

A micro-typological study of split intransitivity in Pamir languages: How lexical variation points to diachronic changes in alignment

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ALT 2026
1 July

Outline of the talk

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1. Introduction



Languages under study

Indo-European < Iranian
< Eastern Iranian < Pamir group

Shughni-Yazghulami group:

Shughni

Bartangi

Rushani

Khufi

Roshorvi

Sarikoli

Yazghulami

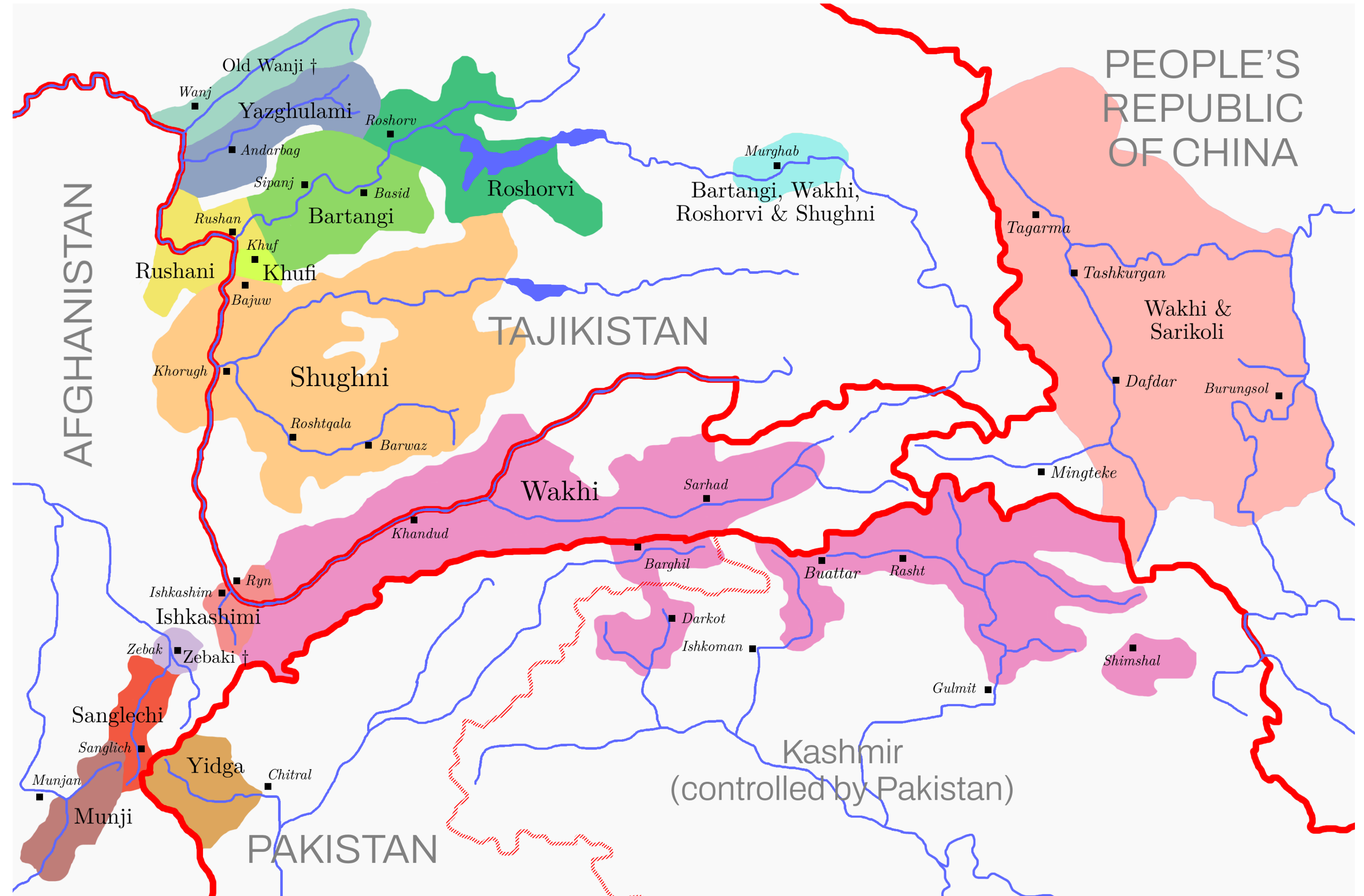


Fig.1. Map of Pamir languages⁴ by M. Melenchenko and Yu. Koryakov.

