

On Incorporation in Persian Verbal Predicates

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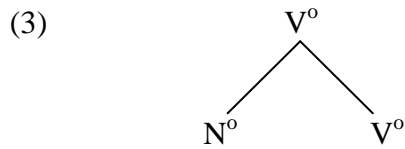
The nature of preverbal nouns in Persian and their relation to the verbal element has been the focus of much debate in the literature. Noun and verb combinations such as those illustrated in (1), in particular, have been difficult to classify since they do not behave as a single morphological unit and differ from the traditional light verb constructions, yet seem to be interpreted as a single predicate containing a nonreferential noun. These N+V constructions have been analyzed as a noun incorporation (NI) process (Dabir-Moghaddam 1997) or as juxtaposed X^0 units (Ghomeshi and Massam 1994). In this talk, I will review the properties of these constructions and will show that the mixed characteristics observed are reminiscent of what has been described as Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) in the literature (cf. Massam 2001, Dayal 2003). I will argue, however, that these constructions can be better explained if the preverbal nominal is treated as a nonspecific internal argument of the verb that remains in the lower verb phrase domain without positing NI, PNI, or juxtaposition.

Dabir-Moghaddam (1997) provides an incorporation analysis for the verbal constructions in (1), whereby the direct object incorporates into the verb “to create an intransitive compound verb which is a conceptual whole”. According to this analysis, the specific noun *qæzashuno* in (2a) is a direct object of the verb *xordæn* ‘eat’, which may lose its grammatical endings and incorporate with the verb giving rise to the clause in (2b). Dabir-Moghaddam states that this process of noun incorporation is very productive in Persian, allowing any direct object that can be conceived nonreferentially to incorporate. These nouns are neutral in number (i.e., do not possess singular or plural implicature), are nonreferential and nonspecific, have narrow scope, and form verbal constructions that give rise to unbounded events and disallow gapping constructions. Ghomeshi and Massam (1994) also argue that these N+V constructions behave as single phonological and syntactic units, and treat them on a par with the light verb constructions in a juxtaposed V^0 structure as shown in (3).

There is empirical evidence, however, against the NI or juxtaposition analysis of these verbal constructions, since the preverbal nouns may be modified or conjoined thus appearing as NPs and not just bare nouns, behave as internal arguments and are visible to syntactic processes, display phrasal stress patterns, and show some degree of referentiality since they can be questioned. I will show, instead, that the mixed properties that seem to call into question the traditional morphology and syntax divide can readily be derived from the syntactic structure in which the preverbal nominal appears: its lack of D features and the fact that it has remained within the vP domain give rise to the semantic and aspectual properties observed, while the fact that it is a nominal element appearing in a specifier-head relation with the verb derives the syntactic characteristics of these constructions. I claim that the need for positing PNI is an artefact of the grammatical framework adopted and the properties of these N+V constructions can be readily captured by the analysis provided.

- (1) *qæza xordæn* food eat ‘to eat (food)’
zæhr dadæn poison give ‘to poison’
mahi gereftæn fish catch ‘to fish’
ketab foruxtæn book sell ‘to sell books’

- (2) a. *bæchche-ha* *qæza-shun-o* *xord-æn*
 child-PL food-POSS.3SG-ACC ate-3PL
 ‘The children ate their food.’
 b. *bæchche-ha* *qæza* *xord-æn*
 child-PL food ate-3PL
 ‘The children ate.’



References:

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