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# Language Conflict: A Case Study of National Language Selection in Iran

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# LANGUAGE CONFLICT:

## A Case Study of National Language Selection in Iran

by

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ABSTRACT

Iran is a complex nation composed of many nationalities and languages. Through the centuries, it has been plagued by interethnic conflicts, and rapid modernization in this century has exacerbated longstanding differences, especially between the dominant, Farsi speaking group and Iran's numerous non-Farsi speaking minorities. No issue has symbolized Iran's interethnic conflicts in this century more than language problems.

Iran's history of language conflict is treated as a case study through which to explore more universal dynamics of language conflict. Emphasis is laid on the historical development of ethnic attitudes, the function of language as a symbol of ethnicity, the necessity of examining the cultural basis of a nation in order to best address the issue of national language choice, and socio-psychological attitudes which inhibit compromise. Some parallels to bilingual issues in this country are drawn.

ERIC DESCRIPTORS

Biculturalism
Bilingual Education
Bilingualism
Ethnic Groups
Ethnic Relations
Ethnic Status
Ethnic Studies
Language
Language Attitudes
Language Planning
Language Research
Language Role
Language Typology

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# INTRODUCTION

Language is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon of human communication. As a language teacher, my interest in language, aside from professional considerations of methodology and technique, has evolved from strictly linguistic concerns to a more comprehensive knowledge of psycho- and sociolinguistic theories, and the realization that a good language teacher should ideally have a general understanding of the full extent of language's multidimensional impact on social interaction. More recently, however, my interest has been brought down from the realm of "esoteric" knowledge to the hard reality of language as a source of widespread conflict in the world. It is distressing for me as a teacher of language to see language as the cause of so much anger and violence.

The focus of this paper will be on the issue of national language choice in Iran as a case study from which can be abstracted dynamics of language conflict applicable, perhaps, to language conflict anywhere, including our own emerging bilingual problems. The issue of national language choice is a serious one which most linguistically heterogeneous nations face at one time or another, because implicit in the conflict between two or more groups over language is the existance of more general

ethnic conflicts.

I spent a total of four years in Iran from 1974-1978, the first two with the Peace Corps as a teacher of English as a Foreign language in a remote town in Baluchistan province. To my surprise, I found that after only two years I spoke Farsi better than many of my Baluchi students. Farsi is such a historically rich and sophisticated language, and so representative of "visible" Iranian culture, that I never questioned its preeminent position in Iranian culture vis-a-vis Iran's many other languages. It seemed only natural. I never questioned the policy which required Iran's sizeable non-Farsi speaking student population to learn Farsi as both the object and means of study at the same time in school. I was simply unaware of the depth and intensity of feeling concerning language issues in the non-Farsi speaking majority of the Iranian population, as I believe nearly all Persians and most foreigners interested in Iranian culture were, too.

When the country plunged into revolution in 1979, non-Persian groups began arming themselves and pressing for regional autonomy. Language demands were obviously a major thrust of those struggles, which soon turned violent. For one who considered himself knowledgeable about Iranian culture and the Farsi language, it was a shock for me to see non-Farsi speakers rejecting the notion of Farsi as the national language of all groups, which implied that the Persian people's own cultural standing was being called into question as well.

The first section of this paper will follow the major historical events and trends which have affected inter-ethnic relations in Iran. This background is vital for a complete understanding of Iran's language conflict in this century, the next area to be explored. An attempt will be made to define Iran according to various culture-based nation models and to trace the symbolism of language in the evolution of multicultural, developing nations--in the stage before colonialism, during nationalist movements, and through national policies when a nation has become a sovereign state. Finally, the dynamics of Iran's particular language conflicts and their possible resolution will be examined in more universal terms. As a teacher of English who may return to developing nations in the future, I have also looked at the types of problems these issues could very well cause for my prospective students.

Iran has yet to be treated as an object of study in research concerning language choice and planning. Emphasis has been given to countries which have directly emerged from colonial control or which have tried to settle national language issues in unique ways; nations which are typical of this research are Turkey (which early in this century Romanized its previously Arabic script and tried to purge the language of foreign words), India (whose Constitution delineates fourteen official languages) and Kenya (whose national language is not spoken by a dominant group). In my opinion, though, Iran is particularly valuable as an object of study

because the dynamics of its interethnic conflicts are so obvious due to Iran's long history and Iranian culture itself, which contains many clashes of lifestyles, loyalties and aspirations. Perhaps its multinationalism makes it particularly applicable to this country. If we see that its problems are not as different from our own as they might first appear, we can see how our own problems will grow more extreme if they remain unsolved--as has happened in Iran.

# SECTION I: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## 1:0 Linguistic Breakdown

The process of statistics-gathering in Iran is very political, especially regarding non-Persian minorities. Therefore, it is difficult to speak in exact figures since the Persian-dominated government has tended to underestimate both the size and importance of Iran's minority populations. However, it can be reasonably estimated that out of a total population of roughly thirty-five million, approximately forty-five percent speak the national language, Farsi. Table 1 shows the linguistic breakdown of the Iranian population.

Several languages are spoken by at least three percent of the population; aside from Farsi, one other language, Azari Turkish, approaches twenty percent. Altogether, about sixty-nine percent of the population speaks an Indo-European, Persian-related language, and about twenty-seven percent speak Altaic Turkish tongues. Of the Persian-related languages, Baluch and Kurdish are akin only to ancient Old Persian varieties, while Luri and Bakhtiari are incomprehensible to Farsi speakers. The Mazandarani dialects are slightly closer to modern Farsi.

Language is one of the primary factors of group

Table 1: Languages of Iran[1]

| % of total | Language | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 45 | Farsi (IE) | language of dominant culture group |
| 19 | Azari Turkish (A) | settled Turks of northwestern Iran |
| 8 | tribal Turkish (A) | Qashqa'i, Afshar, Turkoman, Shahsevan |
| 7.5 | Gilaki, Mazandarani (IE) | marginal linguistic minorities related to Farsi |
| 7.5 | Kúrdish (IE) | powerful tribal group distinctly related to Persians |
| 6 | tribal Persian (IE) | Bakhtiari, Luri |
| 3 | Arabic (S) | mostly bordering on Iraq |
| 3 | Baluch (IE) | powerful tribe related to Persians and ancient Indian groups |
| 3 | other | i.e., Armenian, Assyrian |

IE = Indo-European

A = Altaic

S = Semitic

identity in Iran. In fact, many non-Farsi speakers will identify themselves according to the languages they speak. Persians merely consider themselves the rightful heirs of Iranian civilization, the language of which, in their opinion, is Farsi. The importance of language as a primary distinguishing feature of group loyalty and identity has been a core issue in the maintenance of divisions in Iran's multi-ethnic, multicultural society.

Iran has a long history of linguistic heterogeneity. Iranian monarchs generally tolerated that status quo as long as nominal loyalty was paid to the sovereign, taxes were collected and the empire stayed together. It is only in this century that a concerted effort has been made to eradicate a perceived language "problem."

## 1:1 Physical and Demographic Setting

Iran is a large, mountainous and generally arid plateau connecting the Middle East and Europe to central Asia. This geographic setting has been a mixed blessing: it has supported and encouraged a fairly large nomadic population while at the same time maintaining a settled, agricultural population; it hindered facile communication while allowing those away from centers of power to remain relatively unscathed by invasion and the often cruel and whimsical behavior of Iran's monarchs; it facilitated Iran's economic and cultural importance and vitality since the major east-west trade routes crossed it while offering an exposed

