



A corpus-based analysis of relative clause extraposition in Persian



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HIGHLIGHTS

- We studied relative clause extraposition in a less studied language.
- We have shown the role of different factors in relative clause extraposition.
- The findings are important for typology of SOV languages.

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ABSTRACT

In recent functional and cognitive literature different motivations are suggested to influence the relative clause extraposition, where the modifying relative clause is not adjacent to the modified head noun. Information status, grammatical weight and verb class are among such motivations. The current corpus-based study of relative clause extraposition attempts to test the prediction of these different motivations in Persian. Using logistic regression analysis, the effects of these various factors on the extraposition of relative clauses are investigated. The findings revealed that, among different influential sources, grammatical weight is the main factor influencing extraposition of relative clauses. Verb class and information status are found to be lower ranked factors, respectively. The analyses demonstrated that with a special verb class, i.e. linking verbs, which predominantly carries given information in discourse, relative clause extraposition happens more freely. The findings support Hawkins' (2004) principle of domain minimization and provide more evidence for the hypothesis that, Persian, a seemingly SOV language, behaves typologically as a VO language, in which the heavy constituents shift rightward to facilitate constituent recognition, similar to other head-initial languages.

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1. Introduction

Persian can make relative clauses (RC) from different positions; subject, object, and genitive (Taghavipour, 2005). This language uses gaps obligatorily in subject relative clauses, gaps or resumptive pronouns, interchangeably, in direct object relative clauses, and resumptive pronouns obligatorily in other positions:

Persian RCs are typically introduced by the relativizer *ke* (that), and this language is also among languages which formally marks the difference between restrictive and non-restrictive RCs. The suffix *-i* is required on the head of a restrictive relative clause, but

not on the head of a non-restrictive one (Comrie 1989:139).

Another feature of Persian RCs is that they could be optionally extraposed from their canonical head-adjacent position to a rightward position after the verb. For example, in (1.b.), the RC, (*ke yek kife bozorg be dast-aš bud*; who had a big bag in his hand) is detached from its head-adjacent position in (1.a.) and is moved to a post-verbal position. The extraposed and non-extraposed sentences express the same proposition.

Different formal and functional explanations are provided to account for the relative clause extraposition (RCE) in different languages. Formalists have explained RCE in different ways. Some regarded it as rightward movement (Baltin, 1981; Ross, 1967), some considered it as discontinuous constituency of the NP (McCawley, 1987, 1998), some others as leftward movement of non-extraposed elements (Kayne, 1994), still others as base-generated (Rochemont and Culicover, 1990), and finally the last group viewed it as simple adjunction (Culicover Peter and Jackendoff, 2005). It is apparent that they were not able to provide a satisfactory explanation for the problem (Baltin, 2006). On the other hand,

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1. a. *marde mosenni [ke yek kife bozorg be dast=aš bud] vâred šod.*

Man old COMP a bag big in hand=his was arrive become.

'An old man who had a big bag in his hand arrived.'

b. *marde mosenni vâred šod [ke yek kife bozorg be dast=aš bud].*

Man old arrive become COMP a bag big in hand=his was.

'An old man arrived who had a big bag in his hand.'

Functionalists tried to explain RCE, too. The main explanations they have provided are based on discourse information (Takami, 1999; Kuno and Takami, 2004; Huck and Na, 1990), grammatical weight (Arnold et al., 2000; Francis, 2010; Francis and Michaelis, 2014; Wasow, 2002; Hawkins, 1999; Yamashita and Chang, 2001) and predicate types (Rochemont and Culicover, 1990). Strunk (2010, 2014) discussed six factors relevant to RCE in German, concluding that the distance of extraposition and the length of relative clauses are the most important factors in RCE.

The present study seeks two aims. Since most of the explanations provided in literature for RCE are based on data from well-studied languages, mainly English; as the first goal, following functional views, it is tried to find out which functional motivation(s) plays the most significant role in Persian RCE, and which explanation is supported based on the findings.

The second goal is a typological one. Persian exhibits hybrid features regarding word order correlations (Dryer, 1992); while it is an SOV language in surface sentence form, most of its other features are similar to SVO languages. For instance, it has prepositions, and Noun-Genitive order. It is argued that this language is moving from an OV type language to a VO type one (Dabir-Moghaddam, 2001, 2006). Following Dryer (1992), Dabir-Moghaddam (2001) studied word order correlations in Persian and some other Iranian languages. After examining nineteen of Dryer's correlations which are applicable to Persian, he concludes that "in about two third of the correlation pairs Modern Persian is compatible with strong VO type, both in its own area and globally. This finding is particularly interesting because Modern Persian in terms of the linear order of its constituents is predominantly SOV, both in its written and spoken varieties" (Dabir-Moghaddam, 2001, p. 21). Based on these observations, he hypothesized that Persian is in the process of a syntactic change from an OV type to a VO type language. In order to further examine this syntactic change, the present study aims to find out if Persian, concerning RC extraposition, is acting like an OV type language (Japanese for example) putting the RCs in a leftward position, or like a VO type one (English as an example), and puts the RCs in a rightward position, based on the phrases weight. In English-like languages, the heavy constituents are preferred after short ones, while the situation in Japanese-like languages is reversed (Hawkins, 2004, p. 109).

This paper is organized as follows: after this introduction, in section (2), a brief review of related literature, especially functional studies, is provided to enumerate the different motivations

suggested for RCE. In section (3), the corpus analysis and its findings are provided to answer the first question. Section (4) tries to give an answer to the second question, focusing on typological implications of this study. Section (5) is the conclusion.

2. Review of literature

Apart from formalists who tried to explain RCE, two main positions are suggested in functionalist literature for this phenomenon which are known as "newness (and importance of information)" (Huck and Na, 1990, 1992; Kuno and Takami, 2004) and "grammatical weight" (Arnold et al., 2000, 2004; Hawkins, 1994, 2004; Wasow, 1997a; Yamashita and Chang, 2001; Francis, 2010).

Regarding the first position, scholars have argued that in RCE, the relative clause carries newer or more important information, compared with the VP (Huck and Na, 1990; Kuno and Takami, 2004; Takami, 1999). For example, Kuno and Takami (2004, p.186) introduce a discourse constraint on extraposition from subject NPs, according to which the "extraposition from subject NPs is allowed only if the predicate that the extraposed constituent crosses over, represents anaphorically or deictically grounded information, and if the extraposed constituent represents the most important information in the sentence". In example (2) (from Kuno and Takami, 2004, p.185), the extraposition of a relative clause is acceptable because the predicate of this sentence i.e., *did*, is anaphorically grounded and the extraposed relative clause carries new information.

2. Speaker A: Who gave you this book?

Speaker B: A stranger did who said he had come from Islamabad.

Takami (1999:27) arrives at a similar explanation and states that "Extraposition from NP is allowed only when the element extraposed to sentence-final position is interpreted as being more important than the rest of the sentence". Arnold et al. (2000:30) also argue that despite different terms and applications of old versus new information, following Clark and Clark (1977:548), it could be generalized that "Given information should appear before new information", stated as Given-before-New principle by Gundel (1988:229). Francis (2010:38) observes that RCE is in line with the general tendency among languages to put the focused constituents later than the old information in the sentence.

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