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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN PERSIAN AND TONEKABONI DIALECT

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ABSTRACT

Language is the mean of communication among people. Tonekaboni is one of the dialects of Mazandarani language which is spoken in the north part of Iran and the south parts of Caspian Sea. The present paper investigated some English idioms and expressions and their equivalents in Tonekaboni dialect to see how similar or different they are. It also compared the teenagers and the adults to see how much intelligible these idioms are for them in Tonekaboni dialect. Twenty Persian idiomatic expressions was chosen and typed from Persian and distributed among more than fifty informants who were mostly from nearby rural areas. They were asked to write the local equivalents of the expressions. Interview was also conducted among some illiterate and older locals to increase the validity of the results. The results showed that although the idiomatic expressions are semantically the same, but they are phonetically very different in the way that the new generation of teenagers cannot even understand them.

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INTRODUCTION

Mazandarani is the local language of Mazandaran, a province stretched along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, with a population of about three million. Among the living Iranian languages, Mazandarani boasts one of the longest written traditions (from the 10th to 15th centuries), roughly matching that of New Persian. This status was achieved during the long reign of the independent and semi-independent provincial rulers in the centuries after the Arab invasion. Several major works were written in Mazandarani, but all are lost, except some fragments preserved in the Persian works connected to the province (Borjian, 2001, 2004; Windfuhr, 1989). The geographical domain of Mazandarani, roughly within the present administrative boundaries of the province, has remained almost unchanged over the past millennium. It is still spoken in the historical cities as well as in modern industrial centers. Most speakers, however, dwell in a series of loosely knit villages spread over the plains of Mazandaran. They also live in individual mountainous settlements in the central-eastern Alborz, as far south as the suburbs of Tehran (Borjian, 2004; Windfuhr, 1989). The usage of Mazandarani, however, has been in decline. Its literary and administrative rank was lost to Persian perhaps long before the ultimate integration of Mazandaran into the national administration in the early 17th century. Considerable migration has occurred in modern times from the foothills into the littoral plains and towns of Mazandaran.

This demographic change has combined with the widespread use of Persian in gradually limiting the use of Mazandarani. An overwhelming majority of the population of the province is now bilingual. Moreover, Persian is increasingly influencing Mazandarani, which belongs to the northwestern family of Iranian languages, and, therefore, is mutually unintelligible with respect to Persian, a south-western language Borjian, 2001, 2004). Attempts have been made to promote the language in the later decades. Phraseology and idiomatic expressions are branches of linguistics that are closely related and deal with proverbs and idioms respectively. Seale's advice that we "speak idiomatically unless there is some special reason not to" (Seale, 1979, 50).

However, in Spain, a group of linguists claims that the use of proverbs and idioms is not advisable. The reason for this counsel is that they are generalizations of both knowledge and linguistic expression, which may be contradictory. In relation to other languages, Čermák (1998) says that proverbs have a high index of use and that 80% of them are prototypical, since they are used as general statements expressing accepted truth and shared experience. There has been a growing number of literary publications, mostly verse, but also proverbs, idioms, and vocabulary of various localities and sub-dialects that are being collected and published. Radio and television programs, both entertaining and educational, are regularly broadcast in Mazandarani. Since there exists a high mutual intelligibility among various Mazandarani sub-dialects, the broadcasts attract many listeners and are considered to be successful.

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Mazandaran's rural economy ranks high among the provinces of Iran, because of its rich soil and abundance of precipitation, in contrast to the arid plateau covering the bulk of Iran. It has so far been discussed that in Mazandaran a high level of sociocultural and political integration between the standard language, Persian, and the vernacular, Mazandarani, exists. Moreover, Mazandarani is neither the dominant language of any nation, nor do its speakers live across the border. Additionally, the lack of external factors, religious division, and economic inequality has allowed the peaceful co-existence of this linguistic division. Tonekaboni is one of the sub-dialects of Mazandarani which is very different from it in the way that sometimes they are not mutually intelligible. The present study focuses on Tonekaboni as a sub-dialect of Mazandarani. It is an investigation in idiomatic expressions and to see whether they are different from standard Persian or not.

