Semantic-pragmatic functions of *râ* in Persian: a diachronic and synchronic study

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After a brief look at the history of *râ*, and an overview of contemporary studies on it, this paper aims at showing that *râ* may appear with noun phrases having one of the features such as definiteness, specificity, genericity. However, it is not an exclusive maker of any of the above. The main argument of the present research is that in the realm of Pragmatics, any phrase obligatorily followed by *râ* is necessarily of *a high degree of reference* as discussed in the body of the paper. With structures similar in terms of any of the concepts conveying the above features, but differing only in presence or absence of *râ*, the form accompanied by *râ* reflects a higher degree of reference to the entity in question compared to the one without *râ*. The paper also discusses adjuncts represented by NPs accompanied by *râ*. Finally, prepositional phrases accompanied by *râ* along with their pragmatic functions are discussed.

1.   Introduction

Almost all natural languages undergo drastic changes in the course of centuries in different respects, including phonology, syntax and meaning. Persian is among the languages which have changed greatly through its three diachronic periods, namely, Old, Middle and Modern Persian, especially in terms of syntax and phonology. About 2500 years ago when Iranians spoke Old Persian besides adjectives and verbs nouns were inflected in reflecting cases such as accusative, dative, ablative, etc. However, in Modern Persian no noun is inflected for such cases. Instead, different prepositions such as *be* 'to' *az* 'from, of', b*â* 'with, by', etc., and a postposition called *râ* are used in expressing the different cases of the NPs. This paper aims at a diachronic as well as a synchronic study of *râ*. First, we start with its origin and evolution, then will analyze and discuss its function(s) in today's Persian.

Persian Phrasal categories have been extensively scrutinized from different perspectives by different scholars, including Browne (1970), Peterson (1974), Lazard (1982), Samiian (1983), Karimi (1989, 1990), Dabir-Moghaddam (1990), Mahootian (1997), Ghomeshi (1996) and Darzi (2005). How NPs are marked for different syntactic or semantic-pragmatic properties forms a main part of linguistic studies on the NP. In the domain of this category, definiteness, genericity and specificity have brought about considerable debate.

A number of functions of dependents in marking the NP for a certain feature are crystal-clear. In the following, for instance, the NP is formally marked for definiteness by the determiner *in* 'this':

1) **in ketâb** *jadid-e-ϕ*
   this book new-be.NPS-3SG
   This book is new

However, in numerous other cases, there may be disagreement upon the way different syntactic-semantic features are marked. Moreover, sometimes, the NP is accompanied by no formal marker while, depending on the context, it is open into definite or indefinite interpretations. In the following, for example, depending on prosodic features of the sentence, *sib* 'apple' would be interpreted as definite or indefinite:

2) *Sib xarid-i?*
   apple buy.PS-2SG
a. Have you bought apples?
b. Have you bought the apples?

Question (2a) conveys the first interpretation of the Persian version. It would be used in a context where a wife notes that her husband arriving home is carrying a bag full of apples which she had not ordered at all. Question (2b) reflects the second interpretation of the Persian version. It would be used in a context where a wife sees her husband arriving at home carrying a bag of apples which she had asked him to buy when leaving home in the morning. Here, *sib* is interpreted as definite because the husband knows what apples his wife means.

Each element used with the head of a phrase is normally

expected to play at least a syntactic, semantic or pragmatic role. However, some elements are so elusive that make it extremely difficult for scholars to identify their functions. The most fascinating of these is *râ*. There are also two colloquial allomorphs, namely, *-o* and *-ro* for *râ*. Among different studies on Persian syntax, Karimi (1989 & 1990) takes *râ* as the marker of specific NPs under certain conditions.

Claiming that the occurrence of *râ* depends on different factors, Lazard (1982) holds that each sentence contains three poles, namely, the subject, object and verb, and *râ* functions in the domain of the object. He further divides objects into polarized and depolarized ones. The two types differ in that the former normally take *râ* whereas the latter do not. According to him, objects form a spectrum with three zones. The zones (1-3) belong to definite objects, specific indefinite objects and generic nouns respectively. While zone one witnesses the most frequent occurrences of *râ*, zone three is normally without *râ*. Zone two, however, occasionally takes *râ*.

The present research reveals a new dimension of *râ* and argues for it as a constant marker of a special type of emphasis in any phrase with which it appears. This does not mean that all phrases which are object of emphasis are necessarily followed by *râ*. However, any phrase followed by *râ* conveys a kind of emphasis.

