



LANGUAGE CHANGE AND DIRECTIONALITY: A NOVEL MODEL FOR LANGUAGE CHANGE IN PERSIAN AND IRANIAN LANGUAGES FROM THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the specific changes in the Persian language and many other Iranian languages including Bakhtiari, have got a prominent role since these changes are considered to be tools to identify the thoughts and to have direct insight to the way of life of societies. Language change happens all the time. However, in this paper, the sudden language change after the arrival of a competitive language is considered and discussed. There are so many changes in Persian that it is really hard to recognize them the normal historical trend in the language development. In this study, the Model of Competition and Survival is proposed, which helps us to understand the phenomenon of language change from the sociolinguistic perspective and some arguments regarding the possible political and regional implications of these language changes are discussed. Furthermore, the directionality of language change is discussed as it was one of the well-known conundrums in the diachronic linguistics and the language soul as a powerful force behind the big language change is considered and discussed. Furthermore, Bakhtiari language and Kurdish are presented as evidence for the model.

Keywords: Persian, Arabic, Greek, Historical Trend, Process of Language Change, Model of Competition and Survival, Competitive Model, Diachronic

INTRODUCTION

Aitchison J. (2005) develops interesting ideas about the language change and claims that language transforms itself over the centuries in a slow process. Lightfoot D. (1991) works on the notion of the generative grammar and parameters, in particular, asserting that parameter setting is triggered only by robust, structurally simple elements. Lightfoot D. (1991) examines consequences of the loss of the rich old English case system and the breakdown of the verb classes, arguing that changes only could have taken place the way they did only if language acquisition proceeds on the basis of simple, un-embedded experiences. Brinton L. J. and Traugott E. C. (2005) study the lexicalization and grammaticalization, providing a unified model for both phenomena in the language development. Hock H. H. and Joseph B. D. (1996) investigate the language relationship and language change in a comparative manner, providing insights to some of the changes affecting the English language syntax and morphology. Haspelmath M (2004) works through the important question of the directionality in language change, discussing the uni-directionality of grammaticalization and analyzing the other areas of language change, affecting the

directionality. Kerswill P and Williams A (2000) investigates the koineization in progress, describing the development of a new variety in the English new town of Milton Keynes. Clark R and Roberts I (1993) works on a computational model of language learnability and language change, while Durie M. and Ross M. (1996) investigates the regularity and irregularity in language change, using the comparative method. Kuteva T. and Heine B. (2005) investigate the phenomenon of language contact, looking at how grammatical forms and structures evolve when speakers of two languages come into contact. They offer an interesting insight into the mechanism that induces people to transfer grammatical structures from one language to the other. Alam M. (1998) investigates the rise of Persian in the Mughal politics in India, developing a historical account of the strange phenomenon of Persian prominence when the Turkish language was supposed to be the predominant language of Turkish Mongols in India. Singh (2018) shows how the syntax is influenced by the cognitive processing, making inflectional phrase covert or overt in languages. There have been few studies on the language change in a much broader way, looking at the language change as a natural experience by any language under certain conditions. The fact is that regarding of the considered language, there seems to reign a strong tendency for language to develop in a specific way, which will be shown in this study, affects the syntax and grammar in a very interesting way, providing us with a strong tool to further analyze and predict the trend in language change for future language planning.

LANGUAGE CHANGE

In this work, these changes are looked upon from the historical and societal perspectives, and a meaningful model is presented which claims to be able to predict future changes in languages when they are subject to the dominance from the outside. Language as a living entity has its own lifespan and maturation process, undergoing many changes in its lifespan. Some of these changes are so abrupt that centuries later they become a puzzle to solve for linguists and the society in general. Here, it is intended to shed some light on the process and manner of changes in Persian, and some other languages, consequently providing a model of historical trend predictor for any language. It is very important to highlight the fact that the Persian language has a rich continuous history, undergoing three main periods and thus it is classified as old, middle and modern Persian. In the classification of the Iranian languages, the Middle Period includes those languages which were common in Iran from the fall of the Achaemenid Empire in the fourth century BCE up to the fall of the Sasanian Empire in the seventh century C.E. Haig G. L. J. (2008) works on the alignment changes in Iranian languages and presents the grammar of Old Persian in a much more concrete way. From his work, the most important and distinct development in the structure of Iranian languages of this period, from Old Persian to Middle Persian, is the transformation from the synthetic form of the Old Period to an analytic form as it follows in 1:

- 1)
 - a. Nouns, pronouns, and adjectives lost their case inflections
 - b. Prepositions were used to indicate the different roles of words.
 - c. many tenses began to be formed from a composite form

The fact is that when we consider the path from Old Persian to Middle Persian, there appear some big changes for which the explanation is hard to find. The main features of these revolutionary changes are the loss of noun gender system and even the verb conjugation system was much simplified. On the other hand, from Middle Persian to Modern Persian, the lexical load is heavy as many Arabic words get into Persian and they formed an integral part of Persian lexicon. However, the syntactic changes are minimal in the same period, which is unexpected. Thus, it becomes a mystery why after the Greek conquest of Persia, the Persian language went through so much modification to simplify the grammatical feature, while the same language, Persian, did not show the same syntax simplification in the period of the Arab conquest of Persia. Many would argue that changes in Persian may not be related to the presence the historical prominent points, but as it will be shown further, there is an undeniable link between the language change and the period of dominance of outside languages. In fact, we can look at the timeline of Arab conquest in Persia and the lexical changes in the Persian. Morgan D. (1988) investigates the Middle

Persian grammatical features. From his analysis, the changes in Persian can be classified as follows in 2 to 5:

- 2) Sound changes:
 - a) the dropping of unstressed initial vowels
 - b) the epenthesis of vowels in initial consonant clusters
 - c) the loss of -g when word-final
 - d) change of initial w- to either b- or (gw- → g-)
- 3) Changes in the verbal system, the loss of distinctive subjunctive and optative forms, and the increasing use of verbal prefixes to express verbal moods
- 4) Changes in the vocabulary, particularly the Arabic loanwords replacing many Aramaic loans and native terms.
- 5) The substitution of Arabic script for Pahlavi script.

As it was mentioned earlier, these abrupt changes are in coincidence with the arrival of Greek and Arabic language in Persia, becoming the languages of the court, having established their own identity as the official as well as the working language of Persia. One interesting fact is that one wonders why the arrival of languages such as Arabic and Greek which both have a rich system of verb conjugation and noun gender system led to the simplification of the already known and stable language such as Persian. In the following, we will introduce a model to account for the fact that it seems these changes worked under a specific system. It is then highly controversial to see that the Arabic language had little influence on Persian syntax despite the long period of its dominance in Persia. On the other hand, though the Greek language was present and dominant in Persia for quite some time, compared to Arabic, the influence was much greater, to the extent that Greek dominance made Persian language change from Synthetic language to analytic language. This is almost in the opposition of laymen in Iran, who almost always consider Arabic as the most influential language. However, as it will be shown later, this feeling of Arabic dominance is due to the loan words from Arabic which people use in their daily life and not based on the strong syntactic changes.

Model of Competition and Survival (MCS)

Languages change within time and no one can dispute this. However, in some specific periods, these changes are fundamental and affect the nature of languages. Model of competition and survival provides a great logical explanation for the phenomenon and furthermore, with a mathematical representation makes the prediction about language change much easier and straightforward.

Model of competition and survival, MCS, argues that whenever an already established and aboriginal language (AboL) is exposed to a new imposing language from outside (OutL), the modification process begins in a natural way, no matter how much efforts are put to keep the aboriginal language, AboL, intact. MCS furthermore claims that if the outside imposing language (OutL) is related to the aboriginal language (AboL), then the grammatical simplification will be much higher for the AboL. It will be better explained to put this invisible law in language change in a mathematical formula for the sake of explanation the concept as below in the formula 1:

$$1) \text{ New AboL: } \text{OutL}_i + \text{AboL}_j = \text{AboL} - \text{AboSyn} - \text{AboLex} + \text{OutLex}$$

