



ARABIC LANGUAGE I. ARABIC ELEMENTS IN PERSIAN

ARABIC LANGUAGE

i. Arabic elements in Persian

The profound influence of Arabic in Iran can be traced to its social, religious, and political significance in the wake of the Muslim conquest, when it became the language of the dominant class, the language of religion and government administration, and by extension, the language of science, literature, and Koranic studies. With the fall of the Sasanian dynasty and the eclipse of the Zoroastrian religion and clergy, the literary, Middle Persian language, Pahlavi, lost its two main promoters. By the time that Darī Persian (the spoken language of the Iranian capital—*darī*, lit.: “of the court”—and the northeastern province of Khorasan) was promoted to the rank of the written language in the 3rd/9th century, most of the Pahlavi scientific, literary, and administrative terms were no longer used and were replaced by their Arabic equivalents. After the 6th/12th century, the frequent use of adorned and rhymed style in Persian prose led to the introduction of numerous Arabic words. The proportion of Arabic words in Persian was about thirty percent in the 4th/10th century and reached some fifty percent in the 6th/12th (Lazard, “Les emprunts,” p. 61). These lexical elements were followed by a number of Arabic grammatical elements, the high frequency of which in turn affected the Persian phonological system. Little is known of the real nature and extent of



these influences on classical Persian; written documents do not reveal whether the Arabic grammatical and lexical elements met with in classical Persian texts are part of the spoken language or merely learned additions. In contemporary Persian, however, various layers of influence can be discerned.

1. *Phonological elements.* In contemporary Persian two phonemes are essentially met with in Arabic words: the glottal stop (from Arabic *alef* and *ʿayn*) and the uvular stop (Arabic *q*). The glottal stop is distinctive at the beginning, middle, and end of words, whether following or preceding consonants or coming between vowels: (1) *masʿūd* “fortunate” cf. *maṣūn* “kept safe;” *baʿd* “afterwards, after” cf. *bad* “bad.” (2) *eʿāda* “to repeat, to cause to return” cf. *efāda* “giving profit.” (3) *sūʿ* “badness, evil” cf. *sū* “direction, side;” *jozʿ* “part, portion” cf. *joz* “except, besides.”

The Arabic post-velar stop *q* is pronounced in Persian like the Arabic and Persian *ḡ*: initially as a voiced velar stop, and after vowels as a voiced velar fricative. In Islamic sources *q* is described as a post-palatal voiced stop while it is traditionally pronounced by modern Qurʾān reciters as a velar voiceless stop, corresponding to the old pronunciation of the bedouin and town-dwellers respectively. The two phonemes *q* (stop) and *ḡ* (fricative) are still kept separate in certain southeastern districts of Iran, especially in Kermān and part of Fārs.

Other Arabic phonemes are rendered in Persian as follows: *s*, *sĀ*, and *t* as *s*, a voiceless sibilant; *z*, *zĀ*, and *d* as *z*, a voiced sibilant; *t* and *tĀ* as *t*, a voiceless dento-alveolar stop; *h* and *hĀ* as *h*, an aspirate. The remaining Arabic phonemes are realized like their Persian equivalents.

2. *Grammatical elements.* Arabic plural forms: (1) *-āt*. The use of this ending is limited to the very many Arabic nouns and participles borrowed into Persian. Persian-speakers also use it with several Arabic nouns and participles where it is not used by the Arabs, e.g. *wāredāt* “imports” and *šāderāt* “exports.” In the course of time this ending has become more generalized, and occurs even in such geographical terms as *Šemīrānāt*, *Eṣṭahbānāt*, *Bawānāt*. The exclusively Persian ending *-jāt* is restricted to a number of words ending in a vowel; it seems to have originated in the plurals of arabicized words with singular in *-a*, from Mid. Pers. *-ag*: *mīvajāt* “fruits,” *rūz-nāmajāt* “daily-report books,” *ʿamalajāt* “workmen” (from Arabic *ʿamala*, plur. of *ʿamel*), *šīrīnījāt* “sweets,” *sabzījāt* “vegetables.” Another Persian form derived from *-āt* not found in Arabic is *-īyāt*, originally the plural of Arabic-*īya(t)*. In contemporary Persian



–*īyāt* has acquired a certain degree of autonomy, its use being mostly restricted to specifying various forms and styles of poetry, e.g. *pandīyāt* “moral poems” (from *pand* “advice”), *robāīyāt* “tetrastichs” (sing. *robāī*). (2) Broken plurals. Arabic broken plurals are used mostly in the written language. In the spoken language they are sometimes counted as singulars or as weak plurals and may receive the Persian plural ending –*ha@*. Such repluralization occurs frequently in classical and archaic Persian. Words of Persian origin have occasionally been given broken plurals, e.g. *asātīd* “professors, masters” (sing. *ostād*), *ronūd* “sagacious people” (sing. *rend*).

Nunation. This Arabic syntactic element was introduced into Persian through its accusative form used adverbially. Adverbs of Persian origin constructed in this manner are rare (and stigmatized by purists): *nāčāran* “unwillingly, helplessly,” *ĵānan* “wholeheartedly,” *nežādan* “ethnically.”

Article al-. This element is commonly used in compounds borrowed from Arabic, where it functions to form various types of compounds: *kaṭīr al-entešār* “of vast circulation,” *sarī al-enteqāl* “shrewd,” literally, “of quick intelligence,” *amīr al-moʻmenīn* “Commander of the faithful,” *ḥaqq al-taʻlīf* “book royalty,” *beʻl-nesba* “relatively,” *beʻl-aks* “vice versa.”

