

# **LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

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**Agreement in Persian**

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# AGREEMENT IN PERSIAN

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## Abstract

In every clause that we encounter, we need to identify one nominal that will play the role of subject or actor. If the verb is intransitive, this is an easy matter. But when the verb is transitive, we may find two or even three nominals that are potential candidates for the role of subject. To select among these possibilities, we use a series of cues, including word order, case-marking, animacy and verb agreement-marking. The cues that involve the most complex interrelations between sentential elements are the agreement cues, since these cues require us to decode morphological markers on the verb and on the various nouns that might agree with the verb, and then to compare these two sets of markings in terms of the formal markings of the conjugational paradigm.

**Key Words:** agreement, grammatical agreement, animacy, honorifics.

## 1. Agreement

### 1.1 Definition

The term agreement commonly refers to some systematic covariance between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another (Steele 1978). Within this, we need further terms to discuss the 'elements' involved. The element whose form is determined by agreement is the target. The syntactic environment in which agreement occurs is the domain of agreement, and when we indicate in what respect there is agreement, we are referring to agreement features. Thus number is an agreement feature, it has the values: singular, dual, plural and so on. The leftmost unmarked nominal controls the agreement on the verb. Das (2006) mentioned three types of agreement in different languages.

**Type I:** Languages where case markers put constraint for the verb to agree with the nominal they occur with. So, the verb selects one of the arguments which is not overtly case marked. It has basically object-verb agreement and subject-verb agreement in different syntactic environments. For every Type, we will mention to some Indian languages. Languages such as: Hindi, Punjabi and Gujarati are belonging to this Type.

**Type II:** There are no overt case markers with the nominal and the verb always agree with the Subject. For this Type we can mention languages such as: Sindhi, Oriya and Bhojpuri.

**Type III:** There are overt case markers with the subjects, yet the verb agrees with the subject and other nominal also find their reference on to the verb due to certain pragmatic factor but the languages do not have object-verb agreement as a system. For this Type we can mention the following languages: Maithili, Angika and Kurmali.

Type I is called a dual-system of agreement and Type II and Type III are called a single system of agreement.

### 1.1.2 Grammatical Agreement

‘Grammatical Agreement’ mainly explains those phenomena that exhibit the property of specific morphological form of a word appearing in a sentence with respect to the presence or absence of some other words elsewhere in the sentence. This is probably why Lehmann (1988) prefers to call ‘Agreement’ to be ‘Referential’ in nature. It deals with the distribution of an inflected word (i.e. the verb) with respect to the properties of other words in the sentence. It is for this reason that ‘Grammatical Agreement’ is said to be closely related to ‘inflectional morphology’ in nature as it also looks into the effect of ‘Grammatical Morphemes’ on the structure, i.e. the morphemes that carry information about tense, aspect, person, etc in the sentence.

A commonly accepted definition of ‘Grammatical Agreement’ in the literature can be summed up. Lehmann (1988) which we can interpret as followings:

‘The verb agrees with a noun phrase in the bound morpheme(s).

There is an understanding relationship between the zero features (i.e. PNG) and the noun phrase in the sentence and this relationship is independent of the nature or kind of the verb. The nominal inflection is a subcategory of the verbal inflection, and this part of the condition is also understandable.

The last conditions suggests about the formation of a constituent (i.e. the vp) and this happen when the bound form(s) or the null marker of agreement feature appears with the verb in the sentence.

## 2 Agreements in Persian

### 2.1 Verbs

According to Rezai (2003), Persian verbs are formed using one of two basic stems, present and past. Aspect is as important as tense; and all verbs are marked as perfective and imperfective. Both perfective and imperfective verb forms appear in three tenses: present, past, and future.

Verbs are marked for tense and aspect and agree with the subject in person and number. This is illustrated by the following sentence.

- (1) bačče-hâ panjere râ šekast-and.  
child-PL window DO break.PAST-3PL  
‘The children broke the window.’

Darzi (1995) describes the verbal morphology of the verb in Persian as follows:  
The subject-verb agreement clitic of complex verbs in Persian always appears on the verbal element and never on the non-verbal part. This is shown in (2).

(2) *man u râ [az dast dâd-am.]*  
 1SG 3SG DO from hand give.PAST-1SG  
 ‘I lost him/her.’

In (2) the verbal element of the complex verb *az dast dâd-am* which is *dâd-am* is the host of the agreement with the subject *man*.

## 2.2 Number in Persian

It is a common belief that in Standard Persian verbs agree in Number and Person with the structural subject (Khanlari 1976, Meshkat-al dini 1987, among others). In current minimalist terms, it appears that only Person and Number are among the set of  $\Phi$ -features that need to be valued in the sense of Chomsky (2001).