The purpose of study

Although Persian is the official language of Iran, there are many regional languages and dialects spoken across the country. Most regional languages are related to Persian and belong to a larger "Iranian" family, itself a branch of Indo-European. Turkish, the major non-Iranian language, spoken in the north-western part of the country, is greatly influenced by Persian. In some parts of the country, this linguistic diversity coupled with religious differences has led to ethno-political conflicts (e.g. in the province of Kurdistan). The Caspian provinces of Mazandaran and Gilan enjoy a peaceful coexistence between their vernaculars and the lingua franca, Persian. There are a lot of sub-dialects in this region. Although this coexistence is very strong but there are a lot of phonological variations between Persian and this dialect to the extent that no Persian speaker of language can understand the same words. Among these are the idiomatic expressions that are completely different in phonological features. The present study is an investigation of these differences in Tonekabon to show how much variation exists between standard language, Persian, and this dialect in the north of Iran.

Definations of some key words

What is an Idiom?

An idiom is a word or phrase whose meaning cannot be deduced from the literal definitions and the arrangement of its parts. An idiom refers to a figurative meaning that is known only through its common use. In linguistics, idioms are widely assumed to be figures of speech and contradict the principle of compositionality; however, this has been always subject of debate. It is probably better to refer to idioms as John Saeed has said: words collocated together happen to become fossilized, becoming fixed over time. This collocation, words commonly used in a group, changes the definition of each of the words that often form the collocation. As an expression, the word-group becomes a team, so to speak. That is, the collocated words develop a specialized meaning as a whole and thus an idiom is created. So idioms are combination of words that has meanings that are different from the meanings of the individual words themselves.

They can have literal meanings in one situation and different idiomatic meanings in other situations. They are phrase which do not always follow the normal rules of meaning and grammar.

The Different Forms of Idiom

Depending upon the theoretical preconception, different kinds of sayings, figures of speech, nominal constructions, and twin formulas are all subsumed under idioms. Sometimes, the meaning of an idiom is similar to the meaning of a simple word, e.g., kicks the bucket, and means 'die'. See here how the idiomatic phrase gives its meaning in one word. There are also some expressions that are called partial idiom. In such idioms, one of the words has its common and formal meaning but the other has a figurative meaning as a result of special sequence. E.g. white wine that is in fact yellow. Comedians use such idioms as a joke. Metaphors are another kind of idioms. They are the word that has one or several figurative meanings in addition to their literal meaning. "He knew he was cooked when he saw his boss standing at the desk". Cooked means either caught or responsible for the wrong doings prior to being caught, one is finished or unfinished. There are also common idioms as verbal phrase that includes a verb and an adverb, like: put down, give in, make up and there are often simple words that are synonymous with such verbs like: quell, yield, invent. Proverbs are the most common idioms, with some difference in form, structure and function. The short speech or sentences that are generally known by many people, usually contains words of wisdom, truth or morals that are based on common sense or practical experience. They are often the description of a basic rule of conduct that all people generally follow or should follow. Proverbs are found in all languages.

Research Method

Whilst the researcher of article is from Tonekabon and lives at the place of residents gathers Information by using qualitative and field research in the type of ethnography, techniques of direct observation, problem statement and verbal interview and uses the section of theoretical grounds and documents from scientists' and authors' resources in this field.

Participants

More than fifty male and female Tonekaboni informants were used in this research. Fifteen were young, twenty were middle aged between thirty and forty five or more and the others were old above sixty. Some of these informants were educated from the high school degree to master degree. The researcher also interviews some old illiterate people because they are more conservative and resistant to changes in their local dialect.

Procedures

Inviting more than fifty Tonekaboni in this study, the process has been done as follows: Some Persian idioms were presented to them and they were asked to write their local Tonekaboni equivalents. There was a probability that the younger ones do not know all of local equivalents of the idioms because they had more contacts with Persian language via television and other communication means.

And moreover, they act intentionally to speak Persian and keep off from their dialect. The probability was right; the younger informants did not know more than 50% of Tonekaboni equivalent of the idioms. They only expressed Persian idioms in a different accent or asked their equivalents from their parents. But the middle aged and old participants knew the local Tonekaboni equivalents of the idioms. Although there are a lot of different vernaculars among Tonekabonian, but they all have agreement over these idioms and their application with some trivial phonological differences. It was concluded that most of Persian idioms are used in this dialect with the same form and meaning but with a different words and pronunciations.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

There are many idioms in Persian that without understanding these idioms a foreigner cannot understand the figurative meaning of most utterances. Some of these idioms are also prevalent in Tonekaboni dialect. Some of these idioms are native idioms borrowed from ancient times. Younger people usually don't understand them easily. Although Tonekaboni has its own idioms, but nowadays, Persian idioms have penetrated in this dialect with different pronunciations. This list presents some Persian idioms with their English and Tonekaboni equivalent and pronunciation.