If $i=j$ then syntactic change > lexical change

In the formula (1) OutLex, AboLex, and AboSyn stand for outside language lexicon, aboriginal lexicon, and aboriginal language syntactic change respectively. Furthermore, subscripts j and i are used to show the relationship of languages. If both languages were related, i.e. $i=j$, then we would have had a much greater emphasis on the syntactic change, compared to the situation where the languages were not related and of different family groups. From the formula, it is understood that in the lexical level, there is an enrichment of lexical system with new outside language words but also some vocabulary loss due to the presence of the OutL. On the other hand, the syntax gets simplified by the OutL and the phenomenon can go on as long as the dominance and influence of the OutL continue. The other aspect of the Model of Competition and Survival is the fact that the phenomenon in the syntactic level is irreversible and there is almost no way to get back to the older, much more syntactic complex language. The other fact is that the

syntactic change is closely tied to the family groups of language. For example, MCS is at work when there are two related languages, like Persian and Greek is concerned. However, in the case of Arabic and Persian, the syntactic change is of less importance and as it was mentioned earlier, it can be seen in the changes that Persian underwent under the reign of Arabs. In the period in which Arabic was the official language in Persia, the changes have the phonetic and lexical features, rather than big syntactic changes. Therefore, when languages are from different family groups, changes have the lexical load. On the other hand, when languages are family related, the changes are in the syntax and grammar.

The directionality of language change

The directionality of language change has always been an important question and there was no clear answer to this question as to why languages change within time and how some of these changes are so abrupt. Saussure, F. de (1916/1959) works on the diachronic linguistics and tries to answer this difficult question, facing the facts that languages seemingly acted in different but consistent ways throughout the history. However, with the model of competition and survival, we can have a clear answer to this long-standing question. As it was mentioned earlier, whenever there is a threat to any language from the outside, the language will turn on the defense mechanism and if the imposing and threatening language has similar features to the targeted language, then this mechanism will lead to the simplification of syntax, just as it happened to Persian and English in the past. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between the normal situation for language change and special circumstances, like when language is in the weak position compared to the new imposing language. Therefore, we can illustrate the point with the Figure 1.

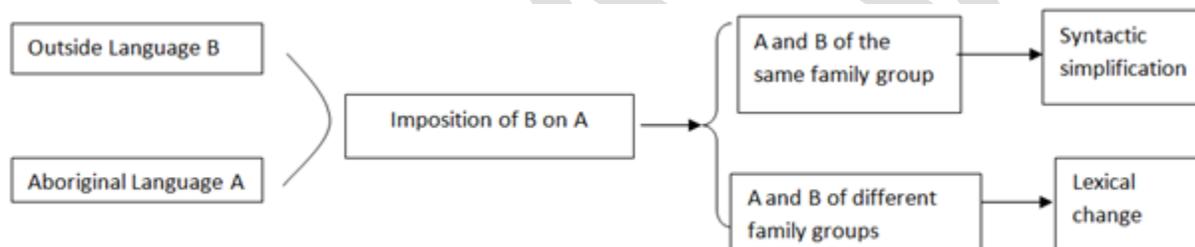


Figure 1: language change direction

Kurdish and Bakhtiari evidence

The structural change that happened in Persia after the dominance of Greek language is not limited to the Persian language. Actually, all of the related Iranian languages lose their inflection when it comes to gender. Bakhtiari as an Iranian language do not contrast based on the gender and there is no inflection in Bakhtiari for gender. This is despite the fact that one does expect that Bakhtiari, being an Indo-Iranian language, distinguishes the gender. Kurdish in Iran, whether Sorani or Southern Kurdish, likewise does not distinguish words based on gender. However, Kurmanji which is a Kurdish dialect spoken mainly in Turkey does have inflection for gender, though it is a weak distinction. The reason is that Kurmanji was spoken in a very isolated place where the influence of Greek was rather weak. Therefore, despite the fact that almost all of the Iranian languages in Iran plateau lost their gender inflection, Kurmanji, being out of the Iranian plateau and isolated from the rest of Iranian languages and the competition with Greek, did not go through a strong language change and did not lose the gender inflection.

