The issue of (in)separability in Persian complex predicates

Due to its limited number of simplex verbs – a total of around 250 – the verbal lexicon of Persian is mainly formed of complex predicates (CPs), that is, syntactic combinations, including a verb and a non-verbal element, mainly a noun, such as *bāzi kardan* 'to play (play do)', *qadam zadan* 'to walk (step hit)', also known as *light verb constructions*. Persian CPs have been a focus of interest during the last two decades. Their formation (i.e. morphological/lexical vs. phrasal/syntactic) and their interpretation (compositional vs. idiomatic) have been thoroughly investigated and various syntactic analyses have been proposed to account for their properties (e.g. Mohammad and Karimi, 1992; Dabir-Moghaddam, 1997; Family, 2006; Folli et al., 2005; Goldberg, 1996; Karimi, 1997; Karimi-Doostan, 1997; Megerdoomian, 2012; Müller, 2010). However, most of these studies are mainly concerned with theoretical issues and only explore a limited set of data. As a consequence, their generalizations turn out to be inaccurate when a larger set of data is taken into account (see e.g. Samvelian 2012; Samvelian and Faghiri 2014).

The separability of the component of a CP is one much debated issue. More precisely, while it is uncontroversial that the non-verbal element (the nominal element to simplify) can be separated from the verb by verbal inflection, clitics and auxiliary, it is controversial that truly syntactic constituents can also separate the components of a CP. Most studies claim that the latter can only be separated in a limited fashion and account for the (in)separability in syntactic terms (e.g. Dabir-Moghaddam, 1997; Goldberg, 1996; Karimi-Doostan, 1997; Karimi, 2005). On the other hand, Samvelian (2012), providing a set of attested examples, argues that the separability of CP components is a matter of tendency, due to their semantic relatedness, rather than syntactic constraints. If the issue of separability is not a matter of syntactic (or hard) constraints, one should be able to identify the soft constraints (or preferences) involved. In this respect, the issue of separability of the components of a CP can be discussed from the point of view of word order preferences. Indeed, studies on word order variations across languages have identified a number of (functional) factors that may influence the relative order of constituents, where the order is not constrained by the grammar. Semantic relatedness and collocational relation are two factors that are known to favor adjacency (cf. e.g. Hawkins, 2001; Wasow, 2002). Hence, the tendency for the components of a CP to appear adjacent to each other is not surprising. Other functional factors such as heaviness and animacy are shown to intervene in word order preferences as well. Adopting a quantitative approach in line with studies on word order variation (see e.g. Faghiri, 2016), the goal of this study is to provide a better understanding of the issue at stake by identifying the factors that (dis)favor (non)adjacency.

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