Number expression variability in Kurmanji

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This paper investigates variability in number agreement expression between two varieties of Kurmanji, an Indo-Iranian language, as well as an outlier pattern that diverges from the generalizations that have been made for both varieties, based on original fieldwork data elicited from multiple consultants. Kurmanji exhibits a split alignment system conditioned by tense, displaying ergative alignment in the past tense and accusative alignment in the present tense, with agreement tracking the nominative-marked argument in both. The paper documents two main varieties, focusing on how number information is encoded across pronouns, verbal agreement, and case marking in both present and past tense. I compare a variety consistent with Standard Kurmanji (spoken by an informant from Mardin) with a variety spoken in Batman that diverges from the standard grammar by employing an OBL-OBL alignment system in the past tense. This divergence disrupts the nominative tracking agreement, creating optionalities in number expression with oblique marked subject and object. These findings have been analyzed as language change towards a simpler lexicon and a simpler alignment system, with the optionalities in the lexicon being caused by syncretism.
Keywords: Kurmanji; number agreement; syncretism; split ergativity; case alignment.

1 Introduction

This paper will present a survey of the variability in number expression in Kurmanji, an Indo-Iranian language, based on original fieldwork data elicited from a couple of informants. Öpengin and Haig (2024) have identified five dialectal regions for Kurmanji. They are the southeastern dialectical region, southern dialectical region, northern dialectal region, southwestern dialectal region, northwestern dialectal region. Both of my main informants are from the southern dialectal region of Turkey. They are from the cities Mardin and Batman. I observed and documented interdialectal variation. In Section 2 and Section 3, I document the expression of number in two Kurmanji varieties, discussing the effects of case alignment and syncretism on where number can be expressed in argument-agreement configurations. In Section 4, I demonstrate the extent of variability in number expression by discussing further data that instantiate outlier patterns, diverging from the robust generalizations that hold for the two reported

varieties. Section 5 discusses the implications emerging from the survey reported in this study.

2 Informant 1: "Standard Kurmanji"

The informant is from Mardin, a city in southeastern Turkey. They are an L1 speaker of Kurmanji. The informant's language aligns with what was described as Standard Kurmanji (Thackston, 2006). Therefore, this informant's language will be referred to as Standard Kurmanji (SK). SK has a split alignment system based on tense. It shows an ergative alignment in the past tense, marking the external argument of the transitive verb as oblique (OBL), while marking the internal argument of the transitive verb and the sole argument of intransitives as nominative (NOM). Whereas in the present tense, it shows an accusative alignment, marking the internal argument of the transitive verb with OBL, while marking the external argument of transitives and the sole argument of intransitives with NOM. It is necessary to mention—as no other informant's Kurmanji fully aligns with the described standard form—that the speaker also teaches Kurmanji at a university in Turkey, and they are interested in the standardization of the language.

2.1 Alignment and agreement in 1st and 2nd person pronouns

Let us start with the pronouns in the language, which have distinct NOM and OBL forms, as shown in Table 1. In this section, I limit my attention to 1st and 2nd person pronouns.

Table 1. *Pronouns in Standard Kurmanji*

	Nominative	Oblique
1SG[1]	*Ez*	*Min*
2SG	*Tu*	*Te*
3SG	*Ew*	*Wî/Wê*
1PL	*Em*	*Me*
2PL	*Hûn*	*We*
3PL	*Ew*	*Wan*

[1] 1 'first person'; 2 'second person'; 3 'third person'; NOM 'nominative'; OBL 'oblique'; PL 'plural'; PRS 'present'; PST 'past'; SG 'singular'.

