

A Contrastive Analysis of English and Persian Word Formation Processes

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ABSTRACT

The present article try to discuss different word formation processes account of English and Persian. Words are considered as one of the most important components of language. There are some strategies by which new lexical items are formed in each language. The process of word formation is frequently used to add to the lexical repertoire of all languages. In order to arrive at this goal, we will examine such morphological strategies as “derivation”, “compounding”, “blending”, “abbreviation” and so forth.

Key words: Word formation, Nominal and adjectival compounds, English, Persian

1. INTRODUCTION

In its most general sense, word formation refers to the whole process of morphological variation in the constitution of words; including the two main divisions of inflection and derivation. In a more restricted sense, word-formation refers to the latter processes only, these being classified into such types as compositional or compound (e.g. black bird form the free elements black + bird) and derivational (e.g. national, nationalize the addition of the bound elements –al, -ize) (Crystal, 2003 502). The subject of word-formation has not until recently received very much attention from descriptive grammarians of English, or from scholars working in the field of general linguistics. As a collection of different processes- compounding, affixation, conversion, backformation and so on, about which, as a group, it is difficult to make general statements, word formation usually makes a

brief appearance in one or two chapters of a grammar (Adams, 1973: 3). Also, languages have the inner capacity of expanding themselves through a series of mechanisms in order to be more specific, to name new objects or ideas, to express a non-systemic meaning, to make distinctions in register and, sometimes, because it just happens to strike the fancy of a person or a group. There are six ways in which a language creates new words such as; by adding to them, by subtracting from them, by making them up, by doing nothing to them, by borrowing from other languages and by mistake. Practically all studies of inter-language word-formation (e.g. Broeder et al. 1993, 1996, Ivarez 2004, Pavesi 1994) agree that of the three word-formation processes mentioned above, compounding is the most frequent process employed by the learners. This also holds for L1 acquisition, where very young learners resort to compounding at a stage where their syntax is still extremely limited (e.g. Clark 1993). Broeder et al. (1993) show that in the interlanguage of their Basic Variety speakers, compounds tend to be used instead of target language derivatives. Across these studies, L2 learners use compounding innovatively as a compensatory strategy.

In Persian, compounding is head-initial, which means that the grammatical properties of the initial constituent determine the properties of the compound as a whole, as in rahe-ahan, lit. 'road-of-iron', i.e. 'railroad'. Obviously, for these learners the grammatical head of German compounds is also initial.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Aiguo (2003) discusses various ways of English and Chinese word formation so that similarities and differences are found between the two languages. He believes that these findings could have a better way of acquiring either or both of the two languages concerned. Hamdallah (1992) reviews different types of English word formation and discusses the need for word-formation teaching in EFL. Hoffmann et al (2009) compare seven new varieties of English as to their word-formation properties and trends. He outlines different methods of determining the extent of use and productivity rate of any word-formation category, and then he analyzes categories as compounding, affixation and conversion by comparing frequencies obtained by specifically devised tests. Tabatabaei (2011) tries to provide a number of facts in favor of the existence of an independent word formation component. As an example, author believes that a great number of the Persian compounds have

meanings which are predictable, yet different from their compositional meanings. Hayatdavoudi (2011) gives a descriptive-analytical account of English and Persian nominal and adjectival compounds. He discusses the orthography, stress pattern, meaning and headedness in English and Persian compounds; finally he suggests some implications for EFL instruction in terms of the interactive effects of Persian and English compounds. Hanawandy (2012) investigates derivational morphemes in English language versus in Kurdish language as a significant comparative analysis and points out the comparative analysis of derivational morphemes in both languages.

There are different ways of shortening and abbreviating in Persian language which are clipping, blending, back formation, and acronyms, but Persian linguists have not paid much attention to them or just very shortly refer to them. Some linguists even do not know them as a part of Persian language and regard them as ill-formed words (Zomorrodian, 2003). On the other hand, Sadeghi (1999) states that the scientific modern society has already encountered millions of scientific new words which have been derived from the West. There are two approaches to facing these words; the first one is adapting them with no change, and second one is suggesting a Persian equivalence for them. Sadeghi agrees with the second approach but does not accept the traditional methods of combination and affixation to achieve this goal. He rejects old approaches of word-formation (e.g. combination and affixation) and proposes new methods, even those which have not been used in Persian until now such as cutting (cutting a part of the word and putting it beside a complete word or another cut word, or cutting different parts of some words and putting them beside each other to make a new word), acronyms, clipping (cutting the last part of a word or collocation), and juxtaposition. He believes that applying these approaches can be useful in reducing lexical borrowing (Sadeghi, 1999).