There is also the unproductive dual marker *-eyn* which can be seen on very few nouns and which is used with the plural verb:

(3) *taraf-eyn-e qarârdâd âmad-and.*  
 side-DUAL-EZ contract come.PAST-3PL  
 ‘The contract parties came.’

In (3), the noun *taraf* shows the dual marker *-eyn* on it, but the verb has the suffix *-and* which is the ending for 3rd person plural.

### 2.2.1 Honorifics with Pronouns

Number can be used for honorific purposes with pronouns. This use sometimes results in agreement mismatches and sometimes not. Both cases will be surveyed below.

### 2.2.2 Agreement mismatches

There is not always agreement between ‘the controller’ and ‘the target’ for pronouns and their verbs. Controller and target are Corbett’s (2000) terms and he defines them in the following way. ‘Controller is the element which determines the agreement and target is the element whose form is determined by agreement’. Therefore, for our case, the pronoun is the controller and the verb ending is the target.

*šomâ*

The 2PL personal pronoun *šomâ* can be used for a single addressee in polite usage:

(4) *šomâ čiz-i mi-xor-id?*  
 2PL thing-IND DUR-eat.PRES-2PL  
 ‘Would you like something to eat?’ [Used for a single addressee in a polite context]

The verb ending which is used in example (4) is 2PL. This ending is the default one for Polite usage; however, 2SG, too, can be used for an utterance like (4) to yield (5) below:

(5) šomâ      čiz-i              mi-xor-i?  
       2PL      thing-IND            DUR-eat.PRES-2SG  
 ‘Would you like something to eat?’ [Used for a single addressee in a polite context, but it is less formal than in (18).]

The pragmatic / sociolinguistic difference between the two is that in (4), there is a higher degree of politeness and formality. Note that the 2SG pronoun *to* can be used for such an utterance in an informal friendly context.

(6) to      čiz-i              mi-xor-i?  
       2SG    thing-IND            DUR-eat.PRES-2SG  
 ‘Do you want something to eat?’ [Used in friendly and informal context.]

The use of the pronoun *to* is restricted to family and close friends, as Mahootian (1997) has mentioned and it is considered impolite to address a person of higher rank or older age with *to*.

(7) \*to      čiz-i              mi-xor-id.  
       2SG    thing-IND            DUR-eat.PRES-2PL

*išun*

The pronoun *išun* is used for third person singular in polite contexts. In this usage, there is mismatch in agreement, i.e. the controller is singular and the target plural.

(8) išun      alân      tu              šerkat              nist-and.  
       3SG      now      in              company            NEG.be.PRES-3PL  
 ‘He/She is not in the office now.’ [Polite context.]

The reason for this mismatch can be traced back to the original place of *išun* in the pronoun. *išun* is the colloquial counterpart of *išân* which used to be the 3PL pronoun. Example (9) shows this old usage.

(9) išân    be      šahr      resid-and.  
       3PL    to      city      reach.PAST-3PL  
 ‘They reached the city.’

But as mentioned earlier, *išun* is used today only for the 3rd person singular in polite usage having its verb in the plural.

### 2.2.3 Honorifics without mismatch

According to Corbett (2000), honorifics can be used to indicate modesty.

(10) mâ            dâr-im            mi-r-im.  
 1PL            have.PRES-1PL    DUR-go.PRES-1PL  
 ‘We are leaving.’

In specific contexts, the same pronoun can denote 1st person singular, where the normal verb ending, i.e. 1PL (-im), accompanies the pronoun.

(11) mâ    dâr-im            mi-r-im            âqâ,    bâ            ejâze.  
 1PL    have.PRES-1PL    DUR-go.PRES-1PL    sir    with    permission  
 ‘With your permission sir, I’m leaving.’

Another example strengthens this hypothesis:

(12) xânum    mâ            be-g-im?  
 madam    1PL            say.PRES-1PL  
 ‘Shall I say it madam?’

The above utterance can be said by a student to her/his teacher in a classroom. Again it can be assumed that the student is identifying herself/himself with the other students in the classroom or with ‘the student’ in general, and therefore uses 1PL pronoun instead of its singular counterpart.

## 2.2.4 The plural marker on the pronoun

*inâ, unâ*

The two 3rd person plural pronouns in modern colloquial Persian (i.e. *inâ, unâ*) are actually the plural forms of the demonstrative pronouns *in* ‘this’ and *un* ‘that’. *inâ* and *unâ* do not show any peculiarity with regard to agreement, i.e. it is always the 3rd person plural ending that is used with them.

(13) unâ            čand            nafar-an?  
 3PL            how many            person-3PL  
 ‘How many are they?’