Alignment

S – single argument of the intransitive clause

A – the most agentive argument of the transitive clause

P – the most patientive argument of the transitive clause

Case-marking, verbal agreement, word order

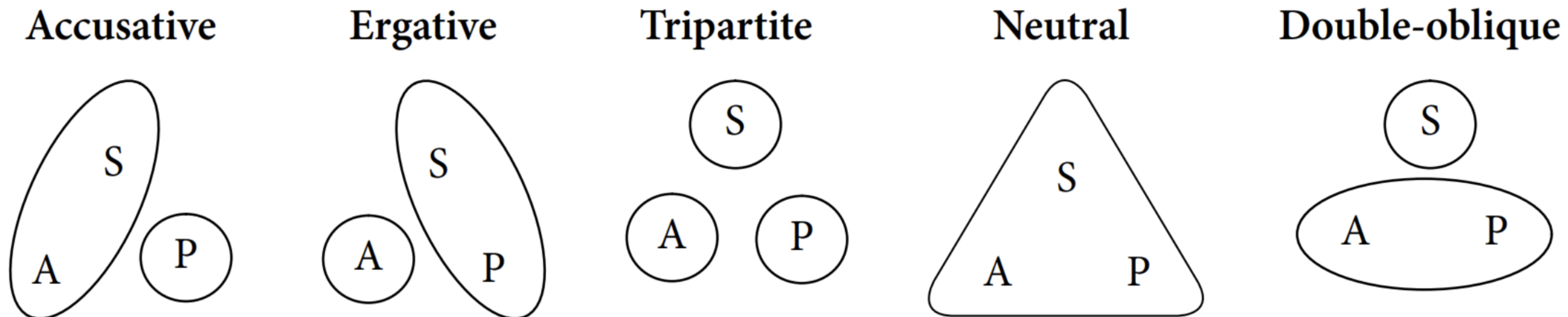
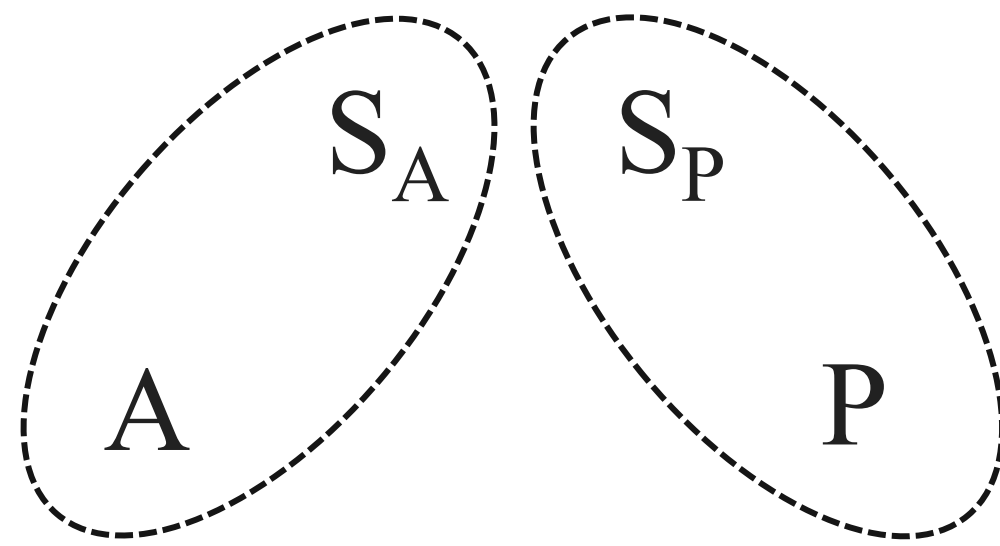


Fig. 2. Alignment strategies (Velupillai 2012:239)

Phenomenon under investigation

Split intransitivity (SI) involves a morphosyntactic split among intransitive verbs, dividing them into two distinct classes, labelled S_A -verbs and S_P -verbs (Dixon 1979; Van Valin 1990, Mithun 1991; Creissels 2007; Arkadiev 2008; cf. *active alignment, split S, unaccusativity, semantic alignment*)



Split intransitivity

Phenomenon under investigation

(1) Basid Bartangi

a) Transitive:

<i>mun</i> = <i>um</i>	<i>az</i>	<i>dif</i>	<i>kitob</i>	<i>xõy-j.</i>
1SG.OBL=1SG	DOBJ	D2.3PL.OBL	book	read-PF

‘I (A) read those books (P).’ (Karamkhudoev 1973:45)

b) Intransitive type 1 (S_A-verb):