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Table 2. *Case alignment in Standard Kurmanji*

Present tense			Past tense		
Valence	Argument count	Pattern	Valence	Argument count	Pattern
Unaccusative	1	NOM	Unaccusative	1	NOM
Unergative	1	NOM	Unergative	1	NOM
Transitive	2	NOM-OBL	Transitive	2	OBL-NOM

When both the subject and the object are 1st and 2nd person pronouns in the accusative alignment (i.e., under present tense), the verb agrees in number and person with the NOM marked subject *tu* in Examples 2a–b and the NOM marked subject *em* '1PL.NOM' in Examples 4a–b. In the ergative alignment (i.e., under past tense), the verb agrees in number and person with the NOM marked objects *ez* and *em* in Examples 1a–b and NOM marked objects *tu* and *hûn* in Examples 3a–b respectively.

All 1st and 2nd person pronouns encode number information on themselves regardless of case; however, only the NOM marked ones agree with the verb in number and person, which is a fact observed regardless of the tense.

(1) a. Te ez dîtim

Te	ez	dît	-im
2SG.OBL	*1SG.NOM*	*see.PST*	*-1SG*

'You saw me'

b. Te em dîtin

Te	em	dît	-in
2SG.OBL	*1PL.NOM*	*see.PST*	*-PL*

'You saw us'

(2) a. Tu min dibînî

Tu	min	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*1SG.OBL*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing me'

b. Tu me dibînî

Tu	me	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*1PL.OBL*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing us'

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(3) a. Me tu dîtî
Me tu dît -î
1PL.OBL *2SG.NOM* *see.PST* *-2SG*
'We saw you'

b. Me hûn dîtin
Me hûn dît -in
1PL.OBL *2PL.NOM* *see.PST* *-PL*
'We saw you(PL)'

(4) a. Em te dibînin
Em te dibîn -in
1PL.NOM *2SG.OBL* *see.PRS* *-PL*
'We are seeing you'

b. Em we dibînin
Em we dibîn -in
1PL.NOM *2PL.OBL* *see.PRS* *-PL*
'We are seeing you(PL)

2.2 Alignment and agreement elsewhere

2.2.1 Subjects of nominal predicates

The subjects of nominal predicates are all marked NOM both in the past and the present tense. The existential copula agrees with the NOM marked subject in number and person. No overt plural (PL) marking can be seen on the subject NP. Example 5 illustrates that in the past tense, the plurality of the NOM marked subject *zarok* is only expressed on the verb and never on the NP itself. Example 6 illustrates that in the present tense the plurality of the NOM subject is again only expressed through the marking on the verb and never through a marker on the NP.

(5) a. Zarok li malê bû
Zarok li mal -ê bû
child.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PST.3SG*
'The child was in the house'

b. Zarok li malê bûn
Zarok li mal -ê bûn
child.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PST.PL*
'The children were in the house'

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(6) a. Zarok li malê ye
Zarok li mal -ê ye
child.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PRS.3SG*
'The child is in the house'

b. Zarok li malê ne
Zarok li mal -ê ne
child.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PRS.3PL*
'The children are in the house'

The abovementioned pattern does not change when the subject of the nominal predicate is inanimate, as in Examples 7–8.

(7) a. Pirtûk li malê bû
Pirtûk li mal -ê bû
book.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PST.3SG*
'The book was in the house'

b. Pirtûk li male bûn
Pirtûk li mal -ê bûn
book.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PST.3PL*
'Books were in the house'

(8) a. Pirtûk li malê ye
Pirtûk li mal -ê ye
book.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PRS.3SG*
'The book is in the house'

b. Pirtûk li malê ne
Pirtûk li mal -ê ne
book.NOM *in* *house* *-OBL.SG* *exist.PRS.3PL*
'The books are in the house'

2.2.2 Agreement in sentences with transitive verbs

The PL agreement tracks the NOM marked subject in the present tense, which is where SK has accusative alignment, as can be seen from Examples 9–11. The plurality of the object does not make a difference, as shown in comparisons in Examples 9a–c and 10a–b; the verb always agrees in number with the NOM marked subject. In fact, agreement with the OBL PL object results in ungrammaticality, as can be seen in Example 9c.

