Introducing Form-Function Theory
Evidence from the Post Position "ra" and Focus Marker "ke" in Persian

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Abstract

Traditionally in linguistics, there used to be trends to observe linguistic data from a definite angle; form or function. However, in modern linguistics, it has been fashionable to figure out a sort of interface between viewpoints such as syntax-pragmatic interface. There are elements in some languages which prompt the linguists to look upon them interactively and synchronously. Morphemes such as 'ra' and 'ke' in Persian necessitate an interactive scrutiny incorporating both formal and functional outlooks. Form-Function Theory introduced by Dabir-Moghaddam (2009) has facilitated the analysis of such elements. This article attempts to re-introduce this theory on the basis of evidence from Persian.

Keywords: Form, function, form-function theory, interface, focus marker

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1. Introduction

Lambrecht (1994) in his book entitled 'Topic, Focus, and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents' focuses on the Information Structure (IS) and its influence over the grammatical structures. He puts his belief in IS in this way:

> *"INFORMATION STRUCTURE is that component of sentence grammar in which propositions as conceptual representation of states of affairs are paired with Lexicogrammatical structures in accordance with the mental states of interlocutors who use and interpret these structures as units of information in given discourse contexts. The information structure of a sentence is the formal expression of the pragmatic structuring of a proposition in a discourse… I see my own research as located somewhere in between the "formal" and the "functional" approaches to syntax" (Lambrecht, 1994).*

As it is crystal clear, Lambrecht as a great proponent of IS supports a sort of approach incorporating both formal and functional points of view. Following Lambrecht, Dabir-Moghaddam (1992) in his article entitled 'On the (in) dependence of syntax and pragmatics: evidence from the postposition -râ in Persian' takes side by an interactive approach to language studies. He expresses his idea in this way:

> *"… These observations imply that neither form-based explanations, which account for the data presented in this paper in the syntactic component…, nor the function-based explanations, which claim that …a fully coherent theory of language must begin at (and not merely include) the level of discourse MOTIVATION for individual sentences are adequate linguistic models. The paper suggests that though syntactic and pragmatic principles constitute independent modules, there is a great deal of dependence between the two; hence, it recommends a parallel and mutual study of the two" Dabir-Moghaddam(1992) .*

Dabir-Moghaddam (2009) claims that theories tend to include languages into frames, the frame of form and the frame of function. It seems that neither of them is able to provide a clear description of linguistic behaviors. On the other hand, each theory could open new horizons for the researchers, the negligence of which could not only lead us towards a superficial understanding of the linguistic entity, but it could also render our description and analysis distorted and disconnected. He adds up that we should utilize an efficient grammar comprising forms and functions as well as diachronic and typological considerations.

2. Basic notions

Based on his observations of Persian data, Dabir-Moghaddam (2009) introduces his belief in a so-called interactive method in linguistics: Form-Function Theory. He believes that formal theories such as Generativism could provide a theoretical possibility for the researchers to probe into the potential aspects of linguistic occurrences. He also believes that functional theories insist on describing the data and de facto evidence (ibid:260). In other words, formalists attempt to depict internal structure of a sentence and illustrate the whole sentence in a tree diagram. They can judge whether a definite sentence is well or ill-formed. They can label structures as passivization, clefting, pseudo-clefting, topicalization, heavy shift movement, preposing, postposing, and left dislocation, but they are not inclined to uncover the reasons behind them. Functionalists, on the other hand, endeavor to expound why the things are the way they are: what the reasons are behind diverse structures conveying a definite proposition. Functionalists claim that forms serve function; that is, forms exist in order to meet a speaker's or writer's requirements for choices. Forms depend on the speaker's or writer's intention.

3. Form-Function Theory

Dabir-Moghaddam (1992) shows that the pragmatic function of –*ra* is a natural projection of the syntactic role of this postposition. He also shows that despite the dependence of syntax and pragmatics, there are clear differences between the syntactic and pragmatic behaviors of this postposition. Having exemplified instances from previous scholars, Dabir-Moghaddam embarks on a diachronic sketch of the syntactic changes in –*ra* in four stages in the history of Persian. On the basis of the observations and discussions, he illustrates the syntactic functions of –*ra* in Old, Middle, Classical, and Contemporary Persian as follows in an accessibility Hierarchy:

Old	Middle	Classical	Contemporary
Oblique >	Oblique, IO, Possessor, DO >	IO, Possessor, DO >	DO

Diagram 1: Accessibility Hierarchy of -ra

According to the above-mentioned hierarchy, -*ra* used to be an oblique marker in Old Persian. Its syntactic role has changed through history and now it is used as a Direct Object Marker in Contemporary Persian. Having thoroughly dealt with the diachronic change of the post position –*ra*, Dabir-Moghaddam launches a synchronic study of this postposition. He believes:

> " I assume a close link between syntax and pragmatics. Thus a sentence is considered as a pragma-syntactic unit" (1992).

