

The Scope of Sentential Negation in Persian

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Undertaking exploration in the realm of negation is not innovatory. This linguistic phenomenon has, from time immemorial, been a centre of attention. Different scholars have approached it from different angles. And yet the nature of negation is such as to defy comprehensive treatment, which means that there is still fresh ground to be broken in this respect. The present paper aims to deal with an aspect of negation in Persian which remains virtually neglected: the scope of negation within sentential units. The main incentive behind embarking on this task is the author's dissatisfaction with the way in which the topic has been addressed by Persian grammarians. For what characterizes the traditional approach to the scope of negation has been an attempt to analyze it in purely semantic and syntactic terms, and by invoking concepts such as linear word order. This may well work in the case of European languages, but it definitely fails when it comes to examining negation in Persian. Fundamental to the concept of the scope of negation as used in Persian is the fact that pragmatic factors play a crucial role. As a result, sole reliance on syntactic and semantic criteria is not sufficient. Take the following example, where it is not clear whether the negative has narrow scope over the adverb or has a wide scope over the propositional content of the sentence:

1. 'æmdæn in kar ra nækærdæm
deliberately this work OM not.did.1SG
'I didn't deliberately do it.' / 'I didn't do it deliberately.'
2. in kar ra 'æmdæn nækærdæm
this work OM deliberately not.did.1SG
'I didn't deliberately do it.' / 'I didn't do it deliberately.'

The problem we are faced with here is that both sentences are ambiguous in the sense that the scope of negation is determined not by word order, but rather by a combination of contextual information and intonation pattern. In other words, the sentences can be disambiguated by using one type of intonation rather than the other. Interestingly enough, the disambiguity does not arise if we use the discourse marker *ke*.

- 3i. 'æmdæn ke in kar ra nækærdæm
deliberately that this work OM not.did.1SG
- 3ii. in kar ra ke 'æmdæn nækærdæm
this work OM that deliberately not.did.1SG

By invoking the diagnostics proposed by Klima (1964), Payne (1985), and McCawley (1988), this paper will seek to identify the scope of negation in Persian, and will take into account pragmatic factors along with semantic and syntactic issues.

Key words: negation, wide and narrow scope, quantifiers, adjuncts, coordinated clauses

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