

## THE INVESTIGATION OF SHORTENING PROCESSES OF PERSIAN VOCABULARIES IN WEB CHATS

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### Abstract

Nowadays, innovation and application of new abbreviations is highly and rapidly represented on a large scale. The current study introduces various shortening processes such as clipping, abbreviation, backformation, acronym and blending and then, assesses them in web chats and determines their level of application. Based on different conducted researches, Persian internet users apply different shortening methods when they are chatting online, for instance using the shortened names of cities and countries, stereotypes, emoticons, shortened sentences, English abbreviations, numbers and also shortening the shortened vocabularies. Using abbreviations is the most common method of all these seven, and acronym process has the most productivity of all. Owing to the fact that if word-formation process is active in a language, borrowing will happen rarely; therefore, each language needs to take advantage of shortening processes especially acronyms.

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**Keywords:** Persian language, word-formation, shortening processes, web chat

### Introduction

It is some decades that abbreviations have become frequent in scientific texts, in a way that sometimes abbreviations are used as another language inside the main language. Considering this fact that abbreviations have got 25 percent of written and published words, it is probable that sometimes they can replace the complete form of those words among experts and specialists (Divani, 1991, p. 31). Abbreviations are a part of word-formation which is a

tool to expand a language's inventory and can convey novel concepts and contribute to communication. Language informants meet their needs through forming new vocabularies and enrich their language. This study investigates how word-formation occurs in web chats. We can recently see the increase of using abbreviations in Persian web chats. Persian speakers utilize these terms in internet environments such as web chats, since abbreviations economize on users' time and money. The present article aims to determine the most common shortening process in Persian web chats and introduce them to reduce non-Persian terms especially English abbreviations among Persian speakers.

### **Review of Literature**

Before inventing paper, the amount of writing was very important for people, but after that, nobody paid any attention to economizing on paper; therefore, in some texts such as Avicenna's and Biruni's no abbreviation can be seen. However, in Islamic texts which were written in Arabic, lots of abbreviations were used, for example just the first letter of "Peace be upon him" replaced the whole phrase.<sup>39</sup> These abbreviations were used to simplify the original forms (Kafi, 1991). But, at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, shortening processes have increased due to the instant development of information. There are different ways of shortening and abbreviating in Persian language which are clipping, blending, back formation, and acronyms, but Persian linguists have not paid much attention to them or just very shortly refer to them. Some linguists even do not know them as a part of Persian language and regard them as ill-formed words (Zomorodiyani, 2003). On the other hand, Sadeghi (1999) states that the scientific modern society has already encountered millions of scientific new words which have been derived from the West. There are two approaches to facing these words; the first one is adapting them with no change, and second one is suggesting a Persian equivalence for them. Sadeghi agrees with the second approach but does not accept the traditional methods of combination and affixation to achieve this goal. He rejects old approaches of word-formation (e.g. combination and affixation) and proposes new methods, even those which have not been used in Persian until now such as cutting (cutting a part of the word and putting it beside a complete word or another cut word, or cutting different parts of some words and putting them beside each other to make a new word), acronyms, clipping (cutting the last part of a word or collocation), and juxtaposition. He believes that applying these approaches can be useful in reducing lexical borrowing (Sadeghi, 1999).

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<sup>39</sup> The original form of this phrase is سلام الله or عليه السلام

Most of the researchers accept this borrowing process, since such kinds of word-formations have not existed in Persian language. They believe that we should attempt to reduce the amount of lexical borrowing in the process of word-formation.

Kafi (1991) has discussed abbreviations in his research in detail. His study can be considered as the only worthy research in this field. He states that in Old Persian texts, abbreviations were called “secrets” or “secret signs”, and abbreviation is a new name for shortened words or phrases. He has made some examples such as NZAJA, HMA, SAVAK which are Persian abbreviations. He also believes that abbreviation has existed both in old and new Persian texts and classifies new ones into two categories of

a) abbreviations which exist in dictionaries and encyclopaedias. For example they use just the first part of the word “zoology”

b) acronyms which are used instead of the names of some organizations and offices such as SMAJA

As it is noticed, he considers some words like “NZAJA” as abbreviations although these words are different from other words. Then, he points out the great importance of abbreviating in Persian language due to the fact that Persian language, like any other language, is used for communication, so it should be equipped with abbreviations. Another reason for creating new abbreviations is that most of the texts are being translated from other languages and if there are not sufficient abbreviated equivalences, Persian language will be damaged. In addition, he believes that the only way of cleansing Persian language is creating new abbreviations. Then, he introduces the following methods of inventing abbreviations:

1. choosing the first letter of the words
2. choosing the last letter of the word
3. choosing both first and last letters
4. the first syllable
5. the last syllable
6. choosing just some of the letters of a word
7. cutting and blending

Although some of the ways Kafi has suggested is not applicable today. He has also investigated the international abbreviations and has proposed to use them in Persian language with no change. He has concluded that Persian language’s shortage of inventing abbreviations can be the consequence of four reasons which are 1. inappropriate abbreviations, 2. using foreign abbreviations, 3. assuming that Persian alphabets and script

are not suitable for making abbreviations, and 4. ignoring the necessity of abbreviations in Persian language. Second and fourth reasons are more important than others. Some other examples which he has mentioned in his article should be classified under other titles. Another problem which exists in his research is the paucity of a clear and precise definition of abbreviation.

