Stative and Non-stative Adjectives in Persian[1]

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Abstract

Adjectives are considered predicates of sentences and take features normally associated with verbs when used predicatively. Functional linguists divide predicate-functioning verbs into stative and non-stative predicates. The aim of this paper is to show through syntactic and semantic evidence that stativity/non-stativity is not limited to verbs; rather; they can be extended to adjectives as well. The questions which the present research aims to answer are: to what extent can the theory of Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) be used as a framework to explain the syntactic and semantic features of stative and non-stative adjectives of Persian, and is the division of predicates into statives and non-statives specific to verbs, as Vendler believes, or can it be extended to other predicates including adjectives? Attempts have been made in this article to describe stative and non-stative adjectives through the analysis of the spoken and written data of Persian. Besides, various syntactic and semantic tests have been used for distinguishing stative adjectives from non-stative ones.

The theoretical framework within which the present research has been conducted is RRG, which is a functional theory developed by Van

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Valin in the 1980s in response to the question about the interface between form and meaning, or the interface of syntax, semantics and pragmatics in different languages. RRG claims that semantic and pragmatic considerations determine the linguistic forms. This theory posits three main representations: a representation of the syntactic structure of sentences, a semantic representation, and a representation of the information structure of the utterance. There is also a set of rules linking the syntactic and semantic representations to each other, and discourse-pragmatics plays a role in this linking. What makes RRG distinct from other formal approaches is that it tries to describe and analyze linguistic structures via reference to meaning and communicative role. The syntactic structure and the semantic structure are combined and the latter is regarded as the basic component. In the semantic structure, verbs are divided based on their type of action (Aktionsart) into states, achievements, accomplishments and activities.

Some adjectives such as *big*, *tall*, *fat* and *red* show permanent states, whereas some others such as *careful*, *disciplined*, *shy* and *arrogant* show temporary characteristics which are not under the control of their arguments, and which are interpreted in the contexts and circumstances where they appear. The researchers have used different syntactic and semantic tests including progressive use, imperative use, function in different tenses with different adverbials and so on, to distinguish stative adjectives from non-stative ones. The syntactic and semantic evidence shows that stative adjectives have a different behavior from non-stative ones, as the latter can be used in imperative function, progressive aspect, different tenses, to mention just a few, whereas the former type of adjectives cannot be used in this way. The analysis of the two types of adjectives also showed that there exists some overlap between them; that is, some adjectives have both stative and non-stative interpretations, depending on the contexts where they appear. For example, adjectives such as *bozorg* (big) and

sangin (heavy) can denote both the physical properties of people and things, and the personality features of people. This is why we can divide adjectives into inherent and non-inherent ones, although some are used both inherently and non-inherently.

The syntactic and semantic tests used in this research revealed that semantic considerations do play a part in determining the linguistic forms, thereby confirming the RRG's main claim regarding the interface or association among different components of language including syntax, semantics and pragmatics. This study also showed that the stativity/non-stativity dichotomy is by no means limited to the verb category; rather, it can be extended to adjective predicates as well. Whether other types of predicates such as nouns and adverbs can also be classified as stative or non-stative can be good topics for future research. This study also showed that some adjectives could be interpreted as either stative or non-stative, depending on the linguistic and situational contexts where they appear. This finding confirms the RRG's claim as to the effective role of contextual or pragmatic features in determining the linguistic forms.