

THE SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF THE PERSIAN VERB

/gereftæn/ "to take"

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It seems to be the case that a great number of compound verbs in Persian are derived postsemantically, using Chafe's terminology, from a configuration of a limited number of lexical units. To be more precise, certain simple verb roots combine with other types of lexical items to effect new semantic units. The number and type of combinations possible depend upon the verb root. Of equal interest is the fact that most of the derived semantic units seem to share somewhat the basic meaning of the simple verb root. In this paper we shall explore /gereftæn/ "to take" and its derivatives within the framework of Chafe (1970).

The following observations have been made by most grammarians about Persian verbs

- A There are two classes of verbs, which are traditionally called simple and compound
- B In each class the verb is used semantically differently both in terms of the accompanying lexical items and in terms of the meaning of the verb

In the following sentences the verb is used as a simple verb

- 1 /dowlæt zæ-minhara gereft/ "The government took the lands"
- 2. /morad paye hormozra gereft/ "Morad grabbed Hormoz's foot"
- 3 /morad moče hormozra gereft/ "Morad took Hormoz's wrist" or "Morad caught Hormoz in the act"

4. /morad zæ~nra gereft/ "Morad caught the woman"
 5. /morad dozdra gereft/ "Morad caught the thief."

In sentences (1-5) the traditionally simple verb is a process-action verb which requires the presence of two nouns, a patient and an agent. The basic meaning of the verb in all these sentences seems to contain the notion of take. However in sentences (6-10), the structures of which seems to be identical to sentences (1-5), the verb /gereftæ n/ is ambiguous

6. /morad ketabra gereft/ "Morad took the book"
 7. /morad pulhara gereft/ "Morad got the money"
 8. /morad ræŋgra gereft/ "Morad took/got the paint"
 9. /morad æ kshara gereft/ "Morad took/got the pictures"
 10. /morad æ~kse hormozra gereft/ "Morad took/got the picture that belonged to Hormoz" or "Morad took Hormoz's picture."

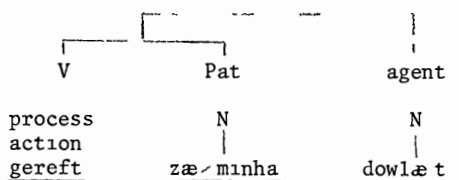
In these sentences initiation of the action seems to play a role in the semantic interpretation of the verb. When Morad is a beneficiary in (6-10), the verb could have an agent as in the following

- 6a. /morad ketabra æ z mæ n gereft/ "Morad took the book from me."

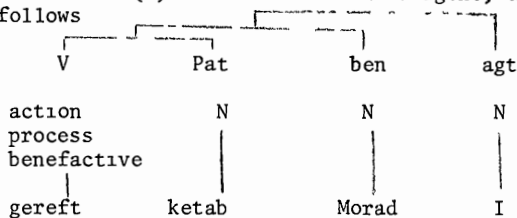
In this sentence /mæ n/ "I" is the agent which follows the preposition /æz/ "from". Therefore, in one sense the verb in (1-10) could be process-action. However, in (6-10) Morad may or may not be the agent. When Morad is not the agent, it is the beneficiary. This has been characterized by Chafe (1970 150) as follows

Rule A v — — — —>> benefactive
 {state }
 {process}
 -ambient

which, among other things, states that a process-action verb may optionally add the feature "benefactive". Thus sentence (1) may be diagrammed as follows



Sentence (6a), however, may be diagrammed in two ways. One would be similar to that for (1) above with Morad as agent, the other would be as follows



The semantic element "force" also seems to play an important role in the semantic structure of the verb. For example, (5) is unambiguous because the semantic element of force is present

In the following sentences while the verb is still a simple one, its semantic structure differs from the earlier sentences

- 11 /luleye boxari gereft/ "The heater pipe plugged up"
- 12 /aseman gereft/ "The sky became overcast"
- 13 /haeva gereft/ "The weather was overcast/It was overcast"
- 14 /kareš gereft/ "His business prospered "
- 15 /mast gereft/ "The yogurt jelled "

Sentences (11-15) all contain the simple verb which is basically a process verb. Our simple verb which was basically process-action has undergone deactivation process which is characterized by Chafe (1970) as follows



This means an inherently process-action verb could derivationally acquire the semantic unit "deactivative" and thus become a process one. It requires the presence of a patient which undergoes a change in its state. For example in sentence (15) /mast gereft/ "The yogurt jelled", the jelling changes the state of the mixture from liquid to semi-solid.

