Quasi-incorporation and number marking in Persian

Bare Nouns (BN) in Persian in object position show properties associated with Noun Incorporation (NI) in the literature (Baker 1988, Borer 1999, Mithun, 2010, among others), such as constituting one phonological phrase with the predicate, narrow scope, focalizing the event rather than the object, number neutrality, inability to be modified by adjectives. Although syntactic adjacency with the verb may be disrupted, BNs form a semantic fusion with the predicate, involving a semantic operation similar to Van Geenhoven (1998), introducing a modified event without being able to pick up a salient discourse referent. Below some examples of such properties are presented. For instance (1) shows that the adjective receives an adverbial interpretation modifying (BN+V) rather than BN

(1) Man ketab khoob kharidam.
I book good/well buy.PAST.1SG
‘I bought book/s well/enough’  The reading ‘I bought good books’ is unavailable

As soon BN objects are marked with morphological number, whether it is a non-specific indefinite marker ‘yek-’, ‘one’/‘a’ or a plural marker ‘-ha’, they are no longer incorporated. Number marking causes a salient discourse referent to be introduced. Sentence (2) is odd because the BN cannot be referred back to whereas in (3) the indefinite yek-marked object can be referred back to.

(2) * Ali ketab kharid va an ra be man dad.
Ali book buy.PAST.3SG and that (ra) to me give.PAST.3SG
‘Ali bought books and gave it to me’

(3) Ali yek ketab kharid va an ra be man dad.
Ali one/a book buy.PAST.3SG and that (ra) to me give.PAST.3SG
‘Ali bought a book and gave it to me’ (an/that is referring back to BN)

Plural marked objects are often marked with the object marker -ra and are interpreted as definite and like (singular) yek-marked objects can also be referred back to. I refer to –ra as back-grounding marker in Persian marking objects which have moved out of VP domain to appear in the restrictive clause in the domain of background information causing specificity, definiteness or genercity. However, there are certain constructions that BNs appear with plural marker –ha without –ra marking (Pluralized BN) creating a different interpretation (Ex.4):

(4) Man ketab-**ha** khandam
I book-s read.PAST.3SG
‘I read books’ (I read many different books in many different occasions)

Such plural objects cannot serve as argument of kind-level predicates (such as kashf- kardan/’discover’, ekhtera-kardan/’invent’ as well as Individual Level Predicates (ILPs), including emotional experiencer verbs (such as doost-dashtan/’love’, parastidan/’worship’, tanaffor-dashtan/’hate’, etc. (similar to Romance languages as shown by McNally, 1995; Dobrovie-Sorin, 2003; Longobardi, 2001). These predicates in Persian must appear with –ra marked objects out of VP domain.

(5) Razi alcohol *(ra) kashf kard.
Razi alcohol-ra discovered.3SG

1 Examples on NI properties of BN will be presented during the talk.
I propose that number marking -ha with incorporated BNs in such constructions (as in 4) is a reference to distributed objects so that the object ‘books’ in (4) refers to a sum of books and that this sum is distributed. Since the noun is incorporated, this notion of distribution carries over to the event expression itself (Krifka 1992). In fact, it is not the BN that is pluralized even if –ha appears after BN rather it is the whole BN+V event description that is pluralized, creating many events of book-reading in different time, space and occasions. Thus if the denotation of book is formalized as: [[book]]: λx [book (x)] similar to a mass noun then ketab+ha/’book+ha’ introduces a structure of different parts; x consisting of different parts (y1…yn) and these parts are distant from each other. The nature of this distance is determined by differences in time and space.

[[Ketab-ha]] : λx [book (x) ∧ (∃ y1, y2,…yn such that they are distinct and distant from each other ∧ x= y1 ⊕ y2…yn)] ∧ book (y1) ∧ book (y2) ∧ ... ∧ book (yn)

In summary the difference between singular BN and Plural BN in object position can be demonstrated as the following:

a) [[ketab-khandam/’book-read ’]]: λe ∃ x book (x) ∧ read (e) ∧ PAT (e, x).

Patient (PAT) of event (e) is x and is assigned by the predicate ‘read’ to x. The existential quantifier obtained here is different from the one obtained by indefinite yek ‘one/a’-marked existentials, as x cannot be referred back to, but only means that the patient role of the event is some x that is of ‘book’ property.

b) [[Ketab-ha-Khandam/’books read ’]]: x is a distributed object and e must be distributed as well: λe ∃ x [book (x) ∧ (∃ y1, y2,…yn such that they are distinct and distant from each other ∧ x= y1 ⊕ y2…yn)] ∧ book (y1) ∧ book (y2) ∧ ... ∧ book (yn) ∧ read (e) ∧ PAT (e, x)]. Both forms can be considered as incorporation that involve modified or restricted events where neither ketab/’book’ nor ketab+ha/’books’ can be referred back to.3

References


McNally, Louise (1995). «Using Property-Type NPs to Build Complex Event Descriptions».


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3 Yek marked nouns are also interpreted existentially, but the difference is that as mentioned above they can be referred back to and they are not number-neutral. They do not undergo semantic incorporation, but are interpreted VP-internally (under verb scope) in line with Diesing’s mapping hypothesis (1992).