2. The origin of *râ*

In Old Persian a root noun like *martiya* 'man' took over four different case markers. Each marker indicated at least one syntactic function (cf. Khanlari 1987, 1, 93-4 and 184-188):

3)
Noun	**meaning**	**case**
martiya[h]	man	[Nominative]
martiya-a=martiyâ	o man, with man,	[Vocative]
martiya-hyâ	of man	[Genitive]
martiya-m	man	[accusative]

Consider (4-6) where *martiya* appears in nominative, vocative and accusative forms respectively:

4) *aivah martiya*[h] *maguš a-ah-a-t Gaumâta nâma*   [Kent 1953:117, 120]
    one man-NOM Magian IMPF-be.PS-3SG   Gaumata name
    There was one man, a Magian, Gaumata by name

5)   *martiya-a hyâ ahuramzdâhâ framânâ hauvtaiy gastâ mâ θad-aya-ø*
       [kent, 1953:137-8]
       man-VOC which Ahuramazda command it-you repugnant not
       seem.NPS-2SG
       O'man, that which is the command of Ahuramazda, let this
       not seem repugnant to you

6)   *aivah martiya-m maθištam a-kunau-š*   [Kent 1953:126-7]
       One man-ACCU chief   IMPF-make.PS-3SG
       He had made one man their chief

As shown in (6), -*m* in *martiya-m* is an accusative case marker in
Old Persian and there is no evidence of *râ* as an accusative
marker in that period. According to Kent (1953:205), in Old
Persian the postposition *râdiy* was used in expressing concepts
like cause or reason. Consider the following:

                                              [Kent 1953: 116-119]
7)   *avahya-râdiy vayam Haxâmanišiyâ θah-ya-amahy*
       For-this-reason we Achaemenids call-PASS-NPS.1PL
       For this reason we are called Achaemanids

In written records left from Middle Persian, *râd/rây*
represented a fairly wide range of functions. According to
Rastorgueva (1966), translated by Shadan (1968: 199), *râd* was
used in expressing concepts such as purpose, reason, cause,
possession and direct objects. For instance, consider the
following where *râd* marks *ardaxšēr* as the direct object of the
verb *frestâd* 'sent':

8)   *u-š*   *ardaxšēr râd ō âxᵛar i stōrân frestâd*
       and-s/he Ardeshir COMP Stable LINK animals send. PS.3SG
       And he sent Ardeshir to the stable of animals

Bruner (1977:152-4) says that in Middle Persian *rây* was used as
a direct object marker for the first time. He adds that this
marker also marked indirect objects including phrasal
categories representing beneficiaries. In the following, for
instance, *rây* marks the direct object :

9)   *šav-ø šagrân rây beōzan-ø*   [Bruner 1977:154]
       go.NPS-IMPVE lions COMP slay.NPS-IMPVE
       Go and slay the lions

According to Rezaee Baghbidi (2006:109), in the Arsacid Pahlavi language, *râð* is a postposition meaning 'for':

10) *u-š   ēð râð hâmčihrag nē   xrōšt*
     And-s/he this for of-same-race not call. PS-3SG
     And for this reason he was not called his fellow creature

As Dabir-Moghaddam (1990:32) notes, in early Modern Persian, *râ* marked direct and indirect objects, object complements as well as beneficiary objects. Numerous examples of the above functions can be found in Bahar (1968, vol 1).

Comparing and contrasting different uses of *râ* in Middle Persian with those in Modern Persian, Dabir-Moghaddam comes to the conclusion that significant changes occurred in the uses of this postposition. He adds that beneficiary objects followed by *râd/râ* in Middle Persian and early Modern Persian have been replaced by dative subjects without *râ* in Modern Persian. Consider (11) and compare it to (12):

11) *pâpak râd pus-ē hast-ø*   [Middle Persian]
     Babak COMP son-INDEF be.NPS-3SG
     A son belongs to Babak

12) *Bâbak pesar-i dâr-ad*   [Modern Persian]
     Babak son-INDEF have.NPS-3SG
     Babak has a son

In (11) *pâpak* is followed by *râd* and functions as a dative object. However, in today's Persian the same meaning is most commonly expressed by (12) where Babak is the subject of the sentence.

