

Topicalization in English and Persian Languages: Similarities and Differences

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التوكيد في اللغتين الانكليزية والفارسية: أوجه التشابه والاختلاف

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Abstract

Topicalization is an instrument of syntax that can simply refer to the emphasis placed on the topic or focus of a clause or sentence by introducing it in the front of the clause or sentence. For example:

1a- The girls roll rocks for amusement

b- For amusement, the girls roll rocks.

Here topicalization is on the object argument *for amusement*.

2a- Everybody refused to answer because the pressure was too great.

b- Because the pressure was too great, everybody refused to answer.

Here the adjunct, *because the pressure was too great*, moved to the front position, which shows focus on the adjunct as a topic of the sentence.

3a- I will eat that mango.

b- That mango, I will eat.

Topicalization here is on the object argument *that mango*.

4a- We are terrified of those puppies.

b- Those puppies, we are terrified of.

Here the focus is on the object argument *those puppies*.

Assuming that a- sentences represent established word order, the b- sentences contain instances of topicalization.

The second examples with a topicalized adjunct are normal or usual, whereas the remaining other examples with a topicalized object argument are relatively exceptional. The presence of the demonstrative determiners (those) and (that) is significant since,

without them, topicalization of an argument seems less significant.

The focus is not only applicable in the English language, but many other languages also permit the movement of either an adjunct or an object argument from the end of the clause or sentence to the initial position.

However, this paper tries to explain the similarities and differences between the English system of topicalization and that of the Persian system of topicalization in syntax by comparative analysis between the two languages. As was written by many scholars, topicalization in the English language takes different forms, there is topicalization of an object, topicalization of an adjunct and many more, which we will explain later.

Key words: Topicalization, thematic topicalization, Persian language

خلاصة البحث

تقوم هذه الورقة البحثية بشرح أوجه التشابه والاختلاف لاستخدام التوكيد باللغتين الانكليزية والفارسية وذلك من خلال التحليل المقارن بين اللغتين باستخدام عدد من الجمل المختارة التي تبين كيفية استعمال هذه الاداة (أي التوكيد) في هاتين اللغتين.

والتوكيد هو واحد من الطرق النحوية المستخدمة لبناء الجملة والذي يمكن أن يشير ببساطة إلى التركيز على موضوع الجملة من خلال تعريفه في الجزء الأمامي من الجملة. كما يشير معنى التوكيد إلى وضع كلمات أو مصطلحات في بداية الجملة لتكون هي الموضوع الأساسي للجملة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التوكيد، التوكيد الموضوعي، اللغة الفارسية

Introduction

In linguistics the meaning of Topicalization refers to placing the topic of sentences at the forefront as in *That movie, I would like to watch*. Therefore, topicalization is one of the syntactic methods used for placing words and terms at the beginning of clauses and sentences.

For Poole (2002), Radford (2004), and Hageman (2006), topicalization is regarded as one of four long known discontinuity kinds besides who-fronting, scrambling, and extra position.

In English, topicalizing arguments is uncommon, while topicalizing adjuncts in conditional cases is regular.

Although the English language allows topicalization, yet other languages permit much more.

As Poole (2002) and Radford (2009) state that wh-movement and topicalization are similar to each other as topicalized constituents can also be wh-fronted, as shown in the sentences below:

- a. John is staying at that one hotel in the village.
- b. Which hotel is John staying at? – The noun phrase involves wh-fronting and this result in preposition stranding.
- c. That one hotel in the village John is staying at. - Topicalization is of noun phrase results in preposition stranding.

In one of his scientific papers published in 2011, Bruria Margolin explains that there is a rooted problem in explaining topicalization's nature, first and at the forefront is that no difference is made when distincting the syntactic structures and their specific applications. According to Margolin, what distinguishes topicalization is that it has pragmatic textual functions.

