

## Persian accusative case: a Lexicalist approach

Ilhan Cagri

University of Maryland, Linguistics

1401 Marie Mount Hall, College Park, MD 20742 USA

Email: *ilhan@umd.edu* Tel: 301-404-2247

Besides being required on specific direct objects (DO), the Persian accusative marker *-ra* can appear on expressions that are not DOs: on a time adverbial in (1), on a place adverbial in (2), and on a possessor in (3) (from Karimi (1996)). Proposals have been made that *-ra* is actually a specificity marker (Browne (1970); Karimi (1989, 1990)). Karimi (1996) suggests that *-ra* is a Functional head that checks an amalgam of +specificity and “Marked” case on a DP.

I argue along the Minimalist framework (Chomsky 1995, 2000) that *-ra* is overt accusative case checked by a specific DP in [Spec, vP]. Arguments first merge into theta positions, internal arguments in the VP, and external arguments in the vP. Assuming that non-specifics lack a  $D^\circ$  feature, only DPs raise overtly to [Spec, vP] for accusative and [Spec, TP] for nominative case. This explains the requirement of *-ra* on specific DOs and its prohibition on non-specific NP DOs, as NPs cannot raise to case-assigning positions. Similar facts are found in Turkish.

*-ra* on DPs other than DOs can be explained by assuming that elements enter into a derivation fully inflected, i.e. bearing relevant case morphemes. Case is checked in overt syntax, and once the case of a DP is checked, that DP is free to further A-bar move or scramble. Thus, direct objects with *-ra* may A-bar move to the CP domain.

The acceptability of *-ra* on time (1) and place (2) adverbials is constrained by telicity; *-ra* is unacceptable on atelic adverbials (4). Telic adverbials have a specificity feature designated in UG by  $D^\circ$ . These adverbial+ $D^\circ$  expressions can also take the accusative morpheme in the lexicon. As adjuncts, they do not merge into theta positions. Structural case-checking is a PF requirement, and structural case on an expression in the CP domain per se is not a PF violation. Nominals must have their case checked for interpretability at LF, but this requirement does not hold for adjuncts. Thus, the *-ra* morpheme is acceptable on adjuncts in the CP domain.

The presence of both nominative and accusative case on a DP is disallowed cross-linguistically. This is what bars the *-ra* on subjects which must bear null nominative case (5). Lexical case also conflicts with *-ra* and it is for this reason that *-ra* cannot appear on DP complements of prepositions (6). Evidence from Korean case-stacking shows that while structural case may be stacked onto inherent or lexical case, the converse is not possible; inherent case cannot be assigned (or checked) on top of structural case. An accusative marked DP cannot appear as the complement of a preposition which would assign/check lexical case.

The presence of *-ra* on an expression in a CP projection does not cause a PF crash, a violation of the constraints against case-stacking does. Arguments bearing *-ra* may move to CP (as in the case of the DO), or they may directly merge there. Persian does not permit preposition stranding, nor does it allow possessor raising. In both these cases, the DP with *-ra* merged directly into the Topic position. Arguments that first merge into the CP domain must be bound into theta positions by resumptive pronominal clitics which themselves must be properly case-marked (3) and (7). Again, the option of merging directly to the CP domain is not possible for subjects as there is no case-checking head for the resumptive pronoun of a subject to cliticize to. DOs with *-ra* have the option of moving to or merging directly to the CP. If the DO merges to the CP, the DO resumptive clitic pronoun must also bear the *-ra* morpheme as it (being  $D^\circ$ ) must have its (accusative) case checked.

Thus, DPs (specifics) merge into a derivation with the –ra morpheme. The presence of the –ra morpheme in non-accusative case positions is prevented by PF conditions. Adjuncts with D° require neither theta roles (no need for a resumptive pronoun) nor case checking. Non-DO DPs with –ra may merge directly to the CP domain where they do not violate PF multiple case constraints. Their theta requirements are met via binding to resumptive clitics.

### Examples

- 1) do hæfte-ro kamel esterahæt kærð-æm  
two week-ACC complete rest did-1s  
'I rested for a full two weeks'
- 2) [ta xune]-ro dovid-æm  
until house-ACC ran-1s  
'I ran [all the way] till [I got] home'
- 3) mašin<sub>i</sub>-o dær-eš<sub>i</sub>-o bæst-æm  
car-ACC door-RP-ACC closed-1s  
'The car, I closed its door.'
- 4) \*væqte-ro æslæn bær-eš ærzeš nædare  
time-ACC no.way for.it worth neg-have-3s  
Intended: 'The time, it's definitely not worth it'
- 5) \*re'ise jomhur-o (u) færda soxænrani mikon-e  
president-ACC (he) tomorrow speech give-3s  
'The President will give a speech tomorrow'
- 6) \*Hatta bəraye Sara-ro, axbar mixun-e  
even for Sara-ACC newspaper read-3s  
'Even to Sara, he reads a newspaper.'
- 7) Hushang<sub>i</sub>-o be madær-eš<sub>i</sub> goft-æm  
Hushang-ACC to mother-RP told-1s  
'As for Hushang, I told his mother'

(Karimi (1996))

### References

- Browne, W. 1970. More on definiteness marker:interrogatives in Persian. *LI* 1: 359-63.  
 Karimi, S. 1989. *Aspects of Persian syntax, specificity, and the theory of grammar*. U. of Washington Ph.D. dissertation  
 Karimi, S. 1990. Obliqueness, specificity and discourse functions. *Linguistic Analysis* 20.  
 Karimi, S. 1996. Case and Specificity: Persian Ra Revisited. *Linguistic Analysis* 26.