

Determining Grammatical Categories of Multifunctional Words in Persian Dictionaries

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Received: 04/10/2018

Accepted: 10/07/2019

Abstract

Determination of the grammatical category is one of the problems faced by the lexicographers. Multifunctional words -words that show characteristics of more than one word class- make this task more difficult. Multiplicity of the function may be the result of ambiguity of lexical categories and interrelationship between them. Lakoff (1986) believes category membership is a matter of degree and words can be more or less member of a category. Neustupny (1966) speaks of marginal elements in each class that belong to the given class, but realize functions proper to another. According to Neustupny, these words are divided into two groups: peripheral elements, those which are characterized by features of another class but still belong to the given class, and the boundary elements which is not clear whether they belong to the given or to the opposite class (Balterio, 2007, p. 71). Some processes, such as ellipsis, polysemy and conversion can also cause that words to perform different functions. However, each of these processes has a different effect on the words that distinguishing these processes is not always easy. Some such as conversion change the lexical category of the word while the others such as ellipsis are a kind of syntactic simplification that occur only in certain circumstances. However, what should be considered in lexicography and recording lexical entries is the process of word formation that creates new words or change the grammatical category of the already-existing words. It is crucial to note that the membership of a word in another word-class is possible only if it can accept all the functions and behaviors of that word-class and can appear in all possible positions for that word-class. Therefore, different

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criteria, syntactic, semantic and morphologic, should be regarded. Syntactically, the word must be able to appear in all possible positions and functions for the new category. Morphologically, it must be able to accept all inflectional affixes of the new category. Semantically, the meaning of the word in the new category should be related to its meaning in the previous category or be defined on it. To distinguish ellipsis, Adams (1973, p. 19) suggests a semantic specification criterion. He believes when an adjectival noun refers to a specific and limited semantic field, what happens is the process of shortening or ellipsis that is a kind of syntactic simplification and not a word formation process such as conversion. However, sometimes the words derived from the processes such as ellipsis, as a result of extensive use by speakers, are entirely independent and accepted in the new category. In such a case, recording both lexical categories for these words is recommended. Finally, diachronic and synchronic criteria are used in distinguishing homonymy, polysemy and conversion. Lyons (1995, p. 58) and Huddleston (1993, p. 105) suggest the etymological and semantical criteria for differentiating between homonymy and polysemy. Polysemous words are said to be semantically related and have the same etymology, but homonymous pairs are said to be semantically unrelated and have different etymological sources. In addition, part of speech for the polysemous words is the same, but for the homonymous words can be the same or different. Converted words, such polysemous pairs have the same etymology and different but related meanings. The difference between these two is part of speech: converted words have different parts of speech but part of speech of the polysemous words is the same. In this research, some problems of lexicographers in this field have been examined and attempts have been made to find solution to overcome them. To achieve this aim, multifunctional words from a dictionary (Sokhan) were collected and studied. Statistical society of this research included all words listed in this dictionary, among them multifunctional words were picked as the sample. The research method was description and content analysis. Data in this research were indexed using Microsoft Excel 2010. Recorded items were 2459 words divided in different groups according to the recorded grammatical categories. The group of adjective-noun that is studied in this research was the biggest one with 1172 words. The members of this group semantically referred to different concepts, so were divided into semantic subcategories such as color terms, numbers terms, curses and offensive terms (which were nouns referring to the animals or unpleasant things or adjectives with negative connotation), words referred to nationality or ethnicity, profession terms and sundry words (which referred to various concepts that could not be included in one group). These data were analyzed in an interpretive way. Results showed numbers and colors are only adjectives the application of which as their name is the result of the anaphoric ellipsis and cannot be considered multifunctional words. Profession terms, although defined in this dictionary as members of adjective-noun group, do not show any adjectival behaviors. These words in another dictionary (Farsi-e-Emrouz) are only defined as noun. Ethnic terms morphologically simple or derived both are defined as adjective-noun in this dictionary. However, the simple ones are only noun and the derived ones are adjectives which are made by adding suffix "-I" to the end of simple ones. These adjectives can be used as nouns to refer to people or languages, so can be considered multifunctional words. Besides, offensive terms defined in this dictionary as both adjective and noun are only nouns or adjectives which are metaphorically used to address people. Finally, members of the sundry group have undergone various processes such as ellipsis or polysemy. Functional changes of the words after ellipsis

are not recorded in other dictionaries. As conclusion, most of the functional changes are the result of different phenomena some of which are only a kind of syntactic simplification and should be ignored by lexicographers.

Keywords: Lexicography, Grammatical category, Conversion, Ellipsis, Multifunctional words