

Some Sociolinguistic aspects of Persian Language

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Persian language "Farsi" , which is spoken in a wide area in Iran, Afghanistan, India and Tajikestan is one of the several languages belonging to the Iranian group. This group , a section of Indo-Iranian languages, in a wider scope is a branch of Indo-European languages.

The Iranian group of languages are normally divided into three periods, Ancient, Middle and Modern Persian . Geographically there were two major groups, Eastern and Western.

I) Ancient Iranian consists of four languages.

- a) Median
- b) Saka
- c) Avestan
- d) Old Persian

II) Middle Iranian, includes , Partian, Khwarizmian, Sogdian, Saka, and Pahlavi.

III) Modern Iranian consists of :

a) North-Western dialects as Gilaki, Mazandarani, Kurdish, Baluchi.

b) South-Western dialect , Persian (it is believed to be a more developed version of Pahlavi and existed parallel to it).

c) Eastern dialects such as Pashtu, Pamir group like Shughni, Wahki, Munjani, Yaghnabi and Osseti.

This paper investigates the social differences of Persian in Tehran . It is based on data collected from sixty informants: forty adults, balanced equally between the two sexes and four educational groups with University, Secondary school , Primary and no education respectively, and twenty school children from both sexes equally from families with highest and lowest education.

The social parameters were related to fourteen phonological morphological and syntactic variables. For this purpose a questionnaire was designed which could provide information on four styles: Free speech, reading the sentences, reading the word list with pause, and reading the word list fast.

The result of analysis from sixty hours of linguistic material provided a large amount of information that enabled me to examine the following theoretical issues:

a) The co-variation between social class and linguistic variables

b) The effect of age on linguistic change, as a result some prediction about the direction of a change in progress became possible.

c) The possible sex differences of each sociolinguistic variable.

d) Lexical diffusion: (Chen & Wang hypothesis 1975) that " a phonological rule gradually extends its scope of operation to a larger and larger portion of lexicon, until all relevant items have been transformed by the process" was examined.

The linguistic variables in this study are of two types:

a) Phonological b) Morphological and syntactic.

Phonological variables are vocalic and consonantal ones. Vocalic variables include: a1) two cases of vowel raising :

i) /e/-/i/ variable. This is the raising of /e/ to /i/ before a high consonant in items such as /negâ/-/nigâ/"look", /kuček/-/kučik/"small" etc.

ii) /â/-/u/ variable which is the raising of /â/ to /u/ before a nasal in items like /xâne/ - /xune/, "house", /tehrân/tehrun/, etc.

a2) two cases of monophthongization:

i) /ey/ - /e/ variable in items such as /meyl/ - /mel/ "wish"/xeyli/ - /xeli/ "plenty", etc.

ii) /ow/ - /o/ Monophthongization, in items such as /rowšan/ - /rošan/ "bright" the monophthong /o/ then subsequently undergoes another change of raising to /u/, this raising is very common among G3 and G4 lower group speakers.

a3) There is also a very frequent case of vowel assimilation. Assimilation occurs in the construction of the prefix /be/ and present stem of verbs in imperative form in which /e/ in prefix /be/ gets assimilated by the next vowel in the stem, this can be seen in items such /bedo/ - /dodo/ "run" /bekon/ - /bokon/ "do". assimilation of this kind has a very close relationship with the level of education.(fig.1)



Fig.1, The vowel system of Persian and the possible movements of /e/.

b)Consonantal variables: there are four variable resulting from consonantal deletion namely b1)/h/ deletion. This occurs in all but initial position in items such as /šahr/ - /šar/ "city", in some cases the deletion causes a slight lengthening of preceding vowel. b2)/t/ deletion in final position in items such as /xâst/ - /xâs/ "he wanted". b3) /d/ deletion this occurs in final position and occasionally in medial position. In items such as /čand/ - /čan/, "some", /nazdik/ - /Nazik/"near", ect. b4) /r/ deletion also in final and medial position in items such as /inqadr/ - /inqad/, "this much", /xorde/ - /xode/, "amount", etc. b5) /ʔ/ deletion. This occurs in medial and final position and gives slight length to the preceding vowel in items such as /taʔtil/ - /

/ - /tatil/, "holiday", /defa?/ - / defa/ "defence", etc. b6) There is also one case of consonantal assimilation of /st/ - / ss/ in items such as /daste/ - /dasse/, "group", /baste/ - /basse/ "closed", etc.

c) Morphological and syntactic variables.

c1)/hâ/ - / â/ - / ân/ plural marker variable in items such as /ketâb/ - / ketâbhâ/ , "books", /deraxt/ - / deraxtân/ "trees" , and so on. c2) /man/ 1st person singular pronoun - /mâ/ 1st person plural variable , this is the use of first person plural for first person singular. and finally c3) preposition deletion. This is the deletion of certain preposition with some verb in a sentence. The deletion of preposition often causes the pattern of word order to be changed fro S.O.V. to S.V.O.

Beside the mentioned variables a number of isolated cases in phonological level, that seemed to vary from one social class to another were examined. Also a number of metathesis and rhythmic doubling which were common among working class informants were taken into consideration.

The results of analysis

To start with vowel assimilation variable, I have examined 6000 occurrences of potential assimilation from sixty imformants in four styles.

The assimilation process proved to differ from :

1. One phonological environment to another.
2. One lexical item with the same phonological environment to another.
3. One social class to another.

a. The effect of phonological environment was examined by looking at the effect to the following vowels and consonants for all speakers