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**THE SEMANTIC STRUCTURES OF COMPOUND VERBS IN**  
**MODERN PERSIAN AND THEIR ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS:**  
**A COMPARATIVE STUDY.**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA - LINCOLN, PH.D.,**  
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THE SEMANTIC STRUCTURES OF COMPOUND VERBS  
IN MODERN PERSIAN AND THEIR ENGLISH  
EQUIVALENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

By  
Habib Sheik

A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English

Under the Supervision of Professor Dudley Bailey  
Lincoln, Nebraska  
December, 1978

**TITLE**

The Semantic Structures of Compound Verbs in Modern

Persian and Their English Equivalents: A Comparative Study

**BY**

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## SYMBOLS USED

### 1. Rules

I have followed basically the same notation convention in presenting the semantic rules and diagrams as used by Chafe (1970: ix) presented below:

$X \longrightarrow Y$	"X obligatorily becomes Y"
$X \longrightarrow Y$	"X optionally becomes Y"
$X \longrightarrow\!\!\!\longrightarrow Y$	"X is obligatorily further specified as Y"
$X \longrightarrow\!\!\!\longrightarrow Y$	"X is optionally further specified as Y"
$\begin{pmatrix} X \\ Y \end{pmatrix}$	"X and/or Y" (inclusive disjunction)
$\{ \begin{pmatrix} X \\ Y \end{pmatrix} \}$	"X or Y but not both" (exclusive disjunction)
$\begin{bmatrix} X \\ Y \end{bmatrix}$	"if X and Y are both present"
$-X$	"if X is not present"
/	"in the environment of"

In addition I have used the symbol = to mean "the same as."

## 2. Phonetic

This list also represents the alphabetic order in which various lists of examples are arranged:

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Persian Ex.</u>	<u>English Ex.</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>Phonetic Description</u>
'	e'teräf 'confession'		glottal stop
a	abr 'cloud'	act	low, front vowel
ä	äb 'water'	calm	low, central vowel
b	botri 'bottle'	bottle	voiced, bilabial stop
c	cap 'left'	chair	voiceless, palatal affricate
d	do 'two'	do	voiced, dental stop
e	emruz 'today'	set	mid, front vowel
f	fekr 'thought'	fat	voiceless labiodental fricative
g	gol 'flower'	go	voiced velar stop
h	häzer 'present'	he	voiceless, glottal fricative
i	dir 'late'	deed	high, front vowel
j	järu 'broom'	judge	voiced, palatal affricate
k	kähu 'lettuce'	car	voiceless, velar stop

<sup>1</sup>The English examples represent the closest sounds to the Persian sounds. That is, although the units are comparable, the quality is not always the same. For example, Persian [t], [d] and [n] are dental, whereas the corresponding sounds in English are alveolar.

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Persian Ex.</u>	<u>English Ex.</u>	<u>Phonetic Description</u>
l	lāzem 'necessary'	look	voiced, alveolar lateral
m	mādar 'mother'	mother	voiced, bilabial nasal
n	nān 'bread'	noon	voiced, dental nasal
o	ojrat 'wage'		mid, back vowel
p	por 'full'	peach	voiceless, bilab- ial stop
q	qodrat 'power'		voiced uvular stop
r	rāst 'right'	right (British var.)	voiced alveolar trill
s	sāde 'simple'	simple	voiceless, alveolar fricative
š	šarāb 'wine'	she	voiceless palatal fricative
t	tāze 'fresh'	two	voiceless dental stop
u	sud 'profit'	brove	high, back vowel
v	vājeb 'necessary'	very	voiced, labiodental fricative
x	xāli 'empty'		voiceless, velar fricative
y	yek 'one'	yes	voiced palatal glide
z	zibā 'pretty'	zero	voiced alveolar fricative
ž	žāpon 'Japan'	measure	voiced palatal frica- tive

## Diphthongs

	<u>Persian Ex.</u>	<u>English Ex.</u>
ay	cāy 'tea'	bite
ey	'eyb 'fault'	bait
ow	owbaš 'rogue'	boat

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

PREVIEW

## 1.0 Persian Verbs

In Modern Persian, there are two types of verbs: simple and compound. Unlike English, the number of simple verbs is quite limited. Some of the simple verbs combine with other elements, mostly nouns, to form a great many compound verbs. The process of compounding is productive in Modern Persian so that most new verbs are formed as compounds, that is, a combination of one of the established simple verbs plus a new element including words from other languages.

It is the aim of this dissertation to investigate the semantic structure of the compound verbs in modern standard Persian and compare them to their equivalents in English with the intention of facilitating the learning of either language by the speaker of the other.

