

Who Owns What? Possessive Constructions in Northern Talyshi (Anbarāni and Lankarāni Dialects)

Hakob Avchyan
Yerevan State University

doi.org/10.46991/jil/2026.01.02

Abstract: Talyshi, a Northwestern Iranian language spoken in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, is traditionally divided into three dialect clusters: Northern, Central, and Southern. This paper investigates possessive constructions in two Northern Talyshi dialects, Anbarāni (Iran) and Lankarāni (Azerbaijan), drawing on original fieldwork and corpus data. In the attributive domain, both dialects share three strategies: oblique marking of the possessor, the optional preposition *čə*, and possessive pronouns. In the predicative domain, hitherto almost undocumented, they diverge sharply: Anbarāni employs a goal-schema construction, marking the possessor with the postposition *ro* and an existential predicate, whereas Lankarāni employs a genitive-schema construction, in which the oblique-marked possessor is obligatorily cross-referenced by an enclitic pronoun. This divergence tracks not the traditional tripartite classification of Talyshi but the dominant contact language of each dialect — Persian for Anbarāni, Azerbaijani for Lankarāni. The findings refine the place of Northern Talyshi within the typology of Western Iranian predicative possession and provide the first description of predicative possession for any Northern Talyshi variety spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Keywords: Anbarāni; Lankarāni; Northern Talyshi; possessive constructions; predicative possession; Talyshi dialectology.

Hakob Avchyan
E-mail: hakob.avchyan@ysu.am
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5764-2640>

Received: 15.11.2025

Revised: 07.05.2026

Accepted: 22.05.2026



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial 4.0
International License.

© Hakob Avchyan, 2026

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts
of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive
any financial support.

1. Introduction

The Possession is among the most basic relations encoded in human language, and every language possesses grammatical means to express it (Heine 1997). Cross-linguistically, a distinction is drawn between attributive possession, holding within the noun phrase, and predicative possession, expressed at the clause level — and languages frequently differ markedly in how elaborated each domain is. In Northern Talyshi, a Northwestern Iranian language spoken in Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, attributive possession has received some descriptive attention, while predicative possession remains almost entirely undocumented and, where mentioned at all, rests on a single example.

This paper offers the first systematic account of possession in Northern Talyshi, based on a comparison of two dialects — Anbarāni (Iran) and Lankarāni (Republic of Azerbaijan) — drawing on original fieldwork and corpus data. We examine three attributive strategies (oblique-case possession, the *čə*-construction, and pronominal possession) and, for the first time, the predicative domain. The two dialects are shown to employ structurally distinct predicative possessive constructions — a goal-schema strategy in Anbarāni and a genitive-schema strategy, obligatorily cross-referenced by an enclitic pronoun, in Lankarāni — a split that tracks the contact language of each dialect (Persian and Azerbaijani, respectively) rather than the traditional Northern/Central/Southern dialect classification. These findings refine the existing typological classification of Northern Talyshi predicative possession — based, in the absence of dedicated fieldwork on the dialect, on a single example excerpted from a broader descriptive source — and provide the first description of predicative possession for any Northern Talyshi variety spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides background on Northern Talyshi and its dialects, reviews previous scholarship on possession in the language, and introduces the typological framework adopted here. Section 3 describes the data and methodology. Section 4 examines attributive possession in its three strategies. Section 5 turns to predicative possession. Section 6 concludes.

2. Background

Talyshi is a Northwestern Iranian language spoken along the southwestern coast of the Caspian Sea, straddling the border between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan. It is traditionally divided into three dialect clusters — Northern, Central, and Southern — a classification that cuts across the state border rather than following it. This paper examines two Northern Talyshi varieties: Anbarāni, spoken in Iran, and Lankarāni,

spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The choice of these two varieties is motivated by more than convenience of access: as members of the same dialect cluster separated by an international border, they have developed for roughly a century under markedly different contact regimes — Persian in the case of Anbarāni, Azerbaijani in the case of Lankarāni — making them a natural pair for examining how far a shared morphosyntactic inheritance can diverge under distinct external pressures.

Possession in Talyshi has received uneven treatment in previous scholarship. Attributive possession is described, with varying degrees of detail, in the major descriptive accounts of Northern Talyshi, including Miller (1953), Schulze (2000), Amiriān-Budālālu (2005), and Paul (2011), several of which also note the preposition *čə* in its genitive function. Predicative possession, by contrast, has gone almost entirely undescribed. The only first-hand observations are found in Paul (2011), who touches on the matter in passing in connection with the existential verb *heste* and the postposition *ro*.¹ In his cross-linguistic survey of predicative possession in Western Iranian, Mohammadirad (2020) classifies Northern Talyshi as a "be"-possessive language of the genitive-schema type, in which the possessor is expressed as a bound pronominal clitic and the possessee functions as the subject of the existential predicate, while Central Talyshi is assigned to the goal schema, with the possessor flagged by the postposition *rā*. This classification, however, rests on a single example drawn from Paul (2011: 222); it has not been tested against a broader body of data, nor differentiated across the Northern Talyshi dialects. The present paper undertakes such a test.