The meaning of the verb in (14) is similar to that of (15) in the sense of "it held together". Again a meaning of "seizure", an "overtaking" is present in (12) and (13), as well as the semantic unit of "force" (of nature).

Sentences (16-21) constitute the third set of examples in which /gereftæn/ seems to act as a simple verb.

16. /pam gereft/ Literally "My foot/leg cramped" meaning "I got a cramp in my leg."
17. /gušæm gereft/ Literally "My ear plugged" meaning "My ear felt plugged up."
18. /gæ-lum gereft/ Literally "My throat plugged" meaning "I choked"
19. /binim gereft/ Literally "My nose plugged" meaning "My nose was plugged up"
20. /qæl-baem gereft/ Literally "My heart seized" meaning "I had a temporary heart seizure" or the idiomatic meaning "I felt closed in, sad"
21. /zaebunaem gereft/ Literally "My tongue seized" meaning "I stuttered or stumbled in my speech"

In these sentences the verb seems to be a process verb which has been derived through the application of Rule B. The difference between the verb of (11-15) and those of (16-21) is the application of further rule to the latter which Chafe (1970 146) characterizes as

v —————>> experiential
-action

That is, all non-action verbs could optionally be further specified as "experiential."

However, for Persian, in the case of the verbs exemplified in (16-21), the rule is obligatory. The required experiencer noun in these examples is "I". Thus we have the following rule having applied as well

Rule C	V	—————>>	V
	process		process
	<u>gereft + deactivative</u>		<u>gereft + deactivative+</u>
			<u>+ experiential</u>

Thus, the semantic structure of the verbs has changed in terms of the accompanying nouns, specifically the loss of an agent and the addition of an experiencer. Furthermore, the lexical meaning of the verb has gone through a post-semantic process. That is, the new meaning of the verb is first converted into its original meaning (that of "take") as exemplified in sentence (6) /morad ketabra gereft/ "Morad took the book", which then goes through the same symbolization and the same phonological process as the original verb root. Thus the new meaning is postsemantically derived from the old meaning. This generalization applies to all the sentences and not just to (16-21). This explanation seems justified since the new meanings ("cramp", "plug", "choke", "seize", "stumble", etc.) seem to all share the semantic unit "process" where a "seizure" or "taking" changes the state of the patient by a force from within or without which creates a closing, cramping situation.

Now, let us examine sentences in which the verb is used as a compound verb

- 22 /bačče madaeraešra gaz gereft/ "The child bit his mother "
 23 /morad naesrinra nišgun gereft/ "Morad pinched Nasrin"

In contrast with the previous sentences, the non-verb element (usually nominal) part of the compound verb in (22-23) may not be considered as an independent element such as patient, etc. This can be demonstrated when we compare (1) /dowlaet zaeminhara gereft/ "The government took the lands" with (22) /bačče madaeraešra gaz gereft/ "The child bit his mother ". In (1) /zaeminha/ is the patient of the verb, and the nominalization of the predicate will give /gereftaene zaeminha/ "the taking of the lands" but not /zaeminha gereftaen/ (Sharifi, 1973). However, in (22) /gaz/ is not the patient of the verb, it is part of the verb structure. This is supported by the fact that the nominalization of the predicate is the reverse of that in (1). In (22) the nominalization will give (gaz gereftæn/ but not /gereftæne gaz/. This establishes (gaz gereftaen/ as a single semantic unit which constitutes the verb in (22) with the

meaning "to bite." A similar explanation can be offered for considering all of the two-part compound verbs as single semantic units which derive their meanings postsemantically from the meanings of the noun and the verb root in each case.² The verbs in (22-23) are process-action since each contains a patient and an agent, e.g., in (23) Morad is agent and Nasrin is patient.