In some studies regarding the wh-movement, Li and Thompson (1974) take a firm position that topicalization involves no movement at all, and that topic structures are base-generated, as they are in surface form. Central to Li and Thompson's arguments were (a) there are topic-comment structures that apparently cannot be derived by movement or deletion, and (b) the surface form of a topic structure differs considerably from its underlying structure.

Two kinds of topicalization were identified years ago. The first kind is the thematic and the second is the focus. These two kinds of topicalization do not share the same effects; instead each type has its force that differs from the other. Each of the two types of topicalization has its behavior.

Thematic topicalization

- a. It was JOHN who killed Harry.
- b. It was SARAH who played the piano.

The elements John and Sarah are given the thematic prominence.

Focus topicalization

- a. A great artist she turned out to be.
- b. A fine show they displayed.
- c. I see that you are living together and that you don't speak to each other. Well, a charming couple you are.

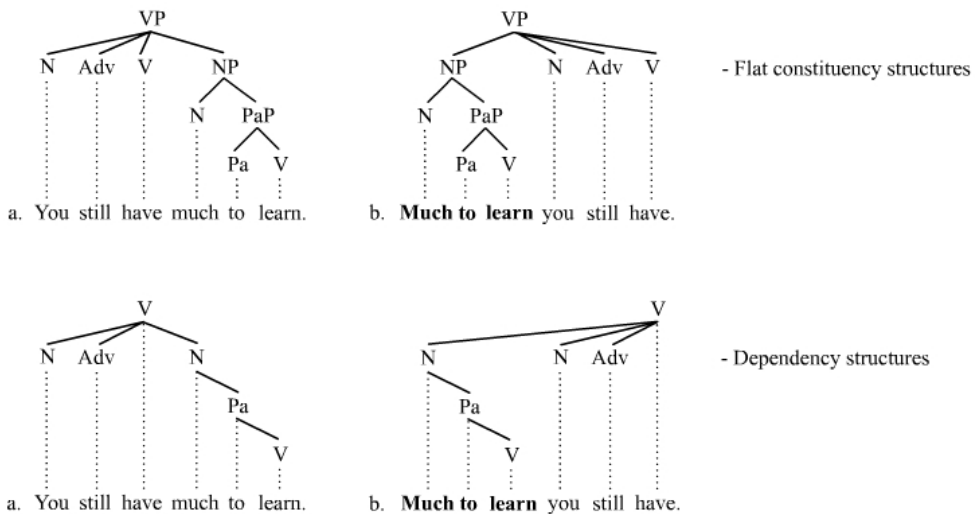
As Bolinger (1980) points out, "these invariable ironies depend not only on focus topicalization; but they also depend on ironically specialized words like a great, fine, and so on, and further dependent on the indefiniteness of the topicalized elements as well."

As regards the theoretical analysis of topicalization, two key references dealing with dependency grammar, Tesnière (1959) and Ágel (2003), explain that analyzing topicalization

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theoretically can differ significantly relying on the sentence structure's theory that one applies. All cases of topicalization will experience a discontinuity if one supposes the layered structures connected with some phrase structure grammars. In contrast, many cases of topicalization do not experience a discontinuity, but the only inversion if less layered structures are supposed as in dependency grammar.

Tesniere and Agel show the above analysis first by adopting flatter structures that do not have finite verb phrase constituent. Dependency and constituency-based analysis are both given. The example illustrated by Tesnier and Agel is itself a part of Yoda Wisdom (when speaking to Anakin), and in this regard, it is definitely of debatable acceptability. It is, nevertheless, completely understandable:



Tens of books and studies have tackled topicalization in Persian as well as in English.

In his book "Persian Grammar" Gernot Windfuhr (1979) explains that the notion of topicalization in Persian language is relatively recent; Peterson (1974) is one of the first who shed light on this subject. However, Windfuhr said constructions involving topicalization had been observed and described since

the earliest grammars, usually defined as emphasis (in Persian ta'kid).