Dabir-Moghaddam is also of the view that many beneficiary objects which were followed by *rây* in Middle Persian, and by *râ* in early Modern Persian, appeared in the form of NPs preceded by different prepositions in Modern Persian:

13) *Mâ u râ pul dâd-im*   [early Modern Persian]
     We s/he COMP money give.PS-1PL
     We gave him/her money

14) *Mâ be u pul dâd-im*   [Modern Persian]
     We to s/he money give.PS-1PL
     We gave money to him/her

Both of the above sentences express the same meaning. However, in (13) *pul* 'money' is followed by *râ* whereas in the second *pul* is preceded by the preposition *be* 'to'.

According to Dabir-Moghaddam, all changes in the uses of this postposition from Old Persian to Modern Persian led to a unified syntactic role for *râ* as a direct object marker. Based on his discussion all changes in the functions of *râ* from Old Persian to Modern Persian are summarized as follows:

Old Persian   **Middle Persian**
Complement object →   Complement object, indirect
object, dative object, direct object →

Early Modern Persian
Complement object, indirect object, dative object, direct object →

Modern Persian (today's Persian)
Direct object

2.   Technical terms and *râ*
In the following section, we clarify our position with regard to three technical terms 'definiteness', 'specificity', and 'genericity' and how they relate to *râ*.

2.1 Definite vs indefinite
In English, any NP preceded by *the* is called definite. However, *the* is not an exclusive marker of definiteness, because different elements including demonstratives and possessives, etc., also make the NP definite. By contrast, when the speaker does not assume that the hearer can identify the referent, NPs are indefinite. In English, an NP which is accompanied by the article *a* is indefinite. Again, however, indefiniteness is not always marked by *a*; there are other elements such as *some*, *each*, zero, etc. which mark indefiniteness [cf. Foley and Van Valin (1985:283)]. The NPs headed by *girl* and *prize* are definite in (15i) and indefinite in (15ii):

15) i. The girl won the prize
     ii. A girl won a prize

The above definitions are applicable to Persian and account for the difference between the definite (16i) and the indefinite (16ii):

16) i. *rânande mâšin-o xarid-ø*
     driver car-COMP buy.PS-3SG
     The driver bought the car
   ii. *yek rânande yek mâšin xarid-ø*
     one driver one car buy.PS-3SG
     A driver bought a car

(16i) would be used in a context where both the speaker and the hearer identify the driver and the car. (16ii) would, by contrast, be used in a context where the hearer has no information about whatever driver and car the speaker is talking about. Here, the NPs headed by *rânande* 'driver' and *mâšin* 'car' are called indefinite. Following Hawkins (1994: 840), we raise a similar question that, while there are many drivers and cars in the world, how is that the driver and the car are identified by the speaker and hearer? As discussed by Hawkins, it is the pragmatic sets that define the parameters and make the speaker and hearer able to refer to the driver and the car unambiguously. In (16i), for example, either by virtue of the immediate situation of the utterance or by the shared knowledge of the speaker and the hearer, the uniqueness of the entities is established.

In Persian definiteness is not fully marked in the form of the NP itself, though elements such as demonstratives, when used with NPs, indicate that they are definite. Some scholars, including Comrie (1981:124), claim that *râ* indicates definite direct objects. Windfuhr (1979:48-9) also notes that traditional grammars regard *râ* as a (definite) direct object marker. However, *râ* does not necessarily mark a direct object for definiteness, because it is not uncommon to use definite direct objects without *râ*. Consider the following, for example:

17) *Ketâb-i ke xâst-i bar-ât xarid-am*
     Book-PREL. CLSUB want.PS-2SG for-you buy.PS-1SG
     I bought the book you ordered

In (17), *ketâb* which is the direct object of the verb *xarid-an* is definite because the sentence would be used in a context where the addressee knows which book the speaker means.

The following further supports the view that *râ* is not necessarily definite direct object marker:

18) *belaxare xune sâxt-i?*
      finally house build.PS-1SG
      Finally, did you built the house?

Depending on the context, the direct object *xune* 'house' would be open to different interpretations. For instance, the above would be used in a context where the addressee knows what house the speaker is talking about possibly because prior to the speech time the addressee promised to build a house someday, and now the speaker would like to know if the house is built.

In short, we regard an NP as definite if its referent is identified by both the speaker and the hearer. By contrast, if the hearer is not able to identify the referent of the NP, it will be referred to as indefinite. As far as the form is concerned, there is no exclusive marker of definiteness and indefiniteness in Persian. However, the postposition *râ* and determiners such as *in* 'this', *ân,*'that', *inhâ* 'these', etc. appear with definite NPs, while forms such as *yek* 'one/a' (as in (16ii), can mark the NP as indefinite. As shown in (2), the same NP can be used as either definite or indefinite without any formal marker. According to the present discussion, one can claim that neither definite NPs nor indefinite ones are exclusively marked by *râ*. In other words, *râ* seems not to mark definite NPs.