<i>mun</i> = <i>um</i>	<i>žox-t,</i>	<...>
1SG.OBL=1SG	run-PST	

‘I (S_A) ran, <...>.’ (Karamkhudoev 1973:163)

c) Intransitive type 2 (S_P-verb):

<i>āz</i> = <i>um</i>	<i>ca</i>	<i>ya-t</i>	<...>
1SG.DIR=1SG	SUB	come-PST	

‘When I (S_P) came, <...>.’ (Karamkhudoev 1973:108)

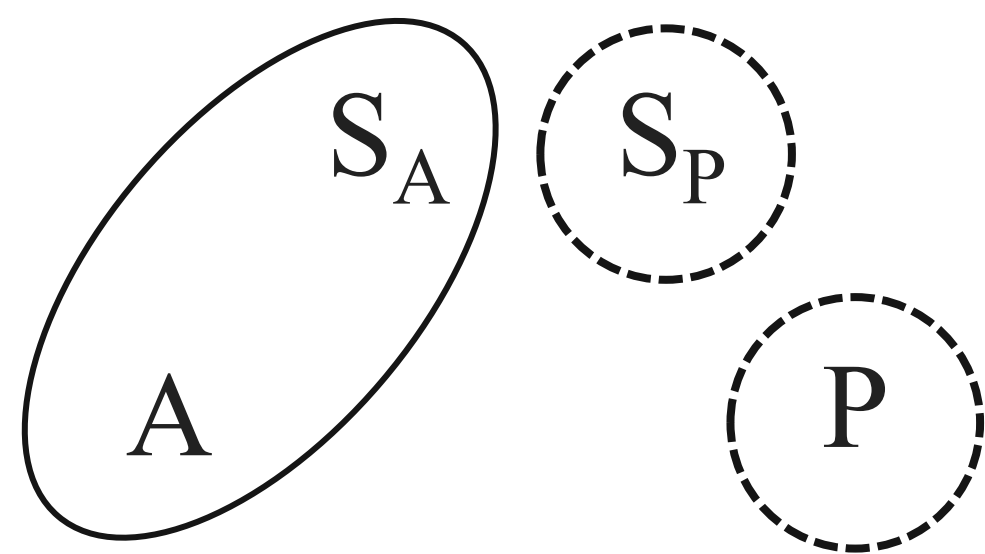
← **Split intransitivity (SI)**
or active-stative alignment;
semantic alignment; split S;
unaccusativity.

Phenomenon under investigation

Split intransitivity (SI) involves a morphosyntactic split among intransitive verbs, dividing them into two distinct classes, labelled S_A -verbs and S_P -verbs (Dixon 1979; Van Valin 1990, Mithun 1991; Creissels 2007; Arkadiev 2008; cf. *active alignment, split S, unaccusativity, semantic alignment*)

Specific subtype of SI analysed in this study:

- SI overtly marked (**case-marking** and/or **verbal agreement**) in a **very limited number of contexts**
- S_A and S_P show distinct morphosyntax, where S_A **aligns with A**, but S_P **may not align with either A or P**



Split intransitivity in Shughni-Rushani

Research questions

Research questions:

- (1) What are the lexical inventories of S_A - and S_P -verbs in Shughni, Rushani and Bartangi, especially of cognate verbs?
- (2) What can the observed data reveal about the diachronic development of closely related languages?



2. Morphosyntactic manifestations of split intransitivity



Morphosyntactic manifestations of SI

(2) Shughni (Chistiakova 2023:17)

a) Transitive:

<i>yu=</i> <i>yi</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>wīn-č̣</i>
D3.M.SG.DIR=3SG	1SG.OBL	see-PF

‘He (A) saw me (P)’.

b) Intransitive, S_A-verb:

<i>yu=</i> <i>yi</i>	<i>lap</i>	<i>paloy-s-t</i>
D3.M.SG.DIR=3SG	much	work-PST

‘He (S_A) worked a lot’.

c) Intransitive, S_P-verb:

<i>yā</i> (*= <i>yi</i>)	<i>pi</i>	<i>dišīd</i>	<i>sifā-d</i>
D3.F.SG.DIR	up	roof	climb.F-PST

‘She (S_P) climbed the roof’.

Morphosyntactic manifestations of SI

(3) Basid Bartangi

a) Transitive:

uf=af *mis az* *def* *mol* *siru-d*
D3.PL.OBL=3PL.TR ADD D.OBJ D2.PL.OBL cattle divide-PST
'They (A) also divided their cattle (P)' (elic. 2025).

b) Intransitive, S_A-verb:

uf=af *kata* *ruz* *fis-t*
D3.PL.OBL=3PL.TR whole day blow_nose-PST
'(The children got sick). They (S_A) were blowing their noses all day' (elic. 2024).

c) Intransitive, S_p-verb:

wāδ=an *ar* *yi* *zul* *čūd* *wīz-d*
D3.PL.DIR=3PL DOWN INDEF small house fit-PST
'They (S_p) fit into a small house' (elic. 2024).

