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Regional Variation and Persian Word-selection

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ABSTRACT

This study strives to investigate the importance of 'regional variation' in accepting and rejecting the words coined by the Iranian Academy of Persian Language and Literature (APLL). A total of 500 students from state universities in Tehran were chosen as prticipants provided with a questionnaire consisting of 50 APLL equivalents. As used in the media, 62% of the first 25 APLL words were accepted by the respondents; however, the second 25 equivalents, which were of zero frequency in the media, were accepted by 38% of the respondents. Of 493 respondents, who returned the questionnaires, 60% were undergraduates, 30% were pursuing MA while 10% were working on their doctoral dissertation. Close to half the Undergraduates and Masters and only a little more than half of the PhD students have accepted the equivalents. The percentages of APLL word acceptance and rejection among Tehrani respondents and non-Tehrani respondents are 48% and 52%, respectively, showing that there is no significant relationship between the response of those living in Tehran or other cities/towns and the acceptance and rejection of the APLL words. Meanwhile, as for dialects/accents, there is no significant relation between using dialects (or accents) other than standard Persian and the acceptance and rejection of the APLL words either.

Keywords: Accent, APLL, Dialect, Geography, IRIB, Word-selection

Introduction

Due to language contact in our globalised world, linguistic borrowing occurs. Once a foreign word is borrowed, there is a need to find an equivalent. Normally, words and phrases are made and/or selected and then introduced into a speech community by individuals in society and/or official experts in an Academy of Language. In either case, these items may be either accepted and used extensively or rejected/ignored by a speech community.

Word-selection in writing and speaking is a linguistic activity. It is also a cognitive activity since it deals with such mental processes as thinking, problem-solving and remembering. That is why word-selection is regarded as a linguistic-cognitive activity. Cognitively, word-selection seems to be an example of problem-solving. According to Soslo (1988, p. 157), "problem-solving is a type of thinking which aims to solve a given problem and provide answers from which a choice has to be made". If we accept such a definition and take word-selection as an instance of problem-solving, we may come to this definition: "Word-selection is a type of thinking aiming to find an equivalent for a foreign word through providing several equivalents among which a choice has to be made." (Ne'matzade, 2000).

Apart from linguistic factors, sociolinguistic factors play an important part when dealing with

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linguistic issues and "may lead to a slight degree of variation of currency of certain language items in use" (Baskaran, 2005: 126). According to Spolsky (1998), a recent study of the Mexican-American border, for instance, indicates that distance from the border is indeed one of the explanations of Spanish language maintenance among people who have crossed into the United States. In addition, Modarresi (1989) observed that while the final /□/ did not essentially appear in the speech of Tehrani speakers, it was still significantly revealed in the case of Qazvin informants (165 km northwest of Tehran). Due to the fact that the process of changing /□/ to /e/ at the end of Persian words (as one of the features of Tehrani Persian) is socially prestigious, younger and more educated people in Qazvin have a greater tendency to final /e/, especially on more formal occasions (Modarresi, 1989).

a. Literature Review

Many researchers have dealt with coining words and word-selection in Persian in Iran (see, for example, Ne'matzade, 2000; Sadeghi, 2001; Haddad Adel, 2003). Also, a number of sociolinguistic studies have been carried out by many scholars (see, for example, Beeman,1986; Jahangiri, 1999; Keshavarz, 2000; Modarresi, 2001). However, to date, no study seems to have critically discussed the criteria considered by the Iranian Persian speech community for accepting or rejecting the lexical items introduced by the Academy of Persian Language and Literature (henceforth, APLL). Once this is determined, it should facilitate the work of academicians and officials involved in coining new words and this, in turn, is likely to contribute to the enrichment of the Persian language.

b. Word-selection

Word-selection, as the word suggests, deals with selecting words from various existing choices. Word-selection is believed to be of two kinds (Ne'matzade, 2000). In other words, there are two approaches in word-selection. One is 'individual' and the other being 'collective'. In the former approach, certain translators [and writers] try to present new words and expressions, whereas in the latter, the issue is pursued by a group of experts, mainly from an authorised department or public body, for instance, an Academy of Language. In collective word-selection, hidden mental argumentations become manifested and meet with opposition, but in individual word-selection, argumentation and reasoning remain in mind (Ne'matzade, 2000).