I will study the various combinations of each simple verb that enters into combination with other elements to see whether there are some common grounds in the compounds based on the meaning and/or function of the simple verb.

While the approach is basically descriptive for pedagogical purposes, the comparison of Persian and English will be a test for the validity of Chafe's theory (1970). This study will propose a number of modifications as well as provide more details for the theory presented by Chafe.

## 1.1 Language Analysis

In analyzing language, one must first decide upon the

best method of presenting the linguistic information. That is, he must decide which of the existing methods is descriptively adequate for his purposes. Much has been said about the adequacies and inadequacies of various available linguistic theories. The main objections to the traditional approach have been the lack of treatment of syntactic structures and inconsistencies in the types of criteria used in setting up the different parts of speech. The structuralists have pointed out that certain words may fall within more than one part of speech.

However, the structuralists' own theoretical approach has suffered even more seriously by limiting language analysis to "observable" data. Thus, while some of their objections directed at the traditionalists were well-founded, their preoccupation with segmentation and classification of words and sentences has earned them the label "taxonomists" (Chomsky 1965). Nevertheless, the structuralists' contribution to the technique of language analysis was very valuable, since they put a great deal of emphasis on rigor and accuracy of description of linguistic forms.

Chomsky (1965) showed very convincingly that language analysis is a description of an abstract level called "deep structure." He proposed a distinction between "surface structure" of sentences and their "syntactic deep structures." For example, he said that the ambiguity of a

sentence such as Flying planes can be dangerous may be accounted for on the basis of the two underlying structures that exist for this surface structure. One underlying structure corresponds with the meaning Flying planes is dangerous and the other with Flying planes are dangerous. That is, in one the subject of the sentence is a sentence like someone flies planes, in the other, the subject is a sentence like planes fly. The syntactic structure of the embedded sentence that functions as the subject of the ambiguous sentence Flying planes can be dangerous is different in the underlying structure. Chomsky argues that the opposite situation is also present in language where two distinct sentences may have a single "deep structure." He claims that the active and the corresponding passive sentences have the same deep structure, for example, The soldier killed the enemy and The enemy was killed by the soldier.

## 1.2 The Inadequacy of the Generative-Transformational Approach

The most attractive and prevalent approach to the description of languages, including Persian and English, has been the generative-transformational. However, in recent years, the notion of the reality of "deep structure" at the syntactic level has been questioned. Chafe (1970), among others, has argued that in fact there are two levels of language analysis: surface and semantic. He points out

that language is a way of converting semantic structures into sound (1970:66) and that it is difficult to see why an intermediate stage, namely Chomsky's syntactic deep structure, should be made the generative component of language instead of the semantic structure (1970:67). For example, Chomsky's model will treat the following sentences,

1. David cried.  
dävud gerye-kard

David cried.

2. David perspired.  
dävud araq-kard

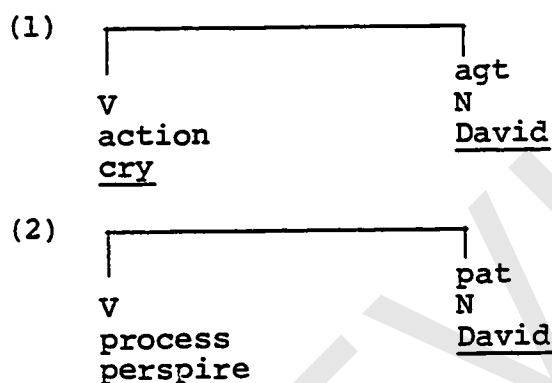
David perspired,

the same in terms of their syntactic deep structure. That is:

- (a) both sentences would be generated by the same rule:  $S \longrightarrow NP VP$ ;
- (b) the syntactic features of both NP's would be given as [+ human];
- (c) both verbs would be specified in terms of their selectional restrictions as [+ animate \_\_\_\_ ], which means the subject noun must be specified as [+ animate];
- (d) both verbs would be said to have the same strict subcategorization feature [N \_\_\_\_ ], which means that each verb requires only a subject noun (it is intransitive).

However, every native speaker of English or Persian knows that sentences (1) and (2) are semantically quite different. In (1), the subject noun is the agent of the action described by the verb, but, in (2), it is the patient of a process.

