Some Sociolinguistic aspects of Persian Language

By: Dr. Nader Jahangiri, Dept. of Linguistics
Faculty of Letters, University of Ferdowsi,
Mashhad,IRAN

Persian language "Farsi" , which is spoken in a wide area in Iran, Afghanestan, 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. Vacolic 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 imparative 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 positon in items such as /šahr/ - / šar/ "city", in some cases the deletion causes a slight lengthing 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 occassionally 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) /?/ deletion. This occurs in medial and final position and gives slight length to the preceding vowel in items such as /ta?til/ - /

/ - /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

The overall percentage revealed that the process of straight backing (mid front to mid back /e/ to /o/ had high percentage of 78% also lowering to /a/ was as high as 50%, raising to /i/, backing and raising to /u/ and backing and lowering to /â/ were respectively 17% , 14% and 2%.

Vowels	o	a	i	u	â	
Overall	78%	50%	17%	14%	21%	inc./bexân
Percentage					2%	Exc. "
	1323	457	969	605	489	

Table 1. The overall percentage of items with
different vocalic environments.

The effect of immediate consonant following the prefix /be/ has been shown in table 2.

Vowel \ Consonant	o	a	i	u	â	TOTAL
Velar fricative / x /	98% / 351	70% / 92			45% / 224	76% / 667
Velar plosive / k,g /	k,92%/457 k,56%/111		g,41%/206	g,26%/209 k, 9%/198		54% / 1181
Alveolar fricative / s,z,r /	r,100%/168	r,61%/153 z,34%/212	r, 6%/209		s, 0/105 z,2%/60	38% / 907
Alveolar plosive / d /	69%/36			7%/198		16% / 234
Bilabial plosive / b /	5%/200		10%/287		2%/100	7% / 587
TOTAL	78%/1323	50%/457	17%/969	14%/605	21%/589	

Table 2.

So the overall conclusion reveals that : table 3.

Conclusions:

(i) o > a > i > u > â / - velar

(ii) velar > alveolar > bilabial

(iii) fricative > plosive

(iv) / x /, / g / always > average

(v) / r / always > average (except / - i)

(vi) all others always < average

Table 3.

b)Differences between lexical items. Apart from the effect of phonological environment, there are certain differences in the behaviour of the lexical items with the same phonological structure which can not be explained purely in term of their phonological context. Items such as /bekon/ 92% assimilated and /bekoš/ "kill", 56% , (though their following consonant and vowel after prefix /be/ have been isolated), still show two clearly different percentages of assimilation (table 4). It seems the process of a change can differ from one word to another.

Lexical items	Total Number	Assimilated	Percentage
boro	168	168	100%
bexor	351	345	98%
bekon	457	421	92%
bodo	36	25	69%
bekoš	111	62	56%
bobor	200	9	5%
TOTAL	1323	1030	78%

Table 4. The percentage of assimilation for individual items and the overall score for all speakers, befor /o/

However the Chen & Wang hypothesis of lexical diffusion may give a satisfactory explanation to this type of problem. Here it may be said that although /bekon/ and /bekoš/ both have competing pronuciations, but /bekon/ should have been affected by rule before /bekoš /, so its assimilated form has wider frequency, not only for a particular social group, but across the social dialects from " non-standard" to "standard" form. It will be also possible to suggest that / bekon/ may undergo the change completely by next generation, like items such as /boro/ "go" that is assimilated completely and have no alternative pronunciation with any social group. At the same time there are items

like /besâz/ "build" that have no assimilated alternation in the entire data. Table 5.

Lexical items	Total number	Assimilated	Percentage
bexân	224	101	45%
bebâs	100	2	2%
besâr	60	1	2%
beeâs	105	0	0
TOTAL	489	104	21%

Table 5. Percentage of assimilation for individual items and the overall score for all speakers, before /â/ .

Therefore it is possible to suggest that we are dealing with three sets of items:

I) Those completely covered by the rule without competing pronunciation such as /boro/.

II) Those which are in an on - going process of change with competing forms such as /bekon/ , /bexor/"eat", etc.