Haddad Adel (2003) suggests that scholars in the field of word-selection should pay attention to individual word-selection as well In Persian, there are many beautiful words coined by individuals revealing aesthetic taste [which have not yet been considered by the APLL].

In this connection, Sadeghi (2001) explains: "The APLL was founded in 1991 with 25 permanent members and seven departments, the most active of which is the department of word-selection... The main task of this department is to find Persian equivalents for foreign words used both in common language and scientific writings. For instance, one of the tasks carried out by this department has been the selection of Persian equivalents for some 200 [now over 280] western loan words used in official documents. This word list was drawn up by the Iranian government and submitted to the Academy.The Academy's first principle for choosing and coining words is transparency and intelligibility. Opaque words and dialectal and ancient forms are rejected as unintelligible for the public. Another principle is to preserve international words, such as râdio, post, televiziyon, etc. Phonetic considerations and simplicity are also taken into account". Sadeghi (2001) claims that "language planning in Iran has predominantly aimed at the modernization of Persian through word coinage and although thousands of Persian equivalents have been coined for loan words during the past several decades, Persian needs many more native equivalents for new foreign terms". Some examples of the words chosen and coined are: payâmgir 'answering-machine', dur-negâr 'fax', čerâqak 'warmer', payâm-negâr 'email' and ramzine 'bar code' (Sadeghi, 2001). The APLL publishes a newsletter every month to obtain the opinions of specialists outside the APLL of the lexical items newly coined and suggested. However, as Sadeghi (2001) observes, from all the products of the Iranian Academy of Language, only a few words, such as râyâne 'computer', hamâyeš 'congress', šomârgân 'printing, tirage (Fr.)', etc., were more or less accepted in the common language. What Sadeghi means by 'specialists outside the Academy' is not clear. Are they really the appointed representatives of the Iranian Persian speech community and if they are, who ap-

pointed them and how? The results would be more significant if officials involved in the APLL had obtained feedback and views of a range of people, including government employees and teachers as the latter are more in contact with people in the speech community. Moreover, Sadeghi does not suggest any reason(s) for not accepting most of the APLL words and terms. Lastly, his claim about the apparent indifference to the APLL products is not supported through any statistical analyses. Sultanzade (2003) proposes that the APLL's site should be accessed by every interested individual to search the latest equivalents made and to present their suggestions and criticisms to the APLL. In addition, translators, writers and other interested individuals should be sent the latest approved words in order to express their views about them. Zomorrodian (2003) holds that if people have a mental image of a given word, then the word is easier to accept. For instance, consider the Persian words xodnevis 'fountain pen', xodkâr 'biro', padâfand 'defence' and pâtak 'counterattack'. The first two words have become widespread because the components of them are completely known to Persian natives and have been used in many words. However, the last two have failed to be used widely since people are not familiar with either of the words and their components. They are, however, used in the army. Shokouhi and Hossein-Nia (1993) point out that for words to be selected, they should be euphonious.compatible with grammar. Similarly, Shari'at (1993) speaks of euphony [a pleasing or harmonious sequence of sounds] and persuasively argues that when a word lacks euphony, though made systematically, it will fail to be used widely. For example, if a word is similar to an unpleasant word existing in language, there is very little chance of acceptance. For example, before 1990s, the two words bolandgu and durgu were suggested for the foreign words 'loud speaker' and 'telephone', respectively. The former was accepted but the latter was not used due to the fact that it was similar to the pejorative Persian word zurgu 'bully' (Shari'at, 1993). A final point needs to be made here. It may appear that the variables involved in Persian word-formation and word-selection have been comprehensively described above but this is not the case. We need to introduce another phenomenon: 'blocking'. This is defined as the non-occurrence of one form due to the simple existence of another.''(Aronoff, 1976. P.43). For blocking to occur, firstly, there needs to be a corpus in another language similar to that of English so as to block further equivalents. Secondly, experts or individuals fail to study and consider the equivalents already suggested and used by other scholars. Lastly, scholars may be aware of the existence of such equivalents.

Kafi (1996) holds that [Persian] word-selection has lapsed into chaos due to the fact that the experts and individuals involved have failed to reach consensus on the issue. For example, for the foreign word 'maximum' one can find three or more equivalents such as bišine, mâkzimom, mehin and hadde aksar. Another example is provided by the word 'reaction' with its seven equivalents. They are: vâkoneš, aksol-amal, barâžireš, fe?lon-fe?âl, radd-e amal, enfe?âl and reâkson (Kafi, 1996).

