

## Iranian Students' Attitudes Towards English Loanwords in Persian with a Focus on Gender Differences



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### Abstract

The English language has affected nearly every language community in the world. Persian is no exception as many English words have been borrowed in Persian. This study was non-experimental quantitative-descriptive research employing an approach to examine the Iranian postgraduate students' attitudes towards English lexical borrowings and if there was a difference between the attitude of male Persian speakers and female Persian speakers. To fulfill the purpose of this study, two sets of questionnaires were distributed among 60 Iranian students majoring in law and business through snowball sampling. The quantitative data were collected by means of two sets of questionnaires and entered into SPSS and the frequencies, percentages, and mean of the individual items were calculated and analyzed. The data analyses showed evidence of positive attitudes of students towards English loanwords. The results also indicated that the growth of social media has a great effect in the use of English words which seems to be kept across both genders. All in all, it was concluded that attitudes towards English loanwords in Persian were positive, yet there was not a statistically significant correlation between Iranian female students and Iranian male participants. The study contributes to our understanding of the nature of lexical borrowings from English into Persian. Therefore, an implication of this study is that English loanwords must only be used appropriately and when necessary because misuses of them will result in weakening and deterioration of the Persian language.

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## Introduction

Sociolinguists always believe that languages do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they often have contact with one another. Hojati et.al. (2013) stated that different world languages have come into varying degrees of contact with each other and have had different influences on one another. Accordingly, language contact and the influence of languages on one another is a very common phenomenon. Such contact results in language borrowing, which has been a favorite topic of discussion from various approaches by different researchers. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) defined borrowing as “a kind of blending foreign features to the language of an indigenous group by the speakers of that language. This language was maintained, but it experienced certain modifications due to those additional features (p. 37)”.

Like many other languages, Persian is not pure and has gone through some modifications as well. In fact, it has borrowed a large number of loanwords from European languages, including French, Arabic, and English. The influence of English on Persian is not a new phenomenon. However, in the last two decades, it has gained momentum because of globalization and new technologies.

The Academy of Persian Language and Literature has tried to fight the influx of foreign words. However, many new Persian equivalents for the foreign terms coined by this association failed to attract the attention of speakers of Persian. With loanwords being influential in daily communications of Persian speakers, especially teenagers and young generations, it can be of great value to consider how this affects the way that people in Iran feel towards the usage of these terms. The main purpose of this study was to describe the attitudes of English loanword users by Iranian postgraduate students if there is a difference between the attitude of male Persian speakers and female Persian speakers.

The motive for selecting this topic was insufficient research of lexical borrowings from English considering Persian speakers' attitudes and perceptions. As a matter of fact, some influential research has been done on the absorption of English loanwords into the Persian system, yet few of them deal with the attitudes of Iranians and the relationship between gender and the use of Anglicism. As a result, the current study would be helpful to elaborate on the attitudes of Persian speakers about English-based vocabularies as well as the concept of borrowing.

### Literature Review

A loanword mainly is a word adopted from one language and entered another language without translation. English loanwords are lexical materials stemming from English that are incorporated into a different language. English as the current lingua franca and the international language has been the main source of borrowing for many languages. According to Görlach (2003), the main reasons for English being at the forefront of global languages are mainly of historical, economical, and political nature, including the Industrial Revolution in 19th century Britain and North America as well as British colonialism. Görlach also stated that the widespread use of English made it a source of loanwords for other languages rather than a recipient. This is not to say that English does not borrow from other languages as words like kindergarten (from German) or sushi (from Japanese) demonstrate. However, English by itself is an influential resource for the acquisition of new words for other languages, and as a result “reflects the importance and status it holds as a leading language” (Kowner & Rosenhouse, 2008, p. 4).

Hoque et. al. (2021) conducted a study on lexical borrowing from English into Bangla short stories. The researchers examined five Bangla short stories selected based on purposive sampling. They reported that an increasing number of English lexes are gradually entering publications in Bangla. According to the findings of this study, they conclude that English has left both positive and negative noticeable effects on Bangla. The findings indicate that although loanwords can enrich Bangla, they may also result in marginalizing the language by replacing some of its lexical items. In a different study, Yegt (2014) paid attention to the attitudes towards English loanwords in Dutch news broadcasts by taking the participants’ gender and age into consideration. The findings highlighted the fact that female participants have more positive attitudes towards English loanwords in comparison to male participants. The research also indicated that most participants do not prefer alternative words to the loanwords since none of the twelve loanwords were replaced with a Dutch alternative by the majority of the participants.