Morphosyntactic manifestations of SI

SI can be observed only **in past tenses** and in a **limited number of contexts**: it can be found in agreement with 3SG and/or 3PL subjects (Table 2) and in case-marking with pronominal subjects (Table 3).

		Shughni	Rushani	Bartangi	
				Sipanj dialect	Basid dialect
3SG	A & S _A	=i		—	
	S _P	—			
3PL	A & S _A	=en	=an	=af	
	S _P			=an	

Table 2. SI in verbal agreement with 3sg and 3pl subjects.

	Shughni	Rushani	Bartangi
P	Oblique case	Oblique case	Optional DO preposition + oblique case
A & S _A	Direct case	Oblique case	
S _P		Direct case	

Table 3. SI in case-marking of pronominal subjects.

3. Data & Methods



Data and methodology

Partially based on: my MA Thesis (Chistiakova 2023) and previous fieldwork:

Shughni, 11 speakers (Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, November 2022 & Khorog, Tajikistan, June 2024);

Basid Bartangi: 3 speakers (Basid, Tajikistan, June 2024).

Field trip March 12 - April 14, Tajikistan, 2025.

Rushani (3 speakers; Vamar; 15-24 of March);

Sipanji Bartangi (3 speakers; Sipanj; 25-31 of March);

Basid Bartangi (3 speakers; Basid; 1-8 of April);

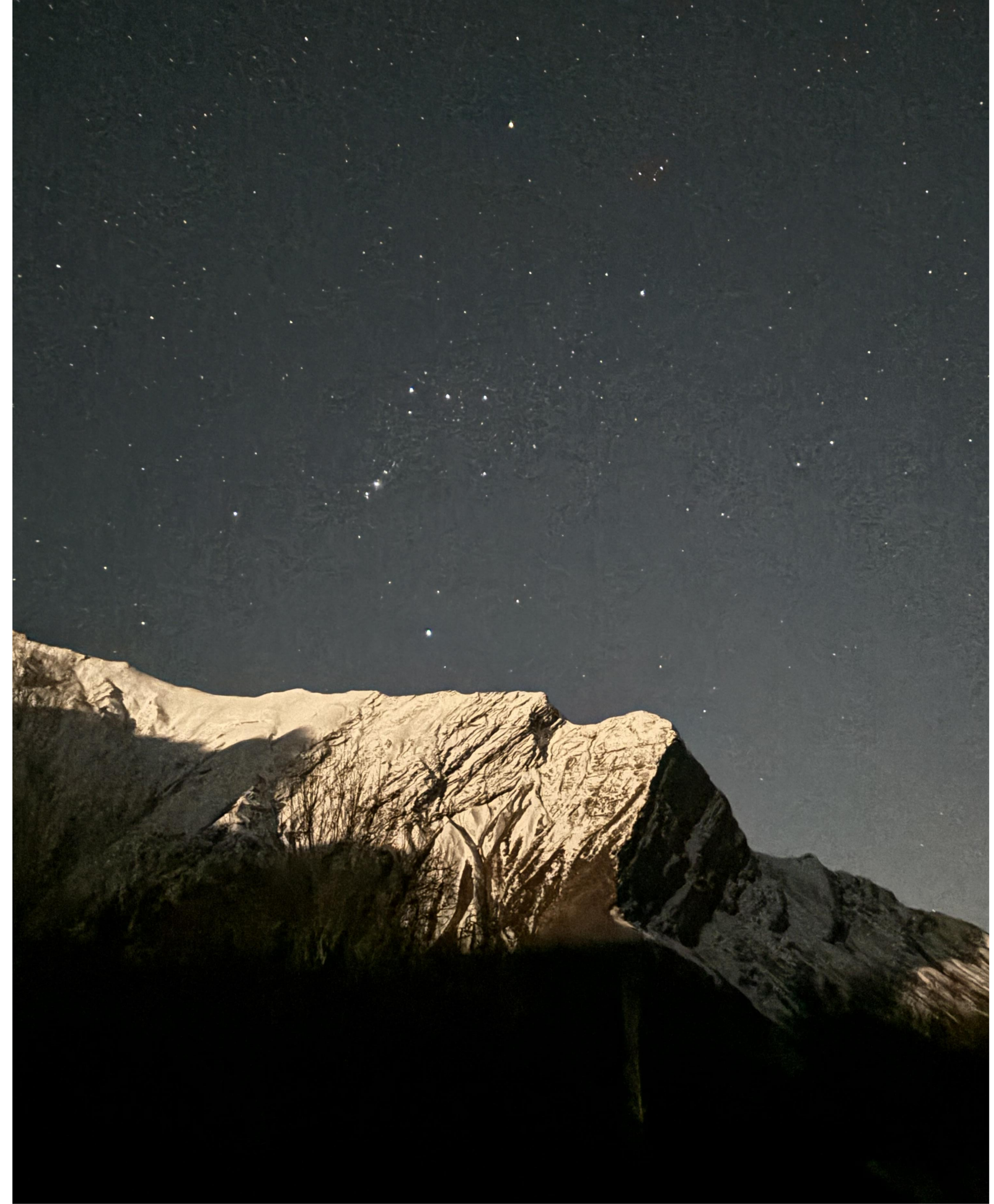
Shughni (1 speaker; Khorog; 9-12 of April).