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(9) a. Tu pirtûkan dibî

Tu	pirtuk	-an	dib	-î
2SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are taking the books'

b. Tu pirtûkê dibî

Tu	pirtuk	-ê	dib	-î
2SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are taking the book'

c. *Tu pirtûkan dibin

Tu	pirtuk	-an	dib	-in
2SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'You are taking the books'

(10) a. Eyşe pirtûkê dibe

Eyşe	pirtuk	-ê	dib	-e
Eyşe.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'Eyşe is taking the book'

b. Eyşe pirtûkan dibe

Eyşe	pirtuk	-an	dib	-e
Eyşe.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'Eyşe is taking the books'

In the past tense, where SK has ergative alignment, the verb does not agree with the OBL marked subject. In Examples 11a–b, the subject is 2SG, but the agreement marker on the verb changes from *in*[2] 'PL' to the 3SG null morpheme. Thus, the verb must be agreeing in number with the NOM marked object.

(11) a. Te pirtûk birin

Te	pirtuk	bir	-in
2SG.OBL	*book.NOM*	*take.PST*	*-PL*

'You took the books'

b. Te pirtûk bir

Te	pirtuk	bir
2SG.OBL	*book.NOM*	*take.PST.3SG*

'You took the book'

A notable fact is that the plurality of the object in past tense can only be understood from the marking on the verb because objects are marked with NOM case, which has no overt marking. This fact is evident from the Examples 12–13

[2] Plural marker *-in* is syncretic for 1st, 2nd, 3rd persons. Therefore, it is indicated as PL and the person is not specified.

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where, no matter how the plurality of the subject and object is manipulated the object, does not show overt number marking and number is shown only on the verb.

(12) a. Eyşeyê pirtûk bir
Eyşe -ye pirtûk bir
Eyşe -*OBL.SG* *book.NOM* *take.PST.3SG*
'Eyşe took the book'

b. Eyşeyê pirtûk birin
Eyşe -ye pirtûk bir -in
Eyşe -*OBL.SG* *book.NOM* *take.PST.3SG* -*PL*
'Eyşe took the books'

(13) a. Wan pirtûk bir
Wan pirtûk bir
3PL.OBL *book.NOM* *take.PST.3SG*
'They took the book'

b. Wan pirtûk birin
Wan pirtûk bir -in
3PL.OBL *book.NOM* *take.PST.3SG* -*PL*
'They took the books'

The OBL argument marks plurality on the NP whether it is a subject or an object, which can be seen in Example 14a, where *zarok* is marked with the portmanteau morpheme -*ê* for OBL and SG and again in Example 14b when *zarok* is marked with the portmanteau morpheme -*an* for OBL and PL.

(14) a. Zarokê ez dîtim
Zarok -ê ez dît -im
child -*OBL.SG* *1SG.NOM* *see.PST* -*1SG*
'The child saw me'

b. Tu zarokan dibînî
Tu zarok -an dibin -î
2SG.NOM *child* -*OBL.PL* *see.PRS* -*2SG*
'You are seeing the children'

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2.2.3 Nominative 3rd person pronoun

While the other pronouns encode the number information on themselves, the only way to understand the number of the 3rd person pronoun *ew* is through the marker on the verb.

Comparing Examples 15a–b with Examples 16a–b respectively, where the independent variable is the plurality of the 3rd person pronoun, it is observed that the agreement marker on the verb is the PL morpheme **-*in*** in Example 15 but the 3SG morpheme **-*e*** in Example 16.

It is evident from the test that the 3rd person pronoun *ew* is syncretic between PL and SG. Thus, it does not encode the number information on itself.