Following Heine (1997), a distinction is drawn between attributive (or adnominal) possession, which holds within a single noun phrase, and predicative possession, which is expressed at the clause level. Cross-linguistically, predicative possessive constructions are argued to derive historically from a small set of source schemas — among them the topic schema ("as for X, Y exists"), the genitive schema ("X's Y exists"), and the goal schema ("Y exists for X") — which in turn motivate a broad typological split between "be"-possessive languages, which retain an existential or copular predicate and mark the possessor non-canonically (obliquely or via pronominal clitic), and "have"-possessive languages, which employ a

¹ Paul (2011) records this postposition as *ru*; in my Aminjān data it is consistently *ro*. Since Paul's consultants were drawn in part from the same village (Aminjān; Paul 2011: 18), the difference is not one of locality. Note that the regular *u/o* correspondence between Anbarāni and the Azerbaijani varieties (e.g. Anbarāni *yul* "big", *tuža* "new", *zua* "boy" vs. Azerbaijani Talyshi *yol*, *toža*, *zoa*) would in fact predict Anbarāni *ru*; the *ro* of my data thus appears to reflect variation specific to this grammatical morpheme, which does not pattern with the lexical vocabulary. This has no bearing on the analysis.

transitive verb historically derived from "hold, keep" (Stassen 2009, Heine 1997, Mohammadirad 2020). Within Western Iranian, Mohammadirad (2020) shows this split to be areally rather than genetically conditioned: "be"-possession predominates at the northwestern and southwestern peripheries of the Iranian-speaking area, in contact with other "be"-languages such as Kurdish, Arabic, and Aramaic, while "have"-possession dominates the center and north, in the sphere of Persian influence; Azerbaijani, a "be"-possessive language, and Persian, the archetypal "have"-language, place Lankarāni and Anbarāni Talyshi on opposite sides of this areal divide. The existential/copular strategy itself continues a pattern already attested in Old and Middle Iranian, where the possessor appeared as a topicalized dative or oblique argument of an existential verb; the transitive "have"-construction is a later Western Middle Iranian innovation. Some languages additionally show a possession split conditioned by alienability, retaining the older "be"-construction for inalienable relations (kinship, body parts) while extending "have" to alienable and abstract possession. This typology provides the frame within which the predicative constructions of Anbarāni and Lankarāni are analyzed in Section 5.

3. Data and methodology

The Anbarāni data were collected during field trips conducted between 2015 and 2017 in the village of Aminjān (Anbarān District, Namin County, Ardabil Province) and supplemented through remote sessions in 2024–2025. The corpus comprises 32 recorded texts — folktales, anecdotes, translations from Persian, and personal narratives — together with an elicited list of over 350 sentences, obtained primarily through direct translation tasks from Persian. The elicited material served both to verify morphosyntactic patterns attested in the texts and to probe constructions — including the possessive constructions examined here — that are not spontaneously frequent in narrative. The Anbarāni data were provided by five native speakers of different generations and educational backgrounds, all originally from Aminjān and all trilingual in Talyshi, Persian, and the local Turkic variety (Torki).

Since direct fieldwork in the Republic of Azerbaijan was not feasible owing to access restrictions, the material for the Azerbaijani side derives from remote interviews with two native speakers — both bilingual in Talyshi and Azerbaijani — complemented by published sources, including collections of folktales, literary works by Talyshi authors, newspapers, and Talyshi-language news portals. This material predominantly represents the Lankarāni variety, which serves as the basis of the emerging written standard in the Republic of Azerbaijan and dominates published Talyshi-language production.

Interlinear examples are glossed according to the Leipzig Glossing Rules; the transcription follows a slightly modified version of Schulze's (2000) system (for details, see Avchyan 2024: 303). Historical-comparative observations, with reference to Old and Middle Iranian reconstructions, are introduced where relevant. A list of abbreviations is provided at the end of the paper.

4. Attributive possession

Attributive possession (also referred to as *nominal* or *phrasal possession*; Heine 1997: 143) describes the way two noun phrases are linked, where the possessor modifies the possessee within a single noun phrase. As Heine (1997: 143) notes, "(a) it typically presents presupposed rather than asserted information; (b) it involves object-like, time-stable contents rather than event-like contents; and (c) it involves phrasal rather than clausal syntax." In Northern Talyshi, attributive possession is expressed through three primary strategies: (i) the use of the oblique case on the possessor, (ii) the optional use of the preposition *čə*, which may precede the possessor in the oblique case, and (iii) the use of possessive pronouns.