Implications of the MCS

It is very interesting to note that what happened in the Persian language, under the dominance of Greek and Arabic, was the case for the English language as well. Middle English began in the Norman conquest of England and again we can see the syntactic simplification in the Middle English compared to the Old English. Another good example is the almost rigidity of Arabic under the Greek and Latin influence, by preserving its noun gender system. In the case of Arabic, being a Semitic language, the syntactic changes were minor which was affirmed in the work of Corriente F. (1976). Now that we have a working model for language change prediction, it is quite possible to predict the future changes any

language may undergo if it is put under the dominance of another language. Many had argued that language change is a natural phenomenon which happens in order to simplify the structure of language within the course of history. What the Model of Competition and Survival presents is that this simplification of grammar does not happen just for the sake of making the language easier. In fact, this simplification is the direct consequence of one language being modified under the dominance of an outside language, when both languages are from the same family groups. Therefore, unless the preconditions do not present themselves, the language change will not happen and there will be no big syntactic change in the language. That's why a language like Arabic or Hebrew had much minor syntactic changes through their history. Arabic and Hebrew were surrounded with Indo-European languages spoken in their area, and naturally, even under the dominance of Indo-European languages, they got syntactically less simplified. MCS is the natural response of the language to the outside pressure when this outside pressure is seen as competitive, being from the same family group, and in order to survive, making the language easier for its native speakers is the intelligent strategy that any language would undertake when it is under attack. Here again, we can see how languages live through the passage of time.

MCS AND ITS ROLE AS A PREDICTIVE TOOL

In the present day, Arabic still exerts some influence on Persian but it does not have the dominant role anymore, which is why even in the lexical level, there is no more lexical contribution from Arabic. On the other hand, even though English is considered an important language and even a prestigious language to learn, due to the fact that it has not become a dominant language politically, there is no further simplification in modern Persian. However, due to the presence of Azeri language, in northwestern Iran, which is a Turkic language, there is a clear lexical contribution from Azeri to some dialects in Persian spoken in that area. However, even in those areas, there is no clear syntactic change in the language spoken by Persian speakers. It shows just how well the MCS can analyze and predict the situation. Now it will be good to investigate how Spanish may play a role in future in the United States of America as it grows in popularity and importance in the country. From the MCS, if southern states experience more Spanish dominance in the next decades, the English itself will begin the process of modification and simplification in the southern states, especially Californian English. Therefore, it is of interest to see how these changes can be stopped if possible ever, and what the consequences are for the English language. The fact is that both English and Spanish are Indo-European languages, thus they are related. Bedore L. M., Pena E. D., Summers C. L., Boerger K. M., Resendez M. D., Greene K., Bohman T., & Gillam R. B. (2012) investigated language dominance profiles across measures in Spanish-English bilingual children and what they found actually is what the MCS predicts. They investigated the simplification, at the initial stage, of both Spanish and English in bilingual families. It is of great interest to record all of these changes as this language change phenomenon can later affect the English spoken in the USA. Boswell L (2000) investigated the identity issues in the French province of Alsace where there is a big German influence. From our MCS model, it is clear that the French spoken in Alsace should have a more simplified syntax and the evidence confirmed this as pointed out by Boswell I. Furthermore, since this language change is not yet distributed in the whole country, so the mechanism has remained in the initial stage, without any further development to a concrete French syntax simplification.

MCS AND STAGES OF LANGUAGE CHANGE

MCS is definitely a strong tool to predict the language change but it is also important to see the different stages in which the language change actually happens. From the evidence provided earlier, regarding French and Persian, it is clear that there should be some stages before the whole mechanism of language change forms the final product, a simplified aboriginal language. The stages of language change are shown in Figure 2.