Zakeri (2001) has investigated abbreviated words in his research. He sees abbreviations as essential elements of language economy. His study is more accurate because of presenting more detailed examples. He states that abbreviations are arbitrary, so they should be stable, unambiguous, and fixed. He believes that if we want to make an abbreviation, we have to omit at least two letters from the original word, and suggests some approaches to make abbreviations: single-letter abbreviations (e.g. p. instead of page), the truncated, the condensed, the complex, cut words, mixed words, and acronyms.

Both Zakeri and Kafi have considered acronyms and blendings as part of abbreviations, although the way they are made is different from abbreviations and their only similarity is in being shortened.

Some linguists such as Sadeghi (2003) have pointed out abbreviations in proper nouns which are increasing in colloquial form of Persian language, for example Eli is mostly used instead of Elham or Elmira.

Among various shortening processes, back-formation has not been applied and considered as much as others. Although some scholars like Arkan (2004) has attempted to this process on the basis of Western linguistics through investigating Persian infinitives and agent nouns, back-formation process seems not to have much productivity. Shaghaghi (2007) has introduced some processes of shortening beside acronyms in his research which are clipping, back-formation, abbreviations and blending (Shaghaghi, 2007, pp. 105-110).

Considering all these researches, it can be concluded that most of the researchers have not accurately classified shortening processes and could not make precise examples relevant to each process.

In English, chat is mostly meant talking through internet, but Castells (2004) in his book “Chat and internet dictionary” has defined chat as “conversational hypertext access technology” and regarded it as one of the most common and prevalent among internet users which presents a synchronous exchange of remarks with one of more people over internet (Castells, 2004, p. 75). It seems that web chat was represented by yahoo site for the first time. After that, google site has followed yahoo and launched the facility of web chat in its site. It should be noted that there is no exact information about the date of starting web chat all over

the world, and no data exists about the history and origin of web chat in Iran. Iranian internet users communicate in chat rooms through Persian and English languages and most of the users, type Persian language through using English letters due to its simplicity. This way of typing is known as Finglish. In section 5, users' approaching will be discussed and analyzed.

In the next section, shortening processes, along with some examples, will be precisely introduced.

### **Shortening Processes**

Nowadays, owing to the huge amount of information and the need of its transfer, shortened phrases and words are more required; therefore, it is not something strange if in each language we easily encounter some vocabularies which have been shortened by language informants through various methods. Although some linguists are reluctant to regard shortening process as one of the word-formation processes, since most of them do not follow any specific rules, linguistic books have mostly mentioned some classifications of shortening processes in the arena of word-formation. By and large, shortening processes can be defined as "in shortening process, one or two words or syllables are omitted from the base form of the vocabulary" (Shaghghi, 2007, p. 106). Most of linguists have generally suggested the following shortening processes:

### **Abbreviation**

Abbreviations are categorized as written and spoken abbreviations. The principal characteristic of written abbreviations is that they are applied just in written language, such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias and scientific books. So, each language possesses its own abbreviations and some of these abbreviations are more general and popular such as scientific abbreviations e.g. Fe= iron. These abbreviations are in large measure the same in all languages, since they are arbitrary and their origin is Latin or English. It should be pointed out that these words should be considered as borrowed words which are prevalent in Persian language. Due to the fact that they are so common in different Persian texts, it is better to use them with their original form and do not replace them because it may make the readers baffled at the time of facing new abbreviations.

Abbreviations which exist in different dictionaries and scientific books cannot be regarded as independent vocabularies. For instance, in most of the dictionaries, "A" is considered as "Arabic"; it is obvious that this usage is just in written language and no one applies it in spoken form. It can be the consequence of this fact that such abbreviations do not have any functions like nominal groups or nouns; therefore, they are just limited in written language and used for indexing. Since long ago, using abbreviations has happened in

shortening proper nouns, for example “Bayazid” has been used instead of “Abayazid”. Today, this application is even more, e.g. “Shamsi” is used instead of “Shamsolmolouk”, “Badri” instead of “Badrozaman”, “Esi” instead of “Esmaeil”, “Feri” instead of “Fereydoun”, “Zeynal” instead of “Zeynol Abedin”, “Abdol” instead of “Abdol Hossein”, “Mamali” instead of “Mohammad Ali”, “Ebi” instead of “Ebrahim”, and “Kati” instead of “Katayoun”. It can be noted that sometimes when abbreviating a word, a letter is also added, for example “i” has been added to “shamsi” and “Badri”, and mostly they do not follow an exact rule.

