

**Isfahan University**

**A Role and Reference Grammar Analysis of  
Simple Sentences in Farsi (Modern Persian)**

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. Sayyed Mohammad Taghi Tayyeb**

**Advisor:**

**Dr. Sassan Sepanta**

**By**

**Vâli Rezai**

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Linguistics of Isfahan  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

**February 2003**

## **Dedication**

**To my wife and my daughter**

**Marzi and Mina**

## Acknowledgement

Many people have helped and supported me while I was writing this dissertation. First and foremost, from the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank **Dr. Sayyed Mohammad Taghi Tayyeb**, my supervisor, for his patient guidance, advice, and endless encouragements on every state of my student life in Isfahan University. His lectures on syntax first sparked my interest and made me want to study Farsi syntax using Role and Reference Grammar. He read countless drafts of my work and was always enthusiastic and very helpful.

I also wish to thank **Prof. Sassan Sepanta**, my advisor, for his extensive comments and suggestions. He shared his knowledge with me, and it was particularly helpful in Chapters 4 and 5, on operators and information structure. I express my deep gratitude to **Prof. Robert D. Van Valin**, the main developer of RRG, for his guidance and encouragements. My dissertation is based on his theory of Role and Reference Grammar. I also thank him for lots of stimulating E-mail communications about this thesis. Thanks also go to **William Foley** for his advice and encouragements.

My deep acknowledgement goes to **Dr. Mohammad Dabir-Moghaddam**, **Dr. Mostafa Assi**, **Dr. Akbar Afghari** and **Dr. Ahmad Moinzadeh**. These four professors acted as referees in the dissertation committee. Their comments and constructive criticisms on various aspects of this dissertation led it to a much better finished study.

I wish to thank the director of the Department of Linguistics, **Dr. M. R. Nasr**, and the director of the graduate division of the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, **Dr. M. Barati**, for their administrative supports.

My best wishes go to my fellow students, **Reza Moghaddam**, **Farhad Badrizadeh** and **Narges Samimi**. I express my gratitude to my dear friend and colleague, **Bijan Namakizadeh** for always being helpful in computational matters.

Finally my deepest gratitude goes to my wife and my daughter whom this dissertation is dedicated to. Without my wife's prayer and patience during the long writing process, I could never have finished this thesis.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation aims to present a Role and Reference Grammar analysis of morphosyntactic phenomena in Farsi simple sentences. It intends to show how RRG's theoretical assumptions as a structural- functional theory of grammar account for Farsi morphosyntactic phenomena and how Farsi follows and supports RRG's general assumptions as a theory of universal grammar.

This thesis includes 7 chapters. Chapter 1 describes the aim and the scope of this study and presents a short introduction to the historical development and theoretical background of RRG and the general characteristics of Farsi. Chapter 2 is devoted to the syntactic structure of simple sentences. Farsi clause structure and its universal and language specific aspects are demonstrated. It will be shown that RRG provides a very efficient framework for the analysis of LSCs in Farsi.

Chapter 3 investigates the semantic representation of simple sentences in the light of RRG's verb classification and lexical representation. I establish diagnostic tests for verb classification in Farsi and present a sample of each verb class in this language. Moreover, thematic relations and generalized semantic roles, Actor and Undergoer, are discussed. Analyzing two-place activity predicates, I show that transitivity can not be determined by only syntactic arguments. But it is the number of macroroles that determines the transitivity. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of different grammatical categories based on RRG's operator system and proposes a new approach to these categories in Farsi. It will be demonstrated that RRG's operator system has several advantages in explaining grammatical categories in this language.

Chapter 5 is a study of information structure. Presenting the Lambrechtian theory of information structure, I try to explore the interaction of focus structure and syntax. It will be shown that the information structure as a major component system of RRG, has a critical role in the exploration of the syntax, semantics and pragmatics interface. Chapter 6 deals with grammatical relations. Introducing RRG's basic assumptions concerning grammatical relations, I claim that the subject NP is the vital argument in Farsi sentences in that it triggers verb agreement and is the privileged syntactic argument. Furthermore, the passive sentences in Farsi are studied using RRG's formulation of voice constructions. It will be argued that Farsi has two recognizable types of passive constructions.

Ultimately, Chapter 7 summarizes the conclusions of this study. This thesis demonstrates that RRG allows new insights into Farsi and Farsi supports the theoretical assumptions of RRG.

