

## A Cognitive Linguistic Account of Farsi *be*

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The spatial marker *be* (به) is one of the most highly polysemous prepositions in Farsi. The semantics of this preposition has been a great source of problems for linguists and learners of Farsi. Traditional approaches, in particular dictionaries, have failed to provide a precise explanation for this preposition, offering only a list of arbitrary and seemingly unrelated meanings. To date, few studies have been conducted on the semantics of *be* (e.g. Abolhassani Chime, 2006; Parsafar, 1996) and no study has looked at Farsi prepositions from a cognitive linguistics (CL) perspective. In this study the various uses of *be* are investigated and a principled network of meanings is suggested for this preposition.

Unlike the traditional approaches, studies in CL have shown that many of the multiple meanings associated with prepositions are related in systematic ways, generating a principled polysemy network. (e.g. Lakoff, 1987; Dirven, 2001; Tyler & Evans, 2001, 2003). Much of the research carried out in this area has been devoted to English prepositions and it is not yet clear whether the CL theories accounting for English also account for spatial markers in other languages. The main goal of this study is to take research on CL analyses of prepositions forward. More specifically, the study extends investigating the universality of the Principled Polysemy Model (Tyler and Evans, 2003) by applying it to the polysemous preposition *be*. For the purpose of this analysis, 1000 instances of *be* were obtained from the Bijan-Khan Corpus and the multiple meanings of the preposition were studied. The results of the analysis showed that Tyler and Evans's Principled Polysemy Model can reveal a range of complex, but systematically related senses of this highly polysemous preposition. Applying the principles of this model led to the identification of fifteen distinct senses of *be* under five individual clusters including Proximity, Purpose, Intended Recipient, Limit and Enclosed Path. The analysis showed that many of the meanings associated with this preposition bear similarities with the English preposition *to*, however, not all the extended meanings share the same spatial scene with this preposition. Moreover, the analysis revealed some interesting comparisons between Farsi and English prepositions. While in English, speakers denote path by using different prepositions, in Farsi, these conceptualizations are expressed using a single preposition. English speakers use *to* for marking the environment as being conceptually open, and *through* for denoting the path as being conceptually enclosed. On the other hand, Farsi speakers denote both environments using a single preposition *be*. The interpretation of the two types of conceptualizations (open and enclosed path) is determined by the context in which the preposition occurs. The analysis offered in this study sheds light on the semantics of this preposition and highlights the potential ability of the Tyler and Evans' (2003) model to provide a systematic account of prepositions in languages other than English. In addition, the study offers a detailed and systematic analysis of a spatial marker in Farsi, a language that has not yet been studied extensively using the CL theories.

### References

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