III) Those which have not been affected by the rule at all like /besâz/.

c) The degree of undergoing the rule can differ from one social group to another, as where the percentage of assimilation in /begir/ "take", is 7% for G1 the G4 scores as high as 94%.Fig. 2 & 3.
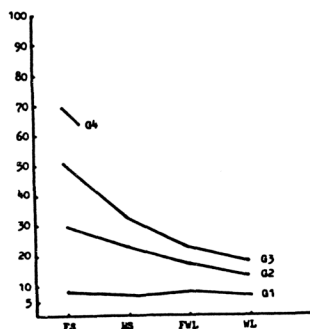

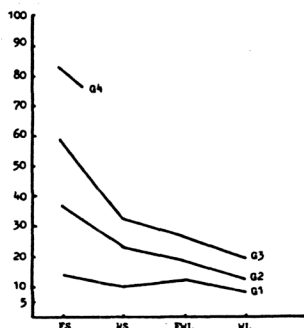Fig. .2. Percentage of vowel assimilation by class and style, female adults

Fig. 3. Percentage of vowel assimilation by class and style, male adults.

Assimilation in Persian is essentially a "lower" class dialect marker, yet the comparison between the two age groups from the two extreme social classes G1 and G4 adults with youngsters, reveals that a competing pressure is directing the change. Although the pressure from below (Labov 1966) is more powerful. The pressure from above seems to be the direct effect of education, as youngsters from G4 families score assimilated form 14 percent male and 28% female less than their illiterate parents. Yet youngsters from G1 families show dramatic increase of three time and four times for female and male respectively in comparison to their university educated parents. As a result, it seems that the extreme groups are getiing closer to each other,but G1 are moving faster.Fig.4 & 5
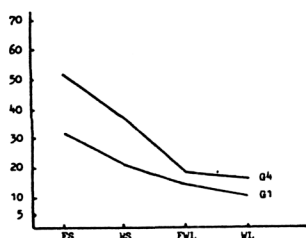
Fig. 4. Percentage of vowel assimilation by class and style, female youngsters.
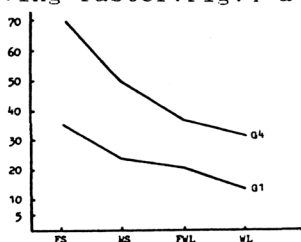
Fig. 5. Percentage of vowel assimilation by class and style, male youngsters.

There are sharp class distinction between the social classes and different styles. The rate of assimilation rises from word list to free speech continuously as the formality of reading, gradually changes to a more or less relaxed free speech, except for G1 females where it is an almost steady process. In all styles the females score less than males.

/e/ vowel raising : It provides more evidence in suport of lexical diffusion hypothesis. This variable divides the social classes into four major groups in free speech, yet in reading style the pattern is not so clear.(Tab. 6,7)

Lexicon	kuček	šekar	šekast	negâ	âteš	TOTAL
G1 F	50%/8	0%/12	0%/5	0%/1	0%/1	15%/26
G1 M	100%/3	0%/10	0%/5	0%/2	0%/1	14%/21
G2 F	100%/10	21%/14	0%/5	-	100%/9	58%/38
G2 M	100%/10	0%/15	0%/5	8%/11	100%/1	45%/42
G3 F	100%/23	53%/15	33%/6	75%/8	100%/4	77%/56
G3 M	100%/16	85%/13	100%/5	100%/7	-	95%/41
G4 F	100%/22	100%/7	-	100%/13	100%/3	100%/45
G4 M	100%/21	100%/6	100%/2	100%/5	100%/15	100%/49
G1 YF	100%/9	0%/14	0%/5	50%/4	100%/2	38%/34
G1 YM	75%/8	7%/15	0%/6	40%/5	77%/13	40%/47
G4 Y	100%/3	0%/11	60%/5	60%/5	100%/4	42%/24
G4 Y	100%/24	100%/16	57%/7	100%/11	100%/15	96%/73

Table 6- Vowel - raising scores for individual items and total percentage of raising by class sex and age.

