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Abstract

Persian bare nouns, like English bare plurals, can have a kind, generic or existential reading. But they also have a definite reading in subject position. This paper intends to describe the conditions under which each reading is permitted in subject position. The factors that play major roles in the interpretation of bare singular (henceforth BS) in Persian include, Information Structure, Predicate type, aspectual properties of the predicate, as well as the position of the BS in the sentence. I will argue that with stage level predicates in episodic sentences Persian BS subjects are interpreted as definite when they are in Topic position and existential when they are focused.

The definite reading of BS can be explained by Chierchia, 1998 blocking principle but is motivated for Information Structure (IS) reasons; The lack of definite marker (definite singular) in Persian allows the BS expand its interpretive range and include definite interpretation as well. For Persian, a language with a relatively free word order, with no definite article, a movement of BS to Topic position makes definite reading available (Similarly in Persian indefinites specific readings are obtained when indefinites are scrambled in a higher position (Karimi, 2003)).

In this paper I have adopted Deising (1992) mapping structure: focused BS subjects are mapped in to nuclear scope and Topic BS subjects are mapped in to restrictor clause and further modification is done to account for Persian data.

With Individual Level Predicates (ILPs), an abstract generic operator (Gen) binds free variables on BS subjects in the restrictor clause. Since we have both definite and Generic reading available with ILPs, BS is either within the binding scope of Gen interpreted quasi-universally or it moves higher up to a topic position, where it is interpreted as definite, (postulating a Topic phrase above IP). Persian data shows that BS objects follow the same mechanism moving to two higher positions with object marker –ra, being interpreted as generic or definite.

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