

Research article: Typology of Conditional Construction in New Persian Language

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Introduction

There are conditional sentences in all languages. A conditional sentence consists of two main and subordinate clauses that are apodosis and protasis clauses respectively. In this study, due to the importance of conditional constructions and the lack of typological classification of these structures in Persian language, we have studied the typology of conditional constructions in New Persian language.

Theoretical concepts

In this study, we will examine conditional sentences of New Persian language, based on the theoretical framework of Declerck and Reed (2001). In this semantic theoretical framework, conditional sentences can be classified in different types according to the possible worlds of protasis clause. In this typology possible world of protasis clause can be factual or theoretical. If the possible world is theoretical, it can be neutral or non-neutral, and if it is non-neutral, it can be one of the four types of closed, open, tentative, and counterfactual. In diagram 1, this typology is shown:

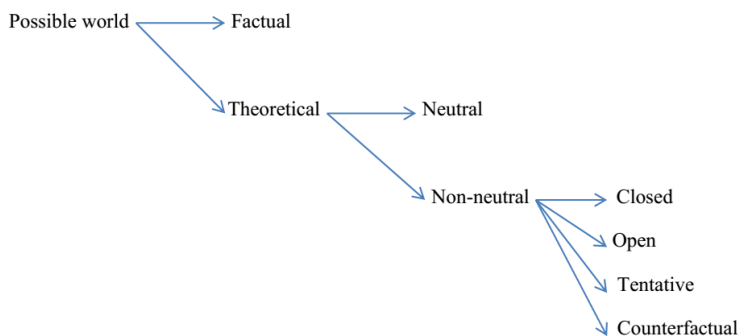


Diagram 1: Typology of possible worlds

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In factual protasis conditional the situation of protasis clause is interpreted as a fact, which forms part of the real world that can be occurred truly (Declerck & Reed, 2001, p. 65-66). The following sentence is a factual one:

1. If I had a problem, I always went to my grandmother.

In a conditional sentence that refers to the theoretical world, if there is no relation with the real world, it will be neutral. The speaker who uses the neutral conditional has no presupposition or assumption about the likelihood of a theoretical world and the real world. The following sentence is a neutral one:

2. If a woman has a history of cancer in her family, she should be examined each year.

On the other hand, if the speaker uses the non-neutral theoretical protasis, there is a presupposition about the likelihood of theoretical and real world. Given the degree of this probability, there are four types of non-neutral theoretical conditionals. In these types the presupposition of protasis clause with real world can be one of the true, probably true, unlikely, and false ones. These are called closed, open, tentative, and counterfactual respectively (ibid, p. 67-72).

In the closed conditional the speaker assumes that the situation of the protasis clause in the real world is true. The following sentence is a closed one:

3. If you know something about this, tell me.

If there is not a certain correspondence between protasis's possible world and the real world, then the possible world would be open. In this type of conditional sentences there is no certainty, no probability or doubt about corresponding between real world and possible world. The following sentence is an open conditional sentence (Ibid, p. 91-93):

4. If the train is late, we will miss our appointment.

In the tentative possible world, the accommodation of the protasis's possible world and real world is impossible but it is not improbable. In fact, in this conditional sentence, it is more likely that the situation of the protasis clause in the real world is false (ibid.,p. 93-98). The following sentence is a tentative one:

5. If he resigned, I would be happy.

Finally, the conditional sentence in which there is an assumption that the protasis's theoretical world is contrary with factuality and which is completely different from the real world is the counterfactual conditional (Declerck & Reed, 2001, p. 99). The following sentence is a counterfactual one:

6. I would never have gone with them if I were you.

According to the research objectives, the authors have selected the data needed for the research from the written texts of New Persian language produced from the 4th to the 14th century AH. In each of these centuries, ten books from different authors were selected. Then, from each of the selected books, randomly an approximate number of 5000 words was examined and conditional constructions were collected in the aforementioned corpus of each book. Therefore, 110 books from 11 centuries and approximately 50,000 words from each century were examined. Finally, it can be said that the present study consists of an approximate number of 556072 words and 3045 pages. In other words, 50552 words and 277 pages have been examined

from each century. Then we examined all the 3648 conditional sentences that were extracted from the corpus and then, we determined the type of conditional construction of each conditional sentence based on the theoretical framework.

We indicated that the conditional construction of the New Persian language can be adapted to the typology of Declerck and Reed (2001). Therefore, there are factual, neutral, closed, open, tentative, and counterfactual conditional types in New Persian language. By examining the frequency of occurrence of conditional sentences in the 4th to 11th century AH, we concluded that the use of conditional constructions in the early centuries was much higher than the later centuries, and there was a steady decline down to the 10th century. By examining the frequency of possible worlds in conditional sentences in the 4th to 14th centuries, we concluded that the highest frequency of occurrence of possible worlds belongs to the open possible world and subsequently the neutral, closed and factual possible worlds have a high frequency. The reason for the higher frequency of open possible world is the higher iconicity of this conditional construction. In this construction the speaker considers the hypothetical position that is likely to occur. This situation by constructing the concept of a conditional term that expresses a hypothetical position has the highest degree of similarity and therefore has the highest iconicity. By increasing the iconicity of a construction that can be a criterion in the rising of the frequency of a construction, the frequency of the conditional sentence with the open possible world is increased, and this result is due to the ease in the processing of such sentences.

Keywords: Typology, Conditional Construction, Open Conditional, Frequency, New Persian Language