

## **This are us! Object agreement in Persian copular sentences**

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In this talk we examine the pattern of agreement in Persian specificational copular sentences with pronominal arguments (e.g. 'This is me'). Agreement in these cases is sometimes with the first NP (hereafter NP1), and sometimes with the second NP (hereafter NP2). This agreement pattern contrasts markedly with the straightforward subject agreement in Persian non-copular sentences. We provide a formal account for the uncharacteristic agreement of the copular expressions. In doing so, we address the question of why this pattern is, on the one hand, restricted to the copular cases in Persian and, on the other hand, absent from copular sentences in other subject-agreement languages such as English.

The straightforward pattern of subject agreement in core transitive/intransitive clauses can be seen in (1). The form of the verb covaries with the phi-features of the subject. In this respect, Persian is consistent with other nominative-accusative languages (e.g. English): agreement correlates with nominative case assignment. This correlation underlies the dominant assumption that nominative-case assignment and agreement are reflexes of a single syntactic relation, which in the framework of Chomsky 2000, 2001 is the establishment of an Agree relation with T.

The agreement pattern in the copular paradigm shown in (2) is markedly different. Here the form of the copula covaries with phi-features of NP2, and is apparently insensitive to the NP in subject position (NP1). In this respect Persian departs from other nominative-accusative languages in which the pattern of agreement in copular sentences is no different from that in core transitive/intransitive sentences (3).

Moreover, a fuller paradigm for Persian copula agreement shows that the agreement controller in fact varies, and is sometimes NP1, as seen in (4). A clear generalization emerges when one abstracts away from number agreement and considers just the person agreement facts summarized in (5): agreement is always with NP1 unless NP1 is 3rd person, in which case it is with NP2. [This clear-cut picture is complicated somewhat when number is taken into consideration; an issue we will address in the talk.]

This sensitivity to person can be modeled as a natural consequence of the probe-goal mechanics in a system along the lines proposed in Bejar 2003 or Bejar & Rezac 2004 where the phi bundle of an agreement probe can be richer or poorer, the degree of specification being a language-specific choice. A minimally articulated phi probe will successfully agree with an NP of any person specification, but more richly articulated phi probes will only successfully agree with 1st or 2nd person NPs. The person-sensitivity of Persian copular agreement is consistent with a richer specification of the phi-bundle. The effect of competition between arguments arises when multiple NPs share a single agreement domain, thus ruling out multiple agreement.

We argue that in the Persian copular construction, NP1 is the preferred controller in this domain (by locality), thus NP2 can only control agreement when NP1 fails to do so (these are the cases when NP1 is 3rd person). The case pattern in the copular construction is NOM-NOM, which suggests that the unique locus of agreement is in the domain of Infl/T. We propose that the difference between the agreement pattern in copular and non-copular sentences in Persian follows from a difference in the number of agreement domains involved in each case: in the non-copular sentences, we are dealing with two agreement domains, and 'competition' between arguments never arises, thus the subject is always the controller. Similarly, the absence of NP2 agreement in English copular sentences follows if in these languages copular sentences, like non-copular ones, involve two agreement domains. This is supported by the fact that in English, unlike Persian, the case of NP2 is accusative (cf. Maling & Sprouse 1995, Schutze 2001).

To conclude, our talk provides a formal analysis of some novel agreement facts in Persian and explores its implications for a cross-linguistic typology of copular agreement (cf. Corbett 1988, den Dikken 2006, Moro 2006) and our general understanding of agreement systems.

- (1) a. (man) ye ketaab xarid-am  
I a book bought-1.sg.  
"I bought a book."  
b. Ali o Maryam man-o na-did-an  
Ali and Maryam I-acc. neg.-saw-3.pl.  
"Ali and Maryam didn't see me."  
c. (man) to-ro dust daar-am  
I you(sg.)-acc. like have-1.sg.  
"I love you."  
d. naama-sh hamin ruz-aa mi-res-e  
letter-his/her these day-pl. dur.-arrive-3.sg.  
"His/Her letter will arrive one of these days."
- (2) a. in man-**am** d. in maa-(**y**)**im**  
this I-be.**1.sg.** this we-be.**1.pl.**  
'This is me.' 'This is us.'  
b. in to-(**y**)**i** e. in shomaa-(**y**)**in**  
this you(sg.)-be.**2.sg.** this you(pl.)-be.**2.pl.**  
'This is you.' 'This is you(pl.).'  
c. in un-**e** f. in unaa-**n**  
this him/her-be.**3.sg.** this they-be.**3.pl.**  
'This is him/her.' 'This is them.'
- (3) a. **This is** me. d. **This is** us.  
b. **This is** you(sg.). e. **This is** you(pl.).  
c. **This is** him/her. f. **This is** them.
- (4) a. man in-**am** d. to in-(**y**)**i**  
I this-be.**1.sg.** you this-be.**2.sg.**  
'I am this (one).'
- b. man to-**am** e. to man-**i**  
I you(sg.)-be.**1.sg.** you I-be.**2.sg.**  
'I am you.'
- c. man Arsalan-**am** f. to Susana-(**y**)**i**  
I Arsalan-be.**1.sg.** you Susana-be.**2.sg.**  
'I am Arsalan.'
- (5) NP2 →  
NP1 ↓ 1 2 3  
1 (NP1) NP1 NP1  
2 NP1 (NP1) NP1  
3 NP2 NP2 (NP2)

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