2.2 Specific vs non-specific

Huddleston (1988:91) states: "The contrast between definite and indefinite is not to be confused with that between *specific* and *non-specific.*" For him, an NP is specific if there is a *certain* entity as the referent of the NP the speaker is talking about. In other words, an NP is interpreted as specific when it indicates the existence of some actual entity it denotes, whereas non-specific does not imply the existence of any particular entity. Consider the following pair:

19) i   *The police found **a car** which had been stolen from my son*
      ii *I am looking for **a car** which consumes less petrol*

While in both instances of (19), the NP headed by *car* is indefinite, (19i) implies the existence of a certain car, whereas (19ii) does not. Accordingly, in the latter the car is called non-specific and in the former it is regarded as specific. It should be noted that specificity is generally not formally marked in English.[1] There are, however, certain determiners or pronouns which are inherently non-specific: *neither, no* and *any* are, for example, always non-specific, while *a* is neutral because it can occur with either a specific or non-specific interpretation, as seen in (19).

Such a distinction as the above is equally applicable to Persian. Consider the following pair:

20) i *hasan emruz* **ye xune-ye arzun-i** *ejâre kard-ø*
   Hasan today one house-LINK cheap-INDEF renting do.PS-3SG
   Today Hasan rented a cheap house
   ii **yek xune-ye arzun-i** *ejâre kon-ø*
   one house-LINK cheap-INDEF renting do.NPS-IMPVE.2SG
   Rent a cheap house

Here although the bold NPs are the same in many respects, including indefiniteness, they are significantly different. The main contrast between (20i) and (20ii) is that in the former there must be a certain house that Hasan rented, whereas in the latter there is no certain house that I'm telling you to rent. The NP in (20i) implies a particular entity in the world, i.e. a certain house. However, the NP in (20ii) does not imply any particular entity. Accordingly, the NPs in (20i) and (20ii) are called specific and non-specific respectively.
Leonetti (2004: 35) argues that ". . . in natural languages the grammatical system does not encode features like specificity, . . .". In the context of investigating the semantics of case marking in Turkish, Kiliçaslan (2006), also argues that the specificity status of the referent of an NP is not a determining factor for that NP to carry case morphology. This means that specificity is not syntactically marked in Turkish. In Persian, specific direct objects are not necessarily followed by *râ*. In the following, for instance, both **yek ketâb-e jadid** and **yek ketâb-e jadid-o** are specific NPs because both would be used in a context where I am talking of a certain book that my father

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[1]For more information regarding specificity, one can refer to Huddleston and Pullum (2002).

gave me:[2]

21)   i   *bâbâ **yek ketâb-e jadid** be man dâd-ø* [specific object NP without *râ*]

father one book-LINK new to I give.PS-3SG
My father gave me a new book

ii. *bâbâ **yek ketâb-e jadid-o** be man dâd-ø* [specific object NP with *râ*]
father one book-LINK new-COMP to I give.PS-3SG
My father gave me a new book

So, 'specificity', which is basically defined in semantic-pragmatic terms, has to do with whether or not the speaker has a certain entity, as the referent of the related NP in mind. It implies that specificity is heavily context dependent. When the speaker is able to identify a certain entity as the referent of the NP s/he is using, then that NP is referred to as specific; otherwise, the NP will be non-specific.

Browne (1970:362) argues that *râ* marks *specific* objects rather than definite objects. Peterson (1974) believes that *specificity* is a necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of *râ*. Karimi (1989), in her PhD dissertation written in the framework of Government and Binding Theory, argues that in any NP where the concepts of *specificity* and obliqueness are relevant the presence of *râ* is necessary. However, Dabir-Moghaddam (1990) through his extensive and insightful paper questions the credibility of this view.

Karimi (1991) fails in making a distinction between *generic* and *specific* NPs. Consider the following examples quoted from Phillott (1919: 455 & 459):

22)   i.   '*serke šir râ mi-bor-ad*'
vinegar milk COMP IMPF-cut.NPS-3SG
[Vinegar curdles milk]

ii. '*mi-dân-id četor gusefand râ mi-koš-and*'
IMPF-know.NPS-2PL how sheep COMP IMPF-kill.NPS-3PL
Do you know how sheep are slaughtered?