Aim of elicitation:

- to compile inventories of cognate intransitive verbs across the languages,
- to classify them as S_A- or S_P-verbs based on the strategies available in each language,
- to compare their behaviour in terms of SI.



4. RQ 1: Lexical inventories of S_A - and S_P -verbs



Results in numbers

Questionnaire: 350 verbs, 371 contexts (some entries include multiple lines for polysemous meanings).

	Shughni (agreement)	Rushani		Sipanj Bartangi		Basid Bartangi (case-marking)
		agreement	case-marking	agreement	case-marking	
Total number of intransitive simple verbs	220 verbs (100%)	193 (100%)	191 (100%)	235 (100%)	230 (100%)	209 (100%)
S _A -verbs	157 (71%)	123 (64 %)	103 (54%)	161 (69%)	135 (59%)	110 (53%)
S _P -verbs	48 (22%)	18 (9%)	55 (29%)	55 (23%)	45 (20%)	62 (30%)
Variable	15 (7%)	52 (27%)	9 (5%)	19 (8%)	10 (4%)	3 (1 %)
Animacy- constrained	-	-	24 (13%)	-	40 (17%)	34 (16%)

Table 1. Distribution of intransitive verbs across four general categories in Shughni-Rushani languages.

Variability: Rushani and Sipanj Bartangi

	Agreement	Case-marking	Rushani	Sipanj Bartangi
1	S _A	S _A	103 verbs (53%)	135 verbs (57%)
2	S _P	S _P	10 verbs (5%)	33 verbs (14%)
3	S _P	S _A	0	0
4	S _A	S _P	3 verbs (1.6%)	5 verbs (2%)
5	S _A	no data	14 verbs (7%)	18 verbs (8%)
6	S _P	no data	8 verbs (4%)	22 verbs (9%)
7	Verbs on which speakers disagree		55 (29%)	22 (9%)
	Total number of verbs		193 (100%)	235 (100%)

Table 2. Patterns of verbs in Rushani and Sipanj Bartangi.

Variability: Rushani and Sipanj Bartangi

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Agreement	1	S _A	S _P	S _P	S _A	S _A	S _P	Total number of verbs
Case-marking	2	S _A	S _P	S _A	S _P	no data	no data	
Rushani, 55 verbs (100%)	3	-	+	-	+	-	-	42 (76%)
	4	+	-	-	+	-	-	5 (9%)
	5	-	-	-	-	+	+	4 (7%)
	6	+	+	-	-	-	-	2 (4%)
	7	+	+	-	+	-	-	2 (4%)
	8	9	46	0	49	4	4	
Sipanj Bartangi, 22 verbs (100%)	9	-	+	-	+	-	-	6 (27%)
	10	+	+	-	-	-	-	6 (27%)
	11	-	-	-	-	+	+	5 (23%)
	12	+	-	-	+	-	-	3 (14%)
	13	-	+	-	-	+	-	2 (9%)
	14	9	14	0	9	7	5	

Table 3. Variability across speakers in Rushani and Sipanj Bartangi.

Variability

(4) Sipanj Bartangi

- a) *yā=****yi*** *balyā* *sikix-t* *az* *di* *kasali*
D3.SG.DIR=3SG barely survive-PST EL D2.SG.OBL illness

“S/he barely survived this illness.” (S_A-verb, agreement) (elic. 2025).