(15) a. Ew pirtûkê dibin

Ew	pirtuk	-ê	dib	-in
3PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'They are taking the book'

b. Ew pirtûkan dibin

Ew	pirtuk	-an	dib	-in
3PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'They are taking the books'

(16) a. Ew pirtûkê dibe

Ew	pirtuk	-ê	dib	-e
3SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'S/he is taking the book'

b. Ew pirtûkan dibe

Ew	pirtuk	-an	dib	-e
3SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'S/he is taking the book'

3 Informant 2: "Batman Kurmanji"

The second informant is from Batman, a city in the southeast of Turkey. They are an L1 speaker of Kurmanji. They actively use the language in their daily life, and they are engaged with the language through the Kurmanji Literary Club in Boğaziçi University. Their Kurmanji dialect does not fully align with the "standard" dialect (Thackston, 2006). Therefore, it will be referred to as Batman Kurmanji (BK)[3]. BK will be described in the present tense and the past tense separately.

[3] It must be acknowledged that a single speaker's dialect does not represent the whole area of Batman.

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Table 3. *Pronouns in Batman Kurmanji*

	Nominative	Oblique
1SG	*ez*	*min*
2SG	*tu*	*te*
3SG	*ew*	*wî/wê/ew*
1PL	*em*	*me*
2PL	*hûn*	*we*
3PL	*ew*	*wan*

3.1 Present tense

3.1.1 Alignment and agreement with 1st and 2nd person pronouns

When both the subject and the object are 1st and 2nd person pronouns, agreement tracks the NOM marked pronoun as in Example 17a–b. As was the case in SK, the number information is encoded inside both the NOM marked and the OBL marked 1st and 2nd person pronouns. However, only the NOM marked pronouns agree with the verb.

(17) a. Tu me dibînî

Tu	me	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*1PL.OBL*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing us'

b. Tu te dibînin

Em	te	dibîn	-in
1PL.NOM	*2SG.OBL*	*see.PRS*	*-PL*

'You are seeing us'

In Examples 17c–d the object is the 1st person SG OBL pronoun *min*, the subject is the 2nd person NOM SG pronoun in Example 17c, while in Example 17d it is PL. For Example 17c, the verb has the 2SG and for Example 17d the verb has the PL morpheme. The verb is observed to have agreed with the NOM subject in both person and number.

c. Tu min dibînî

Tu	min	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*1SG.OBL*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing me'

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d. Hûn min dibînin
Hûn min dibîn -in
2PL.NOM *1SG.OBL* *see.PRS* *-PL*
'You(PL) are seeing me'

3.1.2 Alignment and agreement elsewhere

3.1.2.1 Subjects of nominal predicates

In the subjects of nominal predicates, the number information is never observed on the NP. In Example 18a, the plurality of the sentence can only be understood from the verb. The NP *zarok* does not take any marker in either Example 18a or 18b. However, the verb changes from PL *in* Example 18a to 3SG *e* in Example 18b.

(18) a. Zarok li mal in
Zarok li mal in
child.NOM *in* *house.NOM* *exist.PRS.PL*
'Children are in the house'

b. Zarok li mal e
Zarok li mal e
child.NOM *in* *house.NOM* *exist.PRS.3SG*
'The child is in the house'

3.1.2.2 Agreement in sentences with transitive verbs

While BK marks the subject of the transitive verb as nominative, it marks the object of the transitive verb as OBL. This is evident in Example 19, where the subject *Eyse* is marked NOM in both instances, while the object 'book' is marked with OBL.

(19) a. Eyşe pirtûkê dibe
Eyşe.NOM pirtûk -ê dib -e
Eyşe.NOM *book* *-OBL.SG* *take.PRS* *-3SG*
'Eyşe is taking the book'

b. Eyşe pirtûkan dibe
Eyşe.NOM pirtûk -an dib -e
Eyşe.NOM *book* *-OBL.PL* *take.PRS* *-3SG*
'Eyşe is taking the books'

The agreement in the present tense in BK tracks the NOM case, similar to how agreement tracks the NOM case in SK. As can be seen in Example 20, the verb agrees with the 2SG.NOM subject *tu* in both instances. Even though the object is

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PL in Example 20a and SG in Example 20b, agreement with the object is not observed on the verb.