Daulton (2011) investigated English learners’ attitudes towards English-based loanwords in Japan. To do so, he used a questionnaire to examine 113 freshmen’s attitudes towards English loanwords at a private mid-level University. The research concluded that students were ambivalent and that it could not determine the relationships between English proficiency and English-based loanwords attitudes. In another study, Daulton (2004) suggested that English-Japanese loanwords

are not only a useful source of vocabulary but also a beneficial tool in learning English. Similarly, Rüdiger (2018) investigated South Korean students' attitudes towards English loanwords and their use. Rüdiger also stated that although English has a certain amount of prestige in Korean society and is considered a need for professional advancement, usage of English loanwords is evaluated mainly negatively or with mixed reactions.

Hatanaka and Pannell (2016) conducted a different study on English loanwords and made-in-Japan English in Japanese with six native speakers of Japanese and six native speakers of English. The research purpose was to examine students' attitudes toward made-in-Japan English. The results revealed that students' attitudes toward made-in-Japan were mixed. Native speakers of Japanese had a range of mixed reflection when they were informed that the English-derived words are not used outside of Japan while Native speakers of English generally agreed that the terms were in some way creative, although they found some of them confusing.

A good number of Iranian studies investigated English in Iran from different perspectives. In their recently published 'English in Contemporary Iran', Zarrinabadi and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2018) have comprehensively studied the history and current status of English in Iran. Two other studies have studied both the attitudes of Iranian learners towards World Englishes and the impact of teaching lingua franca on learners' skills and have reported a positive attitude and also a significant impact on Iranian learners' skills (Rezaei, et.al., 2018; Rahimi & Ruzrokh, 2016)

In another research carried out by Mashhadi Heidar et.al. (2017), the researchers intended to study the frequency of occurrence of Anglicism in the speech of young Iranians. The works of Riazi (2005), Sharifian (2008; 2010), and Hosseini Goodrich (2020) also investigated English and the uses of English in Iran.

Moreover, English has various uses in Iran, the most important one is being not only the language of wider communication but also the standard language. Some Iranians intentionally use English in both written and spoken communications in order to sustain the learned knowledge. Additionally, many Persian speakers, particularly the younger generations, mix some English words and expressions into their daily Persian communication because it is considered to be prestigious (Hosseini Goodrich, 2020). However, Islamic Republic News Agency (2017) reported that the immoderate use of loanwords among teenagers and younger adults threaten Persian purity and jeopardizes its prestigious status among Farsi users (cited in Hosseini Goodrich, 2020).

Although the Academy of Persian Language and Literature has always endeavored to coin Persian equivalents of English loanwords, Iranians, particularly younger generations, have always shown a positive attitude and high desire to learn and use English words.

In a quantitative study, Mashhadi Heidar et.al. (2017) investigated the frequency of occurrence of English loanwords among Persian speakers in terms of three variables of age, gender, and educational status. The researchers employed a corpus of a target telegram group as the main source of data collection and analyzed a total number of 320 Anglicism items. To collect the samples of Anglicism words in Persian, the researchers read the total extant posts of the target group and jotted down instances of each type of loanword. The research findings revealed that the frequency of Anglicism in Persian is highly correlated with the variables of age, gender, and educational class. The gender-based analysis of Anglicism frequency in Persian indicated that there is a relationship between the gender of participants and adoption of English loanwords. The research also concluded that Iranians' tendency to use English loanwords is increased as the educational level of speakers increases.

Abdi and Nazari (2016) investigated the changes occurring in the application of Persian vocabularies by taking users' age and gender into consideration. The results of the study revealed that the recent growth in the use of social networks and the virtual space led to more significant use of English loanwords among different age groups and across both genders.

Moreover, in a study regarding the pronunciation of loanwords, Hojati (2012) examined whether a group of Iranian EFL students can accurately pronounce 10 high-frequency technology-related terms. The researcher highlighted that since Persian-speaking learners often use English loanwords, the occurrence of a large number of errors in the accurate pronunciation of such words seems bound to persist, and as a result, this area of research needs more pedagogical and research attention.

The current study was a qualitative description undertaken with the desire to know students' attitudes of English loanwords in Persian by taking the participants' gender into consideration. The present study is an attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the Iranian students' attitudes towards English loanwords in Persian?

RQ2. Is there a significant difference between the attitudes of men and women towards English loanwords?

## Methodology

The current study was undertaken to understand the nature of English lexical borrowings into Persian. This section, in particular, deals with the methodology of the present study. First, the design and context of the study are covered, and then the focus will be on the participants and instruments. Finally, data collection, data analyses, and procedures will be discussed.

