

Lady Presidents? Sociolinguistics and Iranian Constitution*

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Abstract

Section 115 of Iranian constitution reads: "The president should be among the political, religious '*rejal*' ...". The word '*rejal*' taken from Arabic language means 'men'. Some Iranian politicians believe that the word has the same meaning in Persian, therefore, women cannot lead the country as presidents; while, others argue that '*rejal*' can now refer to both sexes, therefore women can be elected as presidents. This, study tackles the issue from a sociolinguistic perspective. To do this, we need to find if the word '*rejal*' is now a Persian word borrowed from Arabic, or, it is an Arabic word to which Persian speakers switch. About eleven hours of sociolinguistic interviews were conducted with 10 Persian speakers and all nouns (Arabic or Persian) were extracted from the data and later subjected to analyses to describe the linguistic behavior of each category in its own context. Then the behavior of nouns in each context is compared to that of the other contexts. Our findings show that Arabic origin nouns are found to be behaving like Persian nouns, they have, therefore, been borrowed into Persian and have Persian connotations and functions. Evidence is, therefore, presented to the 'Persianness' of '*rejal*', shedding scientific light on a political problem.

Keywords: Borrowing, Code-switching, Persian, *rejal*:

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Introduction

Sociolinguists, unlike linguists like Chomsky, are not either interested in politics, maybe they feel that the two fields are not related, or to keep their 'political correctness' they prefer to stay away from that. This paper is no exception, however, whenever the presidential election fever starts to rise in Iranian politics every four years, the debate on the eligibility of women to be presidential nominees is fueled along with it. The problem commences with a word taken (borrowed or code-switched) from Arabic.

Section 115 of Iranian constitution reads: "The president should be among the political, religious '*reja:l*' having the following characteristics: ..." The word '*reja:l*' taken from Arabic means 'men' in its original context. Some Iranian statesmen and politicians (and Arabic grammarians) refer to the historical origins of the word and believe that the word has the same meaning in Persian, therefore, women cannot lead the country as presidents; while, others, referring to the discussions leading to the confirmation of this section in the constitutional congress, argue that '*reja:l*' in Persian can refer to both sexes, therefore women can be elected as presidents. The latter group, however, has no good reasons for their arguments.

This study tackles the issue from a

sociolinguistic perspective without being involved in the political issues mentioned. To do this, we have to find if the word '*reja:l*' is now a Persian word borrowed from Arabic, like so many other Arabic-origin words in Persian, or, it is an Arabic word to which Persian speakers switch in their speech or writings. If it is found that '*reja:l*' is now an established Persian word with its Arabic roots playing only a historical role, then it can be argued that the word, it has Persian syntactic and semantic functions; therefore, like any other similar Persian word, it refers to both males and females. But if on the other hand, it is found that Persian speakers switch to Arabic when using this word, then it will carry its linguistic features to Persian, consequently Iranian females will not be able to lead their country. But how is it possible to distinguish if the word is a token of switching or if it is an established borrowing into Persian? To answer this question, first we have to see what happens when elements of two or more languages are mixed in a single structure.

The mixing of elements from more than one grammar may take on different forms and may be the result of different processes. Lexical borrowing and code-switching at the community and individual levels, as in 1, are the most controversial ones.

1. a. **introduction**-*esh xeyli tula:ni shod.* (E. 443)¹ (Borrowing ?)
-POS. very long became 'Its introduction was very long.'
- b. *bad goft*, "Fortunately we found one." (H. 217) (Unambiguous code-switching)
Then said, " "

1. The letters and numbers in parenthesis represent the speaker code and the line in the transcript respectively.

Their analysis and identification has been the focus of much recent research (Bentahila and Davies, 1991; Eliasson, 1989; Myers-Scotton, 1995; Poplack & Meechan, 1995; to name a few). Some linguists (among the others, Like Bentahial et al., 1991; Mahootian, 1993; Myers-Scotton, 1993) do not believe in any distinction between the

two; and there is a considerable dissent over what qualifies as an example of each, even among those who accept the distinction between them. The outcomes of intra-sentential code-switching and borrowing may be similar, particularly when the other language items are single words or "lone items" as in 2.a.

