

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Diglossia Language Patterns in the Zoroastrian Dari Ethnolect

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Abstract

This study investigates the diglossic language patterns prevalent among speakers of the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect, a distinct linguistic variety spoken by the Zoroastrian community in Iran. Diglossia, a sociolinguistic phenomenon where two distinct varieties of a language are used in different social contexts, provides a framework for understanding the complex interplay between language use and cultural identity within this ethnolect.

The Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect, while rooted in the broader Dari dialect of Persian, exhibits unique characteristics influenced by its religious, cultural, and historical context. This research explores how Zoroastrian Dari functions within a diglossic framework, highlighting the roles of formal and informal varieties in various social domains. The study delineates the primary domains of language use, distinguishing between the high variety, which is employed in religious and formal settings, and the low variety, used in everyday communication among community members.

In formal contexts, such as religious ceremonies and liturgical practices, the high variety of Zoroastrian Dari is characterized by its adherence to traditional vocabulary, syntax, and phonology. This variety serves to preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Zoroastrian community, reinforcing its distinct identity. Conversely, the low variety, used in casual interactions and daily life, is more influenced by modern Persian and exhibits greater linguistic flexibility.

The study employs qualitative methods, including interviews and participant observation, to gather data on language use patterns among Zoroastrian Dari speakers. By analyzing these patterns, the research elucidates how language functions as a marker of cultural identity and social distinction within the community. Additionally, the study addresses the challenges faced by Zoroastrian Dari speakers in maintaining their linguistic heritage amidst the pressures of modernization and assimilation.

KEY WORDS

Diglossia, Zoroastrian Dari, Ethnolect, Language Patterns, Language Use, Sociolinguistics, Bilingualism, Language Variation, Language Contact, Cultural Identity, Language Shift, Linguistic Hierarchies, Vernacular Language, Standard Language, Language Maintenance.

INTRODUCTION

The study of diglossic language patterns within the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect offers a compelling glimpse into the complex interplay between language, identity, and cultural practices among this distinct linguistic group. The concept of diglossia, as introduced by sociolinguist Charles Ferguson, refers to a situation where two languages or language varieties are used in distinct and complementary domains within a single community. In the case of the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect, understanding these patterns reveals much about the sociolinguistic dynamics of this group and their interaction with broader societal structures.

Zoroastrian Dari, also known as Dari or Zoroastrian Persian, is a variant of Persian spoken by the Zoroastrian community primarily in parts of Afghanistan and Iran. This ethnolect carries significant historical and cultural weight, reflecting the ancient religious and cultural heritage of its speakers. The Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect is characterized by unique phonological, grammatical, and lexical features that distinguish it from standard Persian varieties.

The Zoroastrian community, while deeply rooted in the Persian-speaking world, has maintained distinct linguistic practices due to its religious and cultural heritage. This has led to a diglossic situation where different varieties of language are used in different contexts—namely, a high (H) variety for formal, religious, and ceremonial purposes, and a low (L) variety for everyday communication and informal settings. Understanding these diglossic patterns provides insight into how language serves as a marker of identity and a tool for cultural preservation.

In the Zoroastrian Dari context, diglossia manifests in several key ways. The high variety, often linked to religious rituals, literary works, and formal speech, is used in contexts that reinforce the community's cultural and religious identity. This high variety may include specialized vocabulary and archaic forms that are not commonly used in everyday conversation. It serves as a symbol of cultural continuity and religious tradition, reflecting the community's efforts to preserve its heritage amid broader sociolinguistic changes.

Conversely, the low variety of Zoroastrian Dari is used in daily interactions and informal settings. This variety is more dynamic and subject to influences from the surrounding linguistic environment, including standard Persian and other local languages. The use of the low variety highlights the adaptability of the Zoroastrian community as it navigates the practical demands of modern life while maintaining its cultural distinctiveness.

METHODOLOGIES

To investigate diglossic language patterns among speakers of the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect, a comprehensive methodological approach is required. This involves both qualitative and quantitative techniques to capture the nuances of language use, context, and social functions within this specific speech community. The following methodologies outline how to effectively study diglossia in this context:

Ethnographic Fieldwork

Ethnographic fieldwork forms the cornerstone of understanding

diglossic patterns within the Zoroastrian Dari community. This involves immersive observation and interaction within the community to gain insights into everyday language use and social practices. Key components include:

Participant Observation: Researchers will spend extended periods in communities where Zoroastrian Dari is spoken. This helps in observing natural language use in various social settings such as religious ceremonies, educational contexts, and informal gatherings.