Regional differences

Regional varieties of a language result from a number of factors. Baskaran (2005. P.126) holds that "in the United States itself, there are differences between the English spoken in the Western coast compared to that spoken in the Eastern coast." In a speech community, linguistic differences, which are at times quite noticeable, show a significant correlation with individuals' places of residence. An important finding of Modarresi's (1989) study was that the extent to which the final /æ/ occurs in the speech of a number of Persian speakers in both Tehran and Qazvin was measured and compared. The result was that while the final /æ/ did not essentially appear in the speech of Tehrani interviewees, it was still significantly revealed in the case of Qazvini informants. Due to the fact that the process of changing /æ/ to /e/ at the end of Persian words (as one of the features of Tehrani Persian) is socially prestigious, younger and more educated people in Qazvin have a greater tendency to final /e/, especially on more formal occasions (Modarresi, 1989). Thus, such linguistic change in Tehran is at a more advanced stage compared to Qazvin (and many other areas) and this has led to the emergence of differences in the speech of Tehrani and Qazvini speakers (Modarresi, 1989). When we look at such ideas and suggestions, it is clear that these researchers may have considered the role of speech community but their statements

are essentially anecdotal and not based on official statistics (see Sadeghi, 2001). Further, more the mere consideration of ideas on the part of linguists (see Zomorrodian, 2003), men of literature (see Shari'at, 1986) and other experts (see Haddad Adel, 2003) involved in word-formation and word-selection seems to be insufficient and, sometimes, leads to paradoxical and opposing views (Yarmohammadi, 2006 vs Kafi, 1996). In summary, the best judges of linguistic choices are the members of the speech community. It follows that we should be studying their judgments and, accordingly, the present study has used a questionnaire as an attempt to obtain helpful feedback from the Iranian speech community as to which of the APLL words are accepted or rejected and the reasons for this. Words may be accepted by an official body for different reasons but what are the factors that make coined lexical items acceptable by the general public?

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of 'regional variation' in Persian word-selection. In fact, this study strives to answer the following specific research questions:

1. To what extent is 'using different dialects or accents' significant in accepting or rejecting the APLL general words?

2. To what extent is 'respondents' place of residence' important in accepting or rejecting the APLL general words?

Method

Subjects

A total of 500 Iranian undergraduate and postgraduate students majoring in different fields of study from different state universities in Tehran for the academic year of 2009-2010 participated in this study (see Table 1 below). Their ages ranged from 18 to 61 years, with an average of 23.4 years. The rationale for choosing state universities as the research site was due to the free education and high prestige they offer. As Tehran is a metropolitan city, the subjects of the questionnaire represent the different cultures and social background in Iran.

The Cochran's (1977) sample size formula n = z^2 = p= (1- p=) / d^2= was used to determine the sample size (384 students). However, in order to reduce statistical error, the final sample size of this study was considered to be as large as 500. Of 500 respondents, 60% were B.A, 30% M.A and 10% Ph.D (see Table 1 & 2).

In order to achieve the objective of this survey, the researcher utilized multistage sampling. Personnel in the Iranian Students' Polling Agency (ISPA) were asked to call at every faculty of the universities in question in order to select the students randomly from different programmes. The 'gender' proportion was also realized in the sampling.

Table 1: Sample Size from Different Programmes and Universities

No	Names of Universities	Samples	BA	MA	PhD
1	Tehran Univ. (18 faculties)	135	81	40	14
2	Iran Science & Technology Univ. (13 faculties)	115	69	35	11
3	Allameh Tabatabaee Univ. (7 faculties)	100	60	30	10
4	Sharif Technical Univ. (7 faculties)	100	60	30	10
5	Art Univ. (5 faculties)	50	30	15	5
Total		500	300	150	50

Procedure

Before the selection of the APLL words for the questionnaire, 282 APLL equivalents were studied in seven newspapers and over 80 magazines to determine their frequency via the website www. magiran. com. Based on the results obtained, 54% (154 equivalents) of the APLL general words seem to have been used in the above-mentioned media, yet 46% (130 equivalents) showed zero frequency. Analyses revealed that as for the first 25 APLL words (frequent equivalents), the respondents' acceptance of them correlates with the extent to which these words are used in the newspapers and magazines. In other words, the frequent words in the media in question have been accepted by 62% by the respondents; however, the second 25 equivalents, which were of zero frequency in the media, were treated differently. That is, they were accepted by 38% of the N.