2. a. education *ja:zebeye bishtari da:re.* (I. 152) **(Contentious form, status to be determined)**

attraction more has

'Education has more attraction'

b. system *dorost-e inja.* (D. 411)

(Attested loanword)

System correct-is here

'The system is correct here.'

c. People like it. (K. 201)

(Monolingual English)

In 2.a, the English-origin noun "education" appears in the subject position of a Persian sentence, a position equivalent to English subject position. Does this item behave as an integrated loanword like "system" in 2.b or it behaves like "people", the subject of the English sentence in 2.c? Only a systematic, quantitative study of such single items can offer insight as to their status as code-switches or borrowings.

Method

In this paper the assumption is that determining the language membership of items from one language in the context of another language cannot be done on the basis of a single instantiation (Poplack et al., 1995; Sankoff, Poplack. & Vanniarajan, 1990). Thus, we have no way of knowing whether

example 2.a, is in fact a code-switch just from looking at it. Evidence of their status can only come from quantitative analysis of the linguistic structures, they enter into. Their different rates of occurrence in each structure form a quantitative pattern which can be compared with that of their counterparts in monolingual contexts. So, using the quantitative methods and starting from the definitions of code-switching and borrowing given in 3, I compare the patterns of nominal structure in Arabic-origin nouns (attested/non-attested) in Persian contexts, which I will call bilingual contexts, with their counterparts in 2 types of other contexts illustrated in Figure 1: Persian nouns in Persian, Arabic nouns in Arabic (no data, only grammatical accounts). The characteristics of attested loanwords are also given in 5.

3. a. Borrowing: *The adaptation of lexical material to the morphological and syntactic (and usually, phonological) patterns of the recipient language. (Poplack, 1993: 255)*

b. Code-switching: *The juxtaposition of sentences or sentence fragments, each of which is internally consistent with the morphological and syntactic (and optionally, phonological) rules of its lexifier language. (Poplack, 1993: 256)*

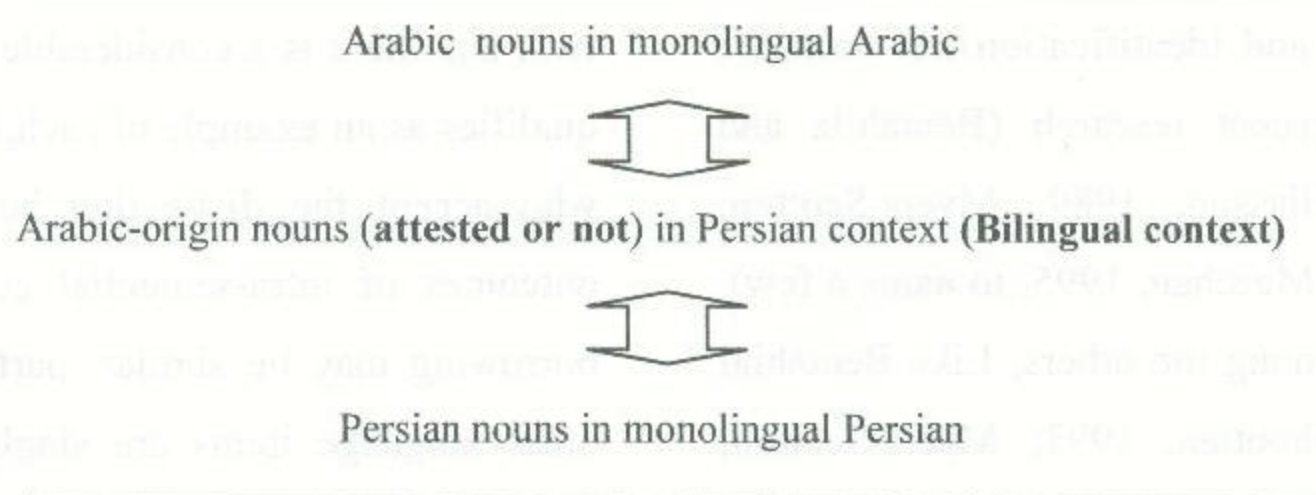


Figure 1 Contexts to be compared

5. Attested loanwords: *Those attested in dictionary lists as part of the lexical stock of the host language, with full linguistic (phonological, morphological and syntactic) integration and widespread diffusion, even among the recipient-language monolinguals. (Sankoff et al., 1990).*

If Arabic-origin nouns, including our target word 'reja:l', in otherwise Persian discourse show a similar behaviour to Persian nouns, and different behaviour from Arabic nouns, the immediate interpretation is that their structure is that of Persian and they are functioning as borrowings. If, on the other hand, they are found to enter into structures of their native nominal counterparts in Arabic, they are functioning as Arabic codeswitches.