*mâ-hâ, šomâ-hâ*

These two pronouns are formed by adding the plural marker to the pronouns *mâ* ‘we’ and *šomâ* ‘you’ and the 3PL pronoun is used with them. It is argued in this paper that there are three reasons for the existence of *mâ-hâ* ‘we’ and *šomâ-hâ* ‘you’ besides *mâ* and *šomâ* in modern colloquial Persian. One reason is that *mâ* and *šomâ* have lost their exclusiveness of usage for plurality, i.e. both pronouns can under certain circumstances, be used for the singular too (remember that *mâ* can mean ‘1SG’ when expressing modesty and *šomâ* can denote ‘2SG’ in polite contexts). Therefore, the plural marker is

used for them to disambiguate the two potential readings. Let us clarify the situation with examples.

(14) *čerâ*            *šomâ*            *na-yâmad-in?*  
       why                2SG / 2PL            NEG-come.PAST-2PL  
 ‘Why didn’t you come?’

Example (14) can be uttered for both singular and plural addressees and only the pragmatic context will distinguish singular from plural usage. In (15) below, this ambiguity is removed by using the plural marker *-hâ* after *šomâ* and forming *šomâ-hâ*:

(15) *čerâ*        *šomâ-hâ*            *na-yâmad-in?*  
       why            2PL-PL            NEG-come.PAST-2PL  
 ‘Why didn’t you come?’ [Addressee only plural.]

Sentence (15) can only be used for more than one addressees.

The second reason is the style-related difference between *šomâ* and *šomâ-hâ*. Unlike *šomâ* which is used both in colloquial and formal styles, *šomâ-hâ* has only colloquial usage, therefore, it can be used where the speaker wants to reinforce the fact that s/he prefers to use the informal style in communicating with her/his addressees. Suppose, person A uses the following utterance while talking to B and C:

(16) *šomâ-hâ*        *ettelâ’ât-e*            *ziyâd-i*            *dâr-in.*  
       2PL            information-EZ            much-IND            have.PRES-2PL  
 ‘You have a lot of information.’

Here, A is expressing her/his familiarity and friendliness with B and C, whereas an utterance like (17) by itself does not show whether A is speaking formally or colloquially with B and C:

(17) *šomâ*            *ettelâ’ât-e*            *ziyâd-i*            *dâr-in.*  
       2PL            information-EZ            much-IND            have.PRES-2PL  
 ‘You have a lot of information.’

The third reason is that *šomâ-hâ* has a more ‘individual-oriented’ usage compared to *šomâ*. Consider examples (18a-b) below.

(18) a. *šomâ*            *kodum-ro*            *tarjih*            *mi-d-in?*  
       2SG            which-OM            preference            DUR-give.PRES-2PL  
 ‘Which one do you prefer?’

b. *šomâ-hâ*            *kodum-ro*            *tarjih*            *mi-d-in?*  
       2PL-PL            which-OM            preference            DUR-give.PRES-2PL  
 ‘Which one do you prefer?’

### 2.2.5 Honorifics without pronouns

Agreement-mismatch-causing honorifics exist outside the pronoun system too. First, any 3rd person singular subject who is considered to have a respected status can take a 3rd person plural verb to connote politeness and reverence:

(19) âqâ-ye            ra'is        tašrif            âvard-an.  
      sir-EZ            boss        honoring        bring.PAST-3PL  
      'The boss came.' [very polite context.]

(20) mâdar-etun        hamin        alân            raft-an.  
      mother-2PL.CL    this very    now            go.PAST-3PL  
      'Your mother just left.' [polite context.]

Note that here the singular subject cannot be any noun, i.e. as mentioned above; it should be capable of receiving the respect created by the plural verb, hence the ungrammaticality of (21):

(21) \*nâder/un    mard/doxtar-am        tašrif        âvard-an.  
      Nader/that    man/daughter-1SG.CL    honoring    bring.PAST-3PL  
      'Nader/That man/my daughter came.' [Meant to be used in a very polite context.]

Second, there are certain periphrases of politeness used in colloquial usage which bring about mismatch. These periphrases actually play the role of pronouns:

(22) jenâb-âli            ke        mottale            hast-in?  
      high dignity (2SG)    that    informed            be.PRES-2PL  
      'You are informed, aren't you?' [Very polite context.]

*tašrif âvard-an* 'came' is an honorific lexical item for *âmad-an* 'came'. The number of the verb alone can affect an honorific use. Also, there are certain periphrases which serve this purpose.