For Karimi (1991: 36), *šir* and *gusefand* are examples of specific NPs, while both are generic NPs, because in each case we mean an unlimited class of individuals rather than a specific instance.

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[2]The reader may ask how (9i) differs from (9ii) then. This is a question I must answer where discussing the main function of râ in this paper.

Karimi (1990: 140) regards *sib* as generic in the following examples:

23) i. '*diruz ru miz yek sib gozâšt-am*'
yesterday on table one apple put. PS-1SG
I put an apple on the table yesterday
ii. '*emruz ru miz yek sib mi-zâr-am*'
today on table one apple IMPF-put.NPS-1SG
I will put an apple on the table today

However, in neither of the above is *sib* generic, because in neither does the speaker mean a whole unlimited class of apples. Based on our discussion in (2.2), *sib* in (23i) is specific because there existed a certain apple the speaker put on the table. However, *sib* in (23ii) is open to two interpretations, depending on the speaker and the context. If there is a certain apple the speaker is going to put on the table, then *sib* will be specific. Otherwise, it will be referred to as non-specific. As seen, in (23i) *sib* is not followed by *râ*.

For Dabir-Moghaddam (1990) an NP for which the speaker does not indicate any referent is indefinite and non-specific. He goes on to say that NPs which take *râ* are semantically either definite, or generic, or specific. In fact, Dabir-Moghaddam thinks that any NP for which the speaker does not identify any referent is non-specific. However, as implied in the following, it is possible for an NP to be specific while no referent is shown for it:

24) *hasan yek bačče az bačče-hâ-š-o be xârej ferestâd-ɸ*
Hasan one child of child-PL-he-COMP to out send.PS-3SG
Hasan sent one of his children abroad

In the above, by using by *bačče* 'child', the speaker does not mean 'any child'; therefore, it indicates a specific NP. Yet, since in one interpretation the speaker does not have a particular child in mind, one can say no referent is shown for it. Again, here the specific NP appears without *râ*.

Comrie (1978) discusses a significant relationship between elements like *yek bačče* and *bačče-hâ-š-o*. For him, the former is a subset of the latter which is a definite superset. According to him, this superset can help the reader identify the referent of the indefinite subset. However, this claim seems too strong because one cannot uniquely identify the

referent of *yek bačče* just on the grounds that one is a subset of a superset. What the superset does here is to make *yek bačče* more specific than cases where such a superset is not present.

Now consider the following where the NP *ketâb-e digar-i* is specific, but not followed by *râ*. It is specific because there exists a certain book the speaker is talking about:

25) **ketâb-e digar-i** *be amânat gereft-am*
     Book-LINK else-INDEF to loan take.PS-1SG
     I borrowed another book

As far as specificity is concerned, *ketâb-e digar-i râ* in (26) is also specific:

(26) **ketâb-e digar-i râ** *be amânat gereft-am*
     Book-LINK else-INDEF COMP to loan take.PS-1SG
     I borrowed another book

One may then pose the question what the role of *râ* is, if both in (25) and (26) the NPs are specific. This question will be answered in the next section.

Accordingly, we claim that specificity in Persian is basically context dependent and is not formally marked. Consider the following:

27) *baxš yek ostâd estexdâm mi-kon-e*
     Department one professor employing IMPF-do.NPS-3SG
     The department is going to employ a professor

The above would be used at least in two different situations. First, it would be used in a context where the department needs a professor but has not yet decided on any certain one. In this interpretation, the NP *ostâd,* 'professor' is interpreted as *non-specific*, because there is no certain professor the department decides to employ. It would also be used in another context where the department considers employing a professor, say, Professor Majidi. Here, the NP *ostâd* is interpreted as specific because the department has already decided on a certain professor. Accordingly, one can claim that it's the context that defines an NP as specific or non-specific.

Now, consider the following:

28) *belaxare baxš yek ostâd estexdâm kard-ø*
Finally department one professor employing do.PS-3SG
Finally, the department employed a professor

The above would be used in a context where the NP *ostâd* is bound to be interpreted as specific, because the speaker is talking about a certain professor that the department employed. It should noted that no interpretation other than specific is applied to the NP *ostâd* in the above context. Based on the above discussion, one can claim that *râ* is not an exclusive marker of specificity.

2.4 Generic vs non-generic
In this subsection we clarify what we mean by generic NPs. Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 406) say, "*Generic* interpretations arise with NPs that are within the scope of expressions denoting the situation type we call *unlimited states.*" In the context of generic sentences, Hurford and Heasley (1983:56) also note that whenever we refer to 'a whole unrestricted class of individuals, as opposed to any particular individual' in fact we deal with a generic case.

