

## Mixing English in Persian Movies Discourse: Will This Continuing Mixing Harm the Persian Language?

Shahla Simin, Ph. D  
Farhangian University, Iran  
shahlasimin@yahoo.com

Fereshteh Teimouri  
English Department, University of Isfahan  
teimouri.fereshteh@yahoo.com

Hosna Kasmaee, Graduate Student  
English Department, University of Isfahan  
hosnakasmaee@yahoo.com

### Abstract

Nowadays, many English words can be seen in print advertisement, newspapers and journals. In this respect, television movies and serials are not exceptions. TV as the most popular mass media has a great impact on people's everyday language. To this end, this paper intended to investigate whether or not the usage and mixing of English words in Iranian TV serials is understandable for Iranian audience or not, considering the fact that many people, more specifically those who are not well educated or not technology users, do not understand even a word of English. For this purpose, one of the most popular TV serial called *Paytakht* (Capital City) broadcasted on Nourouz Holidays 1393 (Iranian New Year, 2014) was analyzed. In spite of constrained use of English in TV programs, these serials wanted to illustrate people's inclination to use English words because of some reasons. The results showed that these alien words are not totally comprehensible and appropriate to all Iranian families at different levels of education. Only a few non-academic educated TV watchers could guess the meaning through the context. As a result, these serials that were produced for all levels of Iranian family in general could block comprehension and may harm Persian language more specifically for the young.

**Key Words:** Movie discourse, Persian language, mixing languages

### Introduction

The usage of English words in media discourse is a common phenomenon these days. Whether it is printing press or public broadcasting, usage of English words directly influences everyday language of people. This is a widespread event as a result of English being the language of science and technology. Several investigations has been directed all over the world to study its causes as well as its effects. English words are also penetrating the advertising discourse. The

influence of ‘hyperglobalization’ and ‘diversity marketing’ in recent years has led copywriters to use English as the most favored language of global advertising (Bhatia, 2006). English is the most commonly used language in advertising messages in non-English-speaking countries serving as the language of modernity, progress, and globalization (Piller, 2003). The reasons for using the English language in Persian print advertising discourse change from attention getting, persuasion, innovation and creativity, prestige, inevitable technological words to fun and memorability. Different reasons has been cited as the inclination toward using English words in advertising, but the question is that whether these words are comprehensible for all people. In order to investigate common people’s understanding of these English words a popular TV serial was analyzed, since TV serials attract different group of people with different ages and education background. Whether you are a school boy, a house wife, a clerk, a trade’s man, a worker or university student, TV serials can fill about forty minutes of your leisure time every day. In this study we have chosen a popular TV serial (Paytakht 3), being broadcasted during Nourooz 1393 in IRIB1 (Iranian New Year, 2014). A lot of English words have been used in the conversation of different characters especially young characters. The main reasons for the characters using English words were ‘prestige’ and ‘fun’. The character named ‘Arastoo’, being a transit driver used a lot of English words in his conversation ignoring the fact that his counterparts don’t understand his speech, however, Arastoo wanted to show that he is more prestigious than other characters and this fact is reflected in his language, too. On the other hand, the genre of this serial was comedy, and these alien words flavored its comic effect.

As the people often imitate the language of media (especially television), we witnessed the wide reflection of these English words in the people’s daily conversations. The people want to achieve two goals by this imitation, first they want to seem more professional, and second as these words have become familiar for all people, and therefore the people are reminded of the comic conversations in the serial. It has been proved that movies can be good channels through which one can improve the lexicon of his vocabulary, as Roohani and Rabiei (2011) demonstrated that watching movies reinforces the incidental learning of formal and informal vocabulary. But most of the people watch national TV in leisure time and not for learning English.

## Method

For the purpose of the analysis of the extent of comprehensibility of the English words being used in the serials, a 13 episodic TV serial called *Paytakht* (Capital City)) directed by Sirous Moghadam (Iranian director), broadcasted on Nourouz (Iranian New Year, 2014) was chosen. The serial being both social and comedy in genre, was the story of couple of families living together and the scenario dealt with the conflicts which came out of the relationship between these families. One of the characters named Arastoo is a transit driver needed to know English for his travels. He is a beginner in learning English, so he tries to use English words in his daily conversation even with his relatives and friends in Iran who are not quite familiar with these foreign words. As a results, in this study, the English words used by Arastoo were extracted from the movie, then they were listed and given to the participants of the study to check their understanding of the English words used in this popular movie.

## Participant

The sample of study were 40, both male and female, ranging from 24-53 years of age – none of them had academic education at higher levels. They all had watched the serial during Norouz (New Year) and were quite aware of the plot of the story. Their English level was to the extent that they were exposed to on the media and their cellphones.