	<b>Table of contents</b>	
Dedication		II
Acknowledgement		III
Abstract		IV
Table of contents		V
List of abbreviations		XI
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction</b>		<b>1</b>
1.1. Purpose and scope		1
1.2. Formal versus Functional Grammar		5
1.2.1. Kinds of Functionalism		7
1.3. Role and Reference Grammar		10
1.3.1. Historical background of RRG		12
1.3.1. Current formalization of RRG		15
1.3.2. Complex sentences in RRG		19
1.4. Language under study		24
1.4.1. Word order		24
1.4.2. Verbs		27
1.4.3. Personal pronouns		28
1.5. Summary		29

Notes to Chapter 1	30
<b>Chapter 2. Syntactic structure</b>	<b>31</b>
2.0. Introduction	31
2.1. The layered structure of the clause	31
2.1.1. Constituent structure	33
2.1.2. Non-universal aspects of the layered structure of the clause	37
2.1.3. Operators and their representation	39
2.2. The LSC of Farsi simple sentences	41
2.2.1. Intransitive sentences	43
2.2.2. Copular sentences	43
2.2.3. Transitive sentences	47
2.2.4. Periphery	50
2.2.5. Pre-core slot and left detached position	52
2.2.6. Head and dependent-marking features of Farsi	56
2.3. The layered structure of adpositionals and noun phrases	59
2.3.1. Adpositional Phrases	60
2.3.2. The layered structure of noun phrases	63
2.3.2.1. The layered structure of noun phrases in Farsi	63
2.4. Syntactic templates	75
2.5. Summary	80

Notes to Chapter 2	82
<b>Chapter 3. Semantic representation</b>	<b>84</b>
3.0. Introduction	84
3.1. The lexical representation of verbs and their arguments	85
3.1.1. Verb classes	86
3.2. Aspectual classification of verbs in Farsi	91
3.2.1. Progressive formation	92
3.2.2. Occurs with adverbs like <i>bešeddat</i>	95
3.2.3. Occurs with adverbs like <i>besor' at</i>	96
3.2.4. Occurs with <i>barâye yek sâ' at</i>	98
3.2.5. Occurs with <i>dar yek sâ' at</i>	99
3.3. Logical structure and lexical representation	104
3.3.1. Attributive and result state constructions	108
3.4. Thematic relations	110
3.5. Macroroles	116
3.5.1. Actor-undergoer hierarchy	121
3.5.2. Transitivity	128
3.5.3. Transitivity in Farsi	129
3.5.4. Two-place activity predicates	132
3.6. Summary	140

Notes to Chapter 3	142
	<b>144</b>
<b>Chapter 4. Operator Projection</b>	
4.0. Introduction	144
4.1. Operator projection in RRG	144
4.2. Operators in Farsi	150
4.2.1. Aspect	151
4.2.2. Negation	153
4.2.3. Directionals	154
4.2.4. Modality and Status	158
4.2.5. Tense and Evidentials	163
4.2.6. Illocutionary force	166
4.3. Summary	174
Notes to Chapter 4	177
	<b>179</b>
<b>Chapter 5. Information Structure</b>	
5.0. Introduction	179
5.1. A synopsis of information structure	179
5.2. Focus Structure	184
5.2.1. Focus types	185
5.2.1.1. Predicate focus	187
5.2.1.2. Sentence focus	190
5.2.1.3. Narrow focus	193



5.2.2 The morphosyntactic marking of focus structure and its representation	196
5.3. The interaction of focus structure and syntax	200
5.3.1. Focus structure and word order in Farsi	202
5.3.1.1. Intransitive sentences	202
5.3.1.2. Transitive sentences	205
5.4. Focus domain in Farsi	218
5.5. Summary	222
Notes to Chapter 5	224
 <b>Chapter 6. Grammatical relations</b>	 <b>226</b>
6.0. Introduction	226
6.1. Grammatical relations in RRG	227
6.1.1. Pivot	230
6.2. Grammatical relations in Farsi	232
6.3. Case marking	241
6.4. Passive constructions in Farsi	244
6.4.1. Basic passive	246
6.4.2. Impersonal passive	249
6.4.3. Transitivity alternations	253
6.4.4. Pivot status in Farsi passives	260

6.5. Linking syntax and semantics	262
6.6. Summary	265
Notes to Chapter 6	268
<b>Chapter 7. Conclusion</b>	<b>271</b>
REFERENCES	283

## List of Abbreviations

ADJ	adjective	PFD	potential focus domain
ADV	adverb	PL/pl	plural
AFD	actual focus domain	PoCS	post-core slot
ASP	aspect	POSS	possessive
AUX	auxiliary	PP	prepositional phrase
CONJ	conjunction	PRED	predicate
DAT	dative	PRO	pronoun
DEF	definite	RPOG	progressive
DEIC	deictic	PSA	privileged syntactic argument
DEM	demonstrative	RDP	right detached position
DET	determiner	REF	referential NP
DIR	directional	REL	relative
DUR	durative	RRG	Role and Reference Grammar
EVID	evidential	PCS	pre-core slot
EZ	ezafe	SFG	Systemic Functional Grammar
FG	Functional Grammar	SG/sg	singular
FUT	future	STA	status
GB	Government and Binding	SUB	subject
GPSG	Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar	SUBJ	subjunctive
IF	illocutionary force	VP	verb phrase
IMP	imperfective		
IMPR	imperative		
INGR	ingressive		
INF	infinitive		
INFL	inflection		
LAD	language acquisitions device		
LDP	left detached position		
LFG	Lexical Functional Grammar		
LOC	locative		
LS	logical structure		
LSC	layered structure of the clause		
LSNP	layered structure of NP		
MOD	modality		
N	noun		
NEG	negation		
NOM	nominative		
NP	noun phrase		
NUC	nuclear		
NUM	number		
OBJ	object marker		
PAST	past tense		