4.1 Oblique case on the possessor

4.1.1 Simple oblique-case possession

In Northern Talyshi, nouns distinguish between a direct (unmarked) form and an oblique form, the latter used for marking objects, possessors, and certain adpositional phrases. Since attributive possession relies on the possessor being in the oblique case, understanding its form and distribution is crucial for the analysis that follows.²

In Anbarāni, the oblique case is marked by the suffix *-ə*, whereas in Lankarāni it is marked by *-i*.³ In the Lankarāni dialect, when the suffix attaches to vowel-final nouns, it typically surfaces as *-y*, as in *muy rāŋ* "the hair's color" and *zoay pəa* "the boy's father". In some cases, however, the marker may also be omitted. By contrast, in Anbarāni, vowel-final nouns show formal syncretism between the direct and oblique forms, as the distinction between the two cases is neutralized in this environment.

² For a concise description of the case system in Northern Talyshi, see Avchyan 2024: 306.

³ According to Miller (1948: 245) and Schulze (2000: 17), the Northern Talyshi oblique case marker can be traced back to Old Iranian *-ahyā*, which appears in Old Persian as the genitive singular ending of *a*-stem nouns. Miller further argues that the Talyshi suffix *-i* ultimately shares the same historical origin as the Persian *ezāfe* construction. Both, he suggests, derive from the Old Persian demonstrative-relative pronoun *hya*, from which the genitive ending *-ahyā* itself also developed (Miller 1948: 244–245).

One of the primary functions of the oblique case in Northern Talyshi is to express attributive possession, marking the person or thing that possesses another entity. In both Anbarāni and **Lankarāni**, the possessor, which appears in the oblique case, precedes the possessee:

- (1) i ruž i nafar-ə dust avə=ku
one day.DIR one person-OBL friend.DIR PP.3SG.OBL=from

pārs=ina=y (Anb)
ask.ST⁴=in=COP.3SG

“One day, **someone’s friend** asks him.”

- (2) Nurahmad-i pəa š-e əšta boa
Nurahmad-OBL father.DIR go.II-3SG REFL brother.Ø⁵

ton=o (Lan)
side=from

“Nurahmad’s father went to his brother.”

As shown in (1) and (2), in both Anbarāni and Lankarāni the possessor appears in the oblique case and precedes the possessed noun, while the possessee remains in the direct case unless required by other syntactic contexts.

4.1.2 Possessee in oblique case

In addition to marking possession, the oblique case in Northern Talyshi is also used to encode the definite direct object in accusative constructions and

⁴ Northern Talyshi inherits the common Iranian two-stem verb system (present stem, Stem I; past stem, Stem II), but this system has been substantially reduced, and many verbs have become monostemmic, retaining only one of the two stems (Stilo 2008: 372). The reduction has proceeded differently in Anbarāni and the Azerbaijani varieties, so that a verb may be one-stem in one dialect and two-stem in the other. Two-stem verbs are glossed here with Stem I / Stem II (following Paul 2011: 105); monostemmic verbs are glossed neutrally as .ST, since their single stem may historically continue either the present or the past stem, and glossing them as .ST avoids implying a stem identity that is not always recoverable.

⁵ In this paper, .Ø in glosses indicates the absence of overt morphological marking. It is used in two main contexts: (i) when a noun occupies a syntactic position that would normally be case-marked — such as an oblique possessor, an oblique agent in an ergative construction, or a definite direct object — but shows no overt marking, particularly with vowel-final stems in Anbarāni, where the direct and oblique forms are syncretic; and (ii) when an adjective, especially one ending in a vowel, does not take the attributive suffix *-a*.

the agent in ergative clauses. Consequently, when in a possessive construction the possessee itself fulfills one of these syntactic roles, it likewise appears in the oblique case, as in the following example:

- (3) Ahmad-ə dust-ə nun=əš vārd-a (Anb)
Ahmad-OBL friend-OBL bread.DIR=ENC.3SG bring.II-PPTC
“Ahmad’s friend has brought the bread.”

- (4) toləš-on dust-i-dəšmen-i farğ-i
Talysh-PL friend-OBL-enemy-OBL difference-OBL

zən-anin=in (Lan)
know.ST-DEB=COP.3PL
“The Talysh need to know the difference between (lit. of) friends and enemies.”

In (3), the possessor (*Ahmad*) and the possessee (*dust* “friend”) are both marked with the oblique case because the possessed NP *dust* functions as the agent of the verb *vārd-a* “to bring” in an ergative clause. In (4), the possessee *farğ* ‘difference’ appears in the oblique case since it serves as the definite direct object of *zən-* “to know”. The possessor phrase *dust-dəšmen* “friend and enemy” is likewise marked with the oblique case, following the regular possessive strategy.

