 2008b
C.	Zakho	NW Iraq		Hoberman 1993
J.	Zakho	NW Iraq		Sabar 2002; Cohen 2012