Analyses and results

The data on which this study is based were gathered by the researcher himself. All the informants are highly educated, range in age from 30 to 40. Eleven sets of informal sociolinguistic interviews or conversations, a total of about 13 hours, were taped and every noun regardless of its language origin, was

extracted from an average of 15 minutes of each interview, yielding 660 tokens. Four of the informants were highly proficient bilinguals of Arabic and Persian, while the others were not fluent in Arabic. The four bilingual informants were supposed to provide data for our Arabic origin nouns category while the other informants provided our Persian corpus. I did not use established Arabic nouns used by monolingual Persians in the study because according to the definition given in 5, they can be treated as Persian words and describing the behavior of established Arabic origin words in bilingual contexts can be applied for their counterparts in monolingual Persian as well. Table 1 shows the overall distribution of all nouns in different contexts.

Table 1 Distribution of nouns

Language	N	Total
Bilingual context		
Arabic-origin nouns in Persian	198	
Monolingual Persian		
Persian nouns in Persian	462	660

All nouns regardless of their source language were transcribed and coded for a number of factors relevant to determining the status of nominal items. These include pre-head material, post-head material, the Persian modification construction known as 'ezafe', plural marking, and word order. Every noun, independent of its context was checked in one of the most comprehensive dictionaries of the Persian language to make sure of its origin (Dehkhoda, 1999). In this way, Arabic and Persian origin nouns were distinguished. Surprisingly only two tokens (used 5 times) of the Arabic nouns had not entered the Persian dictionary and constituted the unattested Arabic-origin nouns in our corpus, which is therefore not suitable for statistical analyses, hence excluded. This study then compares the behavior of

only attested Arabic-origin nouns in Persian discourse to those of native Persian nouns in Persian context. For the behavior of Arabic nouns, I consulted some well-known Arabic grammar books (Ale-Buyeh, 1998; Farshidvard, 1980). Moreover, to be sure that Arabic nouns in genuine Arabic discourse do actually behave as the grammar books indicate (not at least very different from that), consultations were made with a native speaker of Iraqi Arabic, who also provided the examples mentioned in the paper.

I will first present a brief description of each factor and then a tabulated result of the comparisons. Let's first examine the Pre-head material as in 6.a to 6.d.

6. Pre-head material

- a. *tu in spice-ha: mixa:bu-nan.* (H. 355)

In this spice-PL lay-3PL

QARA'ATO HA:Z AL-KETAB MEN ZAMAN (Arabic)

Read-I this def.-book from time

(Demonstrative, definite marker)

'They lay them in these spices.'

- b. *ye(k) dar-e vurudi da:re.* (E. 52)

One door-EZ entrance has

-----NA ----- (Arabic)

(Indefinite marker)

'It has an entrance.'

- c. *ba:yad be tourist information zang bezan-I.* (E. 222)

Must to tourist information ring hit-2SG

RA'AITO SEDIGHI FE L-MADRASA (Arabic)

Saw-I friend-my at def-school

(Preposition)

'You must call the Tourist Information.'

- d. *se-ta: pa:rti ba:ha:shun da:shtim.* (H. 77)

Three-CLSS party with-them had-1PL

QARA'ATO XAMSA KOTOB. (Arabic)

Read-I five book-PL

(Numeral)

'We had three parties with them.'

- e. ----- NA ----- (Persian)

RA'AITO SEDIGHI FE L-MADRASA (Arabic)

Saw-I friend-my at def-school

(definite marker)

'I saw my friend at school.'

This includes prepositions, numerals, articles, and demonstratives. Persian has no definite or indefinite articles, although definiteness may be achieved by the use of prenominal demonstratives as in 6.a and indefiniteness by the use of a numeral 'yek' immediately preceding nouns as in 6.b. Arabic, on the other hand, uses post-nominal indefinite markers, and its definite article 'al' is used before the noun (6.e). Demonstratives,

prepositions, and numerals precede Arabic nouns (Farshidvard, 1980). In Arabic, numerals referring to singular and dual nouns follow their heads.

The data in Table 2 show, first, that there is not even one case of Arabic preposition, determiner, demonstrative or numeral preceding Persian noun. This is even more striking considering that prepositions, numerals and demonstratives occupy the same position in both languages.