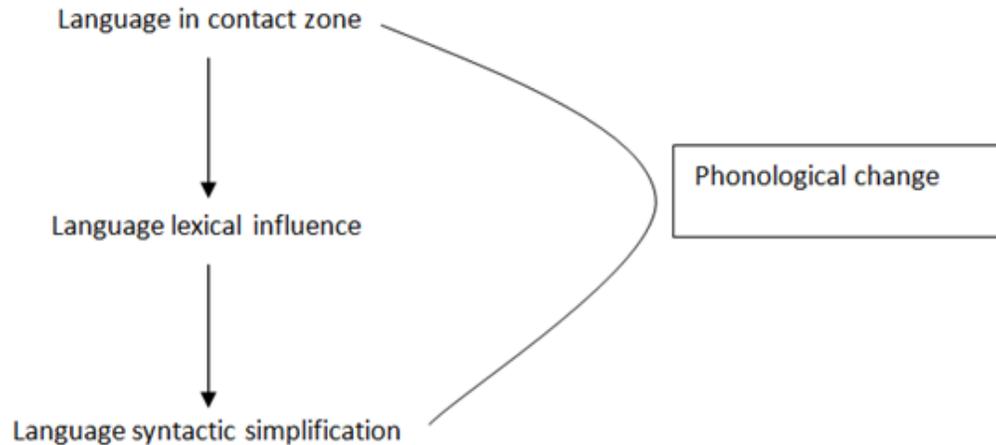


Figure 2: language change stages

As it is shown in figure 2, there are 4 stages that form the language change. In the initial stage, the language in the contact zone, we are faced with the very normal situation that happens in many languages. In language contact zone, despite some initial language features, the syntactic structure and lexical system are weakly affected, and this stage does not provide the force necessary to drastic changes. The data from Persian spoken in the borders between Iran and Turkey does confirm this (Shaffer B., 2002). Furthermore, the same phenomenon, the language in the contact zone, was analyzed by Sahlins P. (1989) in the border between France and Spain. The second stage is the lexical influence which provides the language to simplify syntax later if the dominance context is formed. So as it was shown, the last stage is the syntactic simplification under the dominance, and in all of these stages, phonological changes exist. It means that even in the first stage, in the contact zone, the phonological changes are happening, forming different dialects. Therefore, the formation of dialects should be considered an initial stage of development a future language form with the simplified syntax. Auer P. and Hinskens F. (1996) investigate the development of dialects in different parts of Europe which provides a good evidence of our MCS model implications. The phonological changes somehow pave the way for lexical and syntactic changes in future since any change in lexical and syntactic level needs a supporting phonological system.

LANGUAGE SOUL

As it was discussed in the model of competition and survival, it seems that languages act in a pretty similar way when they are in a weak position, threatened by another related language from the outside. It is incredible how language does react in a systemic way, simplifying its structures and by doing this, making itself a much more attractive option for its users. Therefore, language change is truly a systemic event, which suggests to us that it has a central mastermind. The fact is that this simplification would have never happened in any language if it was to be ordered by a very important person, or based on any other individual effort. It is this language soul which does direct the efforts of individual users toward a much more simplified version of language when it is threatened. Thus, language change is a great example of the existence of such an abstract, not well researched yet, concept of language soul. Language soul is the synergy of arbitrary thinking of the users of a specified language which does have a direction and purpose. The purpose is just to survive and we can contend that in this aspect, languages are just living organisms trying to survive in a harsh environment.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study of language change, a good working model is provided which captures the nuances of language change through the passage of time. Unlike other explications for language change, in this case, the directionality of language change is very clear. Based on the Model of Competition and Survival, always the simplification of the aboriginal language syntax happens. The lexical system does indeed go

through changes, though these changes are rather in the form of borrowing words and ceasing the use of some other words. In the syntactic level, the real response of the language under dominance shows its full capacity. As it was shown, Persian is a classic example of language change. When there was the Greek dominance in Persia, the Old Persian lost many syntactic complexities, to the extent it went from syntactic to analytic language. On the other hand, under the Arabic dominance, the syntactic changes were pretty minor, showing how a language, of another family group, brings changes in the lexical level, rather than syntactic simplification. The MCS model provided us with a novel analytical tool to investigate the dialect formation and many other changes in the phonological level when the phenomenon of language change is still in the initial stage. Four stages of language change were presented while having the phonological level present in all of the remaining three stages. There were many arguments in the favor of simplification of grammar syntax as an independent phenomenon. However, in this work, the model of competition between languages was introduced to show how the dominance plays a big role in the changes of any language. Whenever there is a dominance of an outside language, the language change mechanism begins to work and it is this very mechanism that makes the aboriginal language much simpler syntactically to survive the period. It is very interesting that there is no language which goes from syntactic to analytic when it is under threat. The fact is that language change is a protective mechanism that any language will employ in order to prevent its speakers from switching to the dominant language. Definitely, there are many ways that language responds to the first foreign influence, but the very last stage of protection mode is the syntactic simplification which makes the attacking language less attractive for its speakers. It is then natural to look at languages in a rather competitive position only when they share essential characteristics in the language group. This is definitely novel since in the past there were never made any distinction concerning the languages of the same family with the other ones and as it was shown, this distinction is essential in our understanding of the sense of threat felt by any language, regardless of the type of language. This is then becoming a powerful contrastive tool to consider any future changes that may come as the speakers circulate much faster in the globalized world and therefore, the phenomenon of language change is more than ever dynamic.

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