### Design and Context of the Study

A quantitative descriptive non-experimental inquiry was conducted to fulfill the objectives of the present study. In Encyclopedia of Research Design, non-experimental designs are defined as “research designs in which an experimenter simply either describes a group or examines relationships between preexisting groups. The conclusions drawn from nonexperimental research are primarily descriptive in nature (Para, I)”. The current study was carried out among university students in Isfahan, Iran in June 2021, the second semester of the Iranian academic year.

### Participants

The participants were 60 postgraduate students majoring in law and business at Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch. In terms of gender, 37 of the participants were females and 23 of them were males. The students who were majoring in English and tourism were excluded from the study since their attitudes towards English loanwords might be atypical.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Information of Participants*

Participants	Gender		Age	
	Female	Male	18-22	22-28
Total	37	23	38	22
	60		60	

### Instruments

Two sets of questionnaires were used to collect the data of the study. After a slight modification based on the needs of the present study, the questionnaires were designed on the google form platform. Having online questionnaires facilitates the way of reaching the hands of participants, and the participants could easily resend and forward the link of the questionnaire to any of their friends.

The first questionnaire was adopted from the survey instruments devised by Olah (2007) and modified in order to meet the current study requirement and consisted of 8 statements relating to loanwords, to which the participants gave a response relative to how much they agreed with the statements. The participants were asked to rate their level of attitudes about English loanwords using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Level 1: strongly disagree to Level 5: strongly agree. The statements were written in both English and Persian. It is also worth mentioning that since it might be difficult for Iranian students to distinguish English loanwords from the ones of other origins, the statements referred to loanwords in general.

Regarding the second instrument in the current study, a questionnaire developed by Abdi and Nazari (2016) was used. Moreover, 15 more high-frequency terms were added to meet the requirement of the study. Thus, the questionnaire contained a list of 75 frequently used lexical items in social media. Among the items, 60 were selected from the questionnaire, and then the participants were asked to choose the most frequently used item between the English loanword and the Persian equivalent. The participants were not told the purpose of the study.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The administration of the questionnaires was done through snowball sampling. The participants were told that they had been asked to help with a study into the SLA. They were assured that they would not be assessed in any way by the tests and that the results of the tests would be kept confidential. To ensure optimum understanding, test instructions were translated into Persian/English and typed on the instruction sheets.

After a slight modification, the questionnaire was designed on the google form platform. Having an online questionnaire on the google form facilitates the way of reaching the hands of participants; moreover, the participants could easily resend and forward the link of the questionnaire to any of their friends. After designing the instrument, its link was sent to some online groups of students majoring in law and business at Islamic Azad University, , Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch.

The first instrument used to evaluate Iranian attitudes about English loanwords was a Likert-type questionnaire adapted from Olah (2007). Eight online Likert-type items elicited opinions about loanwords. In the analysis, the neutral answers (three) were dealt with differently from the

ones that reflected a clear opinion — strong and mild disagreement (one or two) and mild and strong agreement (three or four).

Using the second questionnaire devised by Abdi and Nazari (2016), the participants were provided with English and the Persian equivalents of the items in the form of an online 75-item questionnaire to select the preferred one. The questionnaires were distributed among 65 Persian speakers, yet 5 questionnaires were excluded as they were incomplete or illegible.

### Data Analysis Procedure

In order to analyze the collected data, a descriptive statistical procedure was applied to the data. Regarding the first questionnaire, based on the results, the collected data was entered into SPSS, and the frequencies, percentages, and mean of the individual items were calculated and analyzed. As for the second questionnaire, the chi-square test was employed for testing the significance of the difference between using Persian and English lexical items across gender.

### Results

The first research question of the study intended to find out what the Iranian students' attitudes towards English loanwords in Persian are. For this purpose, an eight-item questionnaire borrowed from Olah (2007) was administered. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics concerning the Iranian students towards English loanwords.

Since each choice in this Likert-scale test carries a point (100% = 5, 75% = 4, 50% = 3, 25% = 2, and 0% = 1), the mean score of each test item was compared against the average score of the choices. This means that if the mean score of a questionnaire item was less than 3, there would be a tendency among the participants to have a negative attitude towards English loanwords. On the other hand, a mean score more than 3 shows the propensity of the respondents to have a positive attitude towards English loanwords.

