Wh-Movement in Multiple Wh-Questions in Persian

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Abstract. This paper intends to find out if the application of “Attract Closest Principle” (ACP) is necessary when Persian multiple wh-questions are divided with regard to the Minimalism. It also aims at investigation the conformity of ACP in wh-movement with the way it is used in Persian. Based on the analysis of the data which was collected through recording the real conversations of native Persian speakers, it is proved that the division of Persian wh-questions does not require the application of ACP.

Keywords: Persian, multiple wh-questions, Minimalism, wh-movement, Attract Closest Principle (ACP), c-command.

1. Introduction

Wh-questions are divided in two groups based on the number of wh-operators they contain:

1.1. A. Wh-questions with one wh-operator

The single wh-operator in this group of questions can be placed in the beginning or elsewhere in these questions. According to Iranian linguists, wh-movement in Persian questions is optional. It may or may not occur. In either case, the resulting sentence will be grammatical.

Example:

a) /ali ʧe kasi rɑ molɑGɑt kard ?/ (no wh-movement= echo question)
   Ali whom meet-3rd single
   “Whom did Ali meet?”

b) /ʧe kasi rɑ i ali ɑi molɑGɑt kard ?/ (wh-movement= pragmatic)
   whom Ali meet-3rd single
   “Whom did Ali meet?”

1.2. B. wh-questions with two wh-operators

Questions with two wh-operators are placed in this group.

Example:

/ki ʧi goft?/
   Who what said-3rd single
   “Who did say what?”

According to Minimalism which forms the theoretical base of this paper, wh-movement in multiple questions require the application of ACP, and that only one of the wh-operators can be moved. If you move both, ACP is violated and therefore the question will take an ungrammatical form. Thus the thesis question in this paper is:

Is it necessary to apply ACP when dividing Persian multiple wh-questions? And does it result in ungrammaticality if ACP is violated?

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In other words, and in more general sense, is it necessary to observe ACP when producing multiple wh-questions in Persian?

This paper aims at finding the answer to this question. To this end, various Persian wh-questions are analyzed. But before this, let’s learn more about wh-movement in multiple wh-questions based on Minimalism.

2. Research question

In the present paper, an attempt is made to answer the following question:

Is it necessary to apply ACP when dividing Persian multiple wh-questions?

3. Methodology

3.1. Data gathering

The linguistic data including multiple wh-questions in Persian are gathered through recording the real conversations of native Persian speakers occurred in different linguistic as well as physical contexts.

4. Minimalism principles dominating wh-movement in multiple wh-questions

a) who do you think will say what?
b)*what who do you think will say?
c)* who what do you think will say?
d)*what do you think who will say?

(a) is an example of multiple wh-question in English. The ungrammaticality of (b) and (c) shows that only one wh-operator can be moved. Furthermore, the ungrammatical structure of (d) also suggests that wh-movement doesn’t occur randomly and therefore, must follow certain rules. In this case, Chomsky (1995) suggested application of ACP in order to prevent ungrammaticality. According to ACP, a head which is supposed to attract a given kind of constituent attracts the closest possible constituent of the relevant kind. However, in order to determine the closest constituent to the head, let’s suppose that:

- X is closer to Y than to Z.
- X c-commands both Y and Z.
- Z is contained within some maximal projection which does not contain Y (Radford, 2004:200-201).

Therefore, in multiple wh-questions like the above mentioned examples, a complementiser with a wh-feature and EPP (Extended projection Principle) requires a specifier which has conformity with the wh-feature. So it needs a wh-word for this purpose. As such, and based on ACP, it attracts the closest wh-word. In this example, «who» is closer to complementiser because complementiser c-commands both «who» and «what». Furthermore, «what» belongs to a maximal projection which doesn’t contain «who». As a result, according to ACP «what» cannot move but «who» can. As such, only sentence (a) is grammatical and the rest are ungrammatical as they have violated ACP. Chomsky (1995) introduced another principle which is known as “Minimalism condition”, or “Minimal link condition”, or “Shortest movement principle”.

Producing certain Persian wh-questions is quite different from producing corresponding English wh-questions. For example, «ʧi ro be ki edam?/ “What do I give to whom?”» can also be written as: «be ki ʧi ro bedam?/ “What do I give to whom?”». To Persian speakers, the latter is grammatical as well as acceptable. This creates a challenging attempt for further investigation in this area.

5. Types of multiple wh-questions in Persian

Having analyzed our data, it was found out that multiple wh-questions differ in their syntactic functions in that in some of them, wh-movement occurs whereas in some others, it doesn’t. Accordingly, we divided our data into two categories:

multiple wh-questions with one wh-movement
multiple wh-questions without wh-movement
6. Analysis of the structure and division of multiple wh-questions in Persian

We will first investigate and analyze the way each type of multiple wh-question is produced and divided, and then compare and contrast the results for each group with the other, and finally will try to come to a unified conclusion.

