Syntax and semantics of subjunctive clauses in Persian

Ali Darzi [a,*], Saera Kwak [b,1]

[a] Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, University of Tehran, Tehran 141556158, Iran
[b] Department of Persian, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, 107, Imum-ro, Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul 130-791, Republic of Korea

Abstract

This article examines the syntax and semantics of embedded subjunctive clauses in Modern Persian. We propose that subjunctivity in Persian is regulated via a temporal relation between the embedded subjunctive clause and the matrix clause time. The matrix V is proposed to Agree with/select all the embedded head Cs and Ts as [-Past] in a *Multiple Agree* fashion, along a proposal by Hiraiwa (2001) for raising and ECM constructions in Japanese. The head T, carrying an interpretable [-Past] feature checks the uninterpretable matching feature on C along a similar proposal by Landau (2004) for subjunctive clauses in the Balkan languages and Hebrew. We propose an analysis of embedded subjunctive clauses in terms of the semantic tense anaphoricity between the two clauses in the sense of Landau (2004), rather than a sequence of tenses from a morphological perspective which requires that the morphological tense specification of the selecting verb and the embedded subjunctive verb covary. The [-Past] feature on V is morphologically realized as the subjunctive prefix marker in accordance with the Persian morphology, and triggers a temporal interpretation simultaneous with, or posterior to, the matrix event time in present subjunctives. The paper also employs Reichenbach's (1947) tripartite distinction between speech time, event time, and reference time to account for the fact that in the past subjunctive, the event expressed by the embedded subjunctive clause precedes the matrix event time.
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1. Introduction

In recent years, a variety of approaches to subjunctive clauses in natural languages have been proposed, including hypotheses in terms of realis/irrelais distinction, modaliity (Farkas, 1985, 1992a,b), nonveridicality (Giannakidou, 1997, 1998, 1999), including speaker's commitment to the truth of the embedded clause (Siegel, 2009), tense defectivity (Picallo, 1985; Landau, 2004), and sequence of tense phenomenon (Costantini, 2007; Giorgi, 2009), among others.[2]

From a typological point of view, subjunctivity is generally marked either through verbal morphology as in the Romance languages and Persian, or through a particle/complementizer external to the verb, as in Modern Greek and other Balkan

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[2] We use the following abbreviations throughout the article:

AC: accusative	SUB: subjunctive	ASP: Aspect	SG: singular
PST: past	PSP: past participle	IMP: imperative	

languages, such as Bulgarian, Albanian etc., Bangla an IndoAryan language marks subjunctivity through the pre-verbal Neg and selection of the habitual auxiliary *thake* (Bhattacharya, 2004).

In this article, we provide some background information on Persian in section 2, with emphasis on the properties of subjunctive clauses in this language. Sections 3 and 4 provide arguments against the irrealis and nonveridcality treatment of subjunctive clauses in Persian respectively. Section 5 discusses the temporal properties of Persian complex clauses. In section 6 we present a Minimalist analysis of Persian embedded subjunctive clauses. Section 7 introduces past subjunctives in Persian, the problem it poses to our analysis and the way it may be resolved. Section 8 concludes the paper.

2. Persian subjunctive clauses: a preview

Modern Persian is a pro-drop language that just like German, takes its phrasal complements to the left, but clausal complements to the right. The language has been traditionally treated as having a tripartite mood distinction as declarative, subjunctive and imperative. Windfuhr (1979:92) presents a three-way mood distinction in Persian as indicative, subjunctive and conditional.[3] This language, like Greek and unlike English, lacks nonfinite clauses. The closest counterpart of English infinitival clauses in Persian is the subjunctive clause as it appears in sentences embedded under raising or control predicates (see Ghomeshi, 2001; Darzi, 2008, among others). Subjunctive clauses in this language have a distribution similar to Greek subjunctive clauses marked with *na*-, as discussed in Giannakidou (2009), in being a dependent mood selected by verbs of different semantic classes, such as volition *xastæn* 'want', permission *ejaze-dadæn* (permission giving) 'allow', *mæmnu'-kærdæn* (prohibition doing) 'prohibit', direction *dæstur-dadæn* (order giving) 'order', *towsiye kærdæn*' (advice doing) 'advise', *pišnæhad-kærdæn* (suggestion doing) 'suggest', verbs of fear like *tærsidæn* 'be afraid', and commission/implication *mæjbur-budæn* (obliged being) 'have to', *mæjbur-kærdæn* (obliged doing) 'force'. This is indicative of the fact that that the higher verb somehow *licenses* the subjunctive (Giannakidou, 2009:9). The subjunctive mood may also be selected by some modals, like *momken-budæn* (possible being) 'may', an adverbial particle, etc. The *IF* operator in this language may select a subjunctive, or an indicative clause, where in the latter case, it refers to a counter factual proposition. So is the case with the modal *bayæd* 'must', which may take either a subjunctive complement or an indicative one. In the latter case, however, it may occur with a past stem as well and denotes obligation or counter factuality. The subjunctive form is restricted to embedded clauses in agreement with cross-linguistic observation, except in cases where it express wishes, requests, desires etc., with no affirmative illocutionary force, as in *xoda xeyret bede* 'May God bless you'. Purpose clauses are necessarily in the subjunctive mood.

The subjunctive marker in Persian is the verbal prefix *be*-, which is similar in form to the imperative mood marker. The indicative mood lacks any morphological markers, though some grammarians have mistakenly treated the verbal prefix aspect marker *mi*- as the indicative mood marker. Windfuhr (1979:85) cites Lentz (1958) as stating that *mi*- marks an event not restricted in terms of its beginning or end. This makes it the marker of imperfect aspect, according to Windfuhr (1979:85). Following this proposal, Taleghani (2008:114) analyzes it as the head of the aspect phrase that marks the imperfective aspect. Persian imperfective aspect exhibits a pattern found in Romance and Salavic Languages (Comrie, 1976), in that the imperfective aspect marked with the verbal prefix *mi*- denotes habituality, genericity and progression of an event as the translation in (1) below shows. Thus, we tend to deny the existence of an overt indicative mood marker in Persian altogether. The examples in (1)–(3) are illustrative examples of the indicative, subjunctive and imperative mood respectively. The subjunctive marker, but not the aspect marker, always appears on the present stem of verbs, and may also be optionally left out in some complex verbal forms. We do not take any stance with regard to the existence of imperative mood in Persian.

(1)   mæn   in   ketab-o   mi-xun-æm.
       I   this   book-Ac   Asp-read-1sg
       'I read/am reading/will read this book.'

(2)   mi-xa-m   in   ketab-o   be-xun-æm.
       Asp-want-1sg   this   book-Ac   Sub-read-1sg
       'I want to read this book.'

(3)   in   ketab-o   be-xun.
       this   book-Ac   IMP-read
       'Read this book.'

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[3] More recently, however, some grammarians have also introduced the emphatic, the infinitival and the participial mood, known as *vajhe vasfi* 'the descriptive mood' making a six way distinction in the mood system of the language (Farshidvard, 2009).This classification totally rests on semantic, rather than formal morphological grounds, and hence is not considered here.