

The impact of discourse-pragmatic factors on object omission in Persian

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1. Introduction

Object omission construction is a valency-reduction process in which a transitive verb appears without its object and is used as an intransitive one. However, the addressee can still understand the meaning of the objectless sentence. The type of object omission considered in this paper is context-independent, in which the referent of the omitted object is not mentioned in previous context and the context does not provide any clue to recover the unspecified object. Among different factors which can affect object omission, in this research aims to find out the discourse-pragmatic factors which can facilitate this construction in Persian.

2. Materials and methods

To investigate discourse-pragmatic factors which can affect object omission construction, a data set of 435 cases of object omission was compiled and examined. To avoid bias toward a specific speech type or writing style, the cases of object omission were adopted from different sources including novels, movies, series, and daily conversations. These cases were selected with respect to two criteria. First, the selected verb should be transitive in nature and basically need an object. Second, to select the cases of context-independent object omission, it was essential to note that whether this construction could occur at the beginning of the discourse. In this way, since the context of conversation has not been established, it cannot offer clues for identifying the referent of the omitted object.

3. Results and discussion

The findings regarding the impact of discourse-pragmatic factors on object omission in Persian, revealed the importance of several factors. Some are related to the object, others to the verb, and some involve structures that can facilitate object omission. The findings are summarized below:

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- Features of the object: An object is omissible when it is indefinite, general, and unspecific. Cross-linguistically, activity verbs are the most frequent verbs in object omission construction, partly because they typically take general, unspecific, and non-referential objects. Such objects are not crucial constituents in the sentence and can be omitted.
- Features of the verb: Actions with [-telic] feature do not have an end point and are not fully completed. Therefore, the object is not entirely affected by the verb and the focus is on the action itself. This shifts attention away from the object. Thus, the object cannot be a focusable constituent in the sentence and is not highly individuated, and hence, it can be omitted. Additionally, because of collocation, some words co-occur more often. Because of the collocation of a verb with an object, the object becomes the prototypical complement of the verb; and this prototypical object is recoverable from the objectless sentence. In this way, the verb conveys the meaning of the object as well, and the object can be omitted. Thus, a verb can omit its object when: 1) the verb is more emphasized than the object and the focus is on the verb itself, and 2) the existence of a prototypical object is conceivable for a verb.
- Features of structural omission: Some structures can facilitate object omission, including fixed phrases, linking or sequential phrases, and instructional imperatives which are mostly [-telic]. Interestingly, structural omission seems to dominate other relevant factors. That is, if a verb naturally does not allow object omission, in a structural context, the object may still be omitted.
- Features of the interlocutors: Among people who belong to a certain group with shared goals, the possibility of object omission increases. This is because they have common knowledge of the world, common presuppositions, and common cultural backgrounds. Hence, they can understand the meaning of an objectless sentence.

4. Conclusion

Investigating the impact of discourse-pragmatic factors on object omission in Persian, revealed the importance of several factors. Some of these factors are related to the object, some to the verb, and to the structure facilitating omission. While the investigation of object omission based on the discourse-pragmatic factors enlightens many facts about this construction in Persian, but syntactic, semantic, and typological factors can also affect this construction. Therefore, object omission cannot be considered solely as a discourse-pragmatic phenomenon. To gain a broader view and establish accurate rules for this construction, further investigation of the impact of semantic, syntactic, and typological factors on object omission is inevitable.

Keywords: discourse-pragmatic; object omission; structural omission; valency-reduction