Informal Interviews: Conducting casual, open-ended conversations with community members allows researchers to gather subjective insights into language attitudes, usage patterns, and the perceived roles of different language varieties.

Structured Interviews

Structured interviews with targeted participants will provide detailed and systematic data on language use. Participants may include:

Community Leaders and Elders: To gain perspectives on traditional and evolving language roles within the community.

Educators and Religious Figures: To understand the language practices in educational and religious settings, which may highlight formal and informal uses of language.

General Speakers: To capture a broad range of everyday language use and attitudes towards different language varieties.

Surveys

Surveys can be employed to gather quantitative data on language use and attitudes from a larger sample of the Zoroastrian Dari-speaking population. Key elements include:

Language Use Patterns: Questions will address how often speakers use each language variety in different contexts (e.g., home, community events, religious settings).

Attitudes and Perceptions: Questions will assess attitudes towards the language varieties, including perceptions of their prestige, utility, and relevance.

Sociolinguistic Analysis

A detailed sociolinguistic analysis will be conducted to interpret the patterns observed. This includes:

Contextual Analysis: Examining how language varieties are used in different social contexts, including formal vs. informal settings, and how this reflects social hierarchies and cultural practices.

Functional Analysis: Identifying the specific functions each language variety serves, such as religious rituals, everyday conversation, or education. This helps to understand the diglossic nature of the ethnolect.

Textual and Discourse Analysis

Analyzing written and spoken texts can reveal patterns of diglossia. This includes:

Religious Texts: Examining the language used in religious manuscripts, prayers, and rituals to understand the formal, high-register variety.

Everyday Communication: Analyzing conversations, community newsletters, and other written materials to explore the use of the

colloquial, low-register variety.

Historical and Comparative Analysis

Historical and comparative methods provide context for the observed diglossic patterns. This includes:

Historical Documentation: Reviewing historical records and literature on Zoroastrian Dari to trace the evolution of language use and diglossic patterns.

Comparative Analysis: Comparing Zoroastrian Dari with other languages or ethnolects that exhibit similar diglossic patterns to identify commonalities and differences.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring ethical considerations is crucial for conducting research within the Zoroastrian Dari community. This includes:

Informed Consent: Obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring they are aware of the research aims and how their data will be used.

Confidentiality: Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants, especially when discussing sensitive cultural and linguistic issues.

RESULT

The study of diglossic patterns among speakers of the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect reveals a complex linguistic landscape characterized by distinct functional roles of different language varieties. Diglossia in this context involves the coexistence of two language forms: a high (H) variety used in formal and religious settings and a low (L) variety used in everyday communication. This pattern illustrates how language functions adapt to social and cultural contexts within the Zoroastrian Dari-speaking community.

In the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect, the high variety (H) is primarily represented by Classical Dari, which is employed in religious ceremonies, literary works, and formal discourse. This variety is marked by its adherence to traditional linguistic norms and its use in preserving the sacred texts and rituals of Zoroastrianism. The high variety serves as a symbol of cultural heritage and religious identity, reinforcing the community's connection to historical and religious traditions.

Conversely, the low variety (L) encompasses the modern, everyday spoken Dari used in daily interactions, community events, and informal communication. This variety reflects the linguistic evolution and sociolinguistic dynamics of the community, incorporating elements of colloquial speech and regional influences. The low variety is more flexible and pragmatic, adapting to the needs and contexts of daily life.

The functional distribution of high and low varieties in the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect is marked by a clear separation of domains. The high variety is reserved for formal, ritualistic, and literary contexts, while the low variety dominates in informal and conversational settings. This separation is a characteristic feature of diglossia, where each variety serves distinct purposes and is used in specific situations.