**Table 2**

*Results of the Questionnaire*

N.	Statements	Freq. Per.	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean



1	LWs sound attractive.	F	4	12	14	14	16	3.4
		P	6.6	20	23.3	23.3	26.6	
2	I like to use LWs when I speak Persian.	F	4	8	4	28	16	3.7
		P	6.6	13.3	6.6	46.6	26.6	
3	LWs give new ways of understanding the world.	F	1	9	5	21	24	3.9
		P	1.6	15	8.3	35	40	
4	I think LWs should be regulated.	F	11	13	11	12	13	3.05
		P	18.3	21.6	18.3	20	21.6	
5	LWs enrich the Persian language.	F	4	9	5	27	15	3.6
		P	6.6	15	8.3	45	25	
6	LWs should be taught in English courses	F	8	16	12	10	14	3.1
		P	13.3	26.6	20	16.6	23.3	
7	Percentage of media LWs I understand.	F	14	18	20	4	4	2.4
		P	23.3	30	33.3	6.6	6.6	
8	I adjust the LWs I use for people with lower education.	F	0	6	10	18	20	3.5
		P	0	10	16.6	30	33.3	
Total Mean								3.47

The results of the descriptive analysis show that the overall mean score of English loanwords attitudes among the participants was 3.47 on the Likert scale, meaning positive attitudes towards English loanwords among Iranian students. The results for statement 2 showed that most of the respondents like to use loanwords when they speak Persian which suggests Iranian students have a positive attitude towards the amount of LWs used in their language. The attitudes towards statement 4 were almost evenly distributed between agree, neutral, and disagree, which means that there was no clear evidence that students believed whether loanwords should be regulated or not. The smallest mean score belonged to item 7 which means that in contrast to the positive attitudes towards LWs in statement 1 the small number of students thought that loanwords should be taught in English courses. On the other hand, the statement with the highest level of agreement was statement 3, that is English loanwords give us new ways of viewing and understanding the world and our ideas. This is a very significant result because it shows that students are aware of how important English is in the current modern world.

The other items, arranged in descending order, were item 5, *LWs enrich the Persian language.*, item 1, *LWs sound attractive*, item 6, *I adjust my use of loanwords when I speak to people with lower education*. For statement 8, more than half of the participants responded that they understand more than three-fourths of the LWs used in media sources such as TV, social network, magazines and newspapers, and pop songs. This is a very high figure and could explain that Iranian students have a good knowledge of English-based terms and that is why they have positive attitudes towards English loanwords.

The second research question intended to find out if there was a significant difference between the attitudes of men and women about English loanwords. For this purpose, an online 75-item questionnaire was distributed among 60 participants and the frequencies were calculated for each lexical item. Finally, a chi-square test was employed for testing the significance of the difference between using Persian and English lexical items across two genders.

The data indicated that Iranian students majoring in law and business, including both genders, employed English words more than Persian ones. In total, among all the participants 63% preferred English loanwords, and 37% of the sample population used Persian equivalents of the items. Regarding the gender of participants, 59 % of the female participants preferred English loanwords while it was 70% for male participants.

**Table 3**

*Results of the Questionnaire*

Gender	Frequency and Percentage	English Loanwords	Persian Equivalent
Female	F	22	15
	P	59	41
Male	F	16	7
	P	70	18
Total	F	38	22
	P	63	37

After analyzing the frequency of lexical items among both genders, it was clear that the majority of the students intended to use English words and expressions that are commonly used in media, particularly social networking sites. Concisely, the most frequently used items, both English words, and Persian equivalents, were selected. The data revealed that among males, *ok*, *e-mail*, and *online* were the most frequently used English lexical items, and */rad kardan/*, *to reject*, was

the most frequently used Persian equivalent. On the other hand, among females, the most frequently used English items were *downloaded*, and *shared* while */tanzimat/*, the *setting* was the most frequently used Persian equivalent.

In contrast, the least Persian equivalents of the English loanwords were */rayaname/ email*, and */bar-xat/ online*. One reason may be that the Academy of Persian Language and Literature was not quick enough to coin Persian equivalents of English borrowings. Another reason is that Persian speakers believe that the English loanwords double the item's prestige. However, regardless of gender, infrequent vocabularies in English were *mutual friend*, and *confirm*. The results of this study suggest a smooth change in the linguistic taste of Persian students.

To find out whether the differences between the attitudes of men and women about English loanwords were statistically significant or not, one needs to consult the Chi-square table.

**Table 4**

*Chi-Square Results for the Attitudes of Men and Women About English Loanwords*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.624 <sup>a</sup>	1	.430		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	.264	1	.607		
Likelihood Ratio	.631	1	.427		
Fisher's Exact Test				.583	.305
Linear-by-Linear Association	.613	1	.434		
N of Valid Cases	60				

Since the *p*-value was greater than the alpha level (i.e.,  $.000 > .05$ ), it could be inferred that the difference between the attitudes of men and women about English loanwords was statistically nonsignificant.