### **Clipping**

Clipping means cutting the last part of a word, for instance “carburetor” and “starter” are pronounced as “carburet” and “start” in colloquial speech (Tajvidi, 2000, 32). Some scholars have considered clipping process as a component of abbreviation (Bauer, 1988, p. 33), although it does not look correct. There are some Persian examples at the level of word and phrase like “blood pressure” which is pronounced “pressure”<sup>40</sup> and “passport” which is pronounced “pass”. This process frequently happens in colloquial language.

### **Backformation**

In backformation process, a structural element is omitted from the derived word (Arkan, 2004) such as “edit” which is used instead of “editor”. A language informants form new vocabularies based on similar structures which they have in their mind; therefore, their new word is a word which has existed in advance in the inventory of that language. Against clipping, backformation process changes the word’s category, and recognizing the word’s history and priority needs to search for historical data of that language (Chegini, 2005, p. 47). Nowadays, backformation is not a usual shortening process and few words are being made through this process such as “market” which is used instead of “supermarket”.

### **Acronyms**

Acronym is a process in which a word is formed though the combination of initial letters of a series of words. This created word can perform the role of noun in a sentence. Most of acronyms in Persian language have been made and spread by military organizations. There are some reasons behind spreading these acronyms which may be preventing from wasting time and money, intending to hide military terms due to security reasons, and shortening a very long and frequent title (Tajvidi, 2000, p. 32). Anyways, today, acronyms are highly applied both in writing and speaking.

Besides, there are some acronyms in Persian language which have been borrowed from English and have a high frequency. A large number of these acronyms are related to

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<sup>40</sup> Due to the fact that in Persian pronunciation, pressure come before blood (against English format), clipping happens.

computers and international organizations such as NATO, NASA, and CPU and RAM. Like other Persian acronyms, function of the borrowed acronyms is also noun. For instance, “EPIC has announced that oil producers must reduce their daily quota.” Such sentence are always being used in different newspapers; vocabularies like NHAJA and NZAJA cannot be regarded as abbreviated words, since through choosing initial letters of a series of words, a new word has been created, but when abbreviating a vocabulary, nothing happens except shortening the previous word. A considerable point is that sometimes just the initial letters of a string of words are chosen and sometimes the acronym is formed from the initial parts (for example two initial letters) of a group of words. Persian acronyms are pronounceable words which are not pronounced as separate letters.

### **Blending**

Blending can be defined as combining two cut parts of some vocabularies. In this process, we have at least two words, or a word and a nominal group. During the process of blending, a part of each word is cut and then, they are combined to make a shortened new word. For example “Havanirouz<sup>41</sup>” stands for “army and air forces” or “paramedics” which is a combination of “para” (which means beside, or beyond) and medics. We should not consider blended words as ill-structured words or against Persian word-formation rules because firstly, even if these words are wrong, informants use them and they are not aware of the words’ structures, and secondly, all linguists today believe that the correct form of a word is the form which is used by informants. So, even some words which are awkward to linguists may be accepted more by people, meet their needs and convey their meaning. For example, the word “ashghalance” (which means garbage truck) is a combination of “ashghal” (which means garbage) and “ance” which is a borrowed suffix. This word has been coined by ordinary people and is highly used in colloquial language. People have compared this word with other borrowed words such as “ambulance”, since today garbage trunks use a light like ambulances, so Persian informants have used both simile and analogy to transfer their meaning. Such words rapidly become popular among people. Another feature of such blended words is that the word’s meaning is clearly manifested in its form such as “footsal” (which means indoor soccer) is a combination of “foot” (which refers to football) and “sal” (which refers salon or any indoor arena). This process is not borrowed in Persian and has existed since long ago, but today it is more common than before. The difference between blending and collocation is that in collocation, two complete words are combined but in

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<sup>41</sup> It is a Persian word which is a combination of “hava” (means air) and “nirou” (means force) and “z” (the first letter of “zamini” which means army)

blending, a part of a word is combined with a part of another word and this combination creates a new vocabulary. Another difference is that a collocation is a nominal group which is always more than one word (even if there is no “and” between the words), but a blended word is just one word, not a nominal group.