Meanwhile, Iranian writer Simin Karimi, University of Arizona discusses in his book "*Word-order Variation in Contemporary Spoken Persian*" the Persian main clause topicalization and verb-preposing giving a list of examples on such cases to explain how topicalization may be combined with the rule of verb-preposing.

Moreover, topicalization in English and Persian languages has been deeply tackled in a study by Shahrzad Mahootian, Dept. of Linguistics, Illinois University, and Betty Birner, Institute for Research in Cognitive Science, University of Pennsylvania. In their paper, the two writers display that inversion in English corresponds to the Farsi discourse-functional inversion despite distinctions in word order. SXV word order is canonically shown in Farsi, but it allows an XSV marked order. Despite the fact that this kind of word order is similar to that of topicalization in English, it does not have the same discourse function of that of the English topicalization; XSV in Farsi word order, instead, agrees functionally with the inversion in English language.

Inversion in both the Farsi and English languages demands the pre-posed component to represent more common information in the discourse than does the post-posed constituent; also, inversion in both English and Farsi languages provides for reversing these constituents' relative ordering. Word order difference between reversal in English and reversal in Farsi becomes less to a distinction in the position of the verb and shows independent syntactic constraints. Therefore, the XVS English word order and XSV Farsi word order resembles a single inversion construction.

Moreover, a study on the focus and topicalization movement by Persian Anoushe Mazdak, reveals that this movement has been tackled in literature regarding their difference in properties.

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According to Mazdak's study "*Topicalization and Focus Movement in Persian a Feature-based Approach*" syntactic objects within a tense Persian phrase may be freely removed to a higher place or position which is mainly regarded as elements' reordering resulting from discourse functional elements like focus and topic.

Meanwhile, a study by Afkhami, Dinmohamm G. entitled "*An Explanation on the Variety of Syntactic Structures in English, Arabic and Persian*" make it clear that the diversity in the word-order in English, Arabic, and Persian partially arises from processes such as "scrambling" in Arabic and Persian as well as from "topicalization" in English. Afkhami says that the difference between topicalization and scrambling processes is that the topicalization process is linked to configurational languages similar to English while the scrambling process is related to flat languages like Arabic and Persian.

The writer assumes that both Arabic and Persian languages are configurational in S-structure and flat in Phonetic Form depending on the basis of 1982 Saito's proposal while he believes that the D-structure in both languages is of an SVO order and that the S-structure can come out in an SVO and/or SOV order. As a result, the writer said, the diversity in these languages comes from two kinds of movement. The first is NP movement, and it is optionally applied in Phonetic Form while the second movement is obligatorily applied between S-structure and D-structure.

Data analysis

In this part, six basic sentences will be presented followed by the possible topicalized versions of the sentence. However, some topicalized versions are not common.

By looking at the variations and the false forms, the writer try to draw out some possible categories for topicalization in the Persian language.

The first line is going to be the Persian sentence, followed by the meaning of the words and the whole meaning of the phrase in English.

“*” Is used to indicate the wrong variations.

1) Mehman -e- hamsaaye aamad.

Guest of a neighbor came."*"

Neighbor’s guest came.

As it is seen in sentence (1) which is the basic structure, there are three possible ways in which one can topicalize some constituents of the basic sentence.

a) Hamsaaye, mehman -esh- aamad.

Neighbor, guest his came."*"

A neighbor, his guest came."*"

In example (a) “neighbor” is topicalized but at the same time, a slight change occurred in the structure.

A possessive pronoun has been added to “guest” which shows that this guest is neighbor’s guest. Therefore, in this way of topicalization, a pronoun has been added.

b) Aamad, mehman -e- hamsaaye.

Came neighbor."*"

Came, guest of a neighbor."*"

In the (b) sentence which is the second variation, the sentence starts with the verb, this case can be considered an inversion in Persian though there are some debates among Persian scholars regarding the nature of this structure.

c) Hamsaaya -raa- mehman -esh- aamad.

