Subject-verb agreement in Persian
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Like many languages, Persian exhibits subject-verb number agreement. However, Persian also has some other features that make it an especially interesting language to study agreement phenomena in. First, while most work on agreement has dealt with ungrammatical sentences (e.g. Wagers, Lau, & Phillips, 2009), Persian allows the grammatical use of either singular or plural morphology on the verb, but only when the subject is an inanimate plural noun. Second, Persian is an SOV language and thus objects are typically placed between subject and verb. Finally, there are two bound morphemes marking plurality in nouns, -/ha/ and -/an/. The suffix -/ha/ can be used for all nouns (animate and inanimate) while -/an/ is limited to only animate nouns. In this study, we investigated some of the factors that influence plural vs. singular agreement morphology in Persian, and what the effect of an intervening object attractor would be.

Experiment 1 investigated the effect of tense and the thematic role of the subject on agreement. Twenty-eight native speakers of Persian were provided a series of preambles and instructed to repeat the preambles aloud and then complete the sentences. Tense was manipulated with a counter-balanced block design in which the participants were asked in one half of the experiment to imagine that the events described in the preambles happened the day before, while in the other half they were asked to imagine them happening on the current day. The preambles consisted of an inanimate plural subject noun and the nonverbal component of an intransitive complex (light verb) predicate. Subjects were assigned agent, patient, or instrument roles.

Responses were coded for singular vs. plural morphology on the verb (e.g. kærđ do.Past.3SG vs. kærđ-æn do.Past.3PI). There was an effect of tense, with more singular agreement when verbs were inflected for past tense compared to present tense. Further, more singular agreement was used with patient subject nouns than either agent or instrument. Thus, both tense and thematic role appear to influence subject-verb number agreement in Persian.

In Experiment 2, the goal was to examine the effect of intervening object attractors in agreement. 45 native speakers of Persian were given a series of preambles and instructed to repeat the preambles aloud and then complete the sentences. In critical trials, the preambles consisted of an inanimate plural subject noun, an object noun, and the nonverbal component of an intransitive complex (light verb) predicate. Five types of preambles were created in which the object varied by animacy, number and suffix type (to see if the type of plural marking could have an influence). Participants were told to imagine that all the events of the preambles happened the day before.

An analysis of singular vs. plural verb morphology revealed that both animate and inanimate singular objects (ASO/ISO) caused a higher degree of attraction than the comparison plural conditions (APN/APH and IPH respectively). Further, -/ha/ conditions showed higher degrees of singular use than the -/an/ condition. These results show attraction effects based on both the number and morphological marking of the object.

Experiment 1

**Sample**
ketab xune-ha  ronæq .....  Possible  ketab xune-ha  ronæq  gereft
Preamble  library-Plflourishing .....  Response  library-Pl  flourishing  take.Past.3sg
‘the libraries flourishing .....’  ‘The libraries flourished.’

Experiment 2

**Sample**
wagon-ha æsb-an  ra  hæml  kærđ-æn
Preamble  wagon-Pl  horse-Pl  Acc  carrying
Response  wagon-Pl  horse-Pl  Acc  carrying  do.Past.3Pl
‘the wagons carrying ...... the horses.’  ‘the wagons carried the horses.’

Objects types in Experiment 2:  
- APN: animate plural with -/an/ (e.g. æsb-an, horse-Pl, ‘horses’)
- APh: animate plural with -/ha/ (e.g. æsb-ha, horse-Pl, ‘horses’)
- ASO: animate singular with no suffix (e.g. æsb, horse, ‘horse’)
- IPH: inanim. plural with -/ha/ (e.g. mojæsæme-ha, statute-Pl, ‘statues’)
- ISO: inanim. singular with no suffix (e.g. mojæsæme, statute, ‘statue’)

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