4.1.3 Nested possession

Possessive constructions may also be embedded within one another, yielding so-called recursive or nested possession, in which a single noun phrase functions simultaneously as the possessee of a preceding possessor and as the possessor of a following possessee. In such constructions, every non-final noun in the chain appears in the oblique case, in accordance with the regular possessive strategy described in 4.1.1, while only the final possessee remains in the direct case:

- (5) Maryam-ə utuğ-ə ba səpi=y (Anb)
Maryam-OBL room-OBL door.DIR white=COP.3SG
“The door of Maryam’s room is white.”

(6) Piyamerd-i jen-i nom Fātma b-e (Lan)
old.man-OBL wife-OBL name.DIR Fatima be.II-3SG
“The old man’s wife’s name was Fatima.”

Nested constructions of greater depth are not attested in the present corpus, where possessive chains do not exceed two levels of embedding. There is no grammatical restriction that would rule out longer chains, and they can be

readily constructed; their absence from the material is more plausibly a matter of usage. Whether such chains occur in spontaneous speech, and at what depth acceptability degrades, remains to be investigated.

4.2 Possession with *čə*

The preposition *čə*, which is generally traced back to Old Persian *hačā* 'from' (Miller 1953: 86, Schulze 2000: 18) < OIr. **hačā*, occurs in both Anbarāni and Lankarāni and governs noun phrases in the oblique case. In both dialects, *čə* can function as a genitive marker, yielding possessive constructions such as *čə Ahmadə dada* (Anb) 'Ahmad's father', *čə zoay ka* (Lan) 'the boy's house', or *čə šāiri kitob* (Lan) 'the book of the poet'. As discussed in Section 4.1.1, the genitive relation may also be conveyed by the oblique case alone, without the preposition *čə*. In Anbarāni, the use of *čə* is relatively rare, and it is notably absent from earlier descriptions of this dialect (see Paul 2011; Amiriān-Budālālu 2005). The preposition also combines with various postpositions to express a range of other case relations, which fall outside the scope of the present paper. Below are examples illustrating the use of *čə* in possessive constructions:

- (7) *čə zua nana um-a* (Anb)
of boy.Ø mother.DIR come.II-PPTC
"The mother of the boy came."

- (8) *viša=da ġafil gəlay āvačaka ġənie=da,*
forest.DIR=in suddenly CL lightning.DIR fall.INF=in

čə merd-i ha kəšte=da (Lan)
of man-OBL donkey.Ø kill.INF=in
"In the forest, suddenly a lightning bolt falls and kills the man's donkey."

4.3 Pronominal possession

The third strategy employs the possessive pronouns, which are historically transparent fusions of the preposition *čə* with the personal pronouns — for the first and third persons singular, with their oblique forms (e.g., *čəmān* (Anb), *čəmə* (Lan) 'my'; *čəvə* (Anb), *čəy* (Lan) 'his/her'). Miller (1953: 115) extends this analysis to the second person as well (*əštə* < *čə* + *tə*; *šəma* < *čə* + *šəma*, where the initial *č* was lost owing to the articulatory proximity of *š* and *č*). Pronominal possession is thus not an independent development but the

lexicalized reflex of the *čə*-construction described in Section 4.2. The full paradigms are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Possessive pronouns in Anbarāni and Lankarāni

	Anbarāni		Lankarāni	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1st	<i>čəmān</i>	<i>čama</i>	<i>čəmə</i>	<i>čama</i>
2nd	<i>əštə</i>	<i>šəma</i>	<i>əštə</i>	<i>šəma</i>
3rd	<i>čavə</i>	<i>čavun</i>	<i>čay</i>	<i>čavon</i>

In their attributive use, the possessive pronouns invariably precede the possessed noun, show no agreement with it in number, and are restricted to attributive position:

- (9) *čəmān* *rost-a* *dās* *əmruž* *xayli*
POSS.1SG right-ATTR hand.DIR today much

diž=ina=y (Anb)

hurt.ST=in=COP.3SG

“My right hand hurts a lot today.”

- (10) *se* *ruž=e* *čəmə* *bāla* *tablār-z-i*
three day.DIR=COP.3SG POSS.1SG baby.Ø fever-OBL

gat-a=š=e (Lan)

take.ST-PPTC=ENC.3SG=COP.3SG

“It’s been three days since my baby got a fever.”