(20) a. Tu pirtûkan tênî

Tu	pirtûk	-an	tên	-î
2SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*bring.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are bringing the books'

b. Tu pirtûkê tênî

Tu	pirtûk	-ê	tên	-î
2SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*bring.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are bringing the book'

The OBL marked object encodes the number information on itself. This is attested in Example 21a when the object 'book' is PL, it is marked with *-an*, the portmanteau morpheme for OBL.PL. In Example 21b, the SG object 'book' is marked with *-ê*, the portmanteau morpheme for OBL.SG.

(21) a. Em pirtûkan tênin

Em	pirtûk	-an	tên	-in
1PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*bring.PRS*	*-PL*

'We are bringing the books'

b. Em pirtûkê tênin

Em	pirtûk	-an	tên	-in
1PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*bring.PRS*	*-PL*

'We are bringing the book'

3.1.2.3 Nominative 3rd person pronoun

The agreement between the verb and the subject in number is more evident in Example 22, because the NOM marked pronoun *ew* is syncretic in 3PL and 3SG. Unlike the 1st and 2nd person pronouns, the 3rd person pronoun does not encode the number information on itself. The only way that the plurality of *ew* is understood is through its agreement with the verb. The evidence is shown when comparing Example 22a with Example 23a, where the independent variable is the plurality of the pronoun *ew*, the dependent variable is the agreement marker on the verb, which is *-in* '-PL' in Example 22a; and *-e*, the 3SG marker, in Example 23a. The same pattern appears in Example 22b and Example 23a.

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(22) a. Ew pirtûkê dibin

Ew	pirtûk	-ê	dib	-in
3PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'They are taking the book'

b. Ew pirtûkan dibin

Ew	pirtûk	-an	dib	-in
3PL.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-PL*

'They are taking the books'

(23) a. Ew pirtûkê dibe

Ew	pirtûk	-ê	dib	-e
3SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'S/he is taking the book'

b. Ew pirtûkan dibe

Ew	pirtûk	-an	dib	-e
3SG.NOM	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PRS*	*-3SG*

'S/he is taking the books'

3.2 Past tense

3.2.1 Alignment and agreement with 1st and 2nd person pronouns

SK shows ergative alignment in the past tense. BK diverges from the standard in that when both the subject and the object of the transitive verb are 1st and 2nd person pronouns, they are marked with OBL. In instances like Examples 24–26, where both the subject and the object are marked overtly with OBL, the number information is encoded on themselves, and there is no agreement on the verb observed.

(24) a. We me dît

We	me	dît
2PL.OBL	*1PL.OBL*	*see.PST*

'You(PL) saw us'

b. We min dît

We	min	dît
2PL.OBL	*1SG.OBL*	*see.PST*

'You(PL) saw me'

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(25) a. Te min dît
Te min dît
2SG.OBL *1SG.OBL* *see.PST*
'You saw me'

b. Te me dît
Te me dît
2SG.OBL *1PL.OBL* *see.PST*
'You saw us'

(26) a. Me te dît
Me te dît
1PL.OBL *2SG.OBL* *see.PST*
'We saw you'

b. Me we dît
Me we dît
1PL.OBL *2PL.OBL* *see.PST*
'We saw you(PL)'

c. Min we dît
Min we dît
1SG.OBL *2PL.OBL* *see.PST*
'I saw you(PL)'

3.2.2 Alignment and agreement elsewhere

3.2.2.1 Subjects of nominal predicates

In the subjects of the nominal predicates, NPs do not contain the number information on themselves. In Example 27a, the sentence's plurality can only be understood from the change in the verb. The NP *zarok* does not take any marker that would show plurality in either Example 27a or Example 27b. However, the verb takes the PL marker *-n* in Example 27a while it does not take any markers when the NP is understood as SG in Example 27b.