Generic NPs, as Foley and Van Valin (1985:284) suggests, are not referential. Consider the following:

29) i '***The wombat** is a marsupial*'
    ii '***A wombat** is a marsupial*'
   iii '***Wombats** are marsupial[s]*'

Since by using the above subjects, the speaker does not identify any particular entity, one can say that all are used non-referentially. In fact, here, the NPs imply the **whole class of a species**, thus one can say that they are **generic**.

Similar instances of generic nouns are found in Persian. In the following, for example, the subjects are generic:

30) i **gorg** heivân-e xatarnâk-i-ye
       Wolf animal-LINK dangerous-INDEF-be.NPS-3SG
       The wolf is a dangerous animal
    ii ***yek sarbâz** bâyad šojâ ø-bâš-e*
       one soldier MUST courageous NIN-be.NPS-3SG
       A soldier must be courageous
   iii ***naqqâš-â** âdam-â-ye darungerâ-i-an*
       painter-PL person-PL-LINK introvert-INDEF-be.NPS-3PL
       Painters are introverted

In English, as shown in (30i-iii), a generic NP may be a singular NP preceded by *the* or *a* or a plural NP without any article. This implies that in English there is no formal marker for generic nouns and thus the context indicates whether the NP is generic or not. Similarly, in Persian, there is no marker for generic nouns and the context distinguishes between the generic and non-generic use of the NP. In fact, the same form of an NP may indicate either member of the following pairs:

    (a) Generic or definite (singular)
    (b) Generic or indefinite, and
    (c) Generic or definite (plural).

In (30i-iii), the subjects are generic, while in some other context, each can be used as a definite, indefinite and definite (plural) non-generic respectively. The following are examples of these three cases respectively:

31) i *šir bâ tir košt-e šod-ø*
       lion with bullet kill.PS-PTCPL PASS.PS-3SG
       The lion was killed by bullets
    ii *yek sarbâz az kenâr-e man obur kard-ø*
       one soldier from side-LINK I passing do.PS-3SG
       A soldier passed by me
    iii *naqqâš-hâ diruz kâr na-kard-an*
       painter-PL yesterday working NEG-do.PS-3PL
       The painters didn't work yesterday

In (31i) and (31iii), based on the immediate situation and the shared knowledge of the situation that the speaker and the hearer have, *šir* and *naqqâš-hâ* are regarded as definite. However, in (31ii), the NP headed by *sarbâz* is indefinite by virtue of *yek*. The same rule is applicable to mass nouns in Persian; in (32), for example, the word *qazâ* 'food' is generic in (i), and definite in (ii):

32) i *ensân-hâ be **qazâ** niyâz dâr-an*
       human-PL to food need have.NPS-PL
       Human beings need food
    ii ***qazâ** sard šod-ø*
       food cool become.PS-3SG
       The food turned cool

In Persian mass nouns can take a plural marker. However, there is a significant difference between a plural mass noun and a plural count noun. As we have already seen, the plural of a count noun may be used generically, while a plural mass noun may not. In the following, for example, the only interpretation that *qazâ-ha* has is that it indicates different foods:

33) *qazâ-hâ sard šod-∅*
     food-PL cool become.PS-3SG
     The foods turned cold

In short, whenever an NP denotes an unrestricted class of entities, then the NP is referred to as generic. There is no certain marker for generic NPs in Persian. Even generic object NPs may or may not be followed by *râ*. Accordingly, non one can claim that *râ* is a marker of genericity:

34)i *injâ **nušâbe** bâ sândevič mi-feruš-and*   [generic object NP without *râ*]
     Here coke with sandwich IMPF-sell.NPS-3PL
     Here, cokes are sold with sandwiches
ii. *injâ **nušâbe râ** bâ sândevič mi-feruš-and* [generic object NP with *râ*]
     Here coke COMP with sandwich ide-IMPF-sell.NPS-3PL
     Here, cokes are sold with sandwiches

5.   *râ* **and its semantic pragmatic function**
In pragmatic terms, it was already argued that *râ* was not an exclusive marker of any definite, indefinite, specific, non-specific, generic or non-generic NPs. What is the pragmatic function of *râ* then? Investigating the contrastive uses of *râ* seems a key to the problem. Contrastive uses are not limited to direct object NPs. Adjunct NPs and PPs can also be compatible with this post-position.

