(In)separability of Persian Complex Predicates

Zahra Ghane
Heinrich Heine University, Germany

Reza Soltani
UiT The Arctic University, Norway

The verbal lexicon of Persian is mostly formed of complex predicates (CP), consisting **of** a limited number of verbs and a non-verbal element, mainly a noun, such as /rang zadan/ 'to paint (paint hit)', qadam zadan 'to walk (step hit)', also known as light verb constructions (LVCs). The separability of the components in this construction ha~ve~s been a focus of interest and has been more or less investigated by some linguists (e.g. Dabir-Moghaddam, 1997; Faghiri and Samvelian, 2021, Family, 2006; Fleischhauer and Neisani, 2020; Karimi-Doostan, 2011; Müller, 2010; Saedi, 2016; Saeedi, 2009; Samvelian and Faghiri, 2014) which lead to some invalid generalization**s** when a broader set of data is scrutinized. They, therefore, pose a challenge for linguistic theories, for there are both separable and inseparable CPs in Persian that do not appear to follow a unified pattern. Morphosyntactic and semantic accounts of CPs have attempted to address the issue by focusing on CP formation processes (syntactic, morphological, or both) or semantic features of the nonverbal element (preverb) in CPs. Their findings, however, fail to generalize because they typically focus on one aspect of CPs (form or meaning) while ignoring other aspects of their usage. However, within the framework of Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin, 2005) and focusing on zadan (to hit), this paper takes a more holistic approach, claiming that the (in)separability of Persian CPs is a function of their semantic (meaning of the preverb, the verb, and the whole construction), morphosyntactic (CP formation), and discourse and pragmatic properties (information structure of the text). It goes on to argue that the preverb is located under the core or nucleus in separable and inseparable CPs, respectively, and that CPs can be (in)separable depending on the context and discourse in which they occur and how close the light verb is to the original meaning of the heavy verb. This line of argument avoids the failed dichotomy of separable-inseparable CPs and allows for a more flexible account that is consistent with the gradient nature of CPs.

References:
Dabir-Moghaddam, M. 1997. Compound verbs in Persian. Studies in the Linguistic Sciences 27(2). 25–59.
Faghiri, Pegah & Pollet Samvelian. 2021. The issue of "separability" in Persian complex predicates. In Berthold Crysmann & Manfred Sailer (eds.), One-to-many relations in morphology, syntax, and semantics, 117–149. Berlin: Language Science Press.
Family, Neiloufar. 2006. Explorations of Semantic Space: The Case of Light Verb Constructions in Persian. Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales dissertation.
Fleischhauer, Jens & Mozhgan Neisani. 2020. Adverbial and attributive modification of Persian separable light verb constructions. Journal of Linguistics 56. 45–85.
Karimi-Doostan, Gholamhossein. 2011. Separability of Light Verb Constructions in Persian. Studia Linguistica 65(1). 70–95.

Müller, Stefan. 2010. Persian complex predicates and the limits of inheritance-based analyses. Journal of Linguistics 46(2). 601–655.

Saeddi, Zari. 2016. Complex predicates in modern Persian. Sheffield: Equinox. Saeedi, Zari. 2009. Persian light verb constructions: A Role & Reference Grammar account.

Dublin: Trinity College dissertation.

Van Valin, Robert. 2005. Exploring the syntax-semantics interface. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.