Instrument

The data for this study were collected by means of a questionnaire. In order to investigate the views of the subjects in terms of acceptance and/or rejection of the APLL general words, the researchers provided a questionnaire composed of 50 words (25 with the highest frequency and 25 others with zero frequency). It should be noted that the 25 frequent words were chosen from a total of 49 equivalents in descending order and for the second 25, systematic random sampling with an interval of 5 was used to choose from a total of 135 equivalents. Meanwhile, five criteria for accepting or rejecting the APLL general words were included in the questionnaire in terms of brevity, euphony, eusemy, productivity and semantic transparency.

Operational Definitions

It should be pointed out here that in the context of this study, **brevity** is defined as "the quality of expressing something in very few words" (Longman, 2009). More precisely, it is the condition of making words using the shortest possible syllables in a language as in Persian words payâmgir for 'answering machine', majles for 'parliament' and goruh for 'department'. As for **euphony**, it is "a pleasing or harmonious sequence of sounds" (Crystal, 1992) as in virâyeš 'editing', afšâne 'spray', and xošâb 'compote'. **Eusemy**[1] is a newly-coined term rhyming with 'euphony' for the phrase 'beautiful meaning' (Barzegar & Menon, 2010). As far as **productivity** is concerned, it is "a general term used in linguistics to refer to the creative capacity of language users to produce and understand an indefinitely large number of patterns or instances" (Crystal, 2003). In other words, it is the ability to create more words from the basic form as in virâstan 'to edit', virâyeš 'editing', virâst 'edition', virâstar 'editor' and virâstari 'editing'. Finally, **semantic transparency** is "a condition in which the meaning of lexical unit is easily understood on the basis of the meanings of the parts of which they are composed" (Malmkjær, 1991). The English word 'incorrect' (meaning 'not correct') and Persian words kâlâbarg 'voucher', čâpgar 'printer', and sardkon 'chiller' are instances of transparent words.

Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, one of the writers distributed hard copies to five experienced professors and lecturers in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya as well as five academic experts in Iran. The purpose was to prevent ambiguity, irrelevance, and excess verbiage in the items in the questionnaire. The experts reviewed the questions by evaluating the content validity in order to ensure that each item was relevant to the research questions. Based on the feedback, certain items were revised, and others deleted in order to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire. According to Bryman and Crammer (1990. p.70), instrument reliability 'refers to its consistency' of measurement. Initially, the reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was below 0.70. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above is considered to be desirable (Nunnally, 1978) and, a few items where the coefficient indicated was less than 0.70 were removed thus, that the reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was above 0.88.

In order to strengthen the research instrument (the questionnaire) two pilot studies to ascertain reliability were conducted.

The first piloting was conducted in November 2009 in Malaysia with 30 Iranian students (B.A, M.A and Ph.D) in the University of Malaya. The questionnaires were distributed randomly to students from different faculties. They were requested to participate in a test within an hour to determine the instrument reliability. For the present questionnaire the Cronbach's Alpha was (r = 0.75), indicating that the items in the questionnaire are reliable enough to retain.

The second piloting on 30 students was carried out in Iran. The Cronbach's Alpha was above 0.88 on this occasion. The feedback from respondents was very useful and modifications were duly made based on these comments. Some questions were rephrased for the sake of better understanding and efficiency, and some other questions were moved to more relevant sections. A modified final version was produced in late May 2010.

[1] This term was first coined by the first author (2010) at the 2nd Postgraduate Conference at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya.

Table 2: Respondents in Terms of Gender and Education

Programmes	BA		MA		PhD		Total	
Gender	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	153	31	57	12	13	2.5	223	~45
Male	143	29	90	18	37	7.5	270	~55
Total	296	60	147	30	50	10	493	100

Results and Discussion

Of 500 respondents, in total, 493 respondents (98.6%) returned the questionnaire, duly completed (see Table 2).