### Discussion

The large number of English loanwords used in Persian cannot be considered a big issue because these loanwords act as a barrier to understanding. The results of the attitude questionnaire given to a group of university students indicated that most of them like to use loanwords when they speak Persian, a response which shows a positive attitude towards English borrowing. This is against the findings of a study carried out by Olah (2007) in Japan. Olah concluded that most of the Japanese students thought that there were too many loanwords used in Japanese which indicated their negative attitudes towards English loanwords. On the other hand, the results are in line with Mashhadi Heidar et.al.'s (2017) conclusion that Persian speakers use English borrowings in their daily speech since they may look more educated and prestigious than others. This explains why they prefer to use English loanwords rather than their Persian equivalents shows their positive attitude towards English borrowings. Similarly, Hoque (2021) concluded that in the fields and concepts where Bangla equivalents are available, English loanwords are used because they are considered to be more fashionable and prestigious than necessary.

Another significant result seen in Table 2 is that the participants indicated that there was a large number of loanwords they understood in media. This high percentage of understanding has a positive effect on their ability to communicate in English. In contrast, in a similar study by Olah (2017), Japanese students showed that they didn't understand many of the LWs used by the media which can explain why they have negative attitudes towards Anglicism.

Moreover, it can be seen in Table 2 that the majority of the respondents believed loanwords enrich the Persian language which indicates that using English loanwords in the Persian language is not always with negative consequences. The obtained result is in accord with Mashhadi Heidar et.al.'s (2017) conclusion that demonstrated using Anglicisms in the Persian language is not only destructive but can also empower the Persian language. In contrast, in a study by Hoque (2021), the findings indicated that English loanwords are not always useful and that their effects on Bangla can be, to some extent, negatively consequential. In other words, although lexical borrowings can empower Bangla, they may also lead to marginalizing the language by replacing some available Bangla words.

The results in the second questionnaire indicated that the recent growth in the use of social networks, among other factors like prestige, resulted in more significant use of English

vocabularies instead of Persian equivalents. Such a result seemed to be the same across both genders. This would also explain why Iranian students often prefer to use loanwords even in cases where the Persian equivalent of the word is available. This outcome is compatible with the findings of other studies including Mashhadi Heidar et.al. (2017) where they demonstrated that Iranian speakers, particularly younger generations, usually intend to use English loanwords in their everyday conversations due to the fact that it gives them a higher status in the society. However, it is worth mentioning that the dominance of the English language on the Persian language may contaminate the native Persian in the fullness of time. It seems crucial to intervene and try to preserve Persian among the native speakers.

Finally, the gender-based analysis of Anglicism frequency in the Persian language revealed that both groups of men and women engaged in this study are somehow using English loanwords similarly. In other words, the findings of the current study suggest that, indeed, there is no significant difference between Iranian males and females regarding attitudes towards English loanwords in Persian (Table. 4). This is against Mashhadi Heidar et.al.'s (2017) findings where they discussed that each gender's preference to use Anglicism of a particular domain is more than the other gender.

### **Conclusion**

Phillipson (1992) stated that the English language has had a pioneering role in the context of globalization. In this inquiry, we can conclude that English has noticeable impact on Iranians' word choice. As reported in this study the impact can be both positive and negative. That is why the authorities and officials have to be aware of Anglicizations and its effects. In this study, the attitudes of postgraduate students majoring in law and business to English loanwords were investigated using two questionnaires. The results in this study, firstly, demonstrated that attitudes towards English loanwords in Persian were positive and the respondents liked to use English loanwords when they speak Persian. Secondly, the outcomes indicated that there was not a statistically significant correlation between Iranian female students and Iranian male participants.

The present study involved a set of limitations as follows. The first problem was the sample size. In the current study, a limited number of participants were selected. Therefore, future research, involving a larger number of participants, is needed to further explore the preliminary

findings of this study. Moreover, a future study should be carried out to take other factors such as age, educational status, and experience of English learning into consideration. In addition, one area of further research that would be of great benefit is investigating a large corpus of social network websites to analyze the number of English loanwords used for communication. Moreover, the participants' knowledge of English loanwords and their Persian equivalents seem to be crucial factor that needs further research.

As an important implication of this study, it is the duty of the policymakers, especially the Academy of Persian Language and Literature, to be aware of this positive attitude of young Iranians towards English loanwords. As a result, they have to focus on proposing and using appropriate Persian equivalents of English loanwords so that Iranians opt for them as their first choice. They can make it possible by raising awareness of English loanwords and warning that the excessive use or misuse of them will result in weakening and deterioration of the Persian language

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