- b) ***wāδ=an*** (**uf=af*) *balyā* *sikix-t* *az* *di* *kasali*
D3.PL.DIR=3PL barely survive-PST EL D2.SG.OBL illness

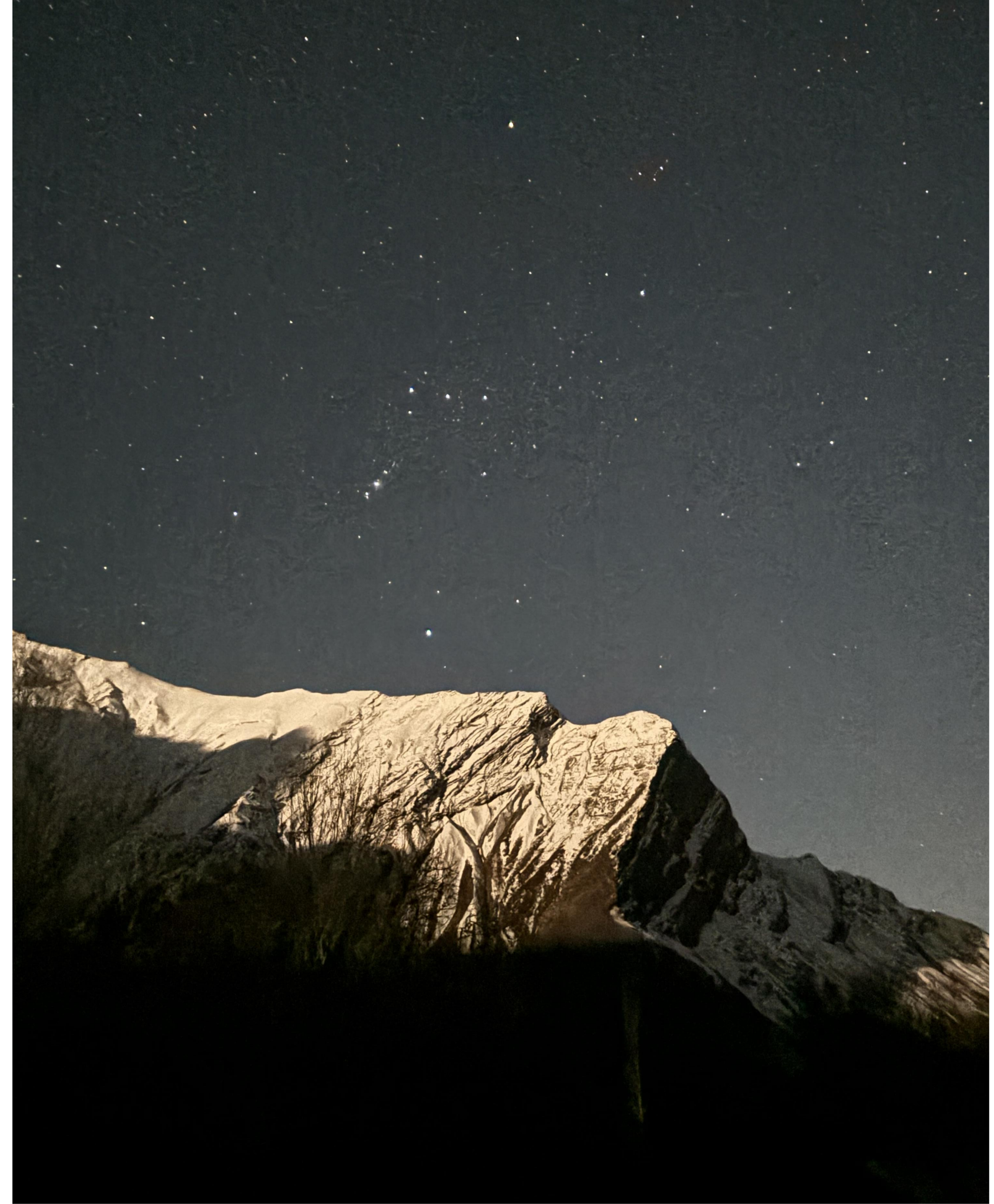
“They barely survived this illness.” (S_P-verb, case-marking) (elic. 2025).

Variability: Shughni and Basid Bartangi

	Shughni, Agreement	Basid Bartangi, Case-marking	Number of cognate verbs for Shughni and Basid Bartangi
1	S _A	S _A	79 verbs (48%)
2	S _P	S _P	30 verbs (18%)
3	S _P	S _A	0
4	S _A	S _P	11 verbs (7%)
5	S _A	No data	18 verbs (11%)
6	S _P	No data	11 verbs (7%)
7	S _A / S _P	S _A	0
8	S _A / S _P	S _P	8 verbs (5%)
9	S _A	S _A / S _P	1 verb (0.6%)
10	S _P	S _A / S _P	0
11	S _A / S _P	S _A / S _P	2 verbs (1.2%)
12	S _A / S _P	No data	4 verbs (2.4%)
	Total number of cognate verbs		164 (100%)

Table 4. Classification of cognate verbs across Shughni and Basid Bartangi.