In this research it is tried to show that Tonekaboni as a Sub-dialect of Mazandarani language must be taken into consideration in linguistic research, since this sub-dialect with more than three million speakers in a multilingual country can have a big influence on linguistics studies. This dialect is full of idioms and proverbs. These will disappear in course of time if we do not pay attention to them. Development of communication means and their influence on accents and dialects is ever-increasing and especially on native idioms and proverbs which have been in decreased use; they may be ignored in future completely just as many of them are not used now by young speakers.

During the work on this article we discovered that in comparison with elders, younger people usually cannot find the same idiom or proverb in their dialect when they hear a Persian's one. In addition, it is clear that Tonekabonians, because of their so similarity with other Iranian tribes in their world view, religion, and a common language origin, etc., have many similar idioms and proverbs that are different only in pronunciation, and sometimes in optional words. The result of the comparison of Persian and Tonekaboni idioms showed that almost all of Persian idioms are used in Tonekaboni dialect without any significant difference. In fact Tonekabonians used such Persian idioms or idiomatic expressions in their dialect but with a lot of phonological variations, so that they are not comprehensible for every person speaking Persian.

Table 1. Idiomatic expressions with their equivalents in Persian, English and Tonekaboni dialect

Persian Equivalent	English equivalent and its meaning	Tonekaboni Equivalent
1. ?æz kah kuh saxt-anff	Make a mountain out of chaff: make something seem much more important than it really is.	Šu-mar irad
2. Dær dæGhiGhe nævæd	At the eleventh hour: at the last minute; almost too late	Tom-man bæzeh
3. Mesl-e ?ab-e xord-æn-e	Be a piece of cake: be very easy	Çom-brik-e bæ-res
4. Vær šekæst-e šod-æn	Be broke: be without money.	Te-leng dær-ša
5. Kuft-e, mord-e	Beat: exhausted; very tired (adj.)	Xæs-te æsb
6. Zæd be kuçe Ali čæp	Beat around the bush: evade an issue; avoid giving a direct answer.	Ne-di- bon hei-te/neš-na-ve-sen hei-te
7. Bæd dæhan, bæd zæban	Blabber mouth: a very talkative person, especially one who use impolite expressions.	Bi-ča-ke dæ-hæn
8. Xun be juš ?amæd-æn	Blow one's top: become extremely angry	Jom-le bei-te
9. "Del-æm por-e xun ?æst."	I am sore-hearted: "I am too sad."	Del- mi -dærd dær-e
10. mesl-e kæneh çæsbid-æn	To stick like a leech, bug; annoy, bother, to molest a person	Dæ-çe-ke vaš
11. kælle šæGh / yek dændeh	Bull-headed: stubborn; inflexible.	Xæ-re gær-den
12. ta xoru xan	Burn the midnight oil: study/work all night or until very, very late at night.	Ta bo-Ghe sæg
13. Dæst-e kæs-i næmæk næ-dašt-æn	Nobody understands your works value."	Dæst ne-mek ne-da-re
14. gereft-æn	To get: to understand	Bei-tom/he-li bæ-ba
15. Dæst be dæst-e hæm dad-æn	Give someone a hand: help someone	Tæ-ke
16. Xam	Green: inexperienced	Næ-pet-e
17. del-e kæs-i gereft-æn	Feel blue: feel sad and depressed	Los-e bi-yar-de
18. Dæst bænd bud-æn	Have one's hands full: be extremely busy.	Tul de-ma-se-se
19. ?æz zir-o zebær-e čiz-I xæbær dašt-æn	Know something backwards and forwards: know/understand something completely.	Ji-ko pi dær bl-yar-den
20. ?atæš be-bar-æd/ seyl be-y-a-y-æd	Rain or shine: (describing something scheduled) no matter what the weather	Xo š-te ye ke-le jo-re ku-te-ne
21. Dæst-e kas-i ra xand-æn	Read someone's mind: know what someone is thinking	Ser-re sær kæ-ten
22. ?aš-i ?æst ke xod-eš poxt-e	Someone's made his/her own bed; now let him/her lie in it.: Someone has caused his/her own problems; he/she will have to solve them himself/herself.	In Xa-ke Xo-deš Xoš-tl sær dæ-ker-de
23. Dir ya zud	Sooner or later: eventually	Hæ-læ mæ-læ
24. Sorx šod-æn	To become red	?ab bæ-ba
25. sæxt gereft-æn	take it easy: relax	Šu-mar næ-baš

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