

# Writeup 3—Definiteness and Case Marking in Farsi

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## 1 Farsi Grammar

In this lab I tried to account for the Farsi definite/indefinite distinction on nouns and case marking.

Farsi makes a distinction between definite and indefinite nouns. Definite nouns appear in presentation form, and indefinite nouns get an *-i* suffix.

Farsi marks accusative case with the suffix *-ra*. The following types of nouns receive this inflection when they are the object of a transitive verb

- Definite nouns

*Shirin ketab-ra xarid.*  
Shirin book-ACC-DEF bought-PAST-3sg  
'Shirin bought the book.'

- Proper nouns

*Ali-ra ranjanid.*  
Ali-ACC he-hurt-PAST-3sg  
'He hurt Ali.'

- Personal pronouns

*an-ra ranjanid.*  
him-ACC he-hurt-PAST-3sg  
'He hurt him.'

- Demonstrative pronouns

*Shirin an-ra xarid.*  
Shirin that-ACC bought-PAST-3sg  
'Shirin bought that.'

- Nouns modified by demonstrative determiners

*Shirin an kitab-ra xarid.*  
 Shirin that book-ACC bought-PAST-3sg  
 ‘Shirin bought that book.’

Indefinite accusative nouns are not marked by *-ra*.

*Shirin ketabi xarid.*  
 Shirin book-ACC-INDEF bought-PAST-3sg  
 ‘Shirin bought a book.’

## 2 Implementation

The value of a noun’s case is changed by a lexical rule that handles the *-ra* inflection. A noun’s definite/indefinite status is controlled by a covert determiner rule.

I do not try to handle proper names because I don’t yet have a way of distinguishing common and proper nouns. I don’t try to handle demonstratives as accusative noun phrases because I don’t yet have a way of using demonstratives as anything other than determiners.

I want my grammar to make the following predictions. (Note that I haven’t implemented verb inflection in my grammar yet, so I left all the verbs above in the infinitive form.)

- (1) *gorbe ketabra xaridan*  
 the cat the book to buy  
 ‘The cat bought the book.’
- (2) *gorbe ketabi xaridan*  
 the cat a book to buy  
 ‘The cat bought a book.’
- (3) *gorbe an ketabra xaridan*  
 the cat that book to buy  
 ‘The cat bought that book.’
- (4) *gorbe mara ranjanidan*  
 the cat we-ACC to hurt  
 ‘The cat hurt us.’
- (5) *\*gorbe kitab xaridan*  
 the cat the book to buy  
 ‘The cat bought the book.’

- (6) *\*gorbera ketabra xaridan*  
the cat the book to buy  
'The cat bought the book.'
- (7) *\*gorbe ma ranjanidan*  
the cat we to hurt  
'The cat hurt us.'

Currently my grammar predicts all these sentences except for (6) to be grammatical, so my grammar is incorrectly overgenerating.