5. RQ 2: Interpretation: Diachronic change



Variability

(4) Rushani

- a) Sp 1&2: *az=um* (**mu*) *pa* *Xaray* *firep-t*
1SG.DIR=1SG UP Khorogh reach-PST
‘I reached Khorogh’ (S_P-verb, case-marking) (elic. 2025)
- b) Sp.1: *Karamsho=yi* *pa* *Xaray* *firep-t*
Karamsho=3SG UP Khorogh reach-PST
‘Karamsho reached Khorogh’ (S_A-verb, agreement) (elic. 2025)
- c) Sp.2: *Karamsho* (*=*yi*) *pa* *Xaray* *firep-t*
Karamsho UP Khorogh reach-PST
‘Karamsho reached Khorogh’ (S_P-verb, agreement) (elic. 2025)

Across languages:

Agreement: variable (S_A/ S_P-verb) (Shughni, Rushani); S_P-verb (Sipanj Bartangi)

Case: S_P-verb (Sipanj Bartangi, Basid Bartangi, Rushani).

S_P-marking is shared by both marking strategies, with S_A-marking representing a more recent innovation limited to agreement → *fireptōw* was originally an S_P-verb.

Generalization

Impossible combination: no examples of verbs that behave as S_P -verb according to verbal agreement (clitic =*i*) but as S_A - according to case-marking (oblique subject) (see Table 18)

		Case-marking	
		S_A -verbs	S_P -verbs
Agreement	S_A -verbs	+	+
	S_P -verbs	—	+

If verb x in language X is marked as S_A (case-marking)
→ its cognate y in language Y is marked as S_A (verbal agreement)

Table 5. Impossible combination.

Evidence of diachronic change

Two possible interpretations:

- (1) The clitic =i (S_A -marking) is expanding to more verbs, resulting in an increased number of S_A -verbs in terms of agreement.
- (2) The use of oblique case-marking for subject (S_A -marking) is declining, leading to more S_P -verbs in terms of case-marking.

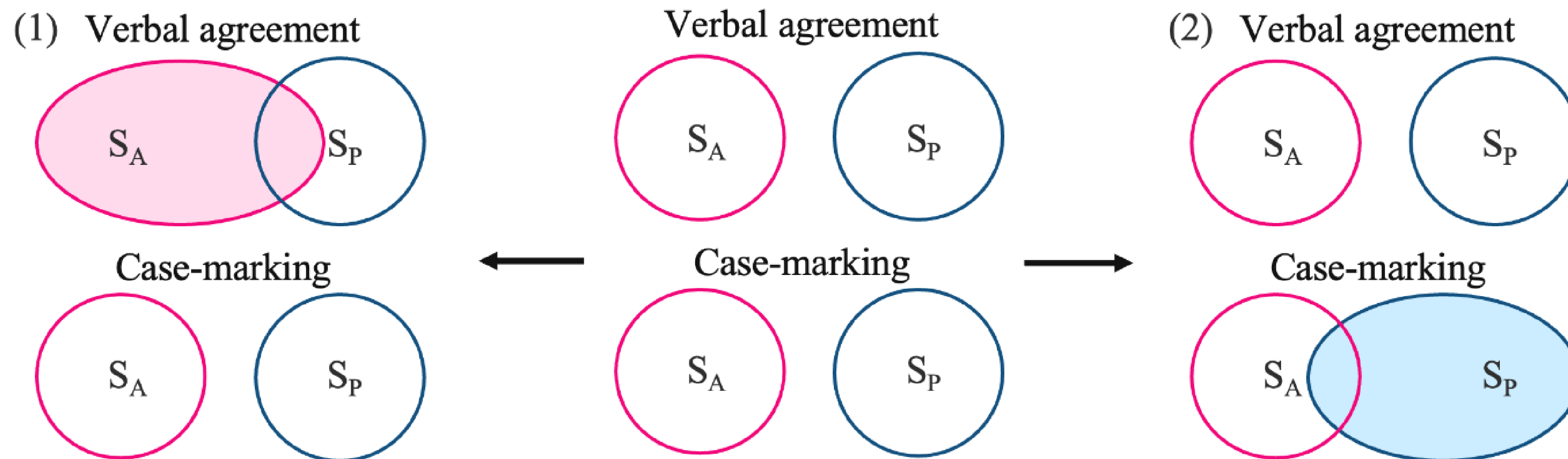


Fig. 3. Two possible directions of change in SI system in Shughni-Rushani languages.

