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The Usage of Loanwords in Spoken Persian

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Abstract

Loan words, as one of the consequences of language contacts, can be widely used by native language speakers. The expansion of loanwords varies depending on many linguistic and non-linguistic factors. The present study, based on a descriptive-analytical method, aims to investigate the usage of loanwords in spoken Persian from three different perspectives: semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. For this purpose, 600 minutes of spoken Persian corpus of Al-Zahra University, including 14000 sentences in Persian for 100 different situations and subjects, used by 240 female speakers and 80 male speakers, have been extracted and studied according to loanwords' "semantic fields", "abstraction and non-abstraction", and "usage frequency" as well as two sociolinguistics variables ("motivation" and "gender" of the speakers). The results of comparing the variety of loanwords and their usage frequency in different semantic fields show that the highest frequency of use belongs to the semantic fields of basic actions and technology, language and speech, and social and political relations. Moreover, research data indicate that loanwords are more related to abstract concepts and phenomena comparing to concrete ones. The research results, from the sociolinguistic view, also reveal that more women than men use loanwords with a common Persian equivalent. "Filling communication gaps in recipient language" and "social, cultural, political and scientific credibility of donor language" are the most important motivations for Persian speakers to use loanwords in their speech.

Keywords: Loanword, Lexical borrowing, Semantic fields, Corpus of spoken Persian language

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1. Introduction

Following the contact and exchange between human societies, due to social, economic, historical, geographical, political, and cultural reasons, their languages influence each other and undergo changes. One of the remarkable instances of these interlinguistic changes is the emergence of loanwords which can be widely used in spoken speech. Today, as a result of the expansion of the mass media and the advancement of science and technology, we are witnessing the increasing use of loanwords in spoken Persian, which might have adverse consequences for our language over time.

The usage of loanwords is not limited to a specific context or field of language. Speakers of each language may use different loanwords in their everyday speech, depending on their individual and social needs or motivations. The current study aims to investigate the usage of loanwords in the spoken Persian from three perspectives: semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics.

Thus, the following research questions are raised:

1. Which semantic fields of loanwords have the highest frequencies in spoken Persian?

2. Are loadwords more related to abstract or concrete concepts?

3. Regarding the gender of speakers, which group mostly uses loanwords with a common Persian equivalent?

4. What are the most important motivations for the use of loanwords by Persian speakers?

2. Literature Review

Since the present study deals with the use of loanwords in the spoken variety of Persian, the literature review is presented into two subheadings:

A) Linguistic and sociological studies about loanwords, including Robins (1964), Sapir (1970) and Haspelmath (2009).

B) Corpus-based studies of Persian language, including Sharafi (2000), Mehryar (2003), Sattari (2009), Ketabi et al. (2010), Kargozari & Tafazzoli (2012), Mohammadi & Abdotajedini (2013).

A small number of the mentioned studies have been devoted to the invetigation of spoken Persian and the majority of researchers have studied loanwords in written literature. Moreover, in those limited number of works on spoken Persian, the reaseachers have expolred controlled data, mostly recorded radio and television programs, which are far from normal speech. Thus, as can be seen, this is the first time that the facts of spoken Persian have been studied in terms of the usage of loanwords.

3. Methodology

To answer the aforementioned research questions, based on a descriptive-analytical method, the usage of loanwords in spoken Persian was analyzed from three perspectives: semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. For this purpose, 600 minutes of spoken Persian corpus of Al-Zahra University, including 14000 sentences in Persian for 100 different situations and subjects, used by 240 female speakers and 80 male speakers, have been extracted and studied according to loanwords' "semantic fields", "abstraction and non-abstraction", and "usage frequency" as well as two sociolinguistics variables ("motivation" and "gender" of the speakers).

The corpus of this study, being prepared in the Linguistics Department of Al-Zahra University, is the first and currently the only corpus of natural speech for spoken Persian recorded in various social situations. One of the most important features of this corpus is that, unlike other controlled databases, here the researchers have access to natural speech of native speakers. Since the participants are not aware of this fact that their words are

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being recorded, the results and findings can reveal facts of nature speech and consequently are less biased. There is no need to mention that all privacy concerns have been observed during data collection.

4. Results

The results of comparing the variety of loanwords and their usage frequency in different semantic fields show that the highest frequency of use belongs to the semantic fields of basic actions and technology, language and speech, and social and political relations. Moreover, research data indicate that loanwords are more related to abstract concepts and phenomena comparing to concrete ones. The research results, from the sociolinguistic view, also reveal that more women than men use loanwords with a common Persian equivalent. "Filling communication gaps in recipient language" and "social, cultural, political and scientific credibility of donor language" are the most important motivations for Persian speakers to use loanwords in their speech.

List 1:
loan words of the corpus

> update, upload, application, atom, autobahn (freeway), autobus (bus), add, Adams (chewing gum), address, adrenaline, eau de Cologne (perfume), art brush, agency, SMS, ascenseur (elevator), spray, sport, speaking, spin, strategy, stress, story, astigmat (astigmatism), screen shot, skill, skill worker, slide, off, UK band (brand new), active, expire, express, expression, aklil (glitter), équipe (group), alarm, album, alzheimer's, ampoule, amphitheater, energy, Angry Birds, online, optic, average, urgence (emergency), origin, OK, Oh Yeah!, idea, ideal, immigration, email, intranet, internet, Internet Explorer, entry, battery, bascule (scale), baguette, band, …

List 2:
Derived, compound, and Derived-compound words containing a non-Persian element

> Atomi (Atomic), energy darmani (energy therapy), ba-class (high-class), Buddayi (Buddhist), post-e- electronic (e-mail), pomp-e-benzon (gas station), testi (by test), telephoni (by telephone), randomi (randomly), size-bandi (sizing), miyan term (midterm), …

5. Conclusion

One of the most frequent linguistic consequences of language contacts is the emergence of loanwords. There are two main motivations for using loanwords: "filling communication gaps in recipient language" and "social, cultural, political and scientific credibility of donor language". The results of data analysis show that, regarding the gender of participants, women tend to use more loanwords with common Persian equivalents than men.

Men mostly use those loanwords which are often common words in Persian and don't seem strange, and a small percentage of their loanwords are non-common and have a typical Persian equivalence; However, this percentage is higher for female participants. In other words, in most cases, men's purpose of using loanwords is to "fill communication gaps in recipient language" and women's motivation is "the social, cultural, political and scientific credibility of donor language".

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