Table 2 Distribution of pre-head material for Persian and Arabic-origin nouns

Pre-head material	Language of noun			
	Mono. Per.		Bilingual	
	N	%	N	%
Arabic.def.marker	-	-	-	-
Definite				
Per.demons.	49	11	21	12
Indefinite				
Persian	38	8	12	7
Arabic	-	-	-	-
Preposition				
Persian	75	17	31	17
Arabic	-	-	-	-
Numeral				
Persian	10	2	5	3
Zero	258	60	111	62
Total	430		180	

As shown, not only are monolingual Persian and Arabic-origin nouns preceded by only Persian pre-nominal material, but also the rate of distribution and the relative weight of each factor in these two language contexts are almost parallel. They are preceded by Persian definite markers at the same rate (11%-12%), by Persian indefinite markers at the same rate (2%-3%) and by Persian

preposition and numeral, at virtually the same rates. The relative weight of each factor in each of these contexts is also identical: in monolingual Persian context 11% of nouns are marked for definite, 8% for indefinite, 17% with prepositions, and 2% with numerals. We observe almost the same percentages for Arabic-origin nouns.

The obvious interpretation of these findings is

that Arabic-origin nouns in Persian context behave the same as Persian nouns in Persian context with respect to pre-nominal material. Consequently, their behavior regarding this factor is different from that of Arabic nouns in Arabic context. This is a very good indicator of the phenomenon of borrowing.

Now, I will examine the effects of the post-head material. There are various items that are part of the

Persian NP structure and are attached to Persian noun, these include: plural markers when there is no numeral prenominal as is 7.a, indefinite marker *-i* as in 7.b, pronominal enclitics (possessive or verbal) as in 7.c, definite/specific or case-marker shown in 7.d, and an unstressed vowel- *e* (or *ye* after vowels other than *-i*) called *ezafe* suffix which links possessors and modifiers (adjectival or nominal) to the preceding head noun as in 8.

7. Post-head material

a. *mark-e badi nist tu printer-ha.* (J. 22)

Make-EZ bad not in printer-PL

b. *ye gol-i ra: varda:ram.* (J. 45)

a flower-IND OM take-1SG.

c. *goft plan-et-o benevis.* (H. 35)

said plan-POSS.-OM write-2SG

d. *un area code-o begir.* (F. 216)

That area code-OM take-2SG

Plural marker

'It is not a bad make in printers.'

Indefinite marker (specific)

'I take a flower.'

Possessive marker (pronominal enclitic)

'He asked me to write my plan.'

Object marker (definite/specific)

'Dial that area code.'

8. Ezafe construction

a. *area code-e har shahri-ro bezan-i.* (E. 229)

Area code-EZ every city-OM hit-2SG

b. *ye slang-e xususi-e.* (F. 216)

One slang-EZ private-is

N + EZ + N

'You dial the area code of any city.'

N + EZ + Adj

'It is a private slang.'

Arabic nouns are generally connected to the following words by two groups of items shown in 9. The first group, called '*tanvin*' in Arabic grammar, is intrinsically indefinite and the second usually marks definite nouns. Depending on the function of the noun in the sentence, one of the options in each group is selected: '*an*' or '*a*' is used when the noun occupies an objective position; '*en*' and '*e*' are used with prepositional objects and '*on*' and '*o*' accompany subjective nominals, examples are shown in 10. The

same items are used as object markers and also to link modifiers, adjectival or nominal, to their modified elements. In spoken Arabic, zero marking is another option in these cases, as well. Contrary to Persian, Arabic modifiers correspond to their nouns in definiteness, gender, humanness, number etc. Another Arabic post-noun item is the possessive marker, which is suffixed to noun as a pronominal clitic, as in 10.d. Dual and plural markers are also parts of the post-noun items in Arabic, which are dealt with later.

9. a. AN, EN, ON

B. A, E, O.

10.a. QARA'AT-O KETAB-AN ADHIM-AN.

Read-I book-a big-

'I read a big book.'

QARA'AT-O L-KETAB AL-ADHIM.

'I read the big book.'

b. KATABT-O FI VARAQAT-EN NADHIF.

Wrote-I on paper-a clean

'I wrote on a clean paper.'

KATABT-O FE-L-VARAGAT-E L-NADHIF.

'I wrote on the clean paper.'

c. KETAB-ON ADHIM-ON.