With regard to the first research question concerning the importance of using other dialects or accents and the acceptance and rejection of the APLL words, it is clear that the respondents did not belong to a single speech community. In fact, a good number of them used other varieties. In other words, the data obtained disclosed that 175 out of 487 (36%) of the respondents used dialects other than Persian. Meanwhile, the percentage of the acceptance among this group which used other dialects or accents was 51% compared to that of the group using only Persian (49%). As for the second research question regarding the respondents' place of living and their acceptance or rejection of the APLL words, the data obtained revealed that of 480 respondents, 288 (60%) lived in Tehran and 192 (40%) in other cities and towns. The percentages of APLL word acceptance and rejection among those respondents who lived in Tehran and in other cities/towns were approximately 48% and 52%, respectively. In other words, the percentage of the acceptance among Tehrani respondents were about 3% less than that of those from other cities or towns.

Despite the fact that those respondents living in Tehran as their hometown are a little less accepting the APLL suggested equivalents, the results of the t-test ($t = 1.46$; $p = 0.145$), show that this relationship was not statistically significant. This finding is not in line with the other cities such as Qazvin. It seems that the reason behind this negative attitude is the higher level of education in big cities. In fact, one can find more educated fami lies and relatives view held by Modarresi (1989) in that linguistic change happens more quickly in Tehran compared to in Tehran. Approximately 19.5% of Iranian educated people reside in Tehran (Department of Statistics, Iran, 2007). It is obvious that these families are more exposed to exchange of ideas in different subject-matters including language issues. This helps Tehrani informants to treat the issue of accepting and rejecting the APLL words more meticulously and therefore not to easily accept them without good reasons. This is exactly the case with the APLL equivalents in Iran.

The most and the least frequent equivalents were (sâzemân for organisation 'organisation', hamâyeš for congrès 'congress', nemâd for symbole 'symbol') each with 81% and (âlemâne for académique 'academic' and darsadâne for pourcentage 'percentage') with 19%, respectively.

It should be noted that the APLL has suggested two or more equivalents for some of the foreign loan words. Studying equivalents of this kind proved that some of these words have not been accepted at all and in some other cases they have been treated differently. For example, for the word académique 'academic', three equivalents (dânešgâhi, elmi and âlemâne) have been suggested with an acceptance score of 78%, a 57% and a 19%, respectively. In contrast, the word musée 'museum' with two equivalents (muze and ganjine) has 69% of the respondents accepting the former which is the Persianised version of the foreign word itself and 43% the latter.

The APLL words with zero frequency were also investigated. The results revealed that 61% of the respondents rejected the suggested equivalents and only 38% accepted them. The most accepted equivalent involves šomâr for the French loan word tirage 'circulation' (59%), and the least accepted one was činijâ for buffet 'sideboard' (19%).

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate the importance of using different dialects/ accents and place of residence in Persian word-selection. With regard to the importance of dialects or ac-

cents and the acceptance and rejection of the APLL, it is clear that the respondents do not belong to a single speech community. In other words, a good number of them use other varieties; and as a result, this provides researchers with great opportunity to carry out further researches on the Persian language from a sociolinguistic perspective. Meanwhile, based on the results obtained there is no relationship between the use of other accents/dialects other than Persian and the acceptance and rejection of the equivalents suggested by the APLL.

Concerning the importance of respondents' place of residence, it is inferred that respondents living in Tehran as their hometown are a little less accepting the APLL suggested equivalents. It seems that the reason behind this negative attitude is the higher level of education in big cities. In other words, one can find more educated families and relatives in Tehran and, accordingly, they are more exposed to exchange of ideas in different subject-matters including language issues. This helps them to treat the issue of accepting and rejecting the APLL words more meticulously and therefore not to easily accept them without good reasons. This is exactly the case with the APLL equivalents in Iran. However, this relationship (between place of residence and acceptance/rejection of the APLL words) does not seem to be significant.

The findings of this study also indicated that more respondents (62%) are positive about the first 25 APLL general equivalents (with 54% frequency in the media); however, the second 25 equivalents, with zero frequency, were treated differently. That is, despite the fact that these words were of zero frequency in the media, they were accepted by 38% of the respondents. In addition, the respondents preferred words which had only a single equivalent. To sum up, it was assumed from the start that the results of this study would confirm earlier research which indicated that dialects/accents and place of residence would be determining factors in the acceptance or rejection of APLL general words. This has not been borne out by the present study.

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