The noun of intensity. Arabic adjectives of the form *faʻāl*, which add to the primary meaning of an adjective the idea of intensity or habit, are frequently used in Persian, as in Arabic, to indicate professions and trades: *bannā* “builder,” *naĵĵār* “carpenter.” At times this form has generated words used solely in Persian: *tabbāt* (from the Arabic root ṬBT “an employee who registers letters,” *żabbāṭ* (from the Arabic root ŻBṬ) the same meaning; *kaffāš* (from Persian *kafš* “shoes”) “shoemaker.”

3. *Lexical elements. Phonetic changes*. Arabic words and morphemes in Persian have undergone the following changes:

Assimilation. (1) Assimilation of vowels to vowels: *a > ā*: *nahār* “lunch” > *nāhār*; *e > ā*: *lehāf* “quilt” > *lāhāf* (colloq.); *e > a*: *demāg* “nose” > *damāg*; *o > ū* uuu: *borūz* “appearance” > *būrūz*; *šoʻūr* “tact” > *šūʻūr* (colloq.). (2) Assimilation of vowels to consonants. *a > e* before and after *s, z, š, ĵ*: *hajr* “separation, cut” > *hejr*; *šakl* “form” > *šekl*; *dabḥ* “sacrificing” > *debhĀ*; *satr* “covering” > *setr*.

Dissimilation. With few exceptions, *a* changes to *e* when in a second, open, and unstressed syllable: *ḥarakat* “movement” > *ḥarekat*; *maʻrafat* “knowledge” >



ma'refat; *ma'darat* “apology” > *ma'derat*.

Syncope. This change sometimes takes place in cases where an unstable vowel, especially *a*, occurs in a medial syllable before a stressed one: *saraqat* “theft” > *sa'erqat*; *zohara* “Venus” > *zohra*; *ḥayawān* “animal” > *ḥaywān*.

Change of *ā* to *u* @ before a nasal. This change, restricted to the spoken language, affects both genuine Persian and Arabic words: *ḥaywān* > (pronounced) *heyvūn*; *ḥammām* “bath” > *ḥam(m)ūm* ; *dokkān* “shop” > *dok(k)ūn*.

Analogical changes. The pronunciation of certain plural nouns is modified to follow the pronunciation of their singulars: *neqāt* “points” is changed to *noqāt* after its singular *noqta*. The same is true of the plural form of *nokta* “subtle saying,” properly *nekāt* but changed to *nokāt*. Certain nouns (or adjectives) derived from adjectives (or nouns) are likewise shaped after their base forms: *šajā'at* “bravery” is changed to *šojā'at* under the influence of the form *šojā'* “brave.”

Grammatical changes. These include nouns and adjectives that are used as adjectives in Persian: *jam'* “brought together,” *zīād* “too much, many,” *kalāš* “liberated,” *maskara* “ridiculous, droll, absurd.” Certain Arabic verbs—with or without their modifiers—are also used at times as adjectives or adverbs: *lam-yazra'* “arid,” *lā-yanḥal* “indissoluble,” *lā-yanqaṭe'* “unceasingly,” *yaḥtamel* “probably.” A number of Arabic conjunctive pronouns and the verbs determining them are used as nouns: *mā-ḥarā* “event, adventure, thing past,” *mā-ḥaṣal* “result.”

Semantic changes. The sporadic nature of these changes in meaning makes it difficult to classify the examples. The lexical elements themselves may be divided as follows: (1) Words of religious significance. These words retain their original meanings in Persian: *āya* “Koranic verse,” *sūra* “Koranic chapter,” *ḥehād* “holy war,” *ḥajj* “pilgrimage to Mecca.” This group also includes proper names such as *Ḥosayn*, *Alī*, *Fāṭema*, taken from the names of Shi'ite saints. (2) Words with administrative and political content, borrowed as a result of the Arab political domination: *ḥākem* “ruler,” *moḥtaseb* “police superintendant,” *kalīfa* “caliph,” *solṭān* “sovereign,” *amīr* “commander.” (3) Scientific terms borrowed after the composition of scientific and literary works in Persian. These Arabic loanwords dominate the terminology of Persian scientific writings. (4) Literary devices, words introduced for the sake



of rhyme and meter, avoidance of repetition, or stylistic embellishment. Examples include such Arabo-Persian doublets as *sen(n)/sāl* “age, life span,” ‘*omr/zendagī* “life, age,” *jahd/kūšeš* “effort.” Arabic broken plurals and such morphological forms as the present and past participles and intensifiers probably fall in this category also. (5) Everyday expressions, words introduced into Persian as a result of direct contact between the Arabs and the Iranians: *salām* “greetings, salutation,” ‘*alaf* “hay, grass,” *gādā* “food,” *kabar* “news.”

Chronologically, the introduction of Arabic lexical elements can be divided into three phases. Religious and common words, together with certain administrative terms, were borrowed with the initial contact between Arabs and Iranians. Scientific terminology was adapted with the composition of scientific works in Persian during the 4th/10th and 5th/11th centuries. Literary language, including abstract words and the majority of Arabic infinitives (*mašdar*) and verbal nouns (*esm-e mašdar*), was first utilized during the 5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries.

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