### 2.2.6 Indefinite pronouns

There are several indefinite pronouns in Persian. They include *yeki* 'someone', *kesi* 'anyone', *folâni* 'someone', *hičkas*, *hički* 'no-one', *hame* 'everyone', *yečiz* 'something', *čizi* 'anything', *hičči* 'nothing', *hameči* 'everything'. Of these, only *hame* 'everyone' takes a plural verb:

(23) hame        in-ro        mi-dun-an.  
      everyone    this-OM    DUR-know.PRES-3PL  
      'Everyone knows this.'

The others take a singular verb:



(24) *yeki unjâ montazer-et-e.*  
 someone there waiting-2SG.CL-be-PRES  
 ‘Someone’s there waits for you.’

(25) *hičči ru miz na-bud.*  
 nothing on table NEG-be.PAST.3SG  
 ‘Nothing was on the table.’

(26) *hameči goft-e šod.*  
 everything say.PAST become.PAST.3SG  
 ‘Everything was said.’

### 2.3 Mass nouns

There is no explicit marker on mass nouns in Persian. Mass nouns can easily be pluralized in Persian; however, the plural counterpart always has an additional meaning attached to it. Consider example (27):

(27) *talâ gerun šod.*  
 gold expensive become.PAST.3SG  
 ‘The price of gold went up.’ [Literally: Gold became expensive.]

In the above utterance, *talâ* ‘gold’ is used in the singular denoting ‘the valuable yellow colored metal’. When this mass noun is pluralized, the meaning will change to ‘jewelry made of gold’:

(28) *talâ-hâ-t xeyli marqub na-bud.*  
 gold-PL-2SG.CL very high quality NEG-be.PAST.3SG  
 ‘Your gold jewelry was not very high quality.’

Note that with the change from *talâ* to *talâ-hâ*, the verb stays singular. The reason is the inanimacy of *talâ*. Plural of mass nouns can have a taxonomic reading (29).

(29) a. *čâi čand-e?*  
 tea how much-be-PRES  
 ‘How much is the tea?’ [The customer does not care about the brand.]

b. *čâi-â čand-e?*  
 tea -PL how much-be-PRES  
 ‘How much are the different kinds of tea?’ [The customer is asking about the prices of the different kinds.]

(30) *do-tâ âb-porteqâl-â tu yaxčâl-e.*  
 two-CL water-orange-PL in fridge-be-PRES  
 ‘The two packages (or glasses) of orange juice are in the fridge.’

Mass nouns always come with the singular verb, although they can be used in the plural as well as singular, the plural having an additional meaning. The additional meaning can be “things made of” (*talâ-hâ* ‘gold jewelry’), “different kinds” (*čâi-â* ‘different kinds of tea’), and “different units” (*âb-porteqâl-â* ‘packages or glasses of orange juice’).

## 2.4 Broken plurals

For some Arabic loan words in Persian, the pluralization is done by means of broken plurals. Broken plurals are formed by changing the vowels accompanying the consonantal root of a noun, e.g. *qolle* ‘mountain peak’, *qolal* ‘mountain peaks’. Corbett (2000) says that ‘broken plurals denote ‘individuals viewed collectively’ whereas sound plurals refer to ‘distinct individuals’. This seems to be the case for Persian too. Two pieces of evidence can be presented in support of this claim. One is the pluralization of double plurals:

- (31) *zarf*            *zoruf*            *zoruf-â*  
       ‘container’    ‘containers’    ‘containers-PL’

*zoruf* is the broken plural of *zarf* but it still undergoes pluralization with *-â*. The justification is that *zoruf* has a rather collective meaning in Persian and so it acts as a unit and it is pluralized.

The other piece of evidence comes from agreement mismatch on some broken plurals like *koffâr* ‘heathens’ (the broken plural of *kâfar* ‘heathen’). In the following example, which is taken from Lazard (1992), the target verb is singular although the controller (i.e. *koffâr*) is plural and animate:

- (32) *jam*        *šav-id*            *tâ* *koffâr*        *be-dun-e*                            *ke*    *be*  
       crowd    become-2PL    till heathens    SBJ-know.PRES-3SG    that    to  
       *mazhab*    *aqide*        *dâr-in.*  
       religion    belief        have.PRES-2PL

‘Assemble yourselves so that the impious may know that you have faith in religion.’

The reason can be that *koffâr* is considered to be a collective unit. Another example in support of the second piece of evidence is (33):

- (33) *tollâb*        *bâyad*        *injuri*        *kâr*        *kon-e.*  
       clergies    must        like this    work        do.PRES-3SG  
       ‘The clergies must work like this.’

*tollâb* ‘clergies’ is the broken plural of *talabe* ‘clergy’ which acts as a collective unit and thus takes a singular verb.

## 2.5 Collectives

Persian grammars define collectives as nouns which are semantically plural but have no formal marker for plurality. Agreement for collectives seems to be semantically or pragmatically influenced and there is no set rule for determining the singularity or plurality of the verb accompanying a collective noun. Below, I will try to clarify the issue with some examples.

