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Middle Voice in Persian: A Minimalist Approach

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the syntactic merging process of the middle constructions in Persian within the minimalist framework proposed by Bowers (2010, 2018). Within this framework, Bowers analyzed the merging of active, middle and passive sentences based on the two categories of 'Predication' and 'Transitivity'. It is worth mentioning that in his latest works, Bowers (2010, 2018) has replaced the transitive phrase (TrP) by 'voice' with its core features intact.

The voice category used in Bowers (2010) is a generalization of the transitivity category previously proposed by Bowers (2002). In general, this category enters into a "matching relationship" with objects. Bowers (2018) in his approach calls this node a role of "transitive voice" which is represented as (Vtr). In fact, Bowers goes back from a more general interpretation of this node to a more detailed one. These changes are merely in the name of syntactic nodes and have no effect on the syntactic properties of transitive nodes, because it is evident that Bowers still knows transitive active constructions, middles and passives, including the transitivity category, and unergative and unaccusative constructions without this category

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According to the theoretical framework of the Minimalist Program is there any evidence of the middle voice found in the contemporary Persian? 2. In case it is proven, as proposed by Bowers, does the process of syntactic merging of middle construction follow 'the universal order of merge'? 3. What is the distinction between middle, unaccusative and unergative constructions in Persian? Based on the mentioned questions, these hypotheses can be made: 1. although the active and passive constructions are common in Persian, there might be also some evidence for the middle voice. 2. The process of middle formation in Persian follows the universal order of merge. 3. Middle, unaccusative and unergative constructions are different in terms of the merging process.

Regarding middle construction, the limited number of studies by Iranian linguists has focused on the presence or absence of this construction in Persian. For example, Jabbari (2003), by accepting the existence of middle construction in Persian, has used 'intransitive construction', instead of the term 'middle construction'. He considers it as a construction between active and passive. He claims that although these verbs are formally similar to active verbs, semantically they are comparable to passive verbs. On the other hand, Rasekhmahand (2007) assumes that middle construction cannot be attested as a 'voice' in Persian and it is not at all comparable to active and passive constructions. He referred to it as 'inchoative construction' which is the reverse of causative sentences.

The data of the present study are collected from Dadegan website (The corpus of syntactic dependency of Persian language). For a better illustration, tree diagrams of Minimalist Program have been used during the data analysis.

The findings of the present paper confirm the hypothesis on the existence of middle voice in Persian. Moreover, the universal order in the process of merging middle constructions (Bowers, 2010, 2018) has been attested. According to this arrangement, the merging position of the subject of the verb, which holds the semantic role of 'agent', is the lowest position in the diagram

140

and the other verb arguments are merged subsequently, based on a determined order. Representation of verb arguments in the form of syntactic nodes is the innovative aspect of this research within the framework of the Minimalist Program.