On the Optionality of Verb-Preposing in Yes-No Questions in Persian: A Minimalist Approach[1]

Hossein Moghani[2]
Shoja Tafakkori Rezayi[3]

Abstract

The present paper examines a phenomenon by means of which the main verb in yes-no questions in the spoken form of Persian can either optionally move to the front of the sentence or remain *in-situ*, intending to yield an interrogative interpretation. However, as the latest approaches to the study of the linguistic systems do not opt for optionality, the issue of the optionality of verb movement in such structures, which seems to be an unfortunate drawback, should be settled down in some way or another.

More specifically, considering the theoretical framework of the paper, which is the feature checking mechanism within the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1981; 1982; 1993; 1995; 2000; 2001a-b), the optionality of verb-preposing in yes-no questions entails a contradiction in terms of the two-valued feature strength in the feature checking theory. A feature should be either [+ value] or [- value], and there is no in-between feature value. That is, a syntactic feature is either strong or weak, making the constituent it is associated with either move or remain *in situ*. Consequently, the optional movement of an element in syntax cannot be analyzed as having a strong and a weak feature simultaneously.

To do away with this inconsistency regarding verb-preposing in yes-no questions in Persian, this paper proposes an alternative approach relying on the notion of Extended Projection Principle ([EPP]) feature. The EPP is considered by Chomsky (2000, 2000a) as a feature optionally assigned to the head of a syntactic phrase, providing the necessary impetus for the overt movement of such a projection or the constituent thereof. In fact, the EPP feature is taken to be a syntactic mechanism or a strong syntactic feature which induces the overt movement of a constituent to satisfy certain semantic and functional requirements.

Turning to the Persian data, the adopted approach in this article considers checking the strong EPP-feature on the head of the focus phrase (FocP) as the trigger for verb-preposing in such constructions. In this approach, the difference between the verb fronting in yes-no questions, on the one hand, and its remaining *in-situ*, on the other hand, reduces to the optional selection of the EPP-feature from the lexicon by the head of the FocP. In the former case, after the verb has checked the strong EPP-feature on the head of FocP through movement to the Foc^o, it fails to move on to the head of CP due to the presence of the complementizer "ke" (that) on the C^o. Subsequently, the [-Q] feature on the C^o is matched with the [+Q] feature of the verb through agree, hence checking the [-Q] feature of the C^o. In the latter case, on the contrary, the [-Q] feature on the C^o is checked against the [+Q] feature on the verb through agree only, with no movement involved.

Keywords: Yes-No Questions, Verb-Preposing, Optionality, Minimalist Program, EPP-Feature.