(34) *guruh-e avval bar gašt-an.*  
 group-EZ first up turn.PAST.3SG /3PL  
 ‘The first group returned.’

There is no semantic difference between the two alternatives in (34); pragmatically, the plural counterpart has more emphasis on the individuals in the group. However, when we replace *avval* ‘first’ with *navâzande-hâ* ‘instrumentalists’, it is more common to use a plural verb:

(35) *guruh-e navâzande-hâ bar gašt-an.*  
 group-EZ instrumentalist-PL up turn.PAST.3PL  
 ‘The group of instrumentalists returned.’

Therefore the plurality of *navâzande-hâ* ‘instrumentalists’, has affected the head-noun of the subject (i.e. *guruh*) and has given it a plural nuance.

For the next example, consider the word *xânevâde* ‘family’:

(36) a. *xânevâd-aš ham tu mehmuni bud-an?*  
 family-3SG.CL too in party be.PAST-3PL  
 ‘Was her/his family in the party too?’

b. *dar in šarâyet xânevâde-ye har kas-i bištarin*  
 in this conditions family-EZ each person-IND most  
*komak-ro mi-tun-e be un šaxs bo-kon-e.*  
 help-OM DUR-be able.PRES-3SG to that individual SBJ-do.PRES-3SG  
 ‘In such conditions, one’s family can be of greatest help to them.’

In (36a), when speaking of *xânevâde* ‘family’, the individuals are emphasized, i.e. whether the family members were present in the party or not, therefore, the plural is used (it should be mentioned that the singular verb is also possible but less common). In (36b), the institution ‘family’ is meant and so the verb is in the singular.

The last example involves two collectives *mardom* ‘people’ and *mellat* ‘nation’. The former always takes a plural verb and the latter a singular verb.

(37) a. *mardom-e ziyâd-i umad-e bud-an.*  
 people-EZ many-IND come.PAST be.PAST-3PL  
 ‘A lot of people had come.’

b. *mellat in-ro xub mi-dun-e.*  
 nation this-OM good DUR-know.PRES-3SG  
 ‘The nation knows this well.’

### 3 Constraint on verbal agreement

#### 3.1 Animacy

Animacy is a crucial feature in the grammar system of Persian since it has a morphological realization on plural markers and direct objects. Moreover, animacy exhibits a constraint on verbal agreement in Standard Persian and a lack of this feature causes the verb to appear with default agreement. In other words, only animate subjects induce number agreement on the verb and plural inanimate subjects appear with singular agreement morphology. An example showing the contrast between the animate and inanimate plural subjects is in (38).

(38) a. *toofân-hâ-ye peyâpey dehkade râ [virân kard-Ø]*  
 storm-PL-EZ constant village OM destroy do.PAST.3SG  
 ‘Constant storms destroyed the village.’

b. *dozd-ân-e qâratgar dehkade râ [virân kard-and.]*  
 thief-PL-EZ plunderer village OM destroy do.PAST-3PL  
 ‘Thieves destroyed the village.’

In (38a) the subject *toofân-hâ* is in 3rd person plural while the verb bears 3rd person singular/default morphology. On the contrary, in (38b) the subject *thieves*, is in plural form and the verb agrees with it in number and is in plural as well. This state of affairs appears to be a violation of the common situation in Persian, which is that predicates agree with the structural subjects.

Saadat (1996) argues that in Old Persian inanimates were not treated as real agents in the sense of having control over their actions and that is why the non-agreeing form was used. Following this claim, we argue that the restriction on inanimate subjects in Persian somehow indicates that Persian respects the hierarchy of features suggested by the scale in (38).

Animacy restriction applies to different predicate types in Standard Persian. In (39a) the copula verb (be) undergoes the agreement restriction and appears with 3rd sing/default morphology while having a plural external argument *xiyâbân-hâ* (streets). In (39b) the verb *čekid* ‘dropped’ is in unaccusative form and the inanimate internal argument *qatre-hâ-ye bârân* ‘rain drops’, originating as an internal argument moving to the subject position, induces the restriction on the verb *čekid-Ø*, which appears with 3rdsing/default morphology. Example (39c) with the transitive verb *tarsând-Ø* ‘scared’ exhibits the highest contrast with respect to the hierarchy of animacy since the subject is inanimate *šâye’e-hâ* ‘roomers’ and the object *mardom* ‘people’ is animate and human.

Again, in (39c) the complex verb *negarân kard-Ø* ‘worried’ is appearing in default form not agreeing with the inanimate subject ) *šây-e-hâ* ‘roomers’.