As shown before, a definite NP may appear with or without *râ*. Consider example (1) in its second interpretation, repeated in (35), and compare it with (36):

35) *Sib xarid-i?*
     apple buy.PS-2SG
     Have you bought the apples?

36)   *Sib-o xarid-i?*
      Apple-COMP buy.PS-2SG
      Have you bought the (very) apples?

Sentence (36) would be used in a context where both the speaker and the addressee know what apples they are talking about, accordingly *Sib* is definite. *Sib* in (35) is also definite with regard to the context discussed as the second interpretation for (1). Then how do the two NPs differ? A pair whose members only differ with respect to the presence or absence of *râ*, we regard the version with *râ* as the marked and the one without it as the unmarked. The difference between the two is justified in terms of degree of reference. By degree of reference we mean that the act of referring to any entity as the referent of a linguistic form, including an NP, is relative rather than absolute. This means that you can refer to an entity with different degrees of concern about that entity depending on different factors, including the context. The more you are concerned about or attentive to the entity in question, the higher the degree of reference would be. Examining numerous sentences in recent years, I found *râ* the most common means in expressing a high degree of reference. First, consider the following:

37)   I bought *a new car* yesterday. I like *it*

In the above, *a new car* and *it* refer to the same entity, i.e., a certain vehicle. Thus both are referring expressions. However, the speaker does not convey the same degree of reference each time. Using the pro-form *it*, s/he refers to the car for the second time but this time s/he implies a higher degree of concern about the car compared to the first time. In a Persian translation of the above, one is obliged to use *râ* not because it is definite or specific but because it conveys a high degree of referentiality:

38) *diruz yek mâšin-e now xarid-am. Un-o dus dâr-am*
     Yesterday one car-LINK new buy.PS-2SG. It-COMP liking have.NPS-2SG
     I bought a new car yesterday. I like it

Interestingly, *un* 'it' in (38) is intrinsically definite and specific by nature, yet it is obligatorily followed by *râ*:

39)   *diruz yek mâšin-e now xarid-am.*Un dus dâr-am*
      Yesterday one car-LINK new buy.PS-2SG. It liking have.NPS-2SG
      I bought a car yesterday. . . .

A more or less similar interpretation is applicable to a pair of sentences carrying specific NPs, one with and the other without *râ*. Consider (21i-ii), repeated in (40i-ii). Here the NP followed by *-o* conveys a higher degree of reference compared to the one without *-o*:

40) i *bâbâ **yek ketâb-e jadid** be man dâd-ø* [specific object NP without *râ*]

        father one book-LINK new to I give.PS-3SG
        My father gave me a new book
    ii. *bâbâ **yek ketâb-e jadid-o** be man dâd-ø*   [specific object NP with *râ*]

        father one book-LINK new-COMP to I give.PS-3SG
        My father gave me a new book
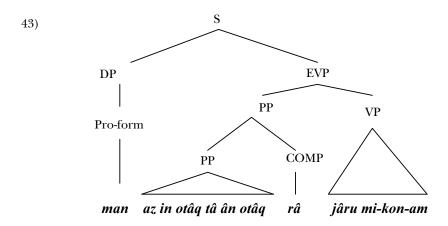
A similar interpretation is applicable to *râ*-less generic NPs in contrast to those accompanied by *râ*. Consider (34i-ii) above, for instance.

     Râ also appears optionally with NPs functioning as adjuncts. Consider (41i), for instance, and compare it with (41ii). In the former, ***in hafte ro*** indicates a higher degree of reference compared to ***in hafte*** in the latter. In (41ii), the speaker uses the adjunct in a quite usual and ordinary way to express the period of stay. In (41i), however, by using *ro*, s/he refers to the adjunct with a kind of special attention or emphasis and this implies a higher degree of reference:

41)   i. **in hafte ro** esterâhat mi-kon-am
          This week COMP resting do.NPS-2SG
          As for this week, I will rest

      ii. **in hafte** esterâhat mi-kon-am
          This week COMP resting do.NPS-2SG
          I will rest this week

Râ sometimes appears obligatorily as the property of a PP functioning as the complement of the verb. Consider the following followed by its tree diagram:

42) *man **az in otâq tâ ân otâq râ** jâru mi-kon-am*
     I from this roon to that room COMP sweeping do.NPS-1SG
     I will sweep from this room up to that room