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Persian and English compounds share some common features in regard to headedness, meaning and affixation. However, there are also differences between them. The subject of word-formation has not until recently received very much attention from descriptive grammarians of English, or from scholars working in the field of general linguistics. There are different ways of shortening and abbreviating in Persian language which are

clipping, blending, back formation, and acronyms, but Persian linguists have not paid much attention to them or just very shortly refer to them. So, The present article try to discuss different word formation processes account of English and Persian.

3. THE MAIN STRATEGIES OF THE PROBLEM

3.1. Derivation and compounding

Derivation and compounding, is of course that learners do not necessarily need morphologically complex words to communicate. Anything that complex words express, can also be expressed using simplex words. In other words, lexical morphology is optional, both for L1 systems and L2 systems. In order to take this to more familiar grounds, we can subdivide these general categories: when we talk about adding up to existent words we are referring to derivation and compounding, which, in fact, are the two more productive ways of creating new words in Persian and English respectively. The specific mechanisms associated with subtracting from the words are clipping, and then we have borrowings, mistakes (backformation or misspelling), and combining them, which can be subdivided into acronyms and blending (or portmanteaus).

3.2. Abbreviation

Abbreviations are categorized as written and spoken abbreviations. The principal characteristic of written abbreviations is that they are applied just in written language, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias and scientific books. So, each language possesses its own abbreviations and some of these abbreviations are more general and popular such as scientific abbreviations e.g. Fe= iron. These abbreviations are in large measure the same in all languages, since they are arbitrary and their origin is Latin or English. It should be pointed out that these words should be considered as borrowed words which are prevalent in Persian language. Due to the fact that they are so common in different Persian texts, it is better to use them with their original form and do not replace them because it may make the readers baffled at the time of facing new abbreviations.

Abbreviations which exist in different dictionaries and scientific books cannot be regarded as independent vocabularies. For instance, in most of the dictionaries, "A" is considered as "Arabic"; it is obvious that this usage is just in written language and no one applies it in spoken form. It can be the consequence of this fact that

such abbreviations do not have any functions like nominal groups or nouns; therefore, they are just limited in written language and used for indexing. Since long ago, using abbreviations has happened in shortening proper nouns, for example “Bayazid” has been used instead of “Abayazid”. Today, this application is even more, e.g. “Shamsi” is used instead of “Shamsolmolouk”, “Badri” instead of “Badrozaman”, “Esi” instead of “Esmail”, “Feri” instead of “Fereydoun”, “Zeynal” instead of “Zeynol Abedin”, “Abdol” instead of “Abdol Hossein”, “Mamali” instead of “Mohammad Ali”, “Ebi” instead of “Ebrahim”, and “Kati” instead of “Katayoun”. It can be noted that sometimes when abbreviating a word, a letter is also added, for example “i” has been added to “shamsi” and “Badri”, and mostly they do not follow an exact rule.

3.3. Clipping

Clipping is a process of word-formation in which an existing form is abbreviated. So it means cutting the last part of a word, for instance “carburetor” and “starter” are pronounced as “carburet” and “start” in colloquial speech (Tajvidi, 2000, 32). Some scholars have considered clipping process as a component of abbreviation (Bauer, 1988, p. 33), although it does not look correct. There are some Persian examples at the level of word and phrase like “blood pressure” which is pronounced “pressure” 40 and “passport” which is pronounced “pass”. This process frequently happens in colloquial language.

3.4. Backformation

In backformation process, a structural element is omitted from the derived word (Arkan, 2004) such as “edit” which is used instead of “editor”. A language informants form new vocabularies based on similar structures which they have in their mind; therefore, their new word is a word which has existed in advance in the inventory of that language. Against clipping, backformation process changes the word’s category, and recognizing the word’s history and priority needs to search for historical data of that language (Chegini, 2005, p. 47). Nowadays, backformation is not a usual shortening process and few words are being made through this process such as “market” which is used instead of “supermarket”.