6.1. Analysis of the structure and division of multiple wh-questions with no wh-movement

In some of multiple wh-questions, neither of wh-words undergoes wh-movement. In other words, both wh-words keep their unmarked original syntactic positions in the sentence. In this type of questions, a wh-movement could lead to ungrammaticality and therefore will be unacceptable to Persian speakers’ intuition.

Example:
1) /[TP[NP to][T’[VP’[PP bɑ ki][AdvP kod 3ɑ ][Vmiri]]]]?/
   “Where do you go with whom?”

We have two wh-words «/ki/» (whom) and «/kod 3ɑ/ » (where) in this question which are in their original syntactic position. No wh-movement had occurred here. Now, if we move wh-word «/ki/» to a position in the beginning where it replaces the specifier of CP the following ungrammatical sentence will emerge:

/*[CP[PP bɑ ki i]][TP[NP to][T’[VP’[PP bɑ ki i][AdvP kod 3ɑ i][Vmiri]]]]?/

Moving the wh-word «/kod 3ɑ/ » also will have the same consequence:
/*[CP[AdvP kod 3ɑ i]][TP[NP to][T’[VP’[PP bɑ ki i][AdvP kod 3ɑ i][Vmiri]]]]?/

The following are some other examples of this type:
2) /ki tʃikɑr mikone?/
   Who what job do-3rd single
   “Who does what?”

3) /ki darbGreje tʃi sohbat mikone?/
   Who about what speak-3rd single
   “Who speaks about what?”

4) /kodum bQzikon tʃikɑr kard?/
   Which player what job do-3rd single
   “Which player did what?”

5) /ɑXe tʃi bedarde ki miXore?/
   So what useful whom hit-3rd single
   “What is useful for whom?”

6) /ki tʃeɾɔ mire?/
   Who why leave-3rd single
   “Who leaves and why?”

As you see here, in this type of sentences, wh-movement is neither necessary in terms of syntax nor optional; any wh-movement will result in an ungrammatical sentence.

To explain this grammatically, let’s say in these questions complementiser is not strong enough as it lacks wh-feature and Extended Projection Principle (EPP). As such, it doesn’t need a specifier for wh feature nor for attracting wh-word. That is why there is no wh-movement in such questions. So it can be concluded that since there is no wh-movement in this type of questions, there would be no need for the application of ACP.

6.2. Analysis of the Structure and Division of Multiple Wh-Questions with Wh-Movement

In the second type of multiple wh-questions, in either case (whether wh-words keep their original syntactic position, or if one of them moves) the question would be grammatical. In other words, in such cases, wh-movement is quite optional and has to do with pragmatics in that when the speaker moves one wh-word,
it is for more emphasis, attracting reader’s attention, over emphasizing a point, or showing criticism, protest, hope, hopelessness, sorrow, surprise, etc.

Example:

1) /\[TP[NP Ø][T’[VP[V’[NP kiyo][PP az tjī][V mitarsuni]]]]?/
   “Whom do you make afraid of what?”
   In this question, wh-word «/ki/» (whom) and «/τjī/» (what) are in their original position and there is no wh-movement. Now, if wh-word «/τjī/» moves to the position of specifier of CP, the sentence will still keep its grammaticality:
   /\[CP az τjī ][TP[NP Ø][T’[VP[V’[NP kiyo a][V mitarsuni]]]]]?/

The following are some other examples of this type:

2) /τjī kod ʒa arzeʃ dɑre?/
   “What is valuable and where?”

3) /kodum dardamo be ki begam?/
   “Which of my problems could I say to whom?”

4) /τjī barɑye ki miXari?/
   “What are you buying for whom?”

5) /τjī ro be ki bedam?/
   “What do I give to whom?”

6) /τjī barɑye ki moheme?/
   “What is important for whom?”

As you can see, in these sentences, whether wh-word is moved or left untouched, in either case, the sentence is grammatical and acceptable. However, since wh-movement in such sentences is somehow related to pragmatics rather than syntax, there is no need for the application of ACP. In fact, when wh-movement has nothing to do with syntax, there would be no need to use syntactic principles to explore and justify the movement.

What we proposed about the weakness of complementiser in 4.1., by the same token, is applicable to this second type of multiple wh-questions. Because wh-movement has no syntactic reason and is triggered by pragmatic reasons.

7. Conclusion

The results of this investigation reveal that there is no need for the application of ACP in the production and division of multiple wh-questions in Persian. Therefore, ACP is not recommended and necessarily applicable to these sentences. As a result, it is suggested that ACP is a parameter, but not a principle in Universal Grammar.

8. References