The imperfect aspect in Persian based on the prototype theory[1]

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Abstract
This paper studies the imperfect aspect of verbs in Persian based on the prototype theory. Cognitive semantics holds that language is part of a more general human cognitive ability. Cognitive linguists believe that *neither form nor* content can be regarded as having *priority over the other*; so it is vain to analyse grammatical units without referring to meaning. Moreover, in cognitive studies, semantic values do not rely solely on linguistic knowledge, but it requires extralinguistic knowledge as well. Aspect is a multidimensional category and indicates a semantic attitude towards the verb structure. According to definitions presented in various proceedings, aspect is a grammatical category that expresses how an action, event, or state, denoted by a verb, extends over time; it denotes the reflection of the static state, continuity, movement, or a completed action pertaining to verb, from the speaker's point of view. Prototype is the most prominent example of each category, and indeed the closest member to its implicit concept. Löbner (2013: 181) states that the prototype is the best example and specimen or definition of a classifier that introduces its members and

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their attributes. Prototype examples, on the one hand, are considered as semantic concepts by means of which human beings classify categories of the outside world. On the other hand, the prototype samples contain new and unfamiliar units. All members of a category are classified according to the number of their distinctive features. This research sheds more light on imperfect aspect in Persian based on the prototype theory within the framework of cognitive semantics. The definitions proposed in different texts for the state of continuation of Persian verbs, (not necessarily the prototype aspect), are more or less identical and refer to the presence of the prefix <می–> pronounced as "mi" in the beginning of the verb indicating continuity. Considering cognitive semantics and the prototype theory, the question that arises here is whether to examine continuity on the basis of formal aspect, or formal and semantic aspects simultaneously. Another question is: what form can be presented as a prototype for the imperfect aspect in Persian? First the present study examines the imperfect aspect in Persian, then investigates it from the prototype point of view. Unlike current view, in traditional perspectives, the concept of continuity was merely referred to as a verb structure carrying the prefix "mi"; there were two kinds of structures indicating continuity of the verb: absolute or simple continuous aspects, while in cognitive terms it is impossible to study the syntax of language without considering the meaning and the original message. Aspect, that is the structural and semantic property of verbs, existed in Old Persian too and has been noticed and studied by Parviz Khanlari (1986). The main aim of this study is to achieve a comprehensive definition and criteria for imperfect aspect in Persian that can be useful in teaching Persian language. For this purpose, the authors present the prototype of this verb property from a cognitive perspective by considering four criteria selected from the presented materials. What is presented in this study is based on the analysis of 200 compound structures, written and sometimes spoken, from which 15 sentences were extracted to be analyzed. Then the sentences that called for semantic criteria for their aspect analysis were chosen to be scrutinized, because the formal criteria as well as the traditional grammar were unable to describe the continuity aspect pertaining to the

mentioned sample. The analysis of the sample is based on both formal criteria of continuous representation (i.e. adding the prefix "mi" or the linking verb "dashtan" to the beginning of the verb) and semantic criteria (including the inherent meaning of the verb and context). So some of the sentences, despite having a sustained formal criteria, were excluded because of the absence of semantic criteria to indicate continuity. According to the results, the imperfect aspect cannot be defined and studied only based on the form but contextual meaning should also be considered simultaneously to determine this property.

In this paper, while referring to the history of the imperfect aspect in grammar books and linguists' works, we showed that the prefix "mi" - especially in the present tense- can not be considered as the only imperfective marker in Persian. The meaning of the verb is the combination of the inherent meaning and the contextual one.

Keywords: aspect, imperfect aspect, prototype, semantics, context