

Statement of Research Interest

Esmail Moghiseh

In formal linguistics, monographs are less common than in other disciplines, where journal articles and conference proceedings are the primary means for disseminating research. With that in mind, I have prepared a research statement to provide a comprehensive overview of my scholarly work and research interests. My postdoctoral plan includes revising my thesis and preparing it for publication in major journals, while also continuing to share my research through journal articles and conference proceedings. My research centers on formal semantics and pragmatics, where I use logical and mathematical tools to model the meaning of linguistic expressions in natural languages.

Current research. My doctoral research focused on the formal semantic analysis of free choice items (FCIs) in Farsi. FCIs are quantificational determiner phrases (DPs) that involve a quantifier, such as English *any*, used to quantify over entities (e.g., ‘any book’). FCIs are notable for their dual behavior. In negative sentences, the FCI *any* behave similarly to the general quantifier *a*, as in (1-a) and (1-b), both conveying that no book was bought. However, in sentences containing a permission modal verb like ‘can’ they diverge: while the sentence in (2-a) with *a* can be true in a scenario where not all books are permitted, its counterpart with *any* in (2-b) requires that all books be permitted. This requirement is known as a free choice effect and the quantifiers with this requirement are called FCIs (Chierchia, 2013).

- (1) a. You didn’t buy *a* book.
b. You didn’t buy *any* book.
- (2) a. You can buy *a* book.
b. You can buy *any* book.

FCIs exist across languages. Cross-linguistic studies of FCIs have gained prominence in the past twenty years, yet we know little about the possible cross-linguistic variations due to the limited sample of languages studied (Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito, 2015). My PhD thesis addresses this gap by focusing on Farsi, an underrepresented language in the literature. Farsi, an Indo-Iranian language, is particularly valuable for studying FCIs because it has a rich morphological system that provides a robust testing ground for existing theories of FCIs that have predominantly focused on Germanic and Romance languages. Moreover, this work contributes to the broader goal of formal semantics, which is to develop a uniform theory that can accommodate linguistic phenomena across diverse languages.

Research interest. In my thesis I discovered that Farsi exemplifies new type of FCIs. My PhD thesis identifies two types of FCIs in Farsi: (i) *yek -i* DPs, formed by adding *yek* (‘one’) to a bare noun marked with the enclitic *-i*, as in (3), and (ii) *har -i* DPs, formed by adding *har* to a bare noun marked with *-i*, as in (4).

- (3) Forood mitune ye ketab-i bexar-e.
 Forood can one book-INDEF buy-3SG
 'Forood can buy a book — any book.'
- (4) Forood mitune har ketab-i bexar-e.
 Forood can HAR book-INDEF buy-3SG
 'Forood can buy any book.'

The literature distinguishes between two types of FCIs based on their distribution and interpretation: Existential (EFCIs) and Universal (UFCIs) (Chierchia, 2013). My dissertation argues that *yek -i* DPs instantiate a new profile of EFCIs. It shows that while they share core properties with other EFCIs, they also exhibit significant differences. This research makes an important empirical contribution by expanding our understanding of EFCIs, which are widespread across languages but still not fully understood. Building on an influential theory of FCIs presented in Chierchia (2013), I put forward an analysis that explains the behavior of *yek -i* DPs and explores the theoretical implications of these findings.

Regarding *har -i* DPs, my dissertation shows that they pattern with other UFCIs. One chapter presents new data demonstrating that *har -i* DPs lose their free choice effect when combined with a particular lexical item. Building on this observation, the chapter explores the conditions under which FCIs may lose their free choice effect and argues for extending the current analysis of UFCIs to account for cross-linguistic variation. The dissertation also addresses an under-analyzed aspect of FCIs: numeral FCIs, which are formed by combining UFCIs with a numeral and a noun, as in 'any two books'. Building on the empirical findings on numeral counterpart of *har -i* DPs, the dissertation evaluates two current analyses of FCIs and shows that one successfully captures the cross-linguistic variation observed in numeral FCIs.

Postdoctoral plan. (i) Publication: As mentioned earlier, monographs are less common in formal linguistics compared to other disciplines. My current plan is to strengthen my dissemination efforts by following current practices in the field, which primarily involve publishing in leading journals. Although this approach may not be a monograph in the traditional sense, it serves as an equivalent in terms of reaching a broad and relevant audience. The findings of my dissertation have already been presented at top-tier international conferences with acceptance rates below 15%, including Semantics and Linguistic Theory, Amsterdam Colloquium, and Sinn und Bedeutung, with publications in their respective proceedings. I am currently revising chapters of my dissertation for publication as journal articles. Recently, two chapters on *yek -i* DPs were combined and accepted for publication in *Semantics & Pragmatics*, one of the foremost journals in formal semantics. This strategy ensures that my work reaches a wider audience and aligns with the standards of contemporary linguistic scholarship. **(ii) Extension of research on FCIs:** Building upon the findings of my PhD thesis, I plan to extend my research on FCIs in Farsi, with a particular focus on *har -i* DPs. This extension will address the open questions left unresolved in my doctoral work. **(iii) Exploring interrogatives:** Beyond FCIs, my postdoctoral research will explore the semantic properties of interrogatives in Farsi, focusing on their behavior and interpretation, an area that has received little attention

in the literature. In an ongoing project, which will be presented at the upcoming Sinn und Bedeutung conference—one of the major international conferences in semantics—I demonstrate that Farsi presents a novel pattern of interrogatives and discuss the implications of this pattern for broader analyses of interrogatives.

References

- Alonso-Ovalle, L. and P. Menéndez-Benito (2015). Epistemic indefinites: An overview. In L. Alonso-Ovalle and P. Menéndez-Benito (Eds.), *Epistemic Indefinites*, pp. 1–30. Oxford University Press.
- Chierchia, G. (2013). *Logic in Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.