- (39) a. *xiyâbân-hâ* [xalvat ast-Ø] (copula)  
 street -**PL** quiet be.PRES-**3SG**  
 ‘The streets are quiet.’
- b. *qatre-hâ-ye bârân be zamin çekid-Ø* (unaccusative)  
 drop-**PL-EZ** rain to ground droppe.PAST-**3SG**  
 ‘Raindrops fell down on the ground.’
- c. *šây-e-hâ-ye axir mardom râ [negarân kard-Ø]*  
 rumor-**PL-EZ** recent people OM worry do.PAST-**3SG**  
 ‘Recent rumors worried people.’

In Modern Persian, however, plural inanimate subjects may select a verb either in plural or singular form as shown in (40a, b).

- (40) a. *qatre-hâ-ye bârân be zamin çekid-Ø*  
 drop-**PL-EZ** rain to ground droppe.PAST-**3SG**  
 ‘Raindrops fell down on the ground.’
- b. *qatre-hâ-ye bârân be zamin çekid-and.*  
 drop-**PL-EZ** rain to ground droppe.PAST-**3PL**  
 ‘Rain drops fell down on the ground.’

In (40a) the inanimate NP in subject position (rain drops) is plural and the verb is singular. In (54b), however, the same NP in plural form takes an agreeing verb in plural form. Meshkat Al-dini (1987) argues that when the emphasis is on the individual members, the agreeing form is used; when the NP is used as a unit/whole, the verb appears in singular form. He provides the following example:

- (41) *dar bâq gol-hâ-ye zibâ-yi [šekofte ast/and.]*  
 in garden flower-**PL-EZ** beautiful-IND bloome be.PRES. SG /PL  
 ‘Beautiful flowers are (have) bloomed in the garden.’

He argues that in (41) if the reference is every single flower in the garden, the agreeing form is used; if the reference is the whole group of flowers that have bloomed in the garden, the non-agreeing form is utilized. However, this distinction is not respected by native speakers who can use the agreeing and non-agreeing form interchangeably.

Although Modern Persian exhibits an optionally with respect to verbal agreement of plural inanimate subjects, there are sentences in Modern Persian (42) in which the no agreeing form is used favorably.

- (42) *in harf-hâ man râ nârâhat mi-kon-e/and.*  
 this word-**PL** 1SG OM uncomfortable DUR-do.PRES-**3SG/3PL**

‘These talks/words make me sad/uncomfortable’

Singular subjects do not pose any agreement problem with regard to animacy, i.e. singular subjects always agree with the verb.

For plural subjects, the animacy factor plays a role in agreement. For animate beings having will or feeling, there is always agreement:

(43) šâgerd-â tu kelâs na-bud-an.  
student-PL in class NEG-be.PAST-3PL  
‘The students were not in the classroom.’

(44) in parande-hâ jâ-hâ-ye sard zendegi mi-kon-an.  
this bird-PL place-PL-EZ cold life DUR-do.PRES-3PL  
‘These birds live in cold places.’

But when the animate subject is not the agent of the process or is simply located somewhere (usually with verbs of existence), singular verb is used:

(45) na-tars xers-o gorg tu in mantaqe peydâ ne-mi-š-e.  
NEG-fear.2SG bear-and wolf in this region found NEG-DUR-become.PRES-3SG  
‘Don’t be afraid, you won’t find any bears or wolves in this region.’

(46) lâle-hâ tu hayât nist.  
tulip-PL in yard NEG- be.PRES.3SG  
‘The tulips are not in the yard.’

Inanimates usually take a singular verb:

(47) sandali-â rang-e âbi xord.  
chair-PL paint-EZ blue eat.PAST.3SG  
‘The chairs were painted blue.’

Also in (48), *sar* ‘head’ is considered to be inanimate or at the most a part of something animate which does not have any will or feeling independently:

(48) sar-â be taraf-e un mard bar gašt.  
head-PL to side-EZ that man up turn.PAST.3SG  
‘Heads turned towards that man.’

However, when the ‘individual’ inanimate items have a role in the utterance, plural verb is used:

(49) in television-â bâ ham farq dâr-an.  
this television-PL with each other difference have.PRES-3PL  
‘These television sets are different from each other.’

Also, when an inanimate subject is given a human quality or, in other words, is personified, a plural verb accompanies it:

(50) setâre-hâ            češmak    mi-zan-an.  
 star-PL                blink      DUR-hit.PRES-3PL  
 ‘The stars are blinking.’

(51) moj-â-ye    daryâ    engâr    dâr-an                    âvâz    mi-xun-an.  
 wave-PL-EZ    sea      as if    have.PRES-3PL    song    DUR-sing.PRES-3PL  
 ‘The sea waves sound as if they’re singing.’