43)

```
                                S
                     ┌──────────┴──────────┐
                    DP                     EVP
                     │              ┌───────┴───────┐
                  Pro-form         PP               VP
                     │         ┌────┴────┐           │
                     │        PP        COMP         ▲
                     │     ┌───┴───┐      │         ╱ ╲
                    man  az in otâq tâ ân otâq  râ  jâru mi-kon-am
```

man   az in otâq tâ ân otâq   râ   jâru mi-kon-am

The above would be used in a context where the speaker commits himself/herself to clean two rooms completely. Here *râ* is obligatory not because *otâq* is definite and/or specific, but because it reflects a high degree of reference of the PP *az in otâq tâ ân otâq.*

Even indefinite and/or non-specific NPs take *râ* obligatorily in contexts such the following:

44) *unâ **az ebtedâ tâ entehâ-ye yek divâr-o** rang mi-kon-an*
     They from beginning to end-LINK one wall COMP painting do.NPS-1PL
     They will paint from the beginning to the end of a wall

The above would be used in a context where the speaker does not know which wall is going to be painted, so it is indefinite and non-specific. What is of importance for the speaker in this context is not the kind of wall but a wall of any sort as the subject of painting. In fact, by using *râ*, the speaker reflects his high degree of reference to the indefinite and non-specific ***divâr.***

The speaker may or may not use *râ* with generic NPs, depending on the degree of reference to them:

45) *ne-mi-dun-am ketâb az kojâ be-xar-am*
     NEG-IMPF-know.NPS.1SG book from where NIN-buy.NPS-1SG
     I don't know where to buy books

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The above would be used in a context where the speaker uses *ketâb* to refer to a whole unlimited class of books and accordingly it is regarded generic. The generic NP can also be accompanied by *râ*:

46) *ne-mi-dun-am ketâb-o az kojâ be-xar-am*
     NEG-IMPF-know.NPS.1SG book COMP from where NIN-buy.NPS-1SG
     I don't know where to buy books

The above is open to two interpretations. In one context, both the speaker and the addressee know what book they are talking about; here, *ketâb-o* is definite and non-generic. It would also be used in a context where the speaker refers to *ketâb* as a whole unlimited class of books. Here it is interpreted as generic. Now, how does (45) differ from (46) in its generic interpretation? As a clear answer, one can say that in the version with *râ* the speaker is more concerned with books than the time *râ* is absent. In fact, *râ* is an appropriate means for the speaker to make a special reference to *ketâb*.

6. Conclusion

In Old Persian *râdiy* was used with adverbial phrases and expressed meanings such as 'reason' and 'cause'. In Middle Persian this postposition appeared in the form of *rây* and marked direct and indirect objects as well as dative and ablative cases. In the Parthian language, it appeared as a postposition expressing concepts such as 'for' and 'reason'.

In today's Persian, as far as syntax is concerned *râ* is a direct object marker. However, in the domain of pragmatics, this post-position is not an exclusive marker of any definite, indefinite, specific, non-specific, generic or non-generic NPs as any of them may or may not appear with or without *râ*. Pragmatically, any phrase obligatorily followed by *râ* is necessarily of a high degree of reference as we discussed what is meant by the term. With structures which are similar in terms of any of the concepts such as being definite/indefinite, specific/non-specific or generic/non-generic, differing only in presence or absence of *râ*, the version with *râ* reflects a higher degree of reference to the entity in question.

Symbols and notational conventions
1. The first line of each example represents the transcribed form of the Persian sentence. In the second line (the gloss line), two types of components are represented: lexical items, and grammatical items. A hyphen separates two components of a single word. A full stop indicates that they do not correspond to distinct segmental units of the Persian: two items separated by a full stop thus corresponds to a single item in the Persian citation. The symbols used to gloss grammatical items are as follows:

ACCU	=	accusative marker
CLSUB	=	subordinate clause marker
COMP	=	complement marker
EVP	=	extended verb phrase
IMPF	=	imperfective marker
IMPVE	=	imperative
INDEF	=	indefinite marker
LINK	=	subordinator *e*
NEG	=	negative marker
NIN	=	non-indicative marker
NOM	=	nominative marker
NPS	=	non-past marker
PL	=	plural marker
PREL	=	pre-relative *i*
POSS	=	possessive marker
PASS	=	passive auxiliary
PROG	=	progressive auxiliary
PS	=	past marker
PTCPL	=	participle
SG	=	singular
VOC	=	vocative marker

2. * asterisk indicates that what follows is ungrammatical/ unacceptable

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