Neighbor -raa- guest his came."*"

Neighbor, his guest came

In the (c) example, case marker of “raa”, which is a very frequent tool for topicalization, has been used, but the sentence is

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wrong because basically "raa" comes for indicating mostly the direct object of the sentences in Persian, therefore, the need for transitive verb is apparent, here the verb is intransitive and "raa" doesn't make sense.

2) Maryam Sara -raa- mishnaase.

Maryam Sara -raa- knows.

Maryam knows Sara.

a) Sara -raa- Maryam Mishnaase.

Sara -raa- Maryam knows

Maryam knows Sara

b) Sara, Maryam mishnaasad -esh-

Sara, Maryam knows -esh- (pronoun)"*"

Sara, Maryam knows her

In these two variations (a) and (b) again the same pattern is seen. In example (a) the place of the constituent is changed while in (b) a slight change has been done, and a pronoun is inserted.

c) Mishnaase, Maryam Sara -raa-

Knows Maryam Sara -raa-

Maryam knows Sara

In this version (c), a verb starts the sentence which can be considered an inversion.

The issue of inversion is not studied in this research.

The third example is more complicated because of the nature of the verb which needs direct and indirect objects, because of which more possible versions of topicalization are presented.

3) Man be bache -ha- ketaab -raa- daadam.

I to child (pl) book -raa- gave.

I gave the book to the children.

a) Be bache -ha- man ketab -raa- daadam.

To child (pl) I book -raa- gave.
To the children, I gave the book

b) Ketab -raa- man be bache -ha- daadam

Book -raa- I to child (pl) gave
I gave the book to the children

c) Daadam man ketab -raa- be bache -ha-.

Gave I book -raa- to child (pl)
I gave the book to the child

d) bache -ha- -raa- beheshoon ketaab -raa- daadam.

Child (pl) -raa- to them book -raa- gave.
The children to them, I gave the book.

In this example all first three ones (a), (b) and (c) are all topicalized without adding anything. Therefore the very case marker “raa” is enough in all these three versions.

In the last example (d) again there is a slight change which is adding a pronoun to the sentence.

The very forth base sentence is in the form of an imperative with one direct object.

4) Baa Chaaghou baazi nakon!

With a knife play don't
With a knife, don't play.

The followings are two possible variations of sentence (4):

a) Bazi nakon baa chaaghou!

Play don't with a knife!
Don't play with a knife!

This example can be again considered as inversion where no changes are done.

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b) Chaaghau -raa- baa -hash- baazi nakon!

Knife -raa- with it play don't!

Knife, don't play with it!

The last version (b) is an example of topicalization in this sentence where two main changes are done, first, adding case marker of "raa" to the object as well as adding "ash" which is a pronoun and is added to the preposition as well.

The last example is another sentence with direct object as following:

5) Daayi gol -ha- -raa- zad.

Daayi goal (pl) -raa- scored.

Daayi scored the goals

Two possible variations as:

a) Gol -ha- -raa- Daayi zad.

Goal (pl) -raa- Daayi scored.

Daayi scored the goals.

b) Zad Daayi gol -ha- raa-

Scored Daayi goal (pl) -raa-

Scored Daayi the goals.

In these two Sentences of (a) and (b), no pronoun is added, and they remain the same with only movement in the constituents.

Findings

One cannot study topicalization in any language without considering the basic structure of it, such as canonical order. Furthermore, when we want to carry out a comparative study between two languages, the need for being aware of this issue becomes more crucial.

Thus, before entering the main analysis of topicalization, here the position of a subject in Persian language and an early coverage of world languages categories are going to be looked at.

According to the typological division of languages on the basis of Basic Word Order, one may recognize three basic segments in a given sentence; Subject (S), Object (O) and Verb (V).

Most languages fall into one of the three categories as below:

SVO: (subject +verb+ object) as examples for this group, we can indicate several languages such as English and Chinese, etc.

