

Pegah Faghiri, Pollet Samvelian. “Word order preferences and the effect of phrasal length in SOV languages: evidence from sentence production in Persian”

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/52760>

DOI: 10.4000/abstractairanica.52760

ISBN: 1961-960X

ISSN: 1961-960X

Publisher:

CNRS (UMR 7528 Mondes iraniens et indiens), Éditions de l'IFRI

Electronic reference

Milad Shariatmadari, "Pegah Faghiri, Pollet Samvelian. "Word order preferences and the effect of phrasal length in SOV languages: evidence from sentence production in Persian"", *Abstracta Iranica* [Online], Volume 42-43 | 2020, document 2, Online since 30 July 2021, connection on 01 August 2021.

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/52760> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/abstractairanica.52760>

This text was automatically generated on 1 August 2021.

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- 1 This study contributes to our understanding of the role of phrasal length in constituent ordering preferences by studying the relative order of verbal complements in Persian, a flexible SOV language displaying mixed head direction. To meet this objective, Faghiri and Samvelian have conducted two sentence production experiments in which they investigate the effect of the linear distance between the verb and its dependents, as well as factors that are related to conceptual accessibility including definiteness and animacy.
- 2 After thoroughly reviewing the parsing and production-oriented accounts for the long-before-short preference in OV languages, Faghiri and Samvelian discuss the interest of Persian as a flexible OV language with mixed head directionality and differential object marking (DOM). In Persian, DOM which is realized by enclitic =*rā* and triggered by definiteness, plays almost the key role in the ordering of direct object (DO) and indirect object (IO) in a way that *rā*-marked DOs show a strong bias toward the DO-IO-V order,

while non-*rā*-marked DOs including bare and (non-specific) indefinite NPs, respectively, show a strong bias and a fair inclination toward IO-DO-V. Faghiri et al. (2014; 2018) have shown that the length of non-*rā*-marked DOs affects their relative order. The same effect is reported for *rā*-marked DOs as well later in this study.

- 3 In the succeeding sections, i) first, the authors present the predictions of Hawkins's Minimizing Domain (MiD) and Temperly's Dependency Length Minimization (DLM) for the preferred word order in different configurations. The results show that the DLM consistently predicts a long-before-short preference that increases with the relative length between the two constituents, whereas MiD predicts a short-before-long preference, which, in some configurations, increases with the relative length. ii) Second, they review the results of previous corpus and experimental studies on the effect of length on the relative order between DO and IO in Persian preverbal domain which highlight a long-before-short preference only for non-*rā*-marked DOs. Moreover, in explaining this preference for Persian, authors favor a production-oriented account over parsing-oriented accounts. iii) Third, they address some potential challenges for dependency-distance minimizing accounts, in the light of the data reported so far. And iv) fourth, they describe the procedure and the design of two sentence production experiments (following the paradigm introduced in Faghiri 2016).
- 4 In the conclusions section, Faghiri and Samvelian sum up their findings and results as follows:
- 5 i) The data confirm a general long-before-short preference in Persian which is in accordance with other studies on SOV languages, and contrary to the universal end-weight principle.
- 6 ii) The provided experimental evidence confirms the existence of a dependency-distance-minimizing effect in the preverbal domain in Persian, while showing that the predictions of DLM are more accurate than those of the MiD.
- 7 iii) There is enough empirical evidence to maintain the conceptual accessibility hypothesis (Yamashita & Chang 2001) since length-based effects can be accounted for in terms of informativity and in line with the conceptual accessibility hypothesis.
- 8 iv) The results show that while dependency distance minimization is relevant for Persian, its effect is relatively weak in this language compared to other OV languages.

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