Alongside these attributive forms, both dialects possess absolute possessive pronouns (“mine”, “yours”, etc.), which are syntactically free, functioning as subjects, objects, or copular complements. Here the two dialects diverge sharply in the morphology they recruit: Anbarāni derives its absolute forms with the suffix *-(n)i* (*čəmāni* “mine”, *čavəni* “his/hers”), whereas Lankarāni employs the suffix *-ki*, borrowed from Azerbaijani (*čəmənki* ~ *čəməki* “mine”, *čayki* “his/hers”). The variation between forms with and without the epenthetic *-n-* — prescribed by Miller (1953: 115) but contradicted by Aboszoda and Sadykhzoda (2019: 57) — appears in the attested materials in both shapes, likely reflecting minor dialect-internal variation:

- (11) čəmān zua vəyi čuk-a zua=y,
POSS.1SG son.DIR very good-ATTR boy.DIR=COP.3SG

əštə-ni čuk=e? (Anb)
POSS.2SG-ABS good=COP.3SG

“My son is a very good boy. Is yours good?”

- (12) čəmān-i=an čuk=e (Anb)
POSS.1SG-ABS=too good=COP.3SG

“Mine is good, too.”

- (13) čəmə-n-ki ni əm māšin (Lan)
POSS.1SG-EP-ABS NEG.COP.3SG DEM car.DIR

“This car is not mine.”

5. Predicative possession

5.1 Anbarāni

In Anbarāni, predicative possession is expressed by means of an external possessor construction (cf. Paul 2011: 78, 330), in which the possessor is marked with the oblique case and the postposition *ro*, the possessee stands in the direct case, and the invariable existential verb *heste* — always in the third person singular regardless of the number of the possessee — completes the predicate:

- (14) Ahmad-ə=ro də gəla səpa hest=e (Anb)
Ahmad-OBL=for two CL dog.DIR exist.ST=COP.3SG

“Ahmad has two dogs.”

- (15) avə=ro tuža māšin hest=e (Anb)
PP.3SG.OBL=for new.Ø car.DIR exist.ST=COP.3SG

“He/she has a new car.”

- (16) ama=ro ila yul-a ka hest=e (Anb)
PP.1PL=for CL big-ATTR house.DIR exist.ST=COP.3SG

“We have a big house.”

As (15) and (16) show, when the possessor is a personal pronoun, the 1st and 3rd singular forms appear in their oblique shape (*avə*), while the remaining persons, lacking a distinct oblique form, appear in the direct case (*ama*). Note further that *heste* shows no agreement with the possessee in number (*də gəla səpa hest-e*, lit. “two dogs exist-3SG”), unlike the possessee agreement still visible in the corresponding Old Persian construction (cf. Mohammadirad 2020: 499, ex. 4).

Possession may alternatively be signaled by an enclitic pronoun alone, without any *ro*-marked possessor phrase — typically when the possessor has already been established in discourse:

- (17) *yul-a* *ka=šun* *hest=e* (Anb)
 big-ATTR house.DIR=ENC.3PL exist.ST=COP.3SG
 “They have a big house.”

The two devices — the *ro*-marked possessor and the enclitic — may also co-occur, in which case the enclitic functions as a resumptive element doubling the possessor:

- (18) *əštə* *žen-ə=ro* *čān* *gəla=š* *hoa*
 POSS.2SG wife-OBL=for how.much CL=ENC.3SG sister.DIR

 hest=e? (Anb)
 exist.ST=COP.3SG
 “How many sisters does your wife have?”

Here, *əštə žen* “your wife” is itself an ordinary attributive possessive phrase (Section 4.3), which as a whole functions as the possessor of the predicative construction; the enclitic *š*, attached to the classifier *gəla* rather than to the possessee noun *hoa* “sister” itself, resumes this possessor. Crucially, the enclitic and the *ro*-phrase are not independent alternatives but two positions in a single licensing system: either may occur alone, but the interpretation of the clause depends on which is present. With the possessor phrase omitted, *čān gəlaš hoa heste* (lit. “how many sisters does he/she have”) is grammatical, with the possessor recovered only anaphorically from *š*; if the enclitic is dropped as well, *čān gəla hoa heste* is no longer a possessive construction at all, but a plain existential, “how many sisters are there?”. Predicative possession in Anbarāni thus requires the presence of at least one possessor-licensing element — an oblique NP marked with *ro*, or an enclitic pronoun — with co-occurrence of both yielding an optional, redundant doubling. No example of the enclitic splitting the verb stem itself

(*hest*=*ENC*=*e*, as attested in Lankarāni, Section 5.2) occurs in the Anbarāni corpus; its possibility cannot, however, be excluded on this basis alone.