3.5. Acronyms

Acronym is a process in which a word is formed through the combination of initial letters of a series of words. This created word can perform the role of noun in a sentence. Most of acronyms in Persian language have been made and spread by military organizations. There are some reasons behind spreading these acronyms which may be preventing from wasting time and money, intending to hide military terms due to security reasons, and shortening a very long and frequent title (Tajvidi, 2000, p. 32). Anyways, today, acronyms are highly applied both in writing and speaking.

Besides, there are some acronyms in Persian language which have been borrowed from English and have a high frequency. A large number of these acronyms are related to computers and international organizations such as NATO, NASA, and CPU and RAM. Like other Persian acronyms, function of the borrowed acronyms is also noun. For instance, "EPIC has announced that oil producers must reduce their daily quota." Such sentence are always being used in different newspapers; vocabularies like NHAJA and NZAJA cannot be regarded as abbreviated words, since through choosing initial letters of a series of words, a new word has been created, but when abbreviating a vocabulary, nothing happens except shortening the previous word. A considerable point is that sometimes just the initial letters of a string of words are chosen and sometimes the acronym is formed from the initial parts (for example two initial letters) of a group of words. Persian acronyms are pronounceable words which are not pronounced as separate letters.

3.6. Blending

Blending can be defined as combining two cut parts of some vocabularies. In this process we have at least two words, or a word and a nominal group. During the process of blending, apart of each word is cut and then, they are combined to make a shortened new word. For example "Havanirouz 41" stands for "army and air forces" or "paramedics" which is a combination of "para" (which means beside, or beyond) and medics. We should not consider blended words as ill-structured words or against Persian word-formation rules because firstly even if these words are wrong, informants use them and they are not aware of the words structures, and secondly, all linguists today believe that the correct form of a word is the form which is used by informants. So, even some words which are awkward to linguists may be accepted more by people, meet their needs and convey their

meaning. For example, the word “ashghalance” (which means garbage truck) is a combination of “ashghal” (which mean garbage) and “ance” which is a borrowed suffix. This word has been coined by ordinary people and is highly used in colloquial language. People have compared this word with other borrowed words such as “ambulance”, since today garbage trunks use a light like ambulances, so Persian informants have used both simile and analogy to transfer their meaning. Such words rapidly become popular among people. Another feature of such blended words is that the word’s meaning is clearly manifested in its form such as “footsal” (which means indoor soccer) is a combination of “foot” (which refers to football) and “sal” (which refers salon or any indoor arena). This process is not borrowed in Persian and has existed since long ago, but today it is more common than before. The difference between blending and collocation is that in collocation, two complete words are combined but in blending, a part of a word is combined with a part of another word and this combination creates a new vocabulary. Another difference is that a collocation is a nominal group which is always more than one word (even if there is no “and” between the words), but a blended word is just one word, not a nominal group.

4. CONCLUSION

All languages are constantly changing and in order to expand they have a series of word-formation processes and bears a variety of issues around it. Persian and English compounds share some common features in regard to headedness, meaning and affixation. However, there are also differences between them. Generally speaking, Persian compounds are more diverse and flexible. Either the leftmost or the rightmost constituent in Persian compounds can function as the semantic and syntactic head while English only allows the rightmost element as the semantic head. This may be due to the more inclusive phrase structure rules which have rendered English a head-last language. English compounds are distinguished from non-compound combinations via stress/accents while Persian compounds generally conform to the stress pattern of single words in isolation. Semantically, compounds express a single psychological reality. That is, the whole compound acts as a single entity and indicates a single meaning and concept (Koziel, 1973).. In English and Persian we have corresponding coinage mechanisms, although they vary in frequency and productivity. These processes are derivation, compounding, clipping, borrowing, backformation, acronyms and blending. Talking about the reason behind word-formation and especially about the use and frequency of certain mechanisms says a lot of the culture, and even though it is

not my intention to go any further in this essay, it is important to highlight the social, political and cultural factors that influence the change in word coinage over time

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