	FS	RS	FVL	VL
G1 F	15	0	0	0
G1 M	14	0	0	0
G2 F	58	0	0	0
G2 M	45	0	0	0
G3 F	77	20	0	0
G3 M	95	70	40	40
G4 F	100	-	-	-
G4 M	100	-	-	-
G1 F.Y	38	0	0	0
G1 M.Y	40	0	0	0
G4 F.Y	42	30	0	0
G4 M.Y	96	50	50	50

Table 7 - The percentage of vowel raising by class style sex and age.

/â/- /u/ vowel raising. It shows that :
i) The location of /â/ - nasal in different positions, does not seem to have a noticeable effect on raising.
ii) The raising of /â/ before /n/ is more favored than before /m/.
iii) /â/ raising is a morphem - bounded process. It also revealed that :
i) New items, learned items, items with formed sources, and borrowed items do not undergo the rule.
ii) In undergoing the rule, there are lexical differences among the items with the same phono-logical environment. (Tab. 8,9).

Phonetactic Position	Phonological environment	Free speech	reading sentences	Fast word list	Word list
Medial	/ -n /	627/1010 66%	65/250 26%	2/40 5%	1/40 3%
	/ -a /	80/238 34%	10/100 10%	-	-
Final	/ -n /	916/1138 80%	73/400 18%	16/300 5%	11/300 4%
	/ -a /	64/204 31%	2/100 2%	0/40 0%	0/40 0%

Table 8- The percentage of /â/ raising in different phonotactic positions and phonological environments by style regardless of class, sex and age distinctions.

Phonological environment	Free speech	Reading sentences	Fast word list	Word list
/ -n /	1543/2154 68%	138/650 21%	18/340 5%	12/340 4%
/ -a /	144/442 33%	12/200 5%	0/40 0%	0/40 0%

Table 9- The percentage of /â/ raising in different phonological environments in all positions by style regardless of class, sex, and age distinctions.

This variable also show that :
i) the /â/ raising variable is sensitive to class and style .
ii) except G3 male in their reading style, there are no noticeable sex differences with this variable.
iii) Youngsters in comparison to their adults are closing the gap slightly.

/ey/ monophthongization.
It also support the lexical diffusion hypothesis they are sensitive to class, age, sex and style.

"Standard" form	N.S.F. Monophthonised	Meaning	Total No.	Number of Monophthongs	% Monophthong
peyqâm	pe.qâm	"message"	64	54	84%
peydâ	pe.dâ	"clear"	61	47	77%
peyvand	pe.vand	"graft"	49	25	51%
xeyli	xe.li	"very"	837	357	43%
seyl	se.l	"flood"	49	13	27%
meydân	me.dân	"square"	96	26	27%
peymâne	pe.mâne	"measure"	85	9	11%

Table 10- The percentages of /ey/ monophtongazation for 7 items and for all speakers.

Style	F.S.			R.S.			F.V.L.			V.L.		
Total	Mon.	No.	Mon. ?	Mon.	No.	?	Mon.	No.	?	Mon.	No.	?
Monosyllable	225	73	32%	200	59	19%	162	28	17%	162	18	11%
Polysyllable	1356	631	47%	450	132	29%	300	70	23%	300	47	16%

Table 11- The percentages of /ey/ monophtongazation of mono- and polysylabic items by style for all speakers.

/st/ assemilation reveals:
i) That Arabic loan words favour assimilation less than Persian words.
ii) The adjacent vowels show no significant effect on assimilation.
iii) Lack of stress creates a better condition for assimilation.
iv) There are individuals unpredictable lexical differences which appear to indicate lexical diffusion. (Tab. 12)

	Second vowel						
First vowel	i	o	a	u	o	a	Total
i	100% 20	29% 42	61% 59	-	40% 5	87% 5	63% 164
o	90 10	68 37	65 78	64 78	-	35 337	49% 540
a	74 150	52 340	56 329	50 6	69 13	39 18	57% 856
u	37 57	48 44	26 31	100 4	-	19 73	32% 213
o	75 4	70 10	67 6	-	-	62 13	63% 35
a	69 84	64 25	57 123	-	-	17 48	54% 281
Total	68% 325	52% 498	56% 628	57% 88	69% 18	36% 527	

Table 12- The percentage of / st / assimilation between all vowels.