5.2 Lankarāni

Lankarāni predicative possession likewise involves the possessor in the oblique case, optionally preceded by the preposition *čə*, the possessee in the direct case, and the invariable verb *heste*. Unlike Anbarāni, the postposition *ro* is never employed in this function. When the possessor is pronominal, Lankarāni draws on the possessive pronouns described in Section 4.3 (*čama*, *čay*, etc.) rather than the bare personal pronouns used in the corresponding Anbarāni construction (Section 5.1: *amaro*, *avəro*) — so that, unlike in Anbarāni, the pronominal possessor in predicative possession is formally identical to the pronominal possessor in attributive possession. Also, unlike Anbarāni, the resumptive enclitic pronoun is obligatory here, regardless of whether the possessor is expressed as a full oblique noun phrase or as a possessive pronoun; only its position within the clause is free, attaching either to the possessee noun or, by the same mobility independently attested for enclitic pronouns elsewhere in the language (Section 4.1.1), splitting the existential verb itself:

- (19) *čə* *Murād-i* *gəlay* *toža* *māšin=əš*
of Murad-OBL CL new.Ø car.DIR=ENC.3SG

hest=e (Lan)

exist.ST=COP.3SG

“Murad has a new car.”

- (20) *čama* *rečín-a* *ka=mon*
POSS.1PL beautiful-ATTR house.DIR=ENC.1PL

hest=e (Lan)

exist.ST=COP.3SG

“We have a beautiful house.”

- (21) *čavon* *yol-a* *boğ*
POSS.3PL big-ATTR garden.DIR

hest=əšon=e (Lan)

exist.ST=ENC.3PL=COP.3SG

“They have a big garden.”

Examples (20) and (21) illustrate the same possessive relation with the enclitic attached, respectively, to the possessee noun and, splitting the

copula from the existential stem, to *heste* itself — confirming that its placement follows the general clitic-mobility rules of the language rather than being fixed to the possessee. The preposition *čə*, by contrast, is genuinely optional: (19) remains grammatical without it, *Muradi gəlay toža māšinəš heste*, with the oblique case alone marking the possessor.

5.3 Negation and past tense

Negation and past-tense marking in predicative possession do not introduce new possessor-marking strategies in either dialect; they operate entirely within the system already described in 5.1 and 5.2, substituting into the position otherwise occupied by *heste*. Negation in the present is expressed by the invariable negative copula *ni*, which replaces *heste* outright and, like its affirmative counterpart, shows no person or number agreement:

- (22) avə=ro aslan pul ni (Anb)
PP.3SG.OBL=for at.all money.DIR NEG.COP.3SG
“He/she doesn’t have money at all.”

- (23) čəmə pul=əm ni (Lan)
POSS.1SG money.DIR=ENC.1SG NEG.COP.3SG
“I have no money.”

As (22) and (23) show, the possessor-licensing patterns established above hold under negation without alteration: the Anbarāni example marks the possessor via *ro* alone, while the Lankarāni example shows the possessive pronoun obligatorily doubled by the enclitic, exactly as in the affirmative (Section 5.2).

Past tense is formed with *hestbe* (Lan)/*hestbə* (Anb), in which the existential stem *hest-* combines with *-be/-bə*, the third person singular past form of the copula *be* “to be”. Despite this etymological composition, the resulting form is invariable for all persons and numbers, a frozen third-singular agreement rather than a productive one; in Lankarāni, the enclitic may split the stem from this past-tense marker, just as it splits *hest-* from the present copula – *e* (Section 5.2):

- (24) vāxti hərdan b-im ilə=m arusak
when child.DIR be.II-1SG CL=ENC.1SG doll.DIR

hest=b-ə (Anb)
exist.ST=be.II-3SG
“When I was a child, I had a doll.”

- | | | | | | |
|------|----|-----|------------|-------|-----------------|
| (25) | čə | Ali | Soltān-i | gəlay | zoa=š |
| | of | Ali | Soltan-OBL | CL | boy.DIR=ENC.3SG |

hest=b-e (Lan)

exist.ST=be.II-3SG

“Ali Soltan had a son.”

- (26) hest=aʃon=b-e də kina də zoa (Lan)
exist.ST=ENC.3PL=be.II-3SG two girl.DIR two boy.DIR

“They had two daughters (and) two sons.”

Example (24) shows the Anbarāni enclitic-only strategy (Section 5.1) extended to the past tense, with *-m* attaching to the classifier *ila*. Example (25) shows the Lankarāni obligatory doubling (Section 5.2) likewise unaffected by tense. Example (26) further confirms that the enclitic may split the existential stem from the past-tense marker in exactly the same way it splits *hest-* from the present copula *-e* (Section 5.2); as in Anbarāni's enclitic-only strategy, no overt possessor phrase is present in the clause, and the possessor — “they” — is recovered from the enclitic *əšon* alone. Note also that *hestəšonbe* shows no agreement with the plural possessee (*də kina*, *də zoa* “two daughters, two sons”), consistent with the invariability of the existential stem observed throughout this section.

