Contrast in Focus Persian and Turkish focus constructions

Simin Karimi
University of Arizona

Abstract

Persian and Turkish exhibit a number of striking similarities, including the following: (a) many verbal concepts are expressed by complex predicates (CPr) consisting of a non-verbal element (NVE) and a light verb (LV) (Folli et al. 2005, Megerdoomian 2002, Kornfilt 2003), (b) both languages exhibit scrambling, (c) they both mark direct objects for specificity (Enç1991, Karimi 2005), and (d) focus-sensitive elements may follow the non-specific object and the NVE in a hierarchical manner in both languages. There are, however, some important differences between these two languages: while contrastively focused arguments, including the non-specific object, can be displaced in Persian, they must be in-situ in Turkish. Similarly, the Persian NVE can be separated from the LV for emphasis, but not in Turkish. In this article, we concentrate on two types of focus known as information focus and identificational/contrastive focus (Kiss 1998), and try to account for the similarities and differences between these two languages in a principled way. We show that the focus-related similarities are accounted for by a post-syntactic operation that is based on specific structural properties in both languages. We further argue that the differences between the two languages with regard to contrastive focus boil down to the syntactic distinction they exhibit with respect to their clausal architecture.

Keywords: Complex Predicates; information focus; contrastive focus; post-syntactic operation.