Book-is big

'It is a big book.'

AL-KETAB-O JAMIL.

The-book-is nice

'The book is nice.'

d. KETAB-O-KA JAMIL-ON.

Book-poss beautiful

'Your book is beautiful.'

Table 3 Distribution of Post-head material in Persian context

Post-head material	Language of noun				
	Mono. Per.		Bilingual		
	N	%	N	%	
<i>Pronominal enclitics</i>	Arabic	---	---	---	---
	Persian	83	16	25	14
<i>Indefinite marker</i>	Arabic	---	---	---	---
	Persian -i	48	9	9	5
<i>Object marker</i>	Arabic	---	---	---	---
	Persian ra:	80	15	16	9
<i>Zero</i>	320	60	127	72	
Total	531		177		
<i>Ezafe construction</i>					
<i>N + EZ + Attrib.N</i>	36	43	45	46	
<i>N + EZ + adjective</i>	47	57	35	44	
<i>Arabic construction</i>	---	---	---	---	
Total	83		80		

As presented in Table 3, Arabic-origin nouns in Persian context show similar distribution to Persian context with respect to post-nominal items. There is not any token of Arabic post-head material in Persian context. This shows that these Arabic-origin nouns are generated by the grammar of Persian and not that of Arabic.

According to this table, our monolingual Persian nouns inserted into *ezafe* construction precede their modifiers (nominal or adjectival). The same is true of Arabic-origin nouns in Persian. Once again, the distributional pattern of Arabic-origin nouns, rate of distribution, and their relative weight are almost identical to those of native Persian nouns: the proportion of N+EZ+Attrib. N ranges between 43 to

11. *Man shesh-sad ta: porseshna:me-Ø gereftam.*

I 600 CLASS questionnaire-Ø got.

46% and the proportion of N+EZ+Adj is between 44 to 57%. Their relative weights in each factor are also similar. None of the Arabic-origin nouns are used with plural definite or indefinite adjectives or attributive nouns typical of Arabic construction. This again confirms the results of the previous section, that these nouns are generated only by Persian grammar.

Next, I focused on the plural marking patterns in both languages because of their differences and the effect of Arabic plural marking patterns on Persian. The Persian plural marker '- ha:' (or 'a:n' for animates) is suffixed to the noun. Numerals are in complementary distribution with plural markers (i.e. wherever a numeral (except for *yek* (one/a) precedes the noun, the plural marker is not overt) as in 11.

'I got 600 questionnaires.'

Arabic has two different sets of markers to mark duality and plurality, shown in 12. A dual noun is formed by adding either 'ayn' or 'a:n' to the end of the noun. Plural, which refers to more than three entities, is of three kinds in Arabic: Intact plurals are formed by adding 'y:n' or 'oon' to the end of masculine nouns and 'a:t' to the end

of mostly feminine nouns. Broken plurals, which are of two kinds themselves, involve some kind of change, e.g., vowel change, in the singular noun itself. In some cases, it is possible to add a plural suffix to a broken plural noun and this phenomenon is known as plural of plural in Arabic grammar.

12. a. Duality: **RAJOL**: RAJOL-A:N:/RAJOL-AYN 'man (two men)'

b. Plurality: intact: masculine: **MOHASSEL**: MOHASSEL-Y:N/MOHASSEL-OON 'student (students)'

Plurality: intact: feminine: **HAMMAM**: HAMMAM-A:T 'bathroom (bathrooms)'

Plurality: broken: **ASAD**: OSOD 'lion/s'; **KETA:B**: KOTOB 'book/s'; **RAJOL**: REJA:L 'man/men'

Contrary to Persian, Arabic numerals are not in complementary distribution with plural

markers as in 13.

13. **QARA'ATO XAMSA KOTOB.** (Arabic)

read-I five book-PL I

read five books.'

Arabic *a:t*, *y:n*, and *oon* and in some cases tokens of broken plurals have been borrowed into

Persian and are used by Persian speakers with no gender or dual/plural distinctions.