(27) a. Zarok li mal bûn
Zarok li mal bûn
child.NOM *in* *house.NOM* *exist.PST.PL*
'Children were in the house'

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b. Zarok li mal bû
Zarok li mal bû
child.NOM *in* *house.NOM* *exist.PST*
'The child was in the house'

3.2.2.2 Agreement in sentences with transitive verbs

In instances like Examples 28–29 where both the subject and the object are marked overtly with OBL, an instance where BK diverges from SK, the number information is encoded on the NPs themselves, and there is no number agreement on the verb observed. The PL NPs are marked with the OBL.PL portmanteau morpheme *-an*, the SG NPs are marked with the OBL.PL portmanteau morpheme *-e*.

(28) a. Te pirtûkan anî
Te pirtûk -an anî
2SG.OBL *book* *-OBL.PL* *bring.PST*
'You brought the books'

b. Te pirtûkê anî
Te pirtûk -ê anî
2SG.OBL *book* *-OBL.SG* *bring.PST*
'You brought the book'

(29) a. Me pirtûkan anî
Me pirtûk -an anî
1PL.OBL *book* *-OBL.PL* *bring.PST*
'We brought the books'

b. Me pirtûkê anî
Me pirtûk -an anî
1PL.OBL *book* *-OBL.SG* *bring.PST*
'We brought the book'

In instances such as Example 30, where the NP is SG, overt realization of the OBL marking on the NP is optional. Example 31a is the first account the informant gave, which has overt OBL marking in the subject and no overt marking on the object. When asked to judge if Example 31b, where the OBL.SG portmanteau morpheme *-ê* is overtly realized on the object, is attested or not, the informant stated that "attaching *-ê* is optional," it is used interchangeably with the cases of no attachment.

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(30) a. Eyşe pirtukê bir
Eyşe pirtûk -ê bir
Eyşe.OBL *book* *-OBL.SG* *take.PST*
'Eyşe took the book'

b. Eyşe pirtukan bir
Eyşe pirtûk -an bir
Eyşe.OBL *book* *-OBL.PL* *take.PST*
'Eyşe took the books'

(31) a. Me zarok-Ø dît
Me zarok -Ø dît
1PL.OBL *child* *-OBL.SG* *see.PST*
'We saw the child'

b. Me zarok-ê dît
Me zarok -ê dît
1PL.OBL *child* *-OBL.SG* *see.PST*
'We saw the child'

c. Me zarok-a dît
Me zarok -a dît
1PL.OBL *child* *-OBL.PL* *see.PST*
'We saw the children'

Another instance where this optionality is observed are Examples 32b–c. Whereas in Example 32a the OBL.PL marking on the object is overt, in Example 32b, where the object is stated as singular by the informant, there is no overt marking on the object observed. When asked, the informant judged Example 32c, where there is an overt OBL.SG marker on the object, as grammatical.

(32) a. Te zarok-a dît
Te zarok -a dît
2SG.OBL *child* *-OBL.PL* *see.PST*
'You saw the children'

b. Te zarok-Ø dît
Te zarok -Ø dît
2SG.OBL *child* *-OBL.SG* *see.PST*
'You saw the child'

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c. Te zarok-ê dît
Te zarok -ê dît
2SG.OBL *child* *-OBL.SG* *see.PST*
'You saw the child'

However, Examples 30, 31 and 32 all behave the same according to where the number agreement is observed. It is never observed on the verb and always observed on the NP or pronoun.

In Example 33a, BK makes a similar construction to SK where the object is marked NOM and there is no number information on it, and the object's number is marked on the verb with the PL morpheme *-in*. Example 33b, however, is BK's OBL-OBL construction where both the object and the subject are marked overtly with the OBL marker, thus the number information is encoded with the morpheme *-an* on the object and there is no agreement with the verb.