He obviously states that he is inclined to claim that there is a need to establish two types of dichotomies: Topic + Comment and Old + New information. He adds that topic-comment dichotomy is speaker-oriented, whereas the old-new dichotomy is hearer-oriented. He presents his general notions in this way:
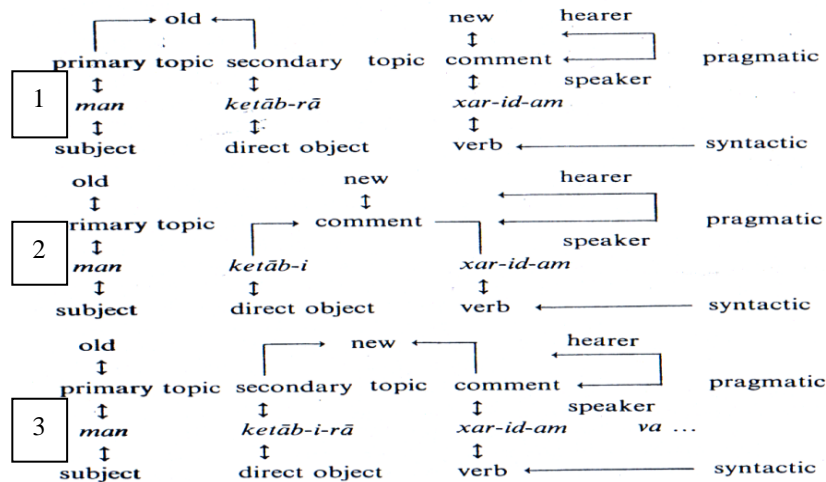

Diagram 2: Interactive analysis of syntax and Pragmatics

Furthermore, Dabir-Moghaddam points out adverbs of time and place may be topicalized (ibid):

4)   a) emšabinǰa   baš
           tonight   here   be
           'Stay here tonight'

           b) emšab-ra   inǰa baš
            'Be here for tonight'

   Dabir-Moghaddam believes that the left-dislocated or topicalized NP sets the scene for a comment. He adds that the pragmatic function of *–ra* is a natural projection of syntactic stabilization of *–ra* as a direct object marker (ibid: 564). Dabir-Moghaddam uses the term 'secondary topic' to characterize this pragmatic function.

   Oroji (2012 b) studies the focus markers in Persian. These focus markers should be studied from two angles, form and function, simultaneously. That is, in order to study these elements, an interactive method is indispensable. In this article, the behavior of 'ke' as a focus marker is to be submitted. "ke" has a variety of grammatical functions. It functions as 'a relative pronoun', 'a complementizer', 'a conjunction meaning when', and 'a conjunction meaning because'. In addition to the above mentioned grammatical functions, it has a different functional behaviour. It can be used after any constituent in a sentence – NP, AdjP, PP, and VP – and it can also be used after subject, direct object, indirect object, verb, comparative adjective complement, subject complement, object complement, different adjuncts, negative adjunct, and non-verbal part of compound verb. In this functional role, "ke" is used in order to focalize the constituent and make it prominent. If it is deleted, the sentence remains grammatical and its propositional meaning doesn't change, while its Information Structure regarding prominence/focus alters.

5) mærdi   **ke**   amæd   Ali   bud.   [relative pronoun]
    a man **rel. pro**   came   Ali   was-3sg
       'The man **who** came was Ali'

6) mæn midanæm   **ke**   Ali   šiše ra   šekæst.   [a Complementizer]
        I   know   **that** Ali   window-obj marker   broke-3 sg
        'I know **that** Ali broke the window'

7) mærd **ke**   hæme čizaš ra   æz dæst dade bud, na omid bud. [Ke= because]
    man **since** everything-pos-3sgobj-marker   had lost   disappointed was-3 sg
        '**Since** the man had lost all his property, he was disappointed'

8) šab **ke**   be xane ræftæm, ou ra   didæm.   [ke = when]
   night **when** to home   went-1sg him obj-marker   saw-1sg
        'When I went home at night, I saw him'

But, as mentioned before, there is another "ke" in Persian, a focus marker, which can mark any constituent in a sentence prominent:

9) mæn-**KE**   ketab- o   be   Ali   ne-midæm.
    I-**FOC**   book-obj marker   to   Ali   won't give-1sg
    '**I** won't give the book to Ali'

10) mæn   ketab-o-**KE**   be   Ali   ne-midæm.
    I   book-obj marker- **FOC**   to   Ali   won't give -1sg

' I won't give **THE BOOK** to Ali'

11) mæn   ketab- o   be   Ali- **KE**   ne-midæm.
   I   book-obj marker   to   Ali-**FOC** won't give-1sg
  'I won't give the book to **ALI**'

12) mæn   ketab- o   be   Ali   ne-midæm- **KE**.
   I   book-obj marker   to   Ali   won't give-1sg-**FOC**
  ' I won't **GIVE** the book to Ali'

It should be noted that "ke" as a focus marker is used *in situ* and if it is deleted, it will not render the sentence ungrammatical. It is believed that a FOC Phrase is a default hidden phrase in a sentence.

4. Concluding Remarks

As it is crystal clear, there are elements in languages that cannot be studied by just one theory. The introduction of Form-Function Theory by Dabir-Moghaddam has provided chances for researchers to re-regard those elements. Two elements that require to be analyzed by this interactive theory are the postposition –*ra* and the focus marker 'Ke' in Persian. As mentioned earlier in this research, -*ra* is labeled as Dirct Object Marker in the contemporary Persian, but it plays a functional role as well: It marks the secondary topic. In contemporary Persian, 'Ke' is considered as a 'relative pronoun', a 'complementizer', a 'conjunction meaning because', and a 'conjunction meaning while'. Meanwhile, it has a functional behavior: it can be used as a focus marker. By receiving 'Ke' as a focus marker, any constituent in a sentence in Persian can receive prominence. This focus marker usually makes a constituent contrastive. Therefore, these two elements necessitate an interactive theory for their analyses. It is crucial to study a given sentence from both formal and functional views; otherwise, our study would lack consistency and would render our conclusions distorted and imprecise.

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