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## Data Collection Procedures

All 13 episodes of the serial were watched carefully by the researchers and 27 English words and expressions were detected through the conversations. Some of them could be easily understood by ordinary people, because the exact meaning was indicated in the conversation. And the meanings of some other words couldn't be easily understood because these words were used without any hint. On the other hand, there were some other words which were used in more than one episode onetime with clue but the other time without any clues. The English words and expressions were divided into three groups (Table 1). In the first group, we have the words with their exact meanings in the characters' give and take of speech. In the second group, are words used without any clues and definition. The third group included the words that were used in the first group but this time without any clue or definition, these words were used more than once

through all the episodes. For each word, a separate video track was made each lasting 45 seconds to 2 minutes of the serial. Each video track was played once for each participant, at the same time they were asked to write the definition of the alien words the way they understand according to the table.

Table 1.

List of English words used in Paytakht Serial

Group 1	Handling- time sharing- license- luxury- out- silent- tiger- change- slim fit- thank you- what to do what not to do- forty two- time- free- March- hyper- reject
Group 2	Chart- driver- depression- good night- baby- God- finish- down- yes- head
Group 3	Time sharing- hyper- handling

## Results

### First Category of words

From the obtained data collected from 40 participants, for each list of words, we received different feedbacks. The words with clue could be easily understood by the participants. To mention some examples we can say that most of the participants could write the meaning of “luxury” as (خوب-عالی-با شکوه) , and “thank you” as (متشکرم- ممنون) which were close to the right meanings of these words in English. All of the participants guessed truly the meanings of “reject”, “silent”, and “thank you” because they were quite familiar with their meanings through the use of cellphones+, computer and media. Some of the participants who received less education, got confused even when they explicitly heard the meaning of word through the very conversation. This was the case for the words “March”, “tiger”, and “handling”. These participants repeatedly asked about the meanings of these words because of their confusion. In general, most of the participants were able to guess the meanings of the first group correctly according to the clues in the characters’ conversations and also participants’ familiarity with the foreign words used in cellphones or computers.

### Second Category of words

The words in this group didn’t give any hints toward their meanings to the participants. They were used as examples of code switching in Persian. For examples, in the sentence” اصلا نباید

شاکرشد را برساند driver " chart اروپا " the words "driver" and "chart" are the examples of code switching. The participants had trouble in understanding the meanings of second group words except the words "God" and "yes", which the participants were frequently exposed to through the conversations of the young generation. On the other hand, the words "baby" and "head" have different meanings and the participants mentioned some meanings which were different from those meanings used and meant by the characters in the serial. The words "baby" and "head" meant "dear" and "a person in charge of" in the serial, but the participants thought of these word as "بچه" (kid) and "سر" (part of body), because the participants have usually been exposed to these words in the sense of their common meanings in the advertisements and school English books. Generally speaking, the participants used their back ground knowledge to guess the meanings of the second group words. The written meanings for this group of words were mostly wrong.

### **Third category of words**

The participants were exposed to the words of this group while they heard the same words before in another video track for the first group. But this time there is no hint, clue or definition in the video track for the audience to understand the meaning of the alien words. Most of the participants were not aware of the fact that they had written the meanings of these words for other situations of the serial. Although they understood the character's conversation as a whole, they couldn't write the true meaning of these words. Therefore, findings are similar to those of the second group of words in which the meanings of the words were not comprehensible for the audience.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The serial "Paytakht" being social and comic in genre depicts the real life of ordinary people, their concerns, their laugh and sorrow in the modern world. As a consequence, its characters are archetypes of modern people. In this respect, the character "Arastoo" as an archetypal of the young generation tries to use English words in his daily speech to show high prestige and to be seen as a more knowledgeable person in his hometown. We can also count some other reasons for using English words in this serial for instance, this character "Arastoo" being a transit driver wants to improve his speaking by switching to English in his daily speech in Persian. Another important reason was to create a fun situation in which the other characters feel confused and

crazy when not understanding the English words. Using English words was the very tactic by which the screen writer could depict an archetypal young generation as well as adding fun and humor to the TV serial.

Young generation willing to seem up-to-date imitate the language they read or hear through media. As mentioned by Shooshtari and Allahbakhsh (2013), Bilingual advertisements can be regarded as the exclusive register of "prestige" in advertising discourse. As Martin (2002) and Vaičėnienė (2006) argued English serves as an index of modernization, prestige, and technological superiority. In this respect, national TV as the most popular mass media is a good source for the young's imitation. The question here is that does this continuing mixing of English and Persian harm our language. In spite of Persian Language Academy's attempts to purify language from foreign words, using English words in media is unavoidable. Persian Language Academy which was established in 1981 has attempted to substitute some new words for the borrowed words (Schirru, Simin, & Dabaghi 2012). Language like all the things in this world is changing constantly and entrance of English words is inevitable as well.

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In sum, the study of English words used in "Paytakht Serial" showed that the audience could not detect the exact meaning of the alien words when there was no hint or clue but they could easily understand the content of the characters' conversation. According to the findings, in spite of the fact that inserting few English words cannot block comprehension, it can easily harm Persian language in long time of exposure. In addition, hearing some English words adds flavor to its fun aspect. In fact, this strategy is a persuasion for the audience to follow the serial and the reasons as noted in a similar study by Shooshtari and Allahbakhsh (2013) can be the prestige, technology, innovation and fun.

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