### **Research Method**

10 internet users (5 male and 5 female) have been randomly chosen to investigate the shortening processes. The researcher asked each of them to chat for one hour and then, the achieved data has been analyzed from two points of view. First, different approaches of shortening in web chats have been determined and second, the amount of applying each process has been calculated. Data analysis will be represented in the next section.

### **Data Analysis**

During the process of investigating 10 internet users, it has been concluded that they creatively shorten their vocabularies to speed up their chatting. Their shortenings can be classified into these following groups:

#### **Shortening the names of countries and cities**

Countries' and cities' names can be shortened into two letters in Persian or three letters in English, so users have applied clipping process. For example, instead of “Tehran”, they have used “Teh”, or “Tab” instead of “Tabriz”, and “Esf” instead of “Esfahan”.

#### **Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are frequently used in web chats, since they have been cliché and arbitrary among internet users, and most of the users are completely familiar with them. They are mostly related to short questions such as sex, nationality, and expressing romantic emotions. For example, ASL is used when two people start their speech and this acronym is symbol of “age, sex and location”.

#### **Emoticons**

Emoticons are a set of special signs which are so effective in simplifying users' meaning and expressing their emotion. For example, if user is sad, happy, angry or so on, without writing any words he/she is able to express his/her emotion just by sending an emoticon. Emoticons have not been mentioned as a shortening process, but due to their high frequency, their categorization is significantly required.

#### **English abbreviations**

Frequency of English abbreviations is so high between Persian internet users. For instance, they use “phot” instead of “photo” which is similar to clipping process.

#### **Shortening the shortened vocabularies**

This approach is used when a user can get access to a shortened word, but he/she again shortens that existing shortened word and makes it shorter than before. In this way,



sometimes just a letter remains, for example users mostly use “u” instead of “you” which is itself the shortened form of a sentence. It should be noted that this process can be only used in English, since this shortening process is impossible in Persian and makes the conversation nonsense.

### Numbers

Numbers are often used both in web chats and text messages. The only reason of using numbers can be their similar pronunciations, for instance they use “4” instead of “for”, or “2” instead of “too” or “to”. Persian internet users also utilize numbers whenever the pronunciation of their word is similar to a number, for example in Persian, people pronounce 2 like “do”, so when they want to write “doaa” (which means prayer), they can write “2aa” instead.

English abbreviations have been the most frequent approach among 7 mentioned approaches which have been applied by Persian internet users in web chats. After determining the type of each process in web chats, their amount of application has been calculated too. In addition, numbers and emoticons have been considered as an individual shortening process. Then, their amount of presence has been counted. The obtained results have been indicated in table 1:

**Table 1 The amount of each shortening processes’ application in web chats**

Shortening processes	Blending	Backformation	Abbreviation	Clipping	Acronym	Numbers and emoticons
Percentage of application	3%	0%	27.2%	12.1%	39.3%	18.1%

On the basis of the achieved findings, acronym is the most frequent shortening process in web chats. But, as it has been previously adverted, acronyms and other shortening processes are mostly created through applying English rules and language. Owing to the fact that none of shortened words has been proposed by language academies and all shortened words have been made by informants themselves, it can be concluded that there is a growing tendency for people to create new shortened words; therefore, it is suggested that language academies create and introduce some shortened words and phrases to gradually replace English ones.

Table 2 refers to some prevalent terms which are being used in chat rooms:

**Table 2 Some common terms in chat rooms**

ASL	Age, sex, location
TM	Trust me
U	You
WDYT	What do you think?
WGF	Without girl friend
WBF	Without boy friend
WYMM	Would you marry me?
YM	Young man
RL	Real life
RNT	Are now there?
RUT	Are you there?
S	Smile
SU	Shut up
SRY	Sorry
PHOT	Photo
PIC	Picture
PLS	Please
PLZ	Please
Q	Question
R	Are?
LY	Love you
LY4E	Love you for ever
HT	Hey! There?

## Conclusion

Accelerating the process of understating and communicating is highly needed due to the increasing speed of growing technology. Web chats are also one of the tools which facilitate communication through applying shortened words and phrases. The present study has studied different shortening processes of Persian users in web chats. The findings of the research indicate that Persian internet users apply seven shortening processes which are as follows: using the shortened names of cities and countries, stereotypes, emoticons, shortened sentences, English abbreviations, numbers and also shortening the shortened vocabularies. Five shortening processes of clipping, abbreviation, back-formation, acronym and blending have been also discussed among which acronym has had the highest frequency.

English abbreviations has recognized as the most common among the approaches which internet users have utilized in web chats. This result can be the consequence of English language which has been recently used by most of the internet users. Due to the people's growing eagerness to use abbreviations, creating new and shortened words by some language academies in a scientific and logical way is strongly suggested.

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