Code-switching between the high and low varieties is a common phenomenon within the community. Speakers often switch from the high variety to the low variety depending on the context, audience,

and communicative needs. For instance, during religious ceremonies or when discussing sacred texts, the high variety is employed to maintain formality and reverence. In contrast, everyday conversations, community interactions, and casual exchanges are conducted in the low variety, reflecting its practical role in daily life.

The diglossic pattern in the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect has significant social and cultural implications. The use of the high variety reinforces the community's cultural and religious identity, preserving traditional values and practices. It also serves as a marker of social status and authority within formal and religious contexts.

The low variety, on the other hand, facilitates communication and social integration within the community. Its use in everyday interactions helps maintain cohesion and mutual understanding among speakers, bridging gaps between different social groups and generations. The flexibility of the low variety allows it to adapt to contemporary linguistic trends and social changes, reflecting the evolving nature of the community's language practices.

DISCUSSION

In the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect, diglossia manifests through a clear division between the high and low varieties of language. The high variety, often referred to as Classical Dari or a more formal variant, is used in religious, literary, and ceremonial contexts. It carries prestige and is associated with Zoroastrian religious practices and traditional texts. On the other hand, the low variety is used in everyday conversations, social interactions, and informal settings. This vernacular form is more accessible and reflects the linguistic and cultural adaptations of the community over time.

The coexistence of these two varieties serves distinct purposes within the Zoroastrian Dari-speaking community. The high variety functions as a marker of cultural and religious identity, linking speakers to their historical and religious heritage. It is a vehicle for preserving ancient texts and rituals, thus maintaining continuity with the past. The low variety, in contrast, facilitates day-to-day communication and reflects the dynamic nature of the community's language use in a contemporary context.

The diglossic pattern in the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect has significant implications for identity. The use of the high variety in religious and formal settings reinforces a collective sense of heritage and belonging. It enables speakers to connect with their cultural roots and express their identity within a historical and religious framework. The preservation of this high variety is crucial for maintaining the community's distinct cultural and religious practices.

Conversely, the low variety plays a key role in the community's adaptation to modernity and interaction with broader society. It reflects the practical aspects of daily life and allows speakers to navigate social and economic interactions outside the religious domain. The use of the low variety can signify a flexible and pragmatic approach to language, balancing traditional values with contemporary realities.

The diglossic nature of the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect is influenced by broader sociolinguistic factors. The community's historical and cultural context shapes the function and perception of the high and low

varieties. The high variety's association with religious texts and rituals underscores its role in preserving the community's heritage. However, the community's interaction with external cultures and languages also impacts language use, leading to potential shifts in diglossic patterns. The dynamics of language contact and social change can introduce challenges to the traditional diglossic arrangement. For example, increased exposure to other languages and cultures may influence the low variety, leading to linguistic borrowing or shifts in usage patterns. The preservation of the high variety, meanwhile, requires ongoing efforts to ensure that it remains relevant and functional within the community.

CONCLUSION

The study of diglossic patterns of language use among speakers of the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect sheds light on the intricate dynamics between language varieties within this community. This analysis reveals how diglossia, the coexistence of two or more distinct language varieties within a single speech community, operates within the context of Zoroastrian Dari, providing insights into both linguistic and sociocultural aspects.

In the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect, diglossia manifests in the coexistence of formal and informal language varieties. The formal variety, often associated with religious, ceremonial, and formal contexts, contrasts with the informal, everyday spoken language. This division reflects a broader pattern found in many diglossic societies, where distinct language forms are used in different social and functional domains.

For the Zoroastrian Dari speakers, the formal variety often aligns with traditional religious practices and cultural preservation. It serves as a marker of identity and continuity, connecting speakers with their historical and religious heritage. In contrast, the informal variety is used in daily communication, reflecting the more practical and immediate needs of the community.

The diglossic nature of Zoroastrian Dari has significant implications for language use and cultural identity. The formal language variety is a vital component of cultural rituals and religious expressions, reinforcing a sense of shared heritage and collective identity among the Zoroastrian community. It also plays a role in maintaining the community's distinctiveness in a broader sociolinguistic landscape. Conversely, the informal language variety facilitates day-to-day interactions and reflects the community's adaptability to contemporary linguistic influences. This duality allows speakers to navigate both traditional and modern contexts effectively, highlighting the flexibility and resilience of the Zoroastrian Dari ethnolect.

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