It should be pointed out that the semantic structure of the verb varies depending on the number and relations of accompanying nouns. This is derived postsemantically by the verb unit undergoing derivational rules

24. /morad duš gereft/ "Morad showered/took a shower."
 25. /morad zaen gereft/ "Morad got married."
 26. /morad aeks gereft/ "Morad took pictures."

In (24-26), the verb seems to have been "deprocessized" since there are no patients, thus these verbs can be said to have undergone the following rule

Rule D	V	—————	—————>>	V
	action			action
	process			<u>compound verb +</u>
	<u>compound verb</u>			<u>deprocessive</u>

Sentences (27-28) have undergone the derivational rule "deactivative" (Rule B) and thus contain only patients. Accordingly, in (27) /raeng gereft/ is the verb element and /muhaš/ is the patient.

27. /muhaš raeng gereft/ "His/her hair acquired color."
 28. /otaq bu gereft/ "The room acquired an odor."

Sentences (29) and (30), although in the surface they appear to contain only one noun in addition to the compound verb, in fact can be said to be similar to (15-21) in that a second noun accompanies the verb, namely the experiencer which is overtly indicated through the pronominal suffix. Like (16-21), these can be said to have undergone the derivational rule "experiential" (Rule C)

29. /delaem daerd gereft/ "I got a stomachache"
 30. /sæ ræ m daerd gereft/ "I got a headache."

Sentences (31-33) also have the experiencer indicated through the pronominal suffix, but it is not entirely clear whether the other nominal unit should be considered a patient or as part of the compound verb

- 31 /sa saem gereft/ "I felt like urinating/needed to urinate "
 32 /zaendaem gereft/ "I felt like laughing/started to laugh "
 33 /geryaem gereft/ "I felt like crying/started to cry "

The meaning of the verb in (31), (32), and (33) is similar, a kind of biological, emotional seizure, resulting in the action which is temporarily controlled in (31), but is perhaps uncontrolled in (32) and (33), emotional control being more difficult than biological. It can be said that the verbs in (31-33), in addition to having the semantic features "state" and "experiential", have what might be termed "delayed action "

To conclude this part of the paper, following Sharifi (1973) and the paper presented by him in this volume, it can be said that the verb root, in this case /gereftæn/ "to take", which is basically a process-action verb provides the basic semantic content of all derived and non-derived verbs both simple and compound

It is also evident that although Chafe's theory seems to work with Persian data in general, the theory needs further elaboration in dealing with semantic notion of intention, force, possession, volition, etc , which appear to play a role in the interpretation of sentences

One last remark regarding the ambiguous sentences. As can be seen from the translations, some of the sentences such as (3) /morad moce hormozra gereft/ and (2) /gaelbaem gereft/ are ambiguous in the sense in which there is a literal meaning and an idiomatic meaning. Of interest is the fact that when the literal sense is taken, the verb is a simple process or process-action, however, when the idiomatic meaning is taken, the patient forms part of the compound verb which is now used with a new (though semantically related) meaning. Chafe's explication of "off-base" Chafe, (1970 44-45) seems to be appropriate here in that we can say that the second meaning, the idiomatic meaning, can be said to be derived postsemantically

from the literal meaning.

In relation to the idiomatic meaning, in each of these cases, the single semantic unit corresponding with the compound verb first goes through a postsemantic process giving the literal, postsemantic structure which in turn goes through the same symbolization and eventually the same phonetic output. We may regard the verbs with idiomatic meanings as a kind of idiom, some of which without a literal counterpart, which nevertheless are derived postsemantically in the manner described by Chafe (1970: 48) and applicable to (3), (20), (14), etc. In this sense idiomatization of verb roots may be considered "rule of the game" rather than "the exception."

NOTES

¹This follows Chafe, 1970, Chapter 5, in particular his discussion on "restricted idioms."

²This is similar to Chafe's (1970) treatment of non-restricted idiom

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