For negative past possession, the negator combines with the past copula exactly as in ordinary negative past clauses: *nəbe* is simply the third person singular negative past of *be* ‘to be’ (cf. *nəbim* ‘I was not’, *nəbiš* ‘you were not’, *nəbe* ‘it/he/she was not’, etc.), used here as the negative existential predicate. As with the affirmative *hestbə/hestbe* discussed above, the form remains invariant regardless of the person and number of the possessor or possessee; this is attested for Lankarāni, where the obligatory possessive-pronoun-plus-enclitic strategy again holds without alteration:

- (27) čay hič gəla dust=əš nə=b-e (Lan)
POSS.3SG none CL friend.DIR=ENC.3SG NEG=be.II-3SG

“He/she didn’t have any friend.”

No corresponding example is attested for Anbarāni in the present corpus; there is no reason to expect the pattern to differ, given that negative present and past-tense affirmative possession both behave regularly in that dialect (22, 24), but the gap should be closed through further elicitation.

In both dialects, then, negation and past tense are morphologically independent of, and do not interact with, the possessor-licensing system itself: whatever strategy licenses possession in the simple affirmative present

— *ro* and/or enclitic in Anbarāni, oblique/*čə* possessor plus obligatory enclitic in Lankarāni — carries over unchanged under negation and under past-tense marking.

5.4 Discussion

The two Northern Talyshi dialects examined here instantiate two structurally distinct predicative possessive constructions. Anbarāni employs a goal-schema construction (Heine 1997: 47, Paul's (2011) "external possessor construction"), in which the possessor is marked by the postposition *ro* — continuing a pattern already attested in Middle Iranian (cf. the Middle Persian *rāy*-construction; Mohammadirad 2020: 505) and shared with Central Talyshi *rā* (Mohammadirad 2020: 508). Lankarāni, by contrast, employs a genitive-schema construction, in which the possessor is marked by the oblique case alone, optionally reinforced by *čə* — formally identical to the attributive possessive strategies described in Section 4.1 and Section 4.2 — with the existential predicate obligatorily cross-referencing the possessor via an enclitic pronoun. The postposition *ro* is categorically unattested in Lankarāni predicative possession.

This division bears on the classification proposed by Mohammadirad (2020: 508), who groups "Northern Taleshi" as a whole under the genitive-schema type on the basis of a single example, *šāš ǵəlam bəva heste* "I have six brothers" (Paul 2011: 222) — a reasonable choice given that his study surveys predicative possession across some thirty Western Iranian languages and could not undertake dedicated fieldwork on each. That example, however, is drawn from a passage in Paul (2011) illustrating the mobility of enclitic pronouns within numeral phrases (§4.10.3-adjacent material), where its possessive meaning is incidental to the point being made, rather than from Paul's dedicated treatment of possession (§6.11.6, 330), where the Anbarāni construction he identifies as characteristic is instead *ro*-marked. The present data, together with Paul's own description, suggest that Anbarāni is better analyzed as a goal-schema language, patterning with Central Talyshi rather than with the genitive-schema type; Northern Talyshi as a whole, rather than forming a single type, appears to split along the Anbarāni-Lankarāni line into goal-schema and genitive-schema types respectively. For the Northern Talyshi varieties of the Republic of Azerbaijan, no description of predicative possession, in any form, has previously existed; the Lankarāni construction reported here is accordingly new to the literature.

The two dialects also diverge in the grammatical status of the resumptive enclitic: optional in Anbarāni, where it may double an overt *ro*-marked possessor or stand alone in its place, but obligatory in Lankarāni, where it co-occurs with the possessor regardless of how the latter is expressed. This

obligatoriness closely parallels the predicative possessive construction of Azerbaijani, in which a genitive-marked possessor pronoun co-occurs with an obligatory possessive-agreement suffix on the possessee before the existential particle *var* (e.g., *mənim maşınım var* “I have a car”, lit. “my car-my exists”). The parallel extends to the pronominal possessor itself: just as Lankarāni recruits its possessive pronouns — rather than bare personal pronouns, as in Anbarāni — into the predicative construction, Azerbaijani possessive constructions are built on the genitive-marked personal pronoun. The structural convergence between Lankarāni and Azerbaijani, absent from Anbarāni, is consistent with contact-induced reinforcement of an obligatory possessor-agreement mechanism under sustained Azerbaijani influence — though, since no comparable “have”-verb or Turkic morphological material has been borrowed, the effect appears to be one of pattern replication rather than lexical or morphological transfer (cf. Matras and Sakel 2007). Considered alongside Southern Talyshi, which has independently developed a “have”-verb possessive construction from *dāştan* (Paul 2011: 330, Mohammadirad 2020: 508), the three dialects trace a cline from goal-schema “be”-possession (Anbarāni, Central Talyshi) through genitive-schema “be”-possession (Lankarāni) to full “have”-possession (Southern Talyshi) — a cline that does not track the traditional Northern/Central/Southern dialect classification directly, but appears sensitive to the possessive typology of the contact language at each point along it.