SOV: (subject + object+ verb) including Turkish and Tamil

VSO: (verb + subject + object) from which, Arabic can be considered as the most important example.

Exceptions from the groups mentioned above can be seen here and there (mostly in remote areas of the world which are isolated, both geographically and culturally) but most of the live languages of the world can somehow be categorized under one of these lines.

When it comes to Persian the canonical order is SOV, but it should be mentioned that scrambling is extremely common among Persian speakers (Karimi 2005) and that is one of the reasons why the study of inversion and topicalization in Persian is very challenging. As mentioned, we can say that scrambling is one of the common phenomena of the Persian language in which the displacement of almost every segment of a given sentence brings forward a particular emphasis on one part of the very phrase.

The Persian language is an Indo-European language and has got very akin grammar with Indo-Iranian languages.

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Though Persian is considered as SOV language, it is not left-branching, and normally, the main clause comes after the subordinate clause.

As opposed to many SOV languages, Persian has prepositions which come after the subject.

The order with the usage of a preposition is as the following:

Subject + Preposition + Object + Verb

Man be u goftam.

I to him told.

I told him.

In other cases where the preposition is not needed the order is as the following:

Subject + Object + raa + Verb

Man u raa bordam.

I him raa took.

I took him.

“raa” is a case marker in Persian which has a very significant role in this language. Various studies have been done about this case marker in Persian since the role of “raa” in this language carries a considerable amount of complexity.

As mentioned before, in Persian scrambling is very common (Karimi 2005) as this free Order of the words is a fruit of unambiguous parts of speech.

It is worth mentioning that this liberty in the order of words in Persian gives enormous possibilities of rhymes and verses.

In Persian, it is not obligatory to use the pronoun for subject since this language is null-subject which can be called pro-drop as well; hence pronouns are allowed to be dropped out of the sentences.

However, for the third person, there are other pronouns which are less common.

Another crucial issue in doing any syntactic study in Persian is the matter of direct objects incorporation which takes place in two ways as the following:

A) Emrooz Man u -raa- be khaane bordam.

Today I him -raa- to home took.

Today I took him/her home.

B) Emrooz man be khaane bordam -ash-.

Today I to home took -ash- (suffix of him)

Today I took him/her home.

In example (A) the object is indicated by the pronoun of "u" third person singular and followed by case marker of "raa" as in example (B) the suffix of "ash" which is added to the verb. The case marker "raa" is used to specify direct objects in sentences. For indicating the direct object, there are two major ways of using the object which is using pronoun and case marker of "raa" or the suffix added to the verb as in the examples mentioned above.

In Persian, standard sentences are terminated by verbs. Adverbs and phrases with prepositions are prone to be in various positions except for adverb of manner which is necessarily placed in the verb phrase. At the same time, adverbs are basically placed before the verbs.

Conclusion

To conclude, some main points are going to be reviewed, firstly Persian is basically an SOV language, but the subject is not necessarily used since this language is pro-dope. Scrambling is very frequent in Persian, and it gives rise to verification.

In Persian, the case marker “raa” is usually used for direct object and plays a very significant role in so many different cases.

There are many possible ways of topicalization and inversion in Persian, and this study categorizes these various variations into two major branches.

On the whole, according to this analysis two major ways of topicalization are being seen.

Firstly topicalized sentence where the topicalized constituent is followed by "raa", in this form in some cases "raa" is not seen in the basic sentence but in the topicalized form the need for adding this case marker exists.

In some other cases the case marker “raa” already exist in the basic form and the topicalized form accompanies the new place of the topicalized constituent.

In the second category, besides the change in the place of constituents of the sentence which is the basis of topicalization, adding a pronoun is also needed.

This Second way of topicalization stands for the way in which one constituent is topicalized, and a pronoun referring to the topicalized constituent has been added to the rest of the sentence.

It can be said that the frequency of the first group is by far higher than the second group.

All in all, these two significant tools are typically used for topicalization in Persian.

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