

D-Linked Wh-Phrases and Focus-Fronting in Persian

It has been argued that in certain languages the fronting of *wh*-words is not a movement to the [Spec, CP] position for clause-typing or licensing, but rather a focus-driven movement (cf. Horvath 1986, Bošković 2002, among others). Kahnemuyipour (2001) proposes that *wh*-in-situ in Persian is an instance of focus-fronting, i.e. the *wh*-element obligatorily moves to a preverbal focus position in [Spec, ν P] providing an unmarked reading; the *wh*-element may then optionally move to a focus position in the left periphery to receive a marked reading. This analysis predicts that inherently D-linked *wh*-phrases will share the same syntactic and semantic properties as their non-D-linked counterparts. We show, however, that whether a *wh*-phrase is D-linked or not gives rise to distinct interpretations that correlate with Information vs. Identificational Focus in the sense of Kiss (1998). We argue that this difference results from the distinct structural positions occupied by the *wh*-elements.

Kahnemuyipour (2001) proposes that *all* instances of the so-called *wh*-in-situ in Persian involve (at least) a syntactic movement of the *wh*-element to a focus position at the edge of the ν P domain, where the *wh*-element would receive an unmarked interpretation. However, as the following data suggest, the D-linked and non-D-linked *wh*-phrases have different interpretations:

- (1) a. ali chi xord- \emptyset ? b. ali chi-o xord- \emptyset ?
 ali what ate-3SG ali what-OM ate-3SG
 ‘What did Ali eat?’ ‘What was it that Ali ate?’

The answer to the question in (1a) could be *sib* ‘apple’, *un do tâ sândevich-ro* ‘those two sandwiches’ or *hichi* ‘nothing’. In other words, the answer could be a member of a nonspecific set, a member of a specific set (syntactically marked with the object morpheme – *o*), or a member of an empty set. The answer to (1b), however, identifies the exhaustive subset of a potential set of candidates for which the phrase holds. Thus, the bare *wh*-element *chi* in (1a) solicits any new information, while *chi-o* in (1b) solicits a contrastive or exhaustive identificational interpretation. We have taken this to be a reflection of two distinct landing sites for D-linked and non-D-linked *wh*-phrases in Persian. Based on evidence from manner adverbs, specificity readings, sluicing, and the availability of a DP structure for the *wh*-phrase, we show that not all instances of the so-called *wh*-in-situ are instances of movement to the same focus position, as argued in Kahnemuyipour (2001). While non-D-linked *wh*-elements move to [Spec, ν P], the D-linked *wh*-elements occupy the higher focus position in the left periphery where they can only receive Identificational Focus.

This paper shows that *wh*-in-situ in Persian is an instance of focus-fronting, but that the lexical and DP properties of *wh*-phrases play an important role in determining their landing sites. In fact, syntactic evidence shows that D-linked elements never occupy the preverbal focus position. In addition, we argue that only D-linked *wh*-phrases can be scrambled to the sentence-initial position. This analysis thus straightforwardly captures the distinct interpretations for *wh*-in-situ and sentence-initial scrambled *wh*-phrases observed for Persian by Karimi and Taleghani (2007).

References

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Karimi, Simin and Azita Taleghani (2007). Wh-movement, interpretation, and optionality in Persian. In S. Karimi, V. Samiian, and W. Wilkins (eds), *Clausal and phrasal architecture: syntactic derivation and interpretation*. John Benjamins.