Table 4 Distribution of plural marking with Persian and Arabic-origin nouns

Plural Markers	Language of noun			
	Mono. Per.		Bilingual	
	N	%	N	%
Arabic				
Num. + N + pl.marker		Ø	Ø	
N + y:n		Ø	3	9
Broken		Ø	12	34
Persian or Arabic N + a:t	2	2	4	11
Persian				
Noun + -ha:	70	86	16	45
Numeral + N + Ø	9	11	Ø	
Total		81		35

As shown in Table 4, Arabic origin nouns are used with Persian plural marker more than any other marker; whereas, not a single token of Arabic origin noun marked by a plural marker and preceded by a numeral. However there are 12 tokens of broken Arabic origin nouns in our data. Are these examples of codeswitchings to Arabic? Four of these nouns are accompanied by Persian pronominal items, and all of them are used in Persian word order patterns,

therefore they may not be tokens of codeswitches. However to better establish the real behavior of broken plurals, monolingual Persian data was checked to see if they have also applied Arabic patterns of plural marking in their speech. In addition to many Arabic origin nouns made plural by Persian markers, there were 56 tokens for which Arabic/Persian *a:t* or Arabic broken patterns were applied, as in Table 5.

Table 5 Distribution of Arabic origin nouns + plural markers by speakers

Plural Markers	Language of noun			
	Mono. Per. (attested)		Bilingual	
	N	%	N	%
Arabic				
Num. + N + pl.marker		Ø	Ø	
N + y:n	2	4	3	16
Broken	17	30	12	63
Broken + a:t	3	5	Ø	
Persian or Arabi N + a:t	17	30	4	21
Persian				
Plural (broken) + ha:/a:n	8	14	Ø	
Variable (Arabi/Persian)	9	16	Ø	
Total		56		19

In addition to the similarities between the two mono- and bilingual contexts, among the broken plurals, 11 were doubly marked for plural, 8 of them using Persian plural marker, indicating that these are dealt with exactly like Persian singular nouns by Persian speakers. For 9 tokens, speakers used Persian ha: or Arabic broken forms variably, again another indication of integrations. Moreover, these forms are produced by speakers who have almost no command of Arabic language. Therefore, use of Arabic broken forms may be tokens of constituent insertion mentioned by Poplack (1993), and not an indication of application of Arabic structures.

The last category to be analyzed, is the function of the noun phrase and the word order of the languages in contact. Persian is characterized as a predominantly SOV language with various reordering rules, making SVO or other word order patterns available in the grammar. Arabic is almost categorically VSO. As seen in Table 6, in my bilingual data, there is only one sentence which starts with the main verb, a structure which is typical of Arabic, while compatible with Persian, as well. Therefore, it is clearly shown that all the nominal items used in the data are inserted in Persian structural configurations and are governed by Persian elements, hence behave like monolingual Persian nouns.

Table 6 Distribution of monolingual Persian and Arabic-origin nouns with respect to word order

Word order patterns	Language of noun			
	Mono. Per.		Bilingual	
	N	%	N	%
SOV	431	93	194	98
VSO	9	2	1	.5
SVO/OVS	22	5	3	1.5
Total	462		198	

The fact that Arabic-origin nouns are treated like native Persian nominal items, suggests that all of them have been borrowed and integrated into Persian grammar.

Conclusion

Concluding, at first, one of my intentions was to find the status of the unattested Arabic-origin nouns in Persian by comparing their behavior to that of Persian and attested Arabic-origin nouns in Persian context, but there were only a few tokens of them in

the corpus. It seems that Persians have sharply decreased the integration of Arabic origin words in their language in recent years. And regarding the attested Arabic origin nouns in Persian, we have seen that whatever measure of integration we use, be it the distribution of determiners, modification, NP structure, or word order, Arabic-origin nouns in Persian discourse, consistently pattern like monolingual Persian nouns. This clearly indicates that Arabic origin nouns in Persian contexts are all tokens of borrowings or attested loanwords and do

not behave differently from Persian nouns in any respect.

Now returning to our question concerning the status of 'reja:l' in Persian, our quantitative analyses clearly show that words like 'reja:l' are integrated into Persian linguistic structures and behave exactly like Persian words; therefore, they carry Persian phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic features. Then it can firmly be claimed that 'reja:l' refers to both men and women in Persian. To further clarify the sociolinguistic functions of this particular word, I asked ten university professors, who are highly educated and more conscious of what they say, to name three 'reja:ls'; from among the influential members of the last Iranian kingdom. As such 80% of them had at least one female name in their lists. This obviously shows the social function of the word as referring to both sexes in Iranian society. Consequently, according to the findings of this study, Iranian women can nominate themselves as presidential candidates and can lead their country as presidents.

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