

Copy Raising in Persian

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Issue The Persian complex predicate *be nazar āmadan* ‘to come to view’ is typically translated to English as ‘seem’ or ‘appear’. However, uses of this construction are described as A’-movement, not subject-to-subject (STS) raising. (Karimi, 2018). Based on two sets of experimental data, and speaker consultations, we make the following claims: i) the agreement facts may be overstated, ii) evidence for movement in sentences where an embedded argument appears displaced is not clear, and iii) there is a lack of uniformity in participant responses. We propose that ‘raising’ in Persian is not a single phenomenon: some cases are indisputably A’ movement, but others are better captured in an analysis parallel to copy raising, in the sense of Landau (2011).

Background As summarized most recently by Karimi, Persian raising has three properties which distinguish it from STS raising. One of these, optionality of movement, is shown in (1):

- (1) be-nazar mi-yâ-d [(ke) bachche-hâ xaste bâsh-an]
to-view ASP-come-3SG that child-PL tired SUBJ-be-3PL
‘It seems that the children are tired. (Adapted from Karimi 2018)’

As seen in (1), movement to the matrix clause is not required with *be-nazar āmadan*. However, raising of the subject *bachche-hâ* into the matrix subject position is equally possible, retaining plural agreement in the embedded clause, and singular agreement in the matrix clause. This lack of matrix subject agreement is the second property in favour of A’ movement. The third property is argument symmetry, where non-subjects of the embedded clause can appear in the matrix subject position before *be nazar*.

New Data Some speakers accept (2) as a variant on (1):

- (2) bachche-hâ be-nazar mi-yâ-n [(ke) xaste bâsh-an]
child-PL to-view ASP-come-3PL that tired SUBJ-be-3PL
‘The children seem like they are tired.’

Crucially, a meaning difference arises from the unexpected agreement (claim i). (1) can be asserted on arriving to a quiet home where children are known to live, but (2) can only be asserted after directly seeing the children. This is reminiscent of the concept PERCEPTUAL SOURCE in Asudeh and Toivonen (2012), describing copy raising. Working in a minimalist framework, Landau (2011) describes copy raising as not involving movement, with subjects merging in the matrix clause.

Experimental Support In a self-paced reading study, we examine the optionality of movement. Using sentences with 3SG subjects of the embedded clause, we compare the reading patterns of moved and unmoved variants. If the embedded subject A’ scrambles to the sentence initial position, it should be treated by the parser as a filler, leading to a slowdown in reading when a potential gap position is encountered (Featherston, 2001). However, we find no significant difference in reading time when a subject appears before or after the matrix predicate, suggesting that sentence initial 3SG subjects are parsed as originating (and agreeing) in the matrix clause (claim ii). In a rating task, participants compare two different sentences to test the symmetry of movement. Participants see pairs of sentences with a transitive embedded clause, and compare placing the embedded subject vs object before *be nazar*. Participants only rate the two options as equally good when the embedded clause subject is **not** 3SG. These are cases where both options (a non-agreeing subject and a non-subject) could only get to the initial position by A’ scrambling. When embedded clauses have 3SG subjects, responses are bi-modal. Some participants prefer having the embedded subject appear first, while other prefer displacing the embedded object (claim iii). This is not expected if all derivations are equally A’ movement. Rather, we believe that participants in both studies may be treating sentence-initial 3SG subjects as instances of copy raising, similar to (2).

References

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