/h/ deletion . It reveals:
i) The deletion of /h/ differs in different phonological environments.
ii) Certain lexical items in non-phrasal initial position allow their /h/ to be deleted.
iii) /h/ deletion is possible in all styles. (Tab.13)

General position	Phonological environment	Total No. of occurrences	Percentage
Initial non phrase-initial	After a vowel	192	57%
	After a consonant	127	95%
Medial	Pre-consonant	2312	41%
	Inter-vocalic	1702	28%
	Post-consonant	167	19%
Final	Post-vocalic	216	70%
	Post-consonant	81	98%

Table 13- The percentage of /h/ deletion in different phonological environments, for free speech by all speakers.

/t/ and /d/ deletion:
They are also sensetive to class, age, sex, and style with both adults and younsters.

Style	Free speech (i)		(ii)		Reading Sentences			Last word list			Word list		
Environment	Total /t/ deleted	/teř/ -tes	Total % deleted		Total /t/ deleted		%	Total /t/ deleted		%	Total /t/ deleted		%
/ at /	1027	80%/826	13%/134	893	92%	380	276	73%	100	67	67%	100	45	45%
/ ät /	185	92%/171	2%/3	182	94%	48	39	81%	-	-	-	-	-	-
/ ťt /	340	81%/274	11%/36	304	90%	180	95	63%	100	36	36%	100	15	1%
/ xt /	112	87%/97	1%/1	111	87%	-	-	-	50	34	68%	50	26	52%

Table 14- The percentage of /t/ variant in different phonological environments and styles, for all speakers.

/r/ deletion . It shows that :
i) As only a small portion of potentially releavant lexical items are covered by the rule, /r/ deletion may be considered a rule in its early stages.
ii) All lexical items involved in this variable have very high frequency , so one may suggest that a phonological rule first covers the more frequent items.
iii) As has been found in other cases,intervocalically the deletion of a consonant is disfavoured .
iv) Thefinal /r/ after a vowel and internal /r/ following a word ending are less favoured to get deleted. (Tab. 15).

	Free speech	Reading sentences	Fast word list	Word list					
G1 F.A.	61%/ 81	10%/ 56	5%/ 20	0 / 20					
G1.M.A.	64%/110	25%	5%/	0					
G2.F.A.	81%/151	29%	10%	0					
G2.M.A.	77%/116	4%	0	0					
G3.F.A.	88%/ 92	4%	5%	5%					
G3.M.A.	94%/108	17%	20%	5%	G1.F.Y.	69%/121	6%	5%	0
G4.F.A.	97%/188	-	-	-	G1.M.Y.	75%/ 88	4%	0	0
G4.M.A.	97%/ 93	-	-	-	G4.F.Y.	92%/ 75	33%	0	0
					G4.M.Y.	92%/ 97	26%	15%	5%

Table 15- The scores for /r/ deletion by class, style, sex and age.

/?/ deletion. It reveals that :
i) Glottal stop has different percentages of deletion in different phonological environments.
ii) Final position is the most favourite and intervocalic the least favourite environment for deletion.
iii) Lexical items with the same phonological environment are not equally sensitive to a phonological rule (Tab. 16).

Style	% deletion	% lengthening	% retained
Free speech	93%	0	7%
Reading sentences	93%	0	7%
Word list	89%	0	11%

Table 16- /?/ in context final (-V?) for all speakers by style.

/a/ - /ha/ - /an/ morphological variables in table 17.

	Female				Male								
	FS	RS	FwL	VL	FS	RS	FWL	VL	G1.Y	68%/279	8%	0	0
G1.A	33%/213	4% / 25	20%/ 5	0/5	54%/260	16%/ 25	0/ 5	0/5	G4.Y	82%/165	40%	40%	0
G2.A	60%/224	24%	20%	0	57%/169	20%	40%	0		56%/376	12%	0	0
G3.A	77%/230	12%	20%	20%	81%/269	52%	60%	20		88%/319	56%	80%	40%
G4.A	77%/308	-	-	-	86%/411	-	-	-					

Table 17- The scores for /â/ plural marker, by class, style, age and sex.