Diachronic change: indications for both interpretations

(2) Decrease of S_A in terms of case-marking.

- ongoing decrease of S_A in case-marking was described in Skalmowski (1974), Payne (1980).
- our data confirms the shift: during elicitation, the oblique S construction never occurred as the first response to any stimulus targeting this construction.

(1) Expansion of S_A in terms of agreement.

- not documented previously, but our data point to it.
- a great number of variable verbs follow the same pattern: some speakers agree on consistent S_P -marking in case and agreement, while others deviate to S_A -marking in agreement.

80 verbs show variability across languages;
for 54 verbs (67.5%) data suggest an original S_P -classification, although in contemporary usage these verbs also allow for S_A agreement.

(2) Case-marking

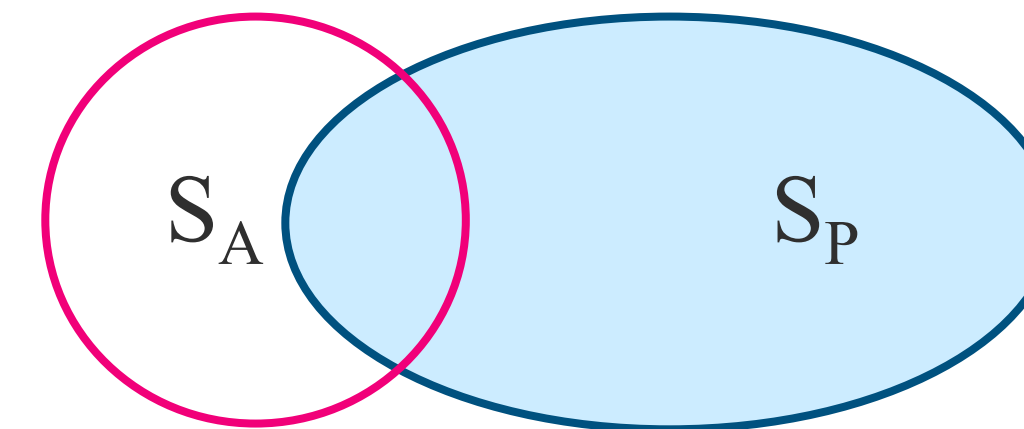


Fig. 4. Possible direction of change in case-marking.

(1) Verbal agreement

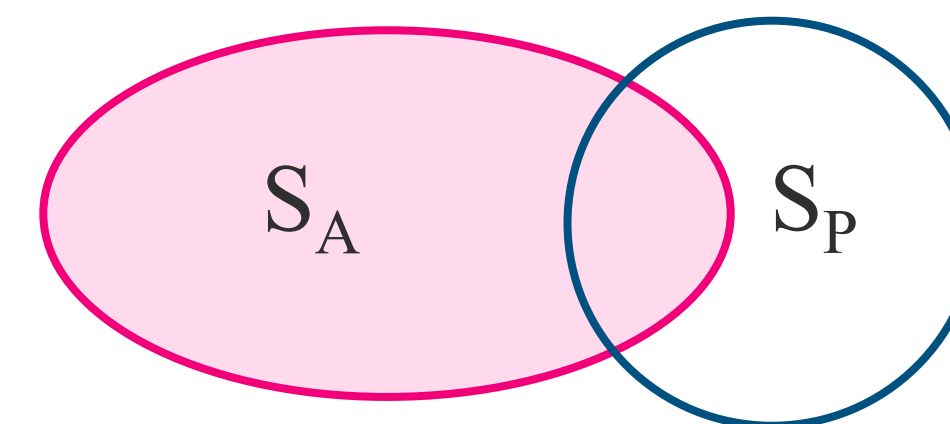


Fig. 5. Possible direction of change in agreement.

Conclusion

The observed patterns suggest an ongoing diachronic shift toward fully accusative alignment, aligning Shughni-Rushani languages with broader trends in the modern Iranian languages.

In this process, the two loci of SI – verbal agreement and case-marking – are diverging.

The oblique S construction that was previously used with transitive and S_A -verbs is diminishing in modern languages, being replaced by consistent nominative-accusative case-marking. As a result, case-marking as a locus for SI marking is disappearing.

By contrast, the 3sg clitic $=i$ is expanding onto verbs that were previously S_P -verbs, and thus weakening as a marker of lexically transitive verbs and S_A -verbs.





Thank you for your attention!

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