### 3.1.1 Animacy and Agreement Restriction in Persian

In (52) the complex verb *be xande andâxt*, appears with 3rd person singular morphology while the plural inanimate subject (*šây-e-hâ* ‘rumours’ is in plural form.

(52) in šây-e-hâ    mardom    râ    [be    xande    andâxt-Ø]  
 this rumor-PL    people    OM    to    laughter    droppe.PAST-3SG  
 ‘These rumors made people laugh.’

To capture the verbal agreement restriction, we propose that agreement is in fact obtained in syntax for both animate and inanimate subjects and that one of the core operations of Distributed Morphology, Impoverishment, is responsible for the restriction on subject verb agreement in the case of plural inanimate subjects.

The restriction that animacy induces on number agreement in Persian is somehow reminiscent of other verbal restrictions that have been studied in the literature as clitics, agreement affixes, or weak pronouns.

In Persian animacy not only has morphological exponents but also imposes a restriction on verbal inflection and subject-predicate agreement, indicating that Animacy is an active feature which is morphologically and syntactically realized. So for proving this, we provide three environments in which animacy is a distinguishing feature.

The first environment in which animacy is morphologically realized in Persian is in Plural markers. As a general rule (Khanlari, 1976), the plural marker for animate NPs is the affix *-ân*, while inanimate NPs will be pluralized by the affix *-hâ* (There are however exceptions to this rule; see Saadat (1996) for a comprehensive list).

(53) a. doxtar-ân                    b. nâme-hâ  
       girl-PL                        letter-PL  
       ‘girls’                         ‘letters’

In (53.a) *-ân* is the plural marker for the animate DP *doxtar* while the plural marker for the inanimate noun in (53.b) *nâme* is *-hâ*.

The second environment in which animacy is realized in Persian is Direct Objects (Lazard 1982, Ghomeshi 1997). It is argued that the animate direct object obligatorily takes the suffix *râ* while the inanimate counterpart can appear without the suffix *râ*. The sentences in (54) differ based on the animacy of the direct object.

(54) a. (u) qâsed-i                      râ                      ferestâd-Ø  
           3SG messenger-IND    OM                      send.PAST-3SG  
           ‘He/She sent a messenger.’

b. (u)    peyqâm-i                      ferestâd-Ø  
           3SG    message-IND            send.PAST-3SG  
           ‘He/Shee sent a message.’

In (54b) there is a tendency to omit the direct object marker *râ* when the object is inanimate.

The third environment where animacy plays a role is verbal agreement. In Standard Persian, inanimate subjects do not induce agreement on the verb. The verb appears in singular/default form and subject-predicate agreement may be restricted. This environment has explained in section (3.1).

Let us consider the Persian data in (55).

(55) in    toofân-**hâ**    dehkade    râ    [virân    kard-Ø]  
           this    storm-**PL**    village    OM    destroy    do.PAST-3SG  
           ‘These storms destroyed the village.’

In (55) the verb does not agree with the inanimate subject in number and appears in default form (3rd person singular).

Sedighi (2003) propose that agreement is obtained with animate as well as inanimate subjects in Persian.

It should be noted that there is no dual in Persian and Number has only two exponents: singular and plural.

Karimi (2005) provides a brief discussion about inanimate subjects. In short she argues that only specific subjects induce agreement on the verb and that Persian grammar optionally interprets inanimate subjects as specific subjects. If they are interpreted as specific, they move to spec vP, and induce agreement. If they have a non specific interpretation, they remain in situ and do not induce agreement on the verb.

Karimi argues that PredP is the domain of existential closure and that NPs inside this domain are neutral with respect to Case. She further suggests that there is no agreement



between the subject inside the PredP and the verb; only specific subjects are checked for agreement. She provides the examples in (56) to support her claim.

(56) a. jelo-ye dar se- tâ sag nešaste bud/\*bud-an.  
front-EZ door three-CL dog sitting be.PAST-3SG/\*be.PAST-3PL  
'Three dogs were sitting in front of the door.'

b. un sag-â-ye sefid jelo-ye dar nešaste bud-an/\*bud.  
that dog-PL-EZ white front-EZ door sitting be.PAST-3PL/\*be.PAST-3SG  
'Those white dogs were sitting in front of the door.'

She argues that in (56a) the verb does not agree with the nonspecific subject *se-tâ sag* 'three dogs'; however, in (56b) the specific subject *un sag-â-ye sefid* 'those white dogs' induces agreement on the verb.

(57) a. jelo-ye dar se-tâ mard nešaste bud\*/bud-an.  
front-EZ door three-CL man sitting be.PAST-3SG\*/be.PAST-3PL  
'Three men were sitting in front of the door.'