/man/ - /mâ/ - first person singular marker in table 18.

Table 18 (left section):

Social class	% /mâ/	Total	% /mâ/	Total
	Female		Male	
	15%	26	13%	98
	3%	72	9%	43
G1.A	6%	105	10%	60
	3%	140	9%	76
	3%	147	16%	67
Group average	4%	496	12%	344
	9%	35	20%	74
	11%	38	26%	147
G2	0	46	18%	186
	3%	119	29%	142
	7%	97	12%	116
Group average	6%	335	21%	665

Table 18 (middle section):

Class	% /mâ/	Total	% /mâ/	Total
	Female		Male	
	0	32	11%	105
	2%	65	8%	60
G1.Y	2%	130	9%	53
	9%	96	20%	80
	4%	110	32%	53
Group average	4%	433	16%	351
	5%	116	62%	205
	14%	156	60%	191
G3	10%	249	60%	139
	0	98	61%	442
	10%	88	43%	212
Group average	9%	707	57%	1189
	45%	74	61%	271
	26%	261	68%	137
G4	34%	278	47%	303
	12%	329	38%	136
	12%	129	43%	94
Group average	23%	1071	53%	941

Table 18 (right section):

Class	% /mâ/	Total	% /mâ/	Total
	Female		Male	
	19%	57	65%	82
	36%	64	49%	186
G4.Y	17%	77	49%	92
	26%	19	65%	149
	24%	46	77%	165
Group average	24%	263	61%	674

Table 18- The scores for /mâ/ by class, sex and age, free speech for all speakers.

Preposition deletion and word order , syntactic variable in table 19.

Class	% SVO word order	% of pp deletion regardless of word order	Total
G1 F.A.	33%	36%	81
G1 M.A.	29%	38%	112
G2.F.A.	44%	58%	102
G2.M.A.	50%	58%	113
G3.F.A.	51%	84%	101
G3.M.A.	65%	78%	181
G4.F.A.	75%	88%	188
G4.M.A.	70%	85%	120
G1.F.Y.	55%	61%	108
G1.M.Y.	31%	41%	160
G4.F.Y.	68%	83%	72
G4.M.Y.	62%	83%	167

Table 19- The scores for SVO word order and pre-position deletion by class, sex, and age in free speech.

they all support the theoretical issues presented in this paper.

References:
1. Abercrombie, D. 1967. Elements of General Phonetics. Edinburgh University Press.
2. Brown, P, and Levinson, S., 1978. "Universals in Language Usage. Politeness Phenomena" in Questions and Politeness, Strategies in Social Interaction, edited by Esther N. Goody. Cambridge Universtiy Press.
3. Chen, M.Y., 1976. "Relative chronology: Three Methods of Reconstruction", Journal of Linguistics, 12, pp. 209-258.
4. Chen, M.Y., Wang, W.S-Y., 1975. "Sound Change: Actuation and Implementation". Language, vol. 51. No.2.
5. Hodge, C.T., 1957. "Some Aspects of Persian Style", Language, Vol. 33, No. 3, Part 1, pp. 366-369.
6. Hudson, R.A., 1980. Sociolinguistics. Cambridge University Press.
7. Labov , W. 1963. "The Social Motivation of a Sound Change", Word, 19, pp. 273-309. The reflection of social process in linguistic structure, reprinted in Labov, W. Sociolinguistic Patterns. 1972, University of Pennsylvania Press.
8. Labov, W. 1972. Language in the Inner City: Studies in Black English Vernacular. University of Pennsylvania Press.
9. Milroy, J. 1978. "Lexical Alternation and Diffusion in Vernacular Speech". Belfast Working Papers in Language and Linguistics, Vol. 3.
10. Sankoff, D. and Laberge, S. 1978. "Statistical Dependence Among Successive Occurrences of a Variable in Discourse"; in D. Sankoff (ed.), Linguistic Variation, New York : Academic Press.
11. Wang S-Y.W. 1969. "Competing Changes as a Cause of Residue", Language, Vol. 45, No. 1.