

Emphasis on Possession: Evidence from Mazandarani

Muhammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani (Islamic Azad University, Kashan; University of Qom, Qom)

Mazandarani [1] is a basically unwritten Iranian language, more accurately, a northwestern Iranian dialect, [2] spoken mainly in northern Iran along the eastern part of the Caspian coastline, hence a Caspian dialect, i.e. a dialect of “the Caspian group”. [3] The geographical distribution of Mazandarani is not limited to the Mazandaran Province and the western part of the Golestan Province; even the local people of the northern outskirts and villages of Tehran speak in Mazandarani.

As for the present study, the examples mentioned and analyzed are based on the data collected during field research at Nowkandeh, a small town located in the Golestan Province, at about 47 kms to the west of Gorgan, the capital city of the province.

Mazandarani possessive adjectives have the same form as their corresponding pronouns. To adduce an example, *te* means both ‘your’ and ‘yours’, as in *?in te piran-ε* [this your shirt-is ‘This is your shirt.’] vs. *?in te-ε* [this yours-is ‘This is yours.’].

However, Mazandarani possessive pronouns can also appear in other, longer forms, too. For example, the unmarked possessive pronoun *te* may appear as follows: *te-sh* and *te-sh-εn*, hence rendering such structures as *?in te-ε/tesh-ε/te-sh-εn-ε*. (The enclitic *-ε* means ‘is’.) These forms have literally the same meaning; however, they are different with regard to the varying, hence relative, degrees of emphasis they imply. In other words, the suffix-like *-sh-* and *-sh-εn-* serve as emphasis markers. Interestingly, not all possessive structures, comprising a possessive classifier adjective plus a head noun, can be rendered as such. Research into the data reveals that when there is an alienable possessive relation, such emphatic, and longer, forms can readily substitute the original possessive structure. This phenomenon is not applicable to cases of inalienable possessive relations. For instance, *?un*

me per-ε [that my father-is 'That is my father'] cannot be put as **?un me-ε* [that mine-is 'That is mine'], while the earlier example is quite acceptable.

In addition to the condition of alienability, two further conditions must be satisfied. First, the copulative verb must be the enclitic form *-ε*. Although it is possible to replace *-ε* with the full form copulative verb *haste* 'is', such replacement would not render emphatic forms. For example, *?in me kεla-ε* [this my hat-is 'This is my hat'] can be changed to *?in me kεla haste* ['This is my hat']. Hence, *?in me-ε* [this mine-is 'This is mine'] can be changed to *?in me-sh-ε* or *?in me-sh-εn-ε*; however, such forms as **?in me-sh/ me-sh-εn haste-ε* are unacceptable. Secondly, the verb must be in simple present tense. If the tense is changed to the past or future, these emphatic markers cannot be added. As it concerns the interplay between the morphology of possessive pronouns and the pragmatics of showing one's emphasis on ownership, this phenomenon can also be considered as a morphopragmatic topic in Mazandarani.

Notes:

1. The name has got various spellings in English. While Crystal (1997, p. 448) records it as "Mazandarani," other sources, e.g. Grimes (2000), record it as "Mazanderani". However, Crystal's spelling is closer to the correct Persian pronunciation of the name. It may be interesting to know that uneducated Mazandarani-speaking people refer to their dialect as either Geleki /gelɛki/- not to be confused with Gilaki /gilæki/, which is also another Caspian dialect, or (less frequently) as Mazeni /mazɛni/.

2. Shokri (1995: 13) quotes from Oransky (1358 Sh/ 1980, p. 331). However, Kent (1953, p. 7) maintains that "The Caspian dialects [...] probably derived from ancient Scythian". Linguistically, Mazandarani has not been sufficiently studied, particularly from the viewpoints that concern discourse analysis or pragmatics. As the phenomenon of mutual intelligibility is a "matter of *degree*," (Hudson, 1996, p. 35), there is one-way, not mutual, intelligibility in the dialect: Mazandarani-speaking people understand Persian, but the latter do not.

3. This is Bloomfield's designation (1933, p. 62).

Bibliography

- Baron, I., and M. Herslund, eds. 1997. *Possessive Structures in Danish*. [KLIMT 3] Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School.
- Baron, I., M. Herslund, and F. Sorensen, eds. 2001. *Dimensions of Possession*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Bloomfield, L. 1933. *Language*. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.
- Croft, W. 2003. *Typology and Universals*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. 1997. *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Dorn, B., and M. M. Schafy. 1860. *Beitraege zur kenntniss der Iranischen sprachen*. St. Petersburg: Commissionaire der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Dressler, W. U. 1990. Morphopragmatics, *Bulletin of the Language Institute of Gakushuin University*, No. 13, pp. 3–19. Tokyo: Gakushuin University.
- Dressler, W. U., and L. M. Barbaresi. 1997. Morphopragmatics. In *Handbook of Pragmatics 1997*, ed. J. Verschueren, J.-O. Ostman, J. Blommaert, and C. Bulcaen, pp. 1–14. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Dressler, W. U., and L. M. Barbaresi. 2001. Morphopragmatics of diminutives and augmentatives: On the priority of pragmatics over semantics. In *Perspectives on Semantics, Pragmatics, and Discourse: A Festschrift for Frenec Kiefer*, ed. I. Kenesei, and R. M. Harnish, pp. 43–58. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Fraser, B. 1996. Pragmatic markers. *Pragmatics*, 6: 167–190.
- Grimes, B. F., ed. 2000. *Ethnologue*, 14th ed. CD-ROM. Dallas, TX: SIL International.
- Hudson, R. A. 1996. *Sociolinguistics*, 2nd ed. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Kent, R. 1953. *Old Persian: Grammar, texts, lexicon*, 2nd ed. rev. New Haven: American Oriental Society.
- Mey, J. 2001. *Pragmatics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Oransky, I. M. 1960. *Vvedenie v iranskuyu filologiyu*. Moscow; [Persian trans.: *Moqaddame-ye Feqh al-loghe-ye Irani*, by K. Keshavarz, Tehran: Payam, 1358 Sh/1980].

- Seiler, H. 1983. *Possession as an Operational Dimension of Language*. Tuebingen: Narr.
- Seiler, H. 1995. Cognitive–conceptual structure and linguistic encoding: Language universals and typology in the UNITYP Framework. In *Approaches to Language Typology*, ed. M. Shibatani, and T. Bynon, pp. 273–326. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shokri, G. 1995. *Sari dialect (Mazandarani)*. Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies. [In Persian]
- Taylor, J. R. 1995. *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Verschueren, J. 2001. *Understanding Pragmatics*. London: Arnold.