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Challenges with English possessive ('s) for Afghan Dari Persian first language speakers

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Abstract

This research article studied the challenges Afghan engineering undergraduate students faced with apostrophe *s* in their conversations. For this purpose, 10 students (7 male and 3 female) from 3 different departments of Computer Science faculty of Kabul polytechnic University were selected as the informants of the research. All 10 informants were interviewed, recorded and the data was analyzed. It was finally found out that the students experienced problems with usage as well as the pronunciation of the apostrophe *s*. In terms of usage, 80 percent of the informants missed apostrophe *s* with nouns in possessive case. Moreover, the rest 20 percent of the informants faced problem with the pronunciation of the apostrophe *s*. That is, they pronounced the apostrophe *s* as /s/ in all cases. This research article has a significant role in improving students' language competence as it tempts English language teachers to keep track of the students' mistakes (especially common mistakes) in order to prevent them being fossilized and as a result offer a better quality of teaching English.

Keywords: Afghans' problem in possessive 's, possessive case in Dari Persian language, pronunciation of final *s* in English, rules of adding 's in possessive case

Introductions

Language is known as the principle method of human communication, conveyed either verbally, written, or by means of gesture. In verbal and written communication, the words are structured in a way which makes sense. The structure of a language can be known as its grammar. However, in verbal communication, in addition to the correct structure, correct pronunciation is something that also needs to be taken care of. One's mistakes with structure and pronunciation can cause misunderstanding and even lack of communication in verbal conversations. Therefore, this research studies the students' challenges with possessive ('s) in their verbal conversations. This study has a crucially important role in encouraging language teachers to keep track of the students' mistakes that they make in everyday classroom activities and prevent them from being fossilized by supplementing their teaching materials with extra exercises and activities.

This research article answers the following main questions

- How do the students use apostrophe *s* when they talk about possession?
- How do the students pronounce the apostrophe *s* added to the nouns in possessive case?
- What mistakes do the students make when they talk about possession?
- What is the difference between English and Dari Persian language in terms of possession structure?

Materials and Methods

This research article uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of research to find what mistakes the students make when they talk about possession. For this purpose, 10 volunteer students of engineering field were interviewed one by one. For the better quality of sound, the interview took place in a calm place using a fine quality microphone. For the data analysis process, the Praat computer software package was used which helped the researcher analyze the date easier and more accurately. The informants for this research article were 10 undergraduate students (7 male and 3 female) of Computer science faculty of the Kabul Polytechnic University. Out of 10, three male students were from Network Engineering department, four male from Information System and the rest three were female students from Computer Engineering Department of Computer Science Faculty. All the ten students were third semester students, aged 18-20.

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The students in Computer Science faculty study English as a foreign language for four semesters.

of the data, the problems of the informants are divided in to two categories: Missing ('s) and Pronunciation of ('s).

Results and Discussions

During the conversation, the informants were asked to talk about possession. They were asked to compare their belongings with others'. For easier analysis and description

1. Missing ('s)

All the informants compared their belongings with others'. Mainly they faced problem in using ('s) when they talked about others' belongings. Please see the table below:

Table 1: Students using/missing apostrophe s

Informants	Number of times used possession	Correctly used	Incorrectly used	Detail
1	3	3	0	Used correctly
2	2	2	0	Used correctly
3	3	0	3	's was missing
4	3	0	3	's was missing
5	1	0	1	's was missing
6	4	0	4	's was missing
7	2	0	2	's was missing
8	3	0	3	's was missing
9	3	0	3	's was missing
10	4	0	4	's was missing
Total	28	5	23	's was missing

The above table shows that the informants talked about possession 28 times, 5 of which was used correctly and the rest 23 were incorrect. All these 23 mistakes were made when the informants talked about the third person's belongings in which ('s) was missing. However, when they

talked about their own possession, they used the possessive adjective correctly. The number of informants made mistakes (missed 's) during the conversation is shown in the chart below:

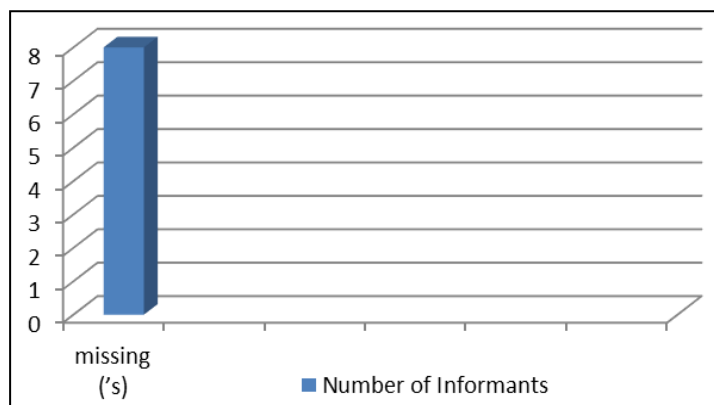


Fig 1: Number of informants missed apostrophe s

In the above chart, it can be seen that 8 of the informants experienced problem when they talked about possession using ('s). The percentage of the mistakes made by the

informants in this part of the conversation is shown in the chart below:

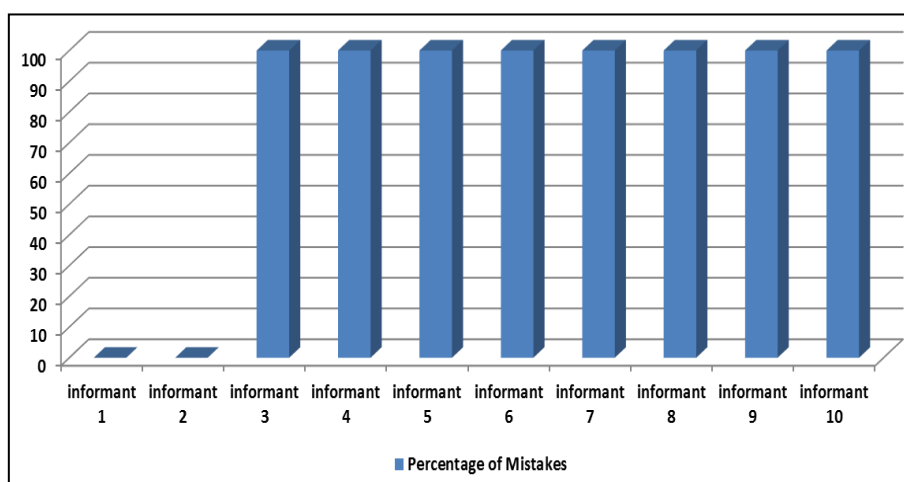


Fig 2: Percentage of problem faced by informants with 's

Except the first two informants, the rest 8 informants made 100 percent mistake when they talked about third person possession. They did not use ('s) at all.

One of the ways of showing possession in English language is using ('s) to the end of the noun in possessive case. For example: Laura's brothers are all younger than her (Murphy, 2015) [4]. However in Dari Persian language, there is no grapheme to represent or show possession. In other words the vowel /ɛ/ is added to the noun in possessive case known as "kasra e ezafa". For example: "کتاب احمد" which means: Ahmad's book (Yamin, 2015) [6]. The vowel /ɛ/ is described as front unrounded vowel, just above half-open position (Usmanyar, 2020) [5].

According to Carter and Carthy (2009) [1], the rule of adding ('s / s') for possession can be described in the following manner:

1. For s singular noun and for an irregular noun, ('s) is used:
The cat's milk is in the fridge. (*Cat* is a singular noun)
His men's obsession with football is out of hand. (*Men* is an irregular plural noun)
2. For a plural noun which ends in s, (s') is used:

- Two hours' walk is too far at our age. (*hours* is a plural noun which ends in s)
3. The ('s) is also added to names ending in s.
However, many writers prefer simply to add an apostrophe mark after the final s, especially to names with more than one syllable:
Dickens's novels or Dickens' novels (more common)
Socrates's writings or Socrates' writings (more common)
Keats's poetry or Keats' poetry (more common)
 4. An ('s) is also added to first names ending in s:
Angus's offer had to be turned down.
In my opinion, Iris's car is too dangerous to go on the road. The service is at St Augustus's church at midday.

2. Pronunciation of ('s)

There was not any specific conversation made with informants to assess the pronunciation ability of the ('s). However, we looked at the same conversation for assessing the informants' pronunciation ability for the ('s) as shown in the following table:

Table 2: Pronunciation problem with 's

Informants	No	Words used	('s) Pronounced	Correctly Pronounced	Incorrectly Pronounced
1	1	My father's	/s/	0	√
	2	My friend's	/s/	0	√
	3	Zohra's	/s/	0	√
Total		3	3	0	3
2	1	My father's	/s/	0	√
	2	My sister's	/s/	0	√
	3	Farangez's	/s/	0	√
Total		3	3	0	3
Grand Total		6	6	0	6

The table above shows that out of the 10 informants, only two of them have used ('s) in their conversation, three times each. That is, the rest of the 8 informants missed ('s) when they talked about possession. Moreover, the two informants

who used ('s), faced problem with the pronunciation. In other words they pronounced the ('s) wrongly. Please see the following chart for the frequency of pronunciation mistakes:

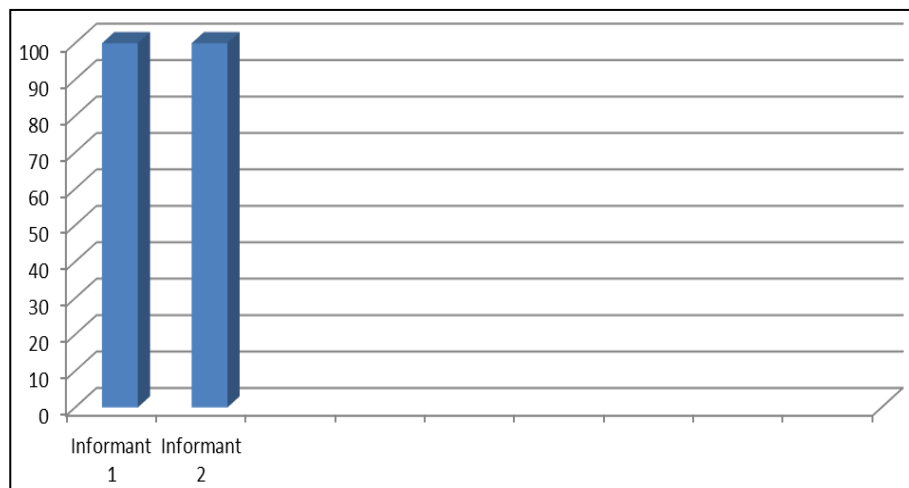


Fig 3: Informants' Frequency of pronunciation problem with 's

As shown in the above chart, only two of the participants used ('s) in their conversations and they faced 100 percent problem during the pronunciation of ('s). In other words, they wrongly pronounced ('s) any time they used it. In English language, the apostrophe s (the final s) can be pronounced as: /s/, /z/ or /ɪz/ (Marks, 2017) [3]. According to

Hancock (2017) [2], the final s pronunciation rules are described in the following manner:

1. The final s is pronounced as /s/ when preceded by the voiceless sounds, other than /s, tʃ, ʃ/. Examples:
/p/: cups, stops, sleeps, landscapes, types, telescopes.
/t/: hats, students, hits, writes, graduates, institutes.

- /k/: cooks, books, drinks, walks, likes, snakes.
 /f/: cliffs, sniffs, beliefs, laughs, graphs.
 /θ/: myths, tablecloths, months, baths, earths.
2. The final *s* can be pronounced as /z/ when is preceded by all vowels and voiced sounds, other than /z, ʒ, dʒ/. Examples:
 /b/: crabs, rubs, describes, tubes
 /d/: cards, words, rides, ends
 /g/: rugs, bags, begs
 /v/: gloves, wives, shelves, drives
 /ð/: clothes, bathes, breathes
 /m/: plums, dreams, times, comes
 /n/: fans, drains, runs, pens, hormones, stones
 /ŋ/: kings, belongs, sings, meanings, things
 /l/: deals calls, falls, hills, crocodiles, styles
 /r/: wears, cures, fires, signatures, figures
 3. The final *s* can be pronounced as /ɪz/ when preceded by /s, z, tʃ, dʒ, ʃ, ʒ/. Examples:
 /s/: buses, gases, rises, embraces, places, convinces
 /z/: amazes, freezes, prizes, quizzes, seizes
 /tʃ/: churches, sandwiches, witches, teaches, watches, reaches
 /dʒ/: wages, changes, ages, judges, arranges, challenges
 /ʃ/: dishes, eyelashes, hairbrushes, wishes, pushes, crashes
 /ʒ/: garage (in American English)

Conclusion

In this research article, it was finally determined that the students experienced problems with usage and pronunciation of the apostrophe *s* when talking about possession. Out of 10, eight of the informants faced problem with the usage of the apostrophe *s*, that is, they missed the apostrophe *s* with the nouns in possessive case. And, the rest two of the informants faced problem with pronunciation of the apostrophe *s*. They pronounced the apostrophe *s* as /s/ in all cases. Also, it was found out that the way of talking about possession in their L1 was quite different from that of English which seemed to be one of the main reasons of encountering problem with the apostrophe *s*. Therefore, this research comes up with the following suggestions:

- Teachers should give more exercises based on the students' needs. In other words, if a teacher feels that the students face a problem with a language item, he/she should supplement the teaching material with more activities accordingly.
- Students' talking time should be increased so that the teachers can note their common mistakes during class activities.
- Teachers should adapt and supplement their teaching materials with pronunciation exercises, especially the ones that the students experience problem in common.
- Teachers should use appropriate techniques of error correction during class activities to prevent errors from becoming permanent.
- Teachers should conduct assessments continuously so that they can notice the language items that the students face problem with.

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