Investigating Negative Wh-Constructions in Persian

Hengameh Vaezi[1], Akram Razavizadeh[2]

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study examines a specific type of constructions that are not intended to get information or receive an answer and the speaker confirms his/her denial or the impossibility of the case; these types of constructions are called negative Wh-constructions. The purpose of the present study is to get the features of these constructions in Persian. Research scope is a number of negative constructions that Persian speakers agree on their correctness. Data are analyzed from two semantic – pragmatic dimensions based on Cheung (2008 – 2009). 1-3 are English negative Wh-examples and 4-5 are Persian ones:

1. ***Where*** did he eat anything in the library?! (Kiss, 2015, p. 4)
2. ***Since when***/ *from when/ *when is John watching TV now?! (Cheung, 2009, p.298)
3. ***Since when***/ *from when/ *when is John a professor?! (Cheung, 2008, p.48)
4. ***Koja*** Mina ketab mi khune?!
   Where Mina book PRES- read
5. ***Az key*** ta hala Maryam qazaye mahali dorost kardan balade?!
   From when (since) Mary food local cook to be able to

Reviewing the research literature shows that so far this type of questions in Persian have been largely ignored linguistically and only rhetorical scholars in poetry and fiction have dealt with it. While the use of them is not limited to the field of literature and poetry, and are also used in a variety of Persian colloquial and discourse contexts. Therefore, in this paper, this type of constructions is studied based on the principles governing linguistics. We examine which wh-words are used in these Persian sentences. What are the special semantic - pragmatic features, and what are their differences or similarities with conventional interrogatives and other similar constructions.

Our study has 3 parts: After reviewing the previous studies, presenting the framework, the features of this type of constructions are discussed semantically - pragmatically. We use different tests to determine their characteristics and distinguish them from other constructions such as conventional, emphatic, surprising and rhetorical ones. The final section deals with the results of Persian data and evidence.

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[1] Assistant Professor, English Language and Linguistics Department, Rasht branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran. (corresponding author); Vaezi@iaurasht.ac.ir
[2] PhD in Linguistics, Marand Payam-e Noor University; razaviakram@yahoo.com

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The scope of the study consists of a number of negative wh-questions that Persian speakers agree on their correctness. The data have been gathered from speakers' everyday conversations in natural contexts. They are analyzed from semantic - pragmatic dimensions. The method of research is descriptive – analytic.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overall results of data indicate that despite the apparent similarity between wh-questions in Persian, the negative wh-questions are different from conventional, surprising, emphatic and rhetorical ones. The results show that conventional wh-constructions can be combined with some adverbs, but the combination of negative wh-ones with the adverbs leads to ungrammatical constructions. The examination of the data also shows that in Persian, some wh-words like *where*, *when* and *who* are unmarked wh-words in negative wh-constructions. Negative wh-question words do not refer to place, time, etc. Unlike conventional interrogative constructs, negative wh-ones are largely fixed in form and cannot be changed or replaced by a seemingly synonymous wh-word. Morphologically, wh-words of negative wh-constructs are restricted to a very limited set of wh-words, and semantically they are used only in the contexts that indicate disagreement. Also, reviewing data shows that in conventional wh-constructions, depending on the type of wh-word, it can be answered with a piece of fragment. While in negative wh-constructions, it is not possible to answer as a fragment.

The examination of Persian data related to negative wh-constructions and rhetorical ones shows that both of them are related to non-interrogative interpretation and in both, the speaker does not follow the answer. Despite this similarity, negative wh-questions in any context show the meaning of *at all* and *negation*, but rhetoric shows both positive and negative states. Generally, the results show that negative wh-constructions are different from the other constructions mentioned above.

4. CONCLUSION

Semantic - pragmatic study of these constructions show that the presence of a positive verb, lack of getting answers and limited use of wh-words are special features of these sentences that distinguish them from other similar ones. Syntactic tests including *substitution*, *adjunct doubling*, *embedding*, and *negation dominance* shows that, a) limited number of wh-words are used in these constructions. Therefore, substituting the synonymous wh-word makes these constructions ungrammatical. b) Adjunct doubling is acceptable and permissible. c) They aren't used in dependent clause positions. d) The dominance of negation in these constructions is one-sided and only the negation form dominates the whole sentence. The evaluation of syntactic features also shows the distinction between these constructions and the conventional ones.

Keywords: Negative Wh-constructions; Persian Language; Semantic & pragmatic features; Wh-Construction; Wh-word