

Anaphoric Potential of Bare Nouns/Weak definites

The central topic of this presentation is the interpretation of a well-known asymmetry in object marking in Persian which is an instance of a wide-spread distinction between syntactic objects referred to “differential object marking (DOM)” (Bossong 1985) or “pseudo-incorporation”/“excorporation” (Massam 1991). We will argue that it is related to another well-known distinction between “weak” and “strong” definites (Carlson et al. 2006), and that the distinction applies to other clausal arguments as well, in particular, subjects. Our focus will be on the readings of these different argument realizations and on their anaphoric potential.

Bare Nouns (BNs) objects and Weak Definites (WDs) share many properties such as, narrow scope, nonspecificity, weak-referentiality, degraded anaphoricity, number neutrality, loss of uniqueness, enriched meanings and conventionalized/institutionalized event (as Mithun, 1984 termed it name-worthiness for Noun Incorporation). Two major solutions proposed to account for these shared properties include: a) kind analysis, b) Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI). Scholars have used either kind or PNI to describe properties of either WDs or BNs in different languages. We propose an alternative unified analysis that yields the weak referentiality and number neutrality of both BNs and WDs as a side effect of a structural position (syntax-semantic-prosody mapping) and dependency on the event existential closure (cf. Modarresi, 2014; Krifka & Modarresi, 2016) with semantic and prosodic reflection and propose a solution for seemingly vacillating anaphoric potential of such nominals that has been under much debate in the literature. In this study we discuss the advantage of this proposal over the existing accounts particularly in accounting the anaphoric behaviors of BNs in Persian. We conduct series of experiments to investigate the anaphoric behavior of such nominals in comparison with indefinite marked nouns in various contexts (neutral, Singular and Plural). The same account can be used to explain the behavior of WDs in English or German.

Under a unified analysis, we also argue that BNs in Persian (a language lacking definite article) are always interpreted as definite, and BN objects assumed as quasi-incorporated or PIN with narrow scope (in Modarresi, 2010, 2014) are actually Weak Definites. In other words, BNs in Persian do not have definite/indefinite readings but rather definite/weak definite reading.