AFFECTIVITY IN PERSIAN LANGUAGE USE

ABSTRACT. A sociolinguistic analysis of emotion in Iranian culture and language use is developed. The work of Friedrich, Bateson, and others is drawn on to indicate how emotion is represented through metacommunicative, paralinguistic, and stylistic elements of language use. Communicative contexts in Iranian culture are marked in terms of two continua: one of personal and communicative intimacy, from "inside" (baten) to "outside" (zaher), and another of social hierarchy, from contexts indicating hierarchical relationships to those indicating equality. Affectivity in Persian language use is represented through intensification of a statement in relation to its contextual frame, through transposition of a linguistic form appropriate for one frame into another, or through culturally marked withdrawal from social interaction. It is argued that since emotions and psychological characteristics of individuals cannot be observed directly, attention should be focused on the expressive rules of culture rather than on "character" or "personality."

Emotions arise in communication
— Hugh Dalziel Duncan

INTRODUCTION — EMOTION AND LINGUISTICS

Linguists of all breeds seem to develop cold feet when it comes to discussion of the expression of emotion in language. Linguistics emerged as a "cognitive" discipline lying somewhere in the vast territory between pure mathematics and experimental physiological psychology at the advent of transformational-generative theory in 1957. The subsequent drive to discover basic rule-governed structures and mathematical/logical principles underlying the production of linguistic forms left little space for discussion of "soft", "idiosyncratic" things like affectivity.

Sociolinguistics has been infected with the problem of rule orientation tyranny as well. One case in point concerns Paul Friedrich's brilliant analyses of Russian pronominal usage (Friedrich 1966, 1972). Friedrich's essays on this topic were an attempt to show how pronominal alternation in Russian literary works served to show an enormous range of psychological and cultural dynamics, including status relations, emotional feeling and rhetorical manipulation.

Friedrich's work inspired by the now classic research by Brown and Gillman (1960) on pronoun usage, points out that pronoun usage in Russian incorporates ten dimensions:

... the topic of discourse, the context of the speech event; then age, generation, sex and kinship status; then dialect, group membership and relative jural and political authority; and finally, emotional solidarity — the sympathy and antipathy between the two speakers (Friedrich 1964: 229).
One of the first re-analyses of this (Ervin-Tripp 1969) immediately reduced Friedrich's rich discussion to a computer flow-chart, where the choice between the second-person pronouns vy and ty are reduced to decision nodes in a matrix. Another reference to Friedrich's work by M. A. K. Halliday (1978: 75) characterizes it as "relating the kind and number of kinship terms in general use to changes in the structure of social relationships in Russian society."

Characterizing Friedrich's analysis as a decision matrix on a flow chart or a permutation of social relationships does not begin to do justice to the richness of his discussion, particularly in the area of the effective use of lexical terms for indicating emotional relations among actors in social situations. Friedrich points out that by studying the dynamic aspects of pronominal usage, much can be learned which is not understood through static models.

Two of his observational foci are worth highlighting here. The first has to do with changes in usage over the course of a single interaction:

... the numerous cases of dramatic, rapid and often erratic switching and 'pronominal breakthrough' often suggest the hierarchical relations between the discriminations. In other words, just as 'regular usage' symbolized a sufficient and necessary occurrence of discriminations, so the many cases of switching symbolized some realignment, or a change in relative power, or simply the addition or subtraction of a component (Friedrich 1964: 239).

Friedrich's examples of switching are singularly interesting, for most often it is a sudden moment of heightened emotion — a reunion, surprise, the realization of love, stressful anxiety, or anger that prompts the 'breakthrough' to the use of the unexpected pronoun:

Some mood, whim or mental state could make the speaker play with or altogether ignore the usual rules, depending of course, on his emotional make-up and social sensitivity (Ibid: 248).

Moreover, he describes another kind of switching, which he terms the "latent or mental ty" where the more intimate, familiar pronoun is indicated with paralinguistic attitudes even though vy is being said with the lips. The existence of such phenomena has definite implications for fieldwork in sociolinguistics:

One of the fallacies of behavioristic descriptive linguistics and of behavioristic social psychology is that, by a sort of convention, the evidence is artificially limited to the overt, actually articulated forms. Such an approach ... is apt to lead to distortion in semantics, because so much of meaning is private and never made explicit during the act of speech ... some of the most trenchant communication involves the combination of one spoken pronoun with paralinguistic features of body movement and intonation that would normally accompany the covert, unspoken pronoun (Ibid: 251).