In (57) it is impossible for the DP *se-tâ mard* 'three men' to appear with the verb in 3SG and must have the plural morphology on the verb.

Karimi (2005) argues that the subject does not have to move out of the vP, and the only position where the specific subject and the verb can establish an agree relation for the purposes of Nom Case and agreement checking is the Spec of vP.

(58) a. ketâb-hâ ru miz-e/an.  
book-PL on table-3SG/3PL  
'The books are on the table.'

b. deraxt-hâ sabz šod-e/an.  
tree-PL green become.PRES-3SG/3PL  
'The trees have become green.'

In (58a, b) there is optional agreement between the subjects *ketâb-hâ* 'books' and *deraxt-hâ* 'trees' and the verbs *e/an* (is/are) and *šod-e/an* (became. SG /became.PL).

She argues that this optional agreement indicates that Persian grammar allows the inanimate subject to optionally move out of the Predicate position to the Spec of vP in order to establish an agree relation with the verb. She quotes Samiiian (1983) in proposing that the plural suffix *-hâ* forces a specific reading. She states this is true for animate subjects, meaning that the plural animate NP always has a specific reading. Karimi, however, argues that inanimate subjects do not necessarily seem to undergo the rule of becoming specific when pluralized and an inanimate subject with the plural suffix may maintain its nonspecific interpretation and consequently remain inside the Predicate position. If they remain in situ, agreement between the inanimate subject and the verb is

obtained. She states that the inanimate subject can appear in a post-verbal position only if the verb agrees with it. Another piece of evidence to show that specificity does not affect agreement is presented in (59) in which the plural inanimate subject in *lebâs-hâ* ‘these clothes’ is undoubtedly in specific form, yet the verbal agreement is constrained and the verb appears with default morphology.

(59) in    *lebâs-hâ*        be to        *ne-mi-yâd-Ø*  
           this clothes-PL    to 2SG    NEG-DUR-come-3SG  
           ‘These clothes don’t suit you.’

In addition, although specificity plays a big role in Persian grammar, many people have argued that specificity should be viewed as a pragmatic effect.

Dabir Moghaddam (1997) believes that ‘full fledged’ sentences in which the nominal element of the complex verb is the ‘subject,’ and the obligatory rule of subject-verb agreement in Persian systematically treats these NPs as the subject. He presents the conjugated form in the following example to support his proposal.

(60) a. *xo-šam*        *âmad-Ø*  
           liking-1SG        come.PAST  
           ‘I liked it.’ (My liking came)

b. *xoš-eš*            *âmad-Ø*  
           liking-3SG        come.PAST  
           ‘He/she liked it.’ (His/her liking came)

c. *xoš-etân*        *âmad-Ø*  
           liking-3PL        come.PAST  
           ‘You liked it.’

Dabir Moghaddam (1997) argues that although subject incorporation has been proposed in the literature, there is not enough evidence to assume that the constructions under study are instances of such a process in Persian. He believes that these constructions are ‘frozen sentences whose verb meanings are metaphorically extended.’

### 3.2 Conclusion

The following general conclusions can be drawn.

Pronouns have an honorific use. This sometimes results in a mismatch and sometimes not. Also, there are certain mismatch-causing honorific periphrases which are used in polite language.

Some personal pronouns show the explicit plural marker on themselves.

Animacy affects agreement. For singular animate and inanimate subjects, there is always agreement. In the case of plural subjects, animates usually take a plural verb and inanimates a singular verb. However, non-agent plural animates take a singular verb and 'individuated' or 'personified' inanimates take a plural verb.

Conjoined noun phrases take a plural verb. The person of the verb is determined by the persons in the subjects, in the way that if there is a 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun in the noun phrase, the verb will be first person plural; in the absence of 1st person pronouns, if there is a 2nd person pronoun in the noun phrase, the verb will be 2nd person plural; in the absence of 1st and 2nd person pronouns, the verb will be third person plural.

For commutative constructions, the noun phrase after *bâ* 'with' is considered an adjunct and does not affect agreement.

The verb in distributive constructions can be singular or plural depending on the element occurring after *har* 'each, every'.

The associative marker *-inâ* always causes the verb to be in the plural.

The default number in colloquial modern Persian is the singular.

The only indefinite pronoun requiring a plural verb is *hame* 'everyone'. The others take a singular verb.

Mass nouns take a singular verb but can be used both in the singular and (with the plural marker) in the plural. The plural conveys an additional meaning other than the plurality of the noun.

Due to their collective nature, broken plurals can sometimes cause a mismatch by taking a singular verb.

For collectives, both numbers for the verb are possible, although the plural emphasizes the individual members of the group.

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