(33) a. Te zarok dîtin
Te zarok dît -in
2SG.OBL *child.NOM* *see.PST* *-PL*
'You saw the children'

b. Te zarokan dît
Te zarok -an dît
2SG.OBL *child* *-OBL.PL* *see.PST*
'You saw the children'

Example 33 shows that unmarked *zarok* can only be understood as SG if there is no agreement observed on the verb.

3.2.2.3 Analysis of the oblique third person pronoun

In SK, *ew* has been analyzed in Section 2 as being syncretic between 3SG.NOM and 3PL.NOM. In BK, *ew* has been analyzed in Section 3.1 as syncretic between 3SG.NOM and 3PL.NOM, the same as SK.
In BK, when both the subject and the object are 1st or 2nd person pronouns, they always occur as OBL and contain the number information on themselves. Considering these facts, the data below will be analyzed as *ew* being an 3SG.OBL pronoun.

In Examples 34a–b, where the independent variable is the case marking of the pronoun, the speaker judged both instances as grammatical and as having the same meaning. Therefore, *ew* can be used as a 3SG.OBL pronoun in BK.

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(34) a. Ew pirtûkan bir
Ew pirtûk -an bir
3SG.NOM book -OBL.PL take.PST
'S/he took the books'

b. Wî pirtûkan bir
Wî pirtûk -an bir
3SG.OBL.M book -OBL.PL take.PST
'He took the books'

In Example 35b, the 3PL.NOM pronoun *ew* is judged ungrammatical. Instead, Example 35a, where the 3PL.OBL pronoun *wan* is used, is judged to be grammatical by the informant.

(35) a. *Ew pirtûkê bir
Ew pirtûk -ê bir
3PL.NOM book -OBL.SG take.PST
'They took the book'

b. Wan pirtûkê bir
Wan pirtûk -ê bir
3PL.OBL book -OBL.SG take.PST
'They took the book'

It is understood from Example 35 that *ew* cannot be used as a 3PL.OBL pronoun.

In Example 36 the speaker judged the use of *ew* as an 3SG.OBL pronoun in the object position as grammatical.

(36) a. Te ew dit
Te ew dit
2SG.OBL 3SG.OBL see.PST
'You saw him/her'

In Examples 34, 35 and 36, the pronoun *ew* does not agree with the verb. It contains the number information on itself, and it can be used interchangeably with the 3SG.OBL pronouns *wî/wê*. It cannot be used interchangeably with the 3PL.OBL pronoun *wan*. Therefore, *ew* in the BK past tense can be analyzed as an 3SG.OBL pronoun.

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Table 4. *Case alignment in Batman Kurmanji*

Present tense	Past tense
transitive verb	transitive verb
argument count: 2	argument count: 2
NOM-OBL	OBL-OBL

4 Outlier data from Batman Kurmanji

Regarding the PL agreement in the past tense, the data is mostly consistent in BK, the OBL subject and object never agree in number with the verb; they encode the number information on themselves. However, there is only one exception to this observation.

(37) a. Wan pirtukan birin

Wan	pirtuk	-an	bir	-in
3PL.OBL	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PST*	*-PL*

'They took the books'

b. Wan pirtukê bir

Wan	pirtuk	-ê	bir
3PL.OBL	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PST*

'They took the book'

The outlier pattern is evident in Example 37a, the 3PL.OBL pronoun and the OBL.PL marked object encode the number information on themselves as usual. However, there is PL agreement on the verb. This is not expected, as the PL agreement never targets OBL arguments elsewhere. The absence of PL agreement in Example 37b, however, is consistent with the data presented so far.

Atlamaz (2019) observed this outlier pattern in Adıyaman Kurmanji, which is mostly aligned with Standard Kurmanji. He gives a morphosyntactic explanation for the existence of this pattern. His explanation does not take the pattern as an outlier. Instead, it is a result of the fusion of the OBL case feature and number feature into a single morpheme.