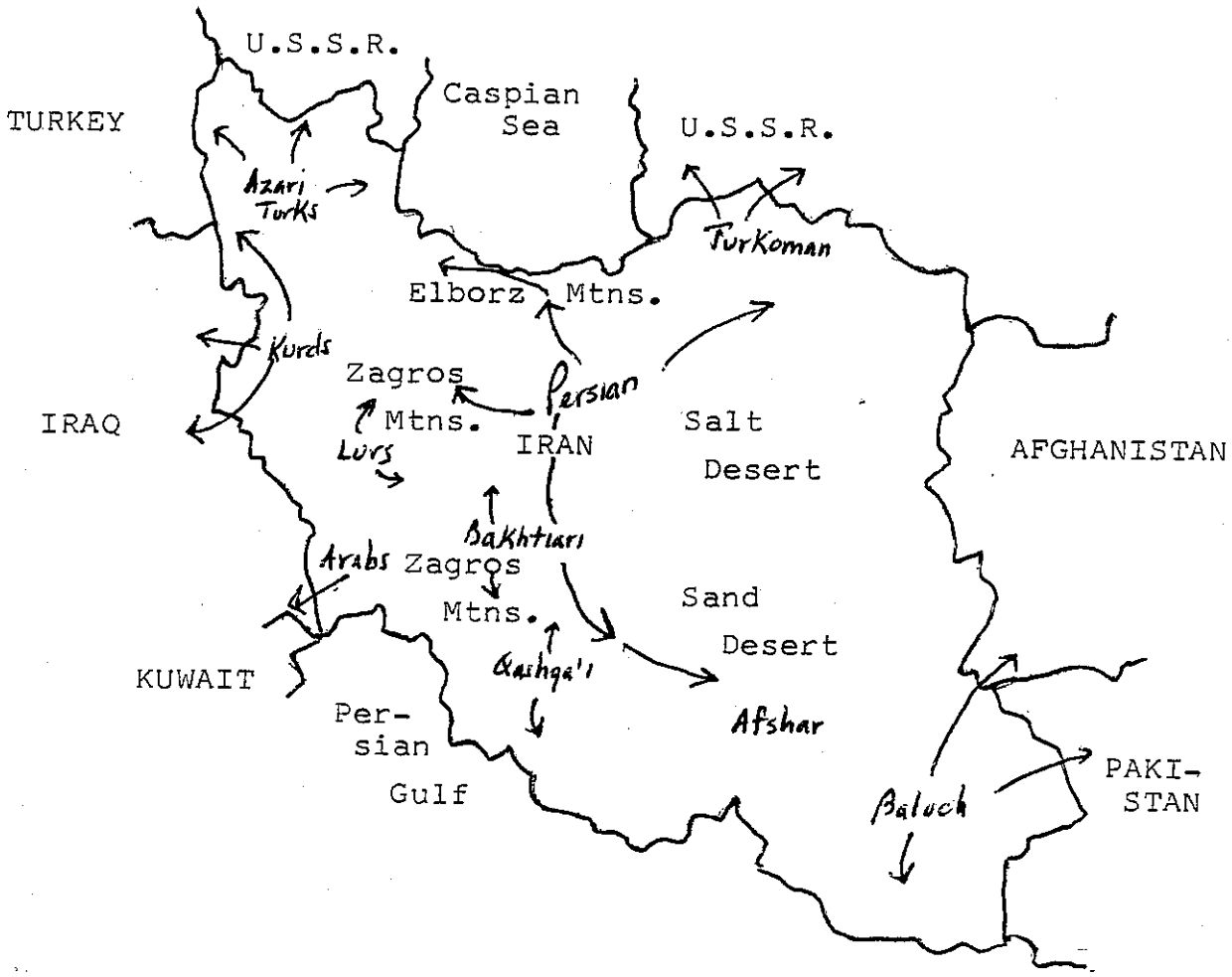
northern boundary to the vast steppes of central Asia, from whence came invading hordes of Turkic people.

The terms "Persian" and "Iranian" are not usually differentiated, but they will be for the purposes of this paper. "Persian" will refer to the original Aryan descendants to the Iranian plateau, who historically formed the backbone of a greater "Iranian" culture and who speak Farsi for the most part, but who over the years have married with non-Persians. Considering Lurs, Bakhtiari, Kurds and the Mazandaranis as Persian brings the total number of Persians to about seventy percent of the total Iranian population. However, with the possible exception of the Mazandarani peoples, their cultures and languages (as noted in chapter 1:0) have grown so far apart from those of Farsi speakers that the relationship is insignificant; certainly Farsi speakers would not be keen on insisting on the commonality between them. In speaking about Persian nationalism and Persian culture, the reference will usually be only to Farsi speakers. "Iranian," on the other hand, will be used in reference to the country and society as a whole. There is a Persian-Iranian culture, a Turkish-Iranian culture, etc. The word itself refers to the Persian people's Aryan ancestry.

Figure 1 illustrates how non-Farsi speaking minorities ring a basically Persian core. Most of Iran's urban centers lie within the Persian sphere. Relative to this, language heterogeneity in Iran can be defined as several

fairly homogeneous language groups (and until recently monolingual as well) existing around and subordinate to a core group of dominant language speakers (who are still basically monolingual).

Figure 1: Map of Iran




Handwritten words indicate Iran's major ethnic groups.

## SECTION II: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF IRAN'S MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY AND RESULTANT PROBLEMS

### 2:0 History from 651 AD to 1501

The population of Iran is a mosaic of cultures: Persians, Turks, Arabs, Jews, Armenians, Georgians, tribes, etc. The evolution of this multicultural society has been a long one. Human history on the plateau stretches back over seven thousand years. The roots of Persian history extend back to the original proto-Aryan migrations from central Europe three to four thousand years ago. Persian history itself is considered as beginning with the rise of Cyrus the Great and the Achaemenian dynasty in 554 BC.

Between 554 BC and the Arab conquest of 651 AD, the vital component of Iranian civilization was almost purely Persian, and it is only since 651 that Iranian society has begun to include large and influential groups of non-Persians. The Arab conquest caused three major changes in Iran which are pertinent to the scope of this paper: first, Arabic inundated the Persian language (then called Pahlavi), and the subsequent movement to "purify" the language became a focal point of the Persian people's eventual cultural and military resistance to Arab domination; second, the first major ethnic dichotomy was introduced into Iranian society--

Arab vs. non-Arab; third, there was a widespread change of religion to Islam. On the other hand, Persian culture heavily influenced the Arab Abbasid Caliphate.

The next major events which changed the make-up of Iranian culture were successive conquests of Iran by three waves of Turkic peoples in the span of about four hundred years: the Seljuqs in 1000, the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and the armies of Timur (Tamarlane) in the fourteenth. Persian secessionist groups had already broken chunks of Iran away from the much weakened Arab Caliphate by the time the Seljuqs attacked, and therefore there was little effective, united resistance to the invasion.

As with the Arabs before and other Turkic invaders after them, Seljuq rulers, so recently nomadic denizens of the steppes, were seduced by the sophisticated, refined and artistic Persian culture. After the initial invasion, Seljuq rulers became patrons of the arts and real enthusiasts of Persian culture. At the same time, though, another distinction was formed in Iran's ethnic make-up--Turkish vs. non-Turkish. So each time the process of invasion-rebuilding-"Persianization"-cultural renaissance occurred, the culture of Iran changed; it was no longer truly Persian even though the Persian language (now called Farsi) continued to be the culture's lingua franca, Persians remained the biggest practitioners of the arts, and Persian culture still served as the major inspiration of Iranian culture.

Although the Mongol and Timurid Khans also succumbed

to the lure of Persian culture, the initial destruction they caused (over four millions killed and the devastation of eastern Iran's agricultural capacity) was so heinous that it left an indelible mark on the Persian people's collective consciousness.

The Azari and tribal Turkish populations in Iran today are for the most part remnants of these invading peoples. Those that stayed nomadic adapted their lifestyle to Iran's mountainous terrain, and continued to plague sedentary Persians in raids out of their mountain strongholds. This further exacerbated a longstanding split in the nature of the Iranian population--nomadic/semi-nomadic vs. sedentary. So, both psychologically and historically, ethnic enmities are vital to an understanding of the scope of Iran's problems.

## 2:1 The Safavid Dynasty (1501-1723)

After the disintegration of Timurid rule a ruling dynasty sought political power by actively exploiting the Persian's own ethnicity for the first time in nine hundred years; in other words, by emphasizing the themes of Persian vs. non-Persian (rather than Turkish vs. non-Turkish, for example) and the Shi'a-Sunni schism[2], Safavid rulers united Iran under a Persian banner. In retrospect, this may be viewed as the first expression of Persian nationalism, although the concept "nationalism" is not commonly considered as existing until the building of European nation-status in

the seventeenth century. Iranian culture reached a Golden Age during Safavid rule. The Persian focus of this period is ironic considering that some scholars contend the Safavis were Iranian Turks and not Persian at all. It is interesting to note, too, that the role of Farsi in the development of this cultural renaissance was not as central or intense as it had been earlier when foreign peoples ruled Iran. This seems to indicate that Farsi assumed a pivotal role when the Persian population felt its dominant cultural position threatened.

Safavid rulers employed tribes in southern Iran to act as buffers against foreign (now European) encroachment from the Gulf, and others were conscripted into the army to help fragment tribal strength. This was the first major instance when Turkish and non-Farsi speaking Persian tribes were viewed as a potential or actual threat to a "Persian" Iran and steps were taken to dissipate their strength. The next attempt would not take place until this century, although in a far more focused and systematic way.