6. Conclusions

This paper has provided the first systematic account of possessive constructions in two Northern Talyshi dialects, Anbarāni and Lankarāni. In the attributive domain, both dialects share the same three strategies — oblique marking of the possessor, the facultative preposition *čə*, and a set of possessive pronouns historically derived from *čə* plus a personal pronoun — with the principal difference lying in the productivity of *čə*, which is rare in Anbarāni, and in the shape of the absolute possessive pronouns, where Anbarāni uses the inherited suffix *-(n)i* and Lankarāni the contact-induced Azerbaijani *-ki*.

In the predicative domain, previously almost undocumented, the two dialects diverge more sharply. Anbarāni employs a goal-schema construction, in which the possessor is marked by the postposition *ro* and an existential predicate; Lankarāni employs a genitive-schema construction, in which the possessor is marked by the oblique case, optionally reinforced by *čə*, and is obligatorily cross-referenced by an enclitic pronoun on the invariable existential *heste*. Negation and past tense operate identically in both dialects, substituting into the existing construction without introducing new possessor-marking strategies. This divergence does not follow the traditional

tripartite dialect classification of Talyshi; rather, it aligns with the predicative possessive typology of each dialect's dominant contact language — Persian for Anbarāni, Azerbaijani for Lankarāni — with the Lankarāni construction in particular showing a close structural parallel to the Azerbaijani genitive-plus-agreement pattern.

These results carry two broader implications. First, they refine the place of Northern Talyshi in the typology of Western Iranian predicative possession: Anbarāni is better grouped with Central Talyshi as a goal-schema “be”-language, and Northern Talyshi as a whole cannot be treated as typologically uniform. Considered together with the “have”-possession of Southern Talyshi, the Talyshi dialects trace a cline across all the major Western Iranian possessive types, sensitive to contact rather than to genealogical subgrouping. Second, they add to the evidence that predicative possession is a domain particularly susceptible to contact-induced restructuring in Iranian. Several questions remain open for further fieldwork: whether the Anbarāni negative past patterns as predicted, how the Azerbaijani Talyshi varieties beyond Lankarāni behave, and where exactly along the goal-genitive–“have” cline the transitional Southern varieties fall. A fuller areal picture of possession across the Talyshi dialect continuum, integrating the Iranian and Azerbaijani varieties on both sides of the border, remains a task for future research.

Abbreviations

∅	zero morpheme	EP	epenthetic sound
1/2/3	first/second/third person	INF	infinitive
I	stem I (present stem)	Lan	Lankarāni
II	stem II (past stem)	NEG	negation
ABS	absolute	OBL	oblique case
Anb	Anbarāni	PL	plural
ATTR	attributive marker	POSS	possessive pronoun
CL	classifier	PP	personal pronoun
COP	copula	PPTC	past participle
DEB	debitive	REFL	reflexive pronoun
DEM	demonstrative pronoun	SG	singular
DIR	direct case	ST	stem
ENC	enclitic pronoun		

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aboszoda, F., and Sadykhzoda, A. (2019), *Toləša zəvon: fonetika, morfologiya, sintaksis* [Talyshi Language: Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax], Minsk: Medisont.
- Amiriān-Budālālu, R. (2005), *Guyeš-e Tāleši-e Anbarān-e Ardabil* [The Talyshi dialect of Anbarān of Ardabil], Tehran: Jāme-e Negar.
- Avchyan, H. (2024), "Comparison Constructions in Two Northern Talyshi Dialects", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 303–324.
- Heine, B. (1997), *Possession: Cognitive sources, forces, and grammaticalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matras, Y., and Sakel, J. (2007), "Investigating the Mechanisms of Pattern Replication in Language Convergence", *Studies in Language*, vol 31, no. 4, pp. 829–865.
- Miller, B. (1948), "O suffikse -i imjon suščestvitel'nyx v talyšskom jazyke" [On the Suffix -i of Nouns in the Talyshi Language], *Jazyk i myšlenie*, vol. 11, pp. 237–246.
- Miller, B. (1953), *Talyšskij jazyk* [The Talyshi Language], Moscow: Nauka.
- Mohammadirad, M. (2020), "Predicative Possession across Western Iranian Languages", *Folia Linguistica*, vol. 54, no. 3, pp. 497–526.
- Paul, D. (2011), *A Comparative Dialectal Description of Iranian Taleshi*, Manchester: University of Manchester dissertation.
- Schulze, W. (2000), *Northern Talysh*, Munich: Lincom Europa.
- Stassen, L. (2009), *Predicative Possession*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stilo, D. (2008), "Two Sets of Mobile Verbal Person Agreement Markers in the Northern Talyshi Language", in *Aspects of Iranian Linguistics*, ed. by S. Karimi, D. Stilo, and V. Samiiān, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 363–390.