5 Discussion

In Standard Kurmanji, the past tense has ergative alignment and NOM is unmarked; hence, we do not observe any marking on the object. However, in Batman Kurmanji, we observe OBL-OBL alignment, which is assumed to be the merger of accusative and ergative alignment systems. In other words, OBL-OBL alignment can be analyzed as an ergative-accusative tripartite system, which has been argued to emerge as a result of a lack of contextual specification for the assignment of the accusative case (Atlamaz, Demirok, Bağrıaçık, 2021, p. 6). BK in some cases behaves like an intermediary form between SK and an OBL-OBL

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system. We observe that our consultant fluctuates between the split-ergative system of SK and a variant where OBL-OBL (tripartite) is the norm in the past tense, suggesting a language change in progress.

BK additionally exhibits optionality in the morphological expression of number. I hypothesize that the language currently draws from two separate lexicons for case and number marking, compatible with the view where emergent patterns or language change in progress is modelled through competing grammars/competing lexicons.

Table 5. *Lexicons*

BK Lexicon I	BK Lexicon II
-a(n) = [OBL, PL]	*-a(n)* = [OBL, PL]
	-ê = [OBL]
elsewhere = ∅	

In BK Example 38b we see the singular object did not take any marking as would be the case in SK. BK draws from Lexicon I and forms the sentence according to the SK grammar in this instance, while in Example 38a and Example 38b it draws from Lexicon II and forms the sentence according to the OBL-OBL system.

(38) a. Te zarok-a dit

Te	zarok	-a	dit
2SG.OBL	*child*	*-OBL.PL*	*see.PST*

'You saw the children'

b. Te zarok-∅ dit

Te	zarok	-∅	dit
2SG.OBL	*child*	*-OBL.SG*	*see.PST*

'You saw the child'

c. Te zarok-ê dit

Te	zarok	-ê	dit
2SG.OBL	*child*	*-OBL.SG*	*see.PST*

'You saw the child'

(39) a. Tu zaroka dibînî

Tu	zarok	-a	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*child*	*-OBL.PL*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing the children'

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b. Tu zarok-Ø dibînî

Tu	zarok	-Ø	dibîn	-î
2SG.NOM	*child*	*-OBL.SG*	*see.PRS*	*-2SG*

'You are seeing the child'

The same phenomenon is observed in the present tense in Example 39 and when the NP is a subject in Example 40. However, in Example 40 BK employs Lexicon I and the OBL-OBL system.

(40) a. Eyşe pirtûkê bir

Eyşe	pirtûk	-ê	bir
Eyşe.OBL	*book*	*-OBL.SG*	*take.PST*

'Eyşe took the book'

b. Eyşe pirtûkan bir

Eyşe	pirtûk	-an	bir
eyşe.OBL	*book*	*-OBL.PL*	*take.PST*

'Eyşe took the books'

This optionality puts BK in a transitional position between a baseline grammar and an emerging grammar. The language seems to be evolving towards a simpler lexicon as syncretism leads to fewer forms, as well as a simpler OBL-OBL alignment pattern in the past tense (where accusative case assignment is no longer restricted to non-past environments and is fully generalized/ underspecified). Dialects like BK, as well as the data in the Outlier section, show us that grammars are not static and constantly evolve, exhibiting intermediate forms along the way.

6 Future directions

There are a few questions that cannot be answered without a bigger sample size. Currently I am unable to clearly state whether the variation I observed stems from my informant's prescriptivist inclinations or whether the Kurmanji that people from Mardin speak is aligned with SK. Likewise, I am unable to state whether the whole region of Batman has undergone a change towards OBL-OBL patterning. I am also unable to state if the variation observed could stem from the informant's age, social status, gender, etc. The effects of these factors need to be further looked at with a bigger sample size.

7 About the author

I am a senior linguistics student at Boğaziçi University. Kurmanji in Turkey is currently undergoing a change; I wanted to see the morphological reflections of this process.

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