Iran was now restored to its old imperial size, extending well into the Caucasus and Russian Turkestan, thereby incorporating yet more ethnic groups inside Iran's boundaries--most notably the Turkoman, also descendants of the Mongol hordes. They continued to harry the Persian population of northern Iran for centures to come.

## 2:2 Qajar Iran (1791-1921)

As the Safavid dynasty declined as a political and cultural force, tribes resumed their old, independent ways and Iran was again ripe for invasion, this time by the Afghans in 1723. Then Nader Shah, an Iranian Turk, gained power and restored Iran militarily. After his death there was a struggle between the Persian Zands and Turkish Qajars with the former temporarily winning out. However, the Qajars eventually overthrew the Zands and continued to rule at least nominally until 1921.

The Qajar period was one of accelerated decline. The despotic Qajars were also very profligate, and in order to maintain Iran's financial solvency they had to borrow heavily from England and Russia, who were only too happy to oblige since each viewed Iran as a strategic prize in their struggle for control of Asia. The inability of the Qajars to control Iran's internal affairs led to increased agitation by the tribes, especially the Kurds, Lurs, Shahsevan, Turkoman and Qashqa'i. Iran's economic vitality also dropped sharply, necessitating even more political and economic dependence on Russia and England as they became Iran's only major trading partners, and on extortive terms. Soon the Qajars granted exploitive industrial and mineral concessions to British and Russian interests as a way to fund their increased dissipations. However, the Persian populace, which had been sunk in a fatalistic lethargy for years, was finally aroused, and

the country went on strike to protest a tobacco concession in 1891. This was the start of the modern Persian nationalist movement. Political resistance tended to be most intense in Persian-dominated areas, although for a time Tabriz, the capital of Turkish Azerbaijan, was the center of anti-Qajar reformism.

That the movement against Qajar misrule and European domination remained basically a Persian one is very important to keep in mind. Of all Iran's ethnic groups, only Persians and perhaps the Azari Turks felt any kind of national loyalty, and nearly the entire educated elite was Persian. The tribes became more opportunistic and tried to take advantage of Iran's internal chaos with increasingly bold and bloody raids.

## 2:3 Pre-20th Century Historical Trends Pertinent to Language Issues

Two distinct socio-economic and political formations have evolved out of Iranian history. One is largely Farsi speaking and Persian, settled urban or rural, while the other is largely non-Farsi speaking, nomadic or seminomadic, often tribal. The former controls Iran's bureaucracy, bazaars and religious centers, and is considered by many as "representing" Iranian culture; the latter has always been geographically peripheral, basically independent, and generally a more recent historical phenomenon.

The Persian people have always maintained some historical

identity with the notion of an Iranian entity via their language and cultural traditions, even though Iran has often been either foreign-ruled, or ruled by non-Persian Iranians. Until early this century, the settled Persian population had been easy prey for the much hardier, more aggressive tribal peoples--tempered as they have been by a harsh life and a fiercely independent spirit--even while considering them only from a very chauvinsitic attitude of superiority and contempt. The contempt is mutual but the tribes have never feared the Persians.

So while even non-Persian governments have come to express Iranian culture's Persian roots and perpetuated its fruits, most historical and geographical factors point to disunity in an Iranian state. Iranian society epitomizes Iran's history of conflict and embodies the contradictory lifestyles and aspirations of its numerous peoples. Regional loyalties and insecurities were reinforced by lawlessness, long distances and harsh terrain. Of course, loyalty to clan or Khan or village undermines the establishment of an overriding national loyalty, and as a result, the development of any type of coherent national consciousness has been thwarted until this century. The Persian people's oft-mentioned historical connection to an Iranian entity was a romantic, self-fulfilling identity with a semi-mythological ideal, artistically redefined and re-expressed periodically through Persian culture. Persian nationalists

attempted to meld the romantic image with the exigencies of a modern state.

And whatever the validity of an argument positing Farsi's preeminent cultural position, it may very well not have been spoken by a majority since the Turkish invasions. European travelers in Qajar Iran often noted their surprise upon hearing Turkish spoken exclusively in northwestern Iran, and predominating to within only one hundred miles of the capital, Tehran. Non-Farsi speakers, especially the tribes, have clung tenaciously to the right to speak their own languages even in this century, so it can easily be imagined that since 651 until fairly recently, Farsi was confined to a steadily shrinking area, encircled by a solid ring of Turkish, Kurdish, tribal Turkish and Persian, Arabic and Baluch. In many cases the speakers of these languages formed nearly independent or autonomous regions inside Iran, and they certainly didn't consider themselves part of any other larger entity.

So, in summation, the historical issues affecting Iran's language situation, aside from strictly political factors, are: Persian chauvinsim, non-Farsi speakers' contempt for Persians, the historic clashes between thse groups, how each vies its respective place in an historical Iranian nation and what each group sees is the nature of Iranian society.[3]

## SECTION III: 20TH CENTURY IRAN AND LANGUAGE CONFLICT

### 3:0 Until Reza Shah

Increasing contacts with the homogeneous societies of Western Europe helped Persian nationalists articulate the philosophy that language heterogeneity and multiculturalism were hindrances to Iran's national development. Eliminating all languages other than Farsi was seen as a way to strike at the heart of Iran's problems. As early as 1906 the following could be heard in Iran's public forums:

> A society can modernize itself only when it constitutes a nation. And it constitutes a nation only when it is bound together by common traditions, beliefs and characteristics. Allegiance to a single monarch is not enough. . .(as) we know from our own bitter experience. . .Many of our misfortunes can be traced to the Mongol and Tatar invasions when a foreign language was imposed on our beloved Azerbayjan and our population sharply divided between Farsi and Turkish speakers.[4]

As the reformist movement grew it focused on the establishment of a Constitution. Reformists demanded that one third of all parliamentary seats be restricted to Farsi-speaking representatives from Tehran, and that furthermore, no one without a knowledge of reading and writing Farsi be allowed a seat at all.

Until the final establishment of a Constitution in 1909 there was a great deal of anarchy throughout the country, and although the tribes often did not even know what the word "Constitution" meant, they fought bitterly with pro- or anti-Constitutionalist forces depending on the allegiances of their friends and enemies. These allegiances shifted mercurially, too; for example, the Turkoman who for years had fought against the Qajars, backed the attempted reconquest of Iran by the ex-Qajar Shah Mohammad 'Ali, who had been forced to abdicate. The Qashqa'i and Bakhtiari were notorious for their shifting alliances. At one point Bahktiari forces actually occupied Tehran.

During World War I Russia, Germany and England intrigued to influence the composition and direction of Iranian govenments. The country was, in effect, partitioned into spheres of influence, with tribes sometimes acting as surrogate armies for foreign powers. State finances were in disarray, highway robbery was rampant, and some peripheral areas even tried to break away from Iran, such as the separatist war in Azerbaijan in 1919-20. The only thing which could have saved Iran from complete collapse was a powerful, compelling leader. In 1921 an obscure Cossack officer, Reza Khan, helped launch a coup, and later that year he completely took over power.

Reza Khan was an intense nationalist whose policies revolved around Iranian independence and internal security. He propelled Iran along a hastily-planned path of moderniza-

tion--that is to say, modernization by and for Persians. (And as he grew more powerful he became increasingly brutal in the implementation of his policies.) Being a nationalist, he saw Iran's tribes as the major military and cultural obstacle to national unity. In order to rectify the prevailing situation he methodically and ruthlessly set about achieving the goal of tribal pacification, and by the time he crowned himself Shah in 1925, he had basically succeeded. While all obvious evidence supported his thesis, with the advantage of hindsight it is now clear that the cause lay in the nature of Iranian society, not with one group or another.

The outward cast of his polity soon took on an increasingly blatant ethnocentric and chauvinistic tone as he harkened back to the real and semi-mythological glories of pre-Islamic Iran for inspiration and propaganda, thereby historically relegating the non-Persian majority to non-Iranians in fact, though not-quite-so-brazenly in name.

## 3:1 Until 1941

Reza Shah was not alone in this chauvinistic nationalism. However brutal and alienating his personal style, he articulated the latent pride of the Persian people which had been suppressed so often since the Arab conquest, and so recently and ignominiously under Qajar rule. The Āyăndeh, a journal popular with the Persian intelligentsia, began publication with an editorial entitled, "National

Unity Is Our First Aim," which went in part:

> All those who value Iranian history, the Persian language and the Shi'a religion must realize that they have much to lose if the Iranian state crumbles. And the Iranian state is in danger of crumbling as long as its citizens consider themselves not primarily as Iranians, but as Turks, Arabs, Kurds. . .we must, therefore, eliminate minority languages, regional sentiments and tribal allegiances. . .this we can accomplish by radically expanding the elementary educational system, and thus taking the Farsi language and Iranian history to the provinces.[5]

This argument is typical: it ignores, or is ignorant of, the fact that no language was a majority language, including Farsi; in addition, it makes the assumption that Persian culture is Iranian culture, and that all other cultures on the Iranian plateau are at best exotic, though often extremely troublesome and ultimately unnecessary adornments. Famous ideologues like Kasravi and Afshar advocated such steps as the elimination of non-Farsi place names, the relocation and dissipation of Turkish and Arab tribes into Persian-dominated central Iran, and the consolidation of a Persian-run administration. In formulating his nationalist programs, Reza Shah incorporated many of these ideas. He outlawed traditional and regional dress, eliminated the provinces of Kurdistand and Baluchistan, closed all non-Farsi printing presses and schools, and concentrated most trade and industry in Persian cities. A state-run school system with Farsi as the only acceptable language was established.

Without a doubt, Reza Shah's treatment of the tribes

was the most sordid aspect of his rule. Although the immediate military threat was reduced considerably, the tribes were never completely subdued, and certainly never in spirit. In order to monitor the pacification program, a policy of forced sedentarization was introduced in the 1930's. Many in the tribes died from illness in the hot lowlands and tribal migratory patterns were disrupted. These measures caused impoverishment and engendered a deep hatred for the Pahlavi regime.[6]

Periodic flare-ups continued, however, with the government's response being military, exiling Khans and tribal princes to Tehran or merely executing them. Exile to Tehran meant being held hostage or "Persianized." A Qashqa'i uprising in 1936 and a Kurdish uprising in 1939 showed that force had only bred more resentment and conflict, though.

Iran's economic fortunes fell in the 1930's, and by the time World War II started, Iran was very weak. It was again partitioned into spheres of influence, this time between Germany and the Allied powers. In the meantime, Reza Shah's tyranny had caught up with him, and when forced to abdicate in 1941 by the Allies for supporting Germany, the country rejoiced.

## 3:2 Synopsis--The Conflict Between Persian Nationalism and Ethnic Minorities (1900-1941) and Its Impact on Language

The motives behind the Persian struggle to eliminate the perceived tribal military threat were the same for the more subtle cultural struggle which followed. Since the

overriding concern of Persian nationalists was national integrity and unification (albeit on a Persian model), it was necessary in their eyes to eradicate regional loyalties, especially in groups which had traditionally felt themselves at least semi-independent from the Iranian government. This attempt to obtain national loyalty from all citizens, even by force if necessary, tried to break down bonds of blood, creed, race and language. In looking back at Iranian history, Persian nationalists, however, saw themselves as victims, victims of non-Persian domination. They felt that despite the preceding 1,300 years, at the core, Iranian culture was only Persian culture, and so naturally that Farsi was the only "Iranian" language.

Of course, non-Farsi speakers usually did not see themselves as obstacles to national unity, because at that time national unity was totally irrelevant to their history, lifestyles and aspirations. The attempt to subdue or "Persianize" the tribes and other non-Persian minorities was an affront to their traditions and cultures, and in fact merely exacerbated the problem. On the other hand, Persian nationalists saw the stubborn refusal of ethnic minorities to integrate into a Persian-dominated society on Persian terms as further evidence of the necessity and legitimacy of their hardline policies. It is a vicious circle which is still turning this day.

When the government built schools and widened educational opportunity, for chauvinistic and ideological reasons

Farsi was made the sole language of instruction of the system, which in any case was inadequate to address the realities of Iran's complex educational needs. The increasing availability of education was a bittersweet development for ethnic minorities because it had to be bought at a linguistic and cultural price. (Certainly the push for quality education was only in urban Persian areas anyway.) In terms of language, the issue was not to maintain non-Farsi speaking students' first languages, but to teacher Farsi at their expense.

The policy of forced sedentarization tried to accomplish four objectives: first, break the military strength of the tribes; second, break the spirit of the tribes; third, enable taxes to be collected; fourth, speed along the process of "Persianization." Confining tribal groups to the cold-weather, lowland sites of their migratory routes were physically and economically debilitating to peoples used to a healthy mountain climate and a finely balanced grazing economy.

The following was written in 1970, but it is quite illustrative of Persian attitudes from the 1930's:

> . . .there are about 3 million tribal members living a nomadic or semi-nomadic life in various regions of Iran. They are reluctant to change and adopt ways of life more in line with the. . .goals of Iran. Their tribal system is an impediment to rapid growth and modernization. . .one may disagree with the authoritarian policy of sedentarization, but Iran could not afford to remain indifferent. . .and adopted a way to deal with the problem.[7]

Aside from the aggressive, chauvinist policies themselves, they were carried out with no small degree of racial and ethnic bias by Persian bureaucrats, soldiers and politicians. This racism is implicit in Farsi, too; two ways to point up someone's stupidity are by saying, "Ăz bīkh 'ărăbī!" (You're an Arab from your roots!), and, "Eh, Tōrke" (What do you expect, he's just a Turk!). Persian haughtiness was aggravated, too, by the self-righteous manner in which they set about rectifying Persian supremacy in Iran--in their own view, righting past wrongs.

In the context of these chauvinistic national policies, the push for Farsi took on symbolic import both for Persians as a focal point of their movement to re-establish cultural supremacy, and ethnic minorities as the most obvious manifestation of Persian ethnocentrism. Thus, at its roots, language suppression is irrevocably bound up with the Persian governments military and cultural suppression of ethnic minorities.

### 3:3 Conflict Between Mohammad Reza Shah and Non-Persians (1946-1979) and At Present

While policies towards ethnic minorities were perhaps less overtly brutal under the government of Mohammad Reza Shah, Reza Shah's son, interethnic relations continued to fester and the relative position of non-Farsi speakers in Iranian society declined, due to the evolution of a fairly affluent middle class composed mainly of Persians. However, for a time it seemed as though there was validity to

the Persian policies of national integration because of the false glow of prosperity which came out of the oil-inspired economic boom. It became profitable, in fact, for non-Farsi speakers to learn Farsi in order to participate more fully in the incredible growth of the Iranian economy. But this apparent stability has only recently been seen to be a chimera; even political foes of the deposed Shah have been shocked at the strength and intensity of ethnic minorities' recent movements for regional autonomy. This is not surprising, however, if the prevailing psychological nation-view of the Persian population as related in the preceding chapters is taken into account. It is not the right's oppression of the left which is ultimately the root cause of Iran's instability, but psychological attitudes and the conflicts inherent in its multicultural society.

It is worth following the development of this situation to better understand the dynamics involved in Iran's social and cultural--and thus language--conflicts. In 1946 the young Shah was confronted with a dramatic problem which actually was an omen of the future: there was an attempt by the province of Azerbaijan to wrest political and cultural autonomy from the Persian-run central government. The movement was aided and agitated by the Soviet Union in the hopes of establishing a proxy government there, but the movement itself was rooted in a sophisticated awareness by Azari Turks of their legitimacy as Turkish-Iranians, not merely non-Persian Iranians. Of course, this concept was an athema to Persians.

This movement was a reaction to a cumulative set of Persian encroachments and antagonisms, and an increase in instances of Persian vs. Azari conflict between workers which had already led to violence. The Communist Tudeh Party saw this as a right wing (i.e., Persian Monarchist) phenomenon, but actually even the Communists themselves found out how abysmally ignorant they were about the true nature of Iranian society. Many delegates to Communist Party Congresses were Azerbaijani (Azari) Turkish speakers who by dint of strength of numbers refused to speak Farsi, while Persian Communist field workers found to their dismay that the non-Persian peasantry was utterly ignorant of Farsi. Eventually an Azari Communist Party was established when it became clear that even the relatively progressive and modernist Persian Communists were unwilling and unable to come to terms with multiculturalism and language heterogeneity as realities of Iranian society.

Azerbaijani rebels issued a proclamation when at one point they seemed to have reached their goals. The relevant portions are produced below:

> 1 The People of Azerbayjan have been endowed by history with distinct national, linguistic, cultural and traditional characteristics. These characteristics entitle Azerbayjan to freedom and autonomy as the Atlantic Charter has promised to all nations.
>
> 2 The people of Azerbayjan have no desire to separate themselves from Iran. . .for they are aware of the close cultural, educational and political ties which exist between themselves and other provinces, and are proud of the sacrafices

> they have made for the creation of modern Iran. . .
>
> 7 The people of Azerbayjan have a special attachment to their national and mother tongue. They realize that the imposition of another language on them has hindered their historical progress. This congress, therefore, instructs its Ministers to use the Azerbayjani language in schools and government offices as soon as possible.[8]

It is obvious to what extent the Azaris' perception of Persian encroachment on their historic, cultural and linguistic rights was the emotional impetus to an otherwise political struggle. Eventually Mohammad Reza Shah, with American help, restored order and Persian supremacy, but not before he had Turkish printing presses destroyed and Farsi reintroduced to Azerbaijani schools.[9] Official reaction to the linguistic demands of the Azerbaijani separatists reflected Persian ignorance of the depth to which the roots of Iran's language conflict are sunk in the dynamics of a wider social and political conflict. For example, in a communiqué issued by the Prime Minister to the American Ambassador it was written that "the people of Azerbaijan never considered Turkish their national or permanent language, but merely a tongue imposed upon them by the aggressions of the Mongols."[10] In the semi-official newspaper "Etălā'ăt," the following were read:

"It (Turkish) is a stigma of the national disgrace we suffered at the hands of the barbarians," and "Who would exchange the cultured literature of Firdowsi, Sa'adi and Hafez[11] for the uncouth babble of the Mongol plunderers."[12]

At the risk of repetition, a most significant fact was the inability and/or unwillingness of even Persian intellectuals and the "politically enlightened" to come to grips with language issues. In yet another example of this blindness, the Communist Party organ Shăhbāz published the following in an article otherwise showing solidarity with the Azerbaijani uprising:

> We realize that our brothers in Azerbaijan have a strong attachment to their local language, which has been unjustly maligned. But we hope this attachment is not so extreme that it will weaken Farsi, the national and traditional language of the state. We are certain that the 'Ferqah-e Demukrat' (Azerbaijani Communist Party) has taken into account this important consideration, which touches us very closely. And we hope that it will pursue a policy which will not lead to the cultural breakdown of the country.[13]

Some Persians tried to argue that a "local" language such as Azari Turkish could not be a "national" language since Azerbaijan was merely a part of the Iranian (read Persian) nation, and political mediators tried to bargain about the number of years Azari Turkish could be taught in Azerbaijani schools before it changed over to Farsi; and of course, the Shah's reconquest of Azerbaijan put an end to the necessity of political mediation. But the answers to these questions are plaintively summed up in the following portion of an article entitled "Linguistic Chauvinism" printed in the Azari Communist Party organ, Zăfăr:

> "The people of Azerbaijan have spoken Turkish for nine hundred years. Who can deny that it is their mother tongue?"[14]

Concurrent with the failed Azerbaijani breakaway, the Kurds and Qashqa'i also agitated for autonomy. By 1947 the government was negotiating with these tribes plus the Bakhtiari about exchanging their weapons for better Parliamentary representation, medical care, education, etc.

After oil was nationalized and Iran's internal situation stabilized in 1951, the Pahlavi government focused more and more of its attention on a simultaneous "westernization/Persianization" (or Farsiization) campaign against what it considered as both the non-national and non-modernist elements in Iranian society. The combination of "westernization" and "Persianization" may appear mutually exclusive or contradictory, but a push was made to modernize Iranian culture. The famed "White Revolution" of 1963 was the Shah's major articulation of this policy. It was his attempt to buy legitimacy and popular support through land and education reform, and modernization. It is not within the scope of this paper to examine the results or motives of the White Revolution, but suffice it to say that the political, economic and cultural gap between Persians and non-Persians continued to grow.

One of the most progressive elements of the White Revolution was the push for education all over Iran. To this end, soldiers were sent to isolated villages as part of their army duty to teach in rural schools, and thus formal

education was brought to areas of Iran it had not been in before. In addition, a great many new schools were built, although the numbers still remained inadequate as did staffing and educational materials. Farsi continued to be the language of instruction, and it was not unheard of for non-Farsi speaking students to be beaten if caught speaking their own languages in school. Increasing numbers of newly educated, newly middle-class Persians who became teachers in non-Persian areas exacerbated cross-cultural frictions, as they tended to feel very superior to their "ignorant" students; some Persian teachers couldn't refrain from ridiculing the parentage of their non-Farsi speaking students.

Schools were constructed in tribal areas as added incentive for the tribes to settle down--the carrot instead of Reza Shah's stick--and a highly successful system of tent schools was instituted in Qashqa'i country, wherein the teacher and school would migrate with the tribe. Yet even here, Farsi was the language of instruction and the subjects reflected the plans of urban Persian educators rather than the needs and realities of nomadic life. Thus tent schools, too, furthered the process of "Persianization," albeit in a less overt manner than methods previously used.[15]

In an ironic sidelight to all this, it was probably easier for an Iranian to learn Chinese in Tehran than find a class where another language spoken in Iran was taught, except Arabic.[16] To mention an issue that will be explored

in more detail in a later chapter, Iran's adult literacy program was engaged in teaching Farsi as a Second Language rather than teaching non-Farsi speakers how to read and write in their own languages.

Politically, ethnic minorities had no real strength in the government's decision-making bodies, and as the upper class and Persian politicians grew more overtly chauvinistic, so did lower-level bureaucrats and the middle class. In carrying out their duties, bureaucrats treated non-Farsi speakers unfairly, gratuitously and contemptuously. Posts in non-Persian provinces were given to Farsi speakers or else to non-Persians from different provinces. In an attempt to "Persianize" the oil- and agriculturally rich province of Khuzistan, many Persians were sent there via the army, bureaucracy and industry.

To further illustrate the cultural and language attitudes of the upper class, Table 2 shows how the first languages spoken in Iran's parliament differ from their representation in the society-at-large.[17] (Compare Tables 1 and 2.) Naturally Farsi, as well as marginal linguistic minorities from the Caspian region (i.e., Mazandarani), were a significantly higher proportion of the total, with Azari Turkish only slightly higher; Arabic, Baluch and especially tribal Turkish were lower. More significantly, however, of the entire Persian elite polled, only seventeen percent knew a second language spoken in Iran, while eighty percent had learned a foreign language such as English, French and

Table 2: First Languages Spoken in the Iran Parliament (1970)

| Language | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Farsi | 50.2 |
| Azari Turkish | 20.6 |
| Gilaki & Mazandarani | 10.9 |
| Luri & Bakhtiari | 5.7 |
| Kurdish | 5.6 |
| Baluch | 2.3 |
| Arabic | 2.0 |
| Turkoman | 1.7 |
| Other | 1.0 |
| | Total: 100 % |

Russian. Of course, Farsi was the second or third language of all the non-native Farsi speaking elite.

With the bureaucracy in Persian hands, education being advancement at the price of "Persianization," no real economic power and a constant stream of highly chauvinistic, pro-Persian propaganda, Iranian minorities gnawed at their resentment in private, but sporadic violent clashes with government forces indicated that the problem had far from disappeared. So naturally, upon the outbreak of civil unrest which toppled the Shah, tribes quickly re-armed and set about fighting the new governments for long-pressed claims of political and cultural autonomy. Ironically, the Shah had prophesized that without a strong central government, the tendency of Iranian society would be to fly apart due to its inherent contradictions and conflicts, and he has been proven correct in this assessment. Whereas the new government has tried negotiation as well as military responses, they are just as ethnocentric as earlier Persian governments. In addition, new religious strains have been added to tribal-government relationships, because the new government is avowedly Shi'ite while sizeable portions of Kurds, Turkoman, Qashqa'i and Baluch are Sunni. Interestingly enough, even Shi'ite factions are breaking down along ethnic lines, such as the unrest in Azerbaijan in support of Āyăt̄ōllăh Shăr̄ĭăt̄mădārī in his struggles against Āyăt̄ōllăh Khōmeīnī. However, it is very difficult to obtain accurate information about these issues due to Iran's intense xenophobia and the Iran-Iraq war.

# CHAPTER IV: LANGUAGE CHOICE IN IRAN

## 4:0 Some Culture-Based Definitions of Nation, Nationalism and Nationality

Research and analysis in the fields of language choice and language planning is a relatively recent phenomenon, and still basically an unexplored issue in Iran. Language planning is mainly the programmed development and standardization of a language so as to keep it relevant in the context of a country's (and the world's) prevailing political, economic, scientific, educational and communicational needs and realities; language choice is the selection of one or more languages to function as the nation's official or national language(s). It is with this latter question that we are concerned, although some elements of language planning are of consequence in any questions about the legitimacy of a particular language to act as a tool of national unification.

Joshua Fishman has written:

> ". . .supposedly natural bases for defining a national group, or selecting an official language, are usually the end points of social processes that are functional for the advancement of a national movement. . . deliberately fostered by the relevant elites and. . .heavily butressed by rationalizations.[18]

This has clearly been the case in Iran. In the previous section on Iran's historical evolution from a purely "Persian" phenomenon to a more variegated "Iranian" entity, ethnic clashes were identified as the major dynamic of that change. Persian nationalists, out of a lack of perspective and intense ethnocentrism, sought cultural justification and inspiration by leaping back 1,300 years, before these national cultural changes had occurred; at the same time, the true nature and relevance of these changes were naturally glossed over, giving Persians a false and misleading conception of the reality of twentieth century Iranian society. Developing nations do generally tend to base their nationalisms on their pre-colonial histories, so in this sense it is understandable, but on the other hand, the intense chauvinsim of Persians towards all other Iranian peoples as well as the interethnic mistrust common to all groups have aggravated the problem, and given it a wider dimension.

Iran is somewhat unique in terms of its vast time scale, which includes two, if not three, "colonial" periods and subsequent resurgent "nationalisms:" the two mentioned in Section III (Safavid Iran after Arab and Turkish domination, and Pahlavi Iran after more Turkish rule and quasi-domination by European powers) plus Sassanian Iran (circa 220 AD until the Arab invasion) after Alexander the Great's invasion and the "Greekish" Parthian dynasty.

The Iranian situation, being so polarized, throws into sharp focus a number of questions which should be asked by any country before it chooses a national language:

1-What is, and has been, the country's national "personality," based upon its history and present ethnic composition;

2-Who can legitimately make this decision;

3-At what point along a historical continuum can a "representative" example of a nation be identified;

4-How representative is a national language in terms of the dominant culture and the society at large;

5-Can there be more than one "nation" inside a nation--that is to say, what defines a nation, and can two "nations" coexist within a larger nation;

6-If #5 is possible, what is the responsibility towards other "national" languages?

Crawford Young posits an 8-fold classification of the cultural basis of a state which helps to synthesize the variables applicable to establishing the "reality" of a nation over a period of time. It is reproduced in Table 3.[19] In this schema, Iran appears to be definition #7, that of a nation which has escaped formal colonialism and has strong links to the past. On the other hand, it is also seen to be definition #1, that of a country with historical boundaries and an influx of settler populations (i.e., the Arabs and Turks) with sovereignty to the immigrant populations. This hints at the extent of Iran's problems.

Table 3: 8-Fold Classification of the Cultural Basis of a Nation

| Definition | Example |
|---|---|
| 1) historical boundaries, influx of settler population, sovereignty to immigrant population | United States |
| 2) no historic basis, grown out of colonial period | Spanish Sahara |
| 3) homeland state | Israel |
| 4) arbitrary colonial creation | Tanzania |
| 5) built out of colonial period, but having cultural identity | Syria |
| 6) predate colonial rule, but came under colonial administration | Morocco |
| 7) escaped formal colonialism, has strong links to past | Iran |
| 8) formed out of the wreckage of colonialism | Pakistan |

Table 4: 6-Fold Classification of Cultural Diversity

| Definition | Example |
|---|---|
| 1) homogeneous society | Sweden |
| 2) single dominant group with minorities | Saudi Arabia |
| 3) core culture with differentiated groups on the periphery | Iran |
| 4) bi-polar dominant | Belgium |
| 5) multipolar, no dominant group | Tanzania |
| 6) cultural multiplicity with differentiation of ethnicity, religion, etc. | United States |

Young has also defined six catagories of cultural diversity, as is shown in Table 4.[20] Here one encounters a more difficult problem because over a period of time, Iran has been each of the classifications: #1 in pre-Islamic Iran; #2 after the Arab invasion; #3 is its best modern definition; #4 between Persians and Turks from the Turkic invasions until Safavid Iran; #5 in Qajar Iran when anarchy reigned; and #6 defines it at present along with #3.

Combining Tables 3 and 4, however, we can abstract a general definition of Iran as an ancient country in which a homogeneous culture was overcome by settler populations, with each major group at one time exercising sovereignty over all or part of Iran, in addition to some degree of independence afterwards; the original culture group has regained its dominant position at the expense of other groups. It has maintained strong links with the past and escaped a period of formal colonial rule, but colonial contact sped along the process of nationalist awareness. Although it is basically a core culture with groups on the periphery, the relative independence of these groups (i.e., settler populations) renders the word "periphery" inappropriate to their actual status. Iran's multiculturalism is characterized by separate, generally homogeneous societies linked together almost solely through conflict, but within the context of relatively consistant boundaries dating back millenia; whatever ties do exist between groups

are based in the institution of a monarchy.

This brings us to the Persian nationalist movement, and the institutionalizing of Persian chauvinist attitudes in government and the society at large. These attitudes can be put in a more universal context, however:

> As the nation-state becomes increasingly an object of primary loyalty for the majority, the position of non-national groups will deteriorate.[21]

Even the most liberal nationalists will prefer to tolerate other minority cultures only insofar as they manifest themselves as part of the national tapestry, subjugated to the nationalists' own ethnocentric nation-view. Nationalist movements tend to represent ethnocentric self-interests; being formulated and regulated by elites, they are often self-serving. Nationalist movements also tend to reforge past history in times of fragmentation or identity loss, so in this the dynamics of Persian nationalism are so far not different from those of many other nationalist movements. Perhaps one difference lies in the fact that a large part of Iranian society is composed of groups against which Persian nationalism has historically been directed. This relates back to Tables 3 and 4.

It is common for nationalist movements to use urban centers as a major source of ethnocultural self-identity, and certainly this has been true for Persian nationalism.

Persian culture has been strikingly urban, exemplified by the cities of Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, Mashhad and recently Tehran. These cities are seen by many Iranian groups as centers of Iranian culture; significantly, despite the Azari capital of Tabriz's enoromous cultural and historical importance to Iran, Persians do not view it as representative of Iranian culture to the same degree as the other cities. It is not surprising, though, that the nationalisms of Iran's nomadic tribal groups do not use cities as romantic expressions of their ethnicity. Does this imply, however, that they are not sufficiently "civilized" to merit legitimacy as a national movement, or even a nation?

There is a strain of legitimacy-seeking in all national movements. Nationalism in response to colonial rule resensitizes a people to its own legitimate pre- and non-colonial past. It is striking that in the case of Persian nationalism, the articulation of Persian legitimacy excluded a claim of equal Iranian legitimacy by other groups. Any nationalist movement must represent a group which has historical integrity, language and continuity of culture. One important aspect of historical integrity is territoriality and another is "officially recognized" sovereignty. Since Iran is a multicultural society in which peripheral groups had been allowed to maintain at least semi-independence from the monarchy in exchange for little more than lip-service allegiance if that, non-Farsi speaking groups have always had, until this century, all the ingredients of

"officially recognized" nations: historical integrity, continuity of culture, language and political autonomy. "Official recognition" implies European recognition, and it was a necessity for any nationality, or group of nationalities, to be considered as a viable nation in the post-colonial world. It was a very capricious system.

For instance, the Baluch and the Kurds are now divided among three contiguous nations: the Baluch in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the Kurds between Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Each maintained a very high degree of military, political and cultural autonomy as entities distinct from surrounding cultures, but internally loyalties to clans and Khans, exacerbated by blood feuds and fights over water and grazing rights, fractured any overall unity--at least the kind that the British expected to find in states worthy of their colonial attentions. The British simply avoided entangling themselves in Kurdistan and Baluchistan overly much, and in this way these nationalities were denied "officially recognized" sovereignty when colonialism receded from Asia; they became portions of arbitrarily created states, or incoportated within boundary adjustments.

Until Reza Shah's suppression of the Kurdish rebellion in 1922, the Kurds had exercised a degree of independence which many "officially recognized" modern states would envy. Europeans felt a good deal of revulsion over the Kurdish means of livelihood--robbing, fighting, raiding and herding--and perhaps this is why they were denied their nationhood.

In the 1946 Kurdish uprising, the assertion of language and culture rights was as prominent as it was in the Azerbaijani fight for autonomy in the same year, demonstrating a sociocultural awareness of a transcendant ethnic consciousness; that is to day, one which transcended small group loyalties. The Baluch, who in any case feel more affinity towards Afghans and Pakistanis than Iranians, and who prefer Urdu to Farsi as a second language, have had a similar historical experience. Military suppression by Reza Shah put to an end centuries of freedom and autonomy. Baluchistan itself is a series of arid plateaus and mountains broken only by a few real desert stretches and small oases; no one ever wanted or needed it until oil and geopolitical considerations in the last one hundred years--no one, that is, except the Baluch! Thus it was consigned to the finge of "useful" history despite a recorded folk literature dating from the tenth century, a distinct national language and dress and a highly efficient grazing economy.

In this century the Persian government has adopted an "amalgamative" model of political unity, because sociocultural unity has been impossible to achieve in the context of Iran's multicultural society. Force has been the major factor in the establishment of political unity. This distinction between political unity and sociocultural unity is one Joshua Fishman makes in Language Problems of Developing Nations[23], where he differentiates between

"nationism" and "nationalism". "Nationism" is an attempt to obtain polical unity, while "nationalism" represents sociocultural unity. The force used in the Persian attempt at nationist unification makes it an example of "artificial nationism" because unity--often temporary--is bought by coersion.

Language problems in nationist movements are of a different magnitude than language considerations in nationalist movements. In the latter, language is a factor present in sociocultural unity, whereas in the former it often symbolizes one group's supremacy over another. Language choice is a difficult problem in countries established along nationist lines. Being an example of a country with many groups socioculturally conscious at the nationalist level, Iran exemplifies how deep-rooted language conflict can be. Ironically, the force used by Persian nationalists in their nationist unification of Iran has accelerated the subordinate groups' articulation of their own ethnocultural unity and national consciousness.

So, in sum, Iran is a country composed of a number of nationalities whose histories and cultures contain many features of "officially recognized" nations, but which because of various reasons have been denied the recognition itself. The Iranian monarchial system since the Arab conquest has evolved from non-Persian rule allowing ethnic autonomy in exchange for lip-service allegiance, to Persian rule which has melded together divergant non-Persian nation-

alities by force in order to obtain political amalgamation which, although "artificial" by definition, is not perceived as such by Persians themselves. Persian nationalism represents the Persian's ethnocultural world-view in which Iran has always been a Persian nation, and this has been the driving force behind the attempt at political and cultural unity. In the meantime, the nationalisms of other groups have grown increasingly more aware and articulate because of the chauvinism and culture suppression involved in the attempt at artificial political unity under a Persian model. We see that Iran has exhibited a number of different culture models at various points along a vast historical continuum, at the same time that it retained a relatively distinct territoriality. The synthesis of one particular typology has shown Iran to be slightly larger in scope than the bounds of some apparently appropriate classical definitions of the culture-based classification of a nation, mainly because of its huge time frame. It is a nation in which Persian nationalists have confused nationalism and nationism. Table 5 illustrates the types of loyalty engendered by nationism as opposed to nationalism, and it is clear that while Persians (Farsi speakers) are "sentimentally loyal" to the Iranian state, all other groups are "instrumentally loyal". The symbolism of language conflict is embedded in the dynamics of nationism.

Table 5: Patterns of Personal Involvement in the National System[24]

| Source of Attachment to System | Ideological | Role-Participant | Normative |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sentimental (Nationalist) | commitment to cultural values reflective of national identity | commitment to national role linked to group symbols | acceptance of demands based on commitment to sacredness of state |
| Instrumental (Nationist) | commitment to institutions promotive of needs of population | social roles mediated by system | acceptance of demands based on commitment to law and order |

## 4:1 National Language Symbolism

Having briefly looked at the problems involved in defining Iran as a cultural entity and synthesizing one possible typology to apply to it, the language question must be approached more directly by examining the problems inherent in national language choice.

Any selected language must have political and cultural validity in terms of the ethnic composition of the society, the language's symbolism (regional and/or national), and its modernity or potential "modernizability." The selection agency's representational validity must be firmly established, and of course, policies regarding minority languages have a direct bearing on the attitudes of linguistic minorities towards national language policy.

There are three phases through which the language attitudes of a nation formed by nationalist movements evolve: first, in its history before a modern nationalist movement when society's traditional attitudes are formed; second, during a nationalist movement when political attitudes are refined and mature; and third, after a nationalist movement becomes government, and its language attitudes are made the law. Each step is vital to an understanding of the next.

Before a multicultural developing nation tries to wrest sovereignty from colonial rule--or in Iran's case, attempts to establish a "supergroup" national loyalty--

each group in society holds closely to its own unique set of language attitudes formed in the context of a sometimes narrow range of inter-ethnic experience. These attitudes revolve around the personal and group symbolism of the language, as well as its relationship to or conflict with other nations with which it is in contact. Sociolinguists would classify language as of primordal group loyalty but not as an absolute factor, because both individuals and even entire speech communities are sometimes willing to adopt another language over a period of time, such as in the United States where most immigrants learn English at the expense of their native language. It is important to distinguish choice in changing one's language from being forced to do so, however, (and now some non-English speaking groups in the United States are more vocal about keeping their mother tongues, even at the expense of English).

If in a society several groups are historically in contact (i.e., through trade patterns), and people are conversant with more than one language from childhood, such as Zaire, where children in the eastern part of the country speak Lingala, Kicongo, Swahili and French, antagonism towards other languages is often minimal in comparison to societies in which intergroup communication is either socially frowned upon or geographically difficult. Iran falls into this latter category.

## 4:2 Traditional Language Symbolism in Iran

Being a society of disconnected, often completely isolated communities with divergent lifestyles and traditions, as well as an almost total illiteracy rate, Iran was a country in which language was a group symbol invested with great intensity of feeling. Even though there are many Arabic and Turkish loan words in Farsi (and much Farsi in Turkish)--not to mention the ancient links between Kurdish, tribal Persian and to a lesser extent, Baluch--languages remained quite fixed to narrow group loyalties and small-group consciousness. If a whole group is illiterate, then the spoken language becomes yet more important as the repository of the group's entire historical experience. Language is so intensely symbolic in Iran that even subdialects in a general dialect area reinforced intragroup antagonisms, such as in Kurdish with its three major dialects, the Iranian dialect being broken up into three subdialects. But of course, while these intragroup squabbles could be temporarily exploited by outsiders, as for instance playing one Khan off against another, any perceived superordinate threat would unite the large group rather than divide it further.

Another factor of language attitudes in Iran is the cultural significance of each language to Iranian culture as a whole. Farsi has traditionally been the most sophisticated and developed of all Iranian languages in terms of

the arts and literature. It serves as the Persian people's major link to their past, the connection with which transcends the domination of Iran by speakers of other languages. It has briefly been noted that Farsi is a very chauvinistic language, with references to Turks, Arabs and even Mazandaranis made to infer ignorance. There are also expressions which graphically express the Farsi speaker's contempt for groups with nomadic or seminomadic lifestyles. To tribespeople and other non-Farsi speakers, Farsi represents everything their own cultures label as mistrustful, unimportant or bad; for example, the city, sensual refinement and Persian ethnocentrism.[25]

## 4:3 Language in the Persian Nationalist Movement

Language consciousness became an increasingly better articulated symbol of ethnicity by each of Iran's many ethnic groups early in this century. Language is only one of several important factors which define a group's ethnicity, but language practically defines the bounds of any nationalist movement because it functions as a major vehicle through which a group's national consciousness is expressed and reconfirmed. Since nationalist movements imply mass support in order to be legitimate, it also implies that the mass is linguistically homogeneous. Thus, it isn't surprising that two or more languages come into conflict in a nationist attempt at political

unification, especially an "artificial" one. In other words, the attempt by one nationality to impose cultural hegemony on another is most symbolic in terms of language demands. The heavy-handed use of Farsi as a tool of national unification helped fracture any possible longterm coalition between Farsi speakers and non-Farsi speaking groups.

## 4:4 Language and the Iranian State

When one nationality establishes itself as the govenment of a multicultural nation, it is natural that its policies reflect nationality-based concerns rather than national concerns, and these concerns are communicated to the public through the symbols of that nationality, the major symbol being language. The more intense the nationalist rivalries which exist before a government solidifies, the more resentment is felt afterwards by subordinate groups. As the tool of communication, education and government, language conflicts are rediscovered every day. There are a great many countries even in the developed world where language conflict exists, and the case of each nation is unique in some way, based upon its history, its ethnic composition and the dynamics of its phase of national unification. In developing nations which do not have longstanding histories, or when intergroup contact has been common, language conflicts are slower to develop, but this is not the case when language conflicts have existed for generations, as in Iran. In the book

Language Surveys of Developing Nations[26] a checklist is proposed which can act as a guideline as to the impact of language policy on a multinational society:

1) population problems--i.e., estimation of number, accessibility
2) population composition--i.e., sex ratio, age, ethno-linguistic composition, bilingualism
3) culture element--i.e., cohesiveness of group attitudes, settlement patterns
4) political and/or historical sense of security
5) group visibility--i.e., social horizons of groups
6) desire to innovate
7) mobility
8) education--
   a) minority students vs. dominant group ratios
   b) average years of school attendance
   c) student command of dominant language
   d) percentage of total possible students attending school
   e) contacts with dominant language outside school
   f) attitude of dominant language teachers towards subordinate language students
   g) educational opportunity beyond primary level
   h) use (if any) of non-dominant languages in school-related activities
9) extent to which each group considers itself part of national consciousness
10) religious affiliations
11) attitudes of educated towards subordinate languages.

This set of questions will be used to examine and clarify the reality of Iran's language conflicts and policies. Some of these questions mainly concern language planning, and some answers will merely synthesize information already presented.

1) Population Problems--It has already been established that geography and differing lifestyles (nomadic

vs. sedentary) served to accentuate regional and ethnic differences between groups. This complicates any attempt at national unification, especially regarding language policies, because cooperation is then expected between groups of traditional enemies. In a more political vein, the Persian government has always understated the size and importance of Iran's minority populations.

2) Population Composition--Table 6, "Language-Based Classification of a Multinational Society--the Case of Iran," restructures Table 1 ("Languages in Iran") in terms of percentage, official attitudes, and modern status. The "formula" of Iran according to this chart is "1-A-III," making it an "endoglossic section-based nation state." Table 7, "Language-Based Classification of a State," further elaborates on this. If Iran is an endoglossic section-based nation state, meaning that the dominant language is spoken by less than seventy percent of the total but the government considers it a national symbol of all groups, several problems are apparent just from the definition; for example, Farsi is not a symbol of all Iran's groups, the percentage of Farsi speakers is not even half, let along two-thirds of the total, and the composition of the government in terms of overall ethnic representation is a direct affront to all non-Persian groups. The situation is complicated by the fact that two sizeable subordinate language groups, the Kurds and Baluch, are divided between two other nations, so that the total contiguous communities of Baluch and Kurdish speakers are much

Table 6: Language-Based Classification of a Multinational Society--The Case of Iran[27]

Symbols:

| % of population | | national recognition | |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | = 90-100% | 1 | = sole official language |
| II | = 70-89% | 2 | = co-equal official languages |
| III | = 40-69% | 3 | = regional official language |
| IV | = 20-39% | 4 | = promoted language |
| V | = 3-19% | 5 | = tolerated languages |
| VI | = less than 3% | 6 | = proscribed languages |

universal status

A = Mature Standard Language (SL)--ancient language modernized to be used to teach modern science and math at high school level
B = Fully Developed Small Group SL--speech community of less than 200,000
C = Archaic SL--pre-industrial language of rich literary tradition; can express deep philosophical ideas but not yet modernized for contemporary math and science
D = Young SL--recently standardized; useful in religious or political indoctrination, but unfit for higher than primary education
E = Unstandard, Alphabetized Language--recently alphabetized, as yet unstandardized
F = Preliterate Language

Note: The classification of a language in this manner does not refer to an objective rating of the ability of a language to be modernized or its intrinsic adaptability to modern ideas and needs. It merely defines a language's status at one point along a continuum of change.

| Language | Nat'l Recog. | Univ. Status | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Farsi | 1 | (C→ ) A* | III |
| Azari Turkish | 5-6** | C→ A* | IV |
| tribal Turkish & Persian | 5-6** | E (→ D)* | V |
| Kurdish | 5-6** | E → D* | V |
| Baluch | 5-6** | E → D* | V |
| Arabic | 4 | A | V |
| English | 4 (2) | A | VI |

*The indication C to A and E to D shows that these languages are in the process of change; the parentheses indicate a change just beginning or ending.

**The indication 5-6 illustrates changes of official policy towards these languages.

Table 7: Language-Based Classification of a State[28]

| nation type | nat'l language | example | Table 6 formula |
|---|---|---|---|
| exoglossic | imported | Somalia (Italian) | 1-A-VI |
| endoglossic, genuine | spoken by at least 70% | France (French) | 1-A(or B)-I (or II) |
| endoglossic, section-based, type A | less than 70%, but dominant gp. considers it a national symbol | Ethiopia (Amharic) | 1-A(or B)-III(or IV) |
| endoglossic, section-based, subjection-based (type B) | same as type A, but forced upon majority by outside domination | Bolivia (Spanish) | 1-A(or B)-III(or IV) |

Note: Because of Farsi's promotion as the national language, a majority of Iranians at least understand it.

greater than their proportion in the Iranian population. (This situation is defined as being "fractured.")

Bilingualism in Iran was traditionally a phenomenon only in market towns where nomads traded, or in peripheral areas where two or more ethnic groups lived intermingled. Recently it has taken on a more insidious meaning, though, because of the force used in getting non-Farsi speakers to learn Farsi. There are obvious advantages, both economic and professional, for linguistic minorities to learn the designated national language of their nation whether or not they have any antagonism towards it; however, if after the first wave of class mobility fades and people realize just how much identity they had sacrificed to raise their status, resentment surfaces. In Kenya, Swahili was a trade language spoken as a second or third language by many other ethnic groups. Its elevation to national language status was generally well-received because it was non-threatening--since mother-tongue Swahili speakers are a small minority of the total population--and also because Swahili is a symbol of some historical identity for many of Kenya's ethnic groups. Iran has no such second, "fall back" language. It is asymetrically bilingual.

3) Culture Element--It has been noted that ethnic groups in Iran are extremely close-knit, and that they also have had long histories. This reinforces small-group loyalties and insecurities, engendering resentment to any attempt at enforcing outside authority and policy.

4) Political and/or Historical Sense of Security--Iran is a country in which insecurity is a defining characteristic of all groups and individuals because of a long history of mercurial rulers, invasions, rapacious regional governments, lack of an effective police force, and a long history of ethnic enmities symbolized by tribal-Persian relations. Therefore, trust is very low, and any perceived imposition of external domination activates the reservoirs of historical mistrust common to all groups. Iranian society is extremely xenophobic in times of stress, both towards foreigners as well as internally between groups. Compromise is nearly non-existent. (See chapter 4:6.)

5) Group Visibility--This issue is mentioned in #2. One ancillary issue is the superiority complex which evolves in mother-tongue speakers of the national language. It is a common phenomenon.

> The emergence of Pilipino as the national language has created a grave problem for non-Tagalogs. The Tagalog speaking group . . .has developed a superiority complex. This makes them use the language even in speaking to non-Tagalogs. . .This is, of course, interpreted as a show of superiority over non-Tagalogs. . .[29]

Persian bureaucrats in non-Persian provinces resort to this same strategy. They will tortuously speak Farsi either to force the non-Farsi speaker to deal only on their terms (usually not having bothered to learn the local language anyway), or force the non-Farsi speaker to use his/her often

heavily-accented Farsi, therby pointing out his/her "inferior pedigree" in relation to the officials' own.

> To many Iranians, Kurdish is not even a real language, but just a rustic dialect spoken by illiterates.[30]

Turks are often openly ridiculed for their thick Farsi accents for example, as are the Baluch and others. But this attitudinal factor does not only apply to Farsi; Turks and Kurds in western Iran have a definite language rivalry which has manifested itself between Turkish and Kurdish speakers in the educational system. All of these issues point up the fractured nature of Iran's interethnic relations, and illustrate why there has been little cooperation between groups concerning these problems, even though for non-Farsi groups the problems are nearly identical.

6 & 7) Desire to Innovate, Mobility--Discussed in numbers 2 and 5.

8) Education--To be discussed in chapter 4:5.

9) Extent to Which Each Group Considers Itself Part of National Consciousness--This has also been discussed at some length. National consciousness in Iran should imply "Iranian" as opposed to "Persian," but non-Persian minorities have not been misled by Iran's Persian-dominated government and society and the implication this holds in terms of government and social policy. It is significant, however, that ethnic groups have been pushing their political, cultural and language

demands within the framework of autonomy in a greater Iranian state. On the surface, this seems to imply that non-Persian groups have acknowledged themselves as Iranian. Along this line of reasoning, the Persian government's acceptance of language demands by non-Farsi speaking minorities would contribute to a resolution of other conflicts as well. We are seeing a transcendant, national consciousness developing in groups which traditionally held firmly only to small-group loyalties and identity. This is in spite of the new tensions added to the relationship between Farsi and non-Farsi speakers in this century.

10) Religion--Because the present Persian government is avowedly Shi'ite and sizeable numbers of non-Farsi speaking communities are Sunni, the language conflict has been given a potentially explosive new dimension it never had before, since the Pahlavi regime tended to play down the influence of Shi'ism in Iranian society.

11) Attitudes of Education Towards Subordinate Languages --Education in Iran has reinforced chauvinistic attitudes. The