An explicit classification of non-epistemic senses of tavanestan, shodan and bayestan based on Depraetere’s semantic-pragmatic model

Gholamreza Medadian*2
Dariush Nezhadansrai Mahabadi3
Hosein Barati4

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Abstract

In this paper we first briefly investigated some Persian scholars’ classifications of non-epistemic (or root) senses of central Persian modal auxiliaries tavanestan, shodan, and bayestan, which roughly correspond to English can/may/might, can/may/might, and must/should, respectively. The findings showed that most of them, which mainly follow Palmer’s semantic-syntactic framework, have not proposed any explicit and operationalizable criteria for analysis and classification of various senses of these polyfunctional modals and have mainly identified and described their various senses through

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2. PhD candidate in Translation Studies, at Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan (corresponding author); gh_medadian@fgn.ui.ac.ir
3. Assistant Professor of English Language Teaching, at Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan; ansari@fgn.ui.ac.ir
4. Associate Professor, Department of English language and literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan.; barati@fgn.ui.ac.ir
researcher-made examples (e.g. Akhlaghi, 2006; Taleghani, 2008). Their approach was found to be mainly semantic-syntactic like that of Palmer and his followers. Even, the studies which are done beyond Palmer’s framework and have integrated pragmatics into their approach have not offered any explicit criteria for the classification of Persian modals (Rahimian, 2008; Rahimian and Amouzadeh, 2012; Amouzadeh and Rezaee, 2009), although their works have shed considerable light on the various senses that these modals can convey. Being aware of the limitations of the previous works, we introduced Depraetere’s (2014) semantic-pragmatic model which is composed of three distinct layers (two semantic and one pragmatic) and classified the non-epistemic senses of Persian modals accordingly. Her two obligatory semantic layers are context-dependent and context-independent layers, while pragmatic layer is optional and mainly appears in the conventionalized uses of the modal auxiliary verbs in colloquial language. The context-independent meaning is either possibility or necessity. The context-dependent meaning, on the other hand, is determined by three parameters (i.e., scope of modality, source of modality, and potential barrier). It is through these parameters that one can explicitly determine the context-dependent meaning of a modal auxiliary. Depraetere tries to reconcile semantics and pragmatics in an integrated framework to account for various senses of modals. She offers explicit criteria and puts an end to the different opinions regarding non-epistemic senses of modal auxiliaries. Upon application, Depraetere’s model proved to be very efficient for a more systematic and
intersubjective classification of non-epistemic senses of Persian modals. In our analysis of some examples taken from Persian websites, we found that bayestan can express narrow-scope internal necessity, wide-scope internal necessity and wide-scope external necessity, like English must. Like English auxiliaries can, may and might, the auxiliary tavanestan can express five senses in Persian, that is, ability (narrow-scope, internal, and [- potential barrier] possibility), permission (narrow-scope external, and [+ potential barrier] possibility), opportunity (narrow scope, external, and [- potential barrier] possibility), situation permissibility (wide-scope, external and [+ potential barrier] possibility) and situation possibility (wide-scope, external, and [- potential barrier] possibility). Shodan which is typically employed in colloquial Persian can only express permission, and situation permissibility and does not have the capacity to express ability and opportunity senses. Due to the unclear status of khah, like English will, its investigation needs an individual investigation.

Key terms: Non-epistemic modality, Context-dependent meaning, Context-independent meaning, Pragmatic layer