A semantic specification of the verbs in (1) and (2) would show their different semantic structures:



Chafe (1970:69) has also pointed out, as have others, that the generative-transformational model cannot account for idioms in language except in an ad hoc fashion. Furthermore, Chomsky's "syntactic features" such as animate for nouns are clearly semantic and a sentence such as The chair ate the food is ungrammatical not because of any syntactic violations but because of semantic violations. Yet, Chomsky is committed to account for the unacceptability of such sentences through the "syntactic deep structure" rules.<sup>1</sup>

Sharifi (1973a) has shown the inadequacy of the transformational grammar as proposed by Chomsky (1965) in the

<sup>1</sup>In spite of the fact that he himself admits such structures may be considered semantically deviant (Chomsky 1965:77).

analysis of Persian compound verbs. He points out that the simple Persian verb xordan "to eat" is a transitive verb and normally requires an "animate" subject and an "edible" object as in (3):

3. dävud sib-hä-rä xord  
David apples-SOM<sup>2</sup> ate

David ate the apples.

However, the verb xordan may be used idiomatically to mean "embezzle," as in (4):

4. dävud zamin-rä xord  
David land-SOM ate

David embezzled the land.

That is, in Chomsky's terms, the selectional features of the verb would have to be changed to accommodate the idiomatic use of the verb.

Also, when the verb xordan combines with non-verb elements to form compounds, as in särma-xordan "to catch a cold," it is no longer a transitive verb but rather an intransitive one, as in (5):

5. dävud sarma-xord  
David cold-ate

David caught a cold.

Again, using Chomsky's terms, in (5) the verb has changed its original strict subcategorization features. That is, it now occurs in the environment [N \_\_\_\_ ] rather than [N \_\_\_\_ N]. The same is true of (6):

<sup>2</sup>SOM stands for specific object marker, which is represented by the postposition -rä in Persian.

6. dāvud zamin-xord<sup>3</sup>  
David ground-hit

David fell down.

Furthermore, as Sharifi points out, there are compounds with xordan that maintain a different semantic relationship with their surface subjects than either the simple verb, such as (3), or other compounds with xordan, such as (6). Examples of compounds with this semantic function are (7) and (8):

7. dāvud kotak-xord  
David beating-ate

David was beaten.

8. dāvud gul-xord  
David deceit-ate

David was deceived.

In (7) and (8), the surface subject of the sentence is the recipient of the action, despite the active construction. In Chomsky's grammar, the "grammatical" function of the surface subject of sentences (3-8) is considered the same.

Clearly, then, the generative-transformational model cannot account for the semantic relations that exist between the verb and its accompanying verbs in the sentence. Nor can it account for the semantic relationships that exist between the Persian simple verb and the compounds using the same verb element.

<sup>3</sup>In my view, the verbal element of this compound comes from bar-xordan "to hit, collide," not from xordan "to eat" as the literature on this verb indicates.

### 1.3 Chafe's Theory

Langacker (1972), in his review of Chafe (1970), says ". . . a semantically based theory<sup>4</sup> is more natural in some intuitive sense than a theory which treats meaning as the output of interpretive rules that operate on syntactic structure"<sup>5</sup>(1972:35). The description of the Persian verbs that follows in this dissertation supports the validity of this statement.

The basic tenets of Chafe's (1970) may be summarized as follows:

- (a) Language is a way of converting meaning into sound.
- (b) The generation of sentences is initially based on semantic formation rules that assemble configurations of concepts.
- (c) The semantic configurations are then subject to postsemantic processes, such as literalization and linearization, eventually yielding surface structures.
- (d) The surface structures are then symbolized, resulting in the underlying phonological configurations.

<sup>4</sup>Referring to Chafe's theory.

<sup>5</sup>A clear reference to the generative-transformational theory.

- (e) The underlying phonological configurations are subject to phonological processes, eventually resulting in the phonetic output.

Thus, language is generated on the semantic side which, through symbolization, is connected to the expression. Three types of processes are apparent in language production. First, the semantic processes of "formation," whereby the underlying semantic structures are generated. Second, the processes of "transformation" by which, on the one hand, a semantic structure goes through the necessary changes to become a surface structure<sup>6</sup> and, on the other, the underlying phonological representation is converted into a phonetic representation. In between the last two processes, however, the important process of symbolization takes place, replacing surface structure units by underlying phonological configurations.<sup>7</sup>

Chafe's language theory is a reaction to two things:

- (a) It is a reaction to the long-established and unquestioned phonetic approach to language analysis, what he calls the "phonetic bias" of Chomsky and his immediate predecessors (Chafe 1970:60).

<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that, for Chafe, surface structure is not equated with phonetic structure. It is equated with orderly arrangement of semantic units.

<sup>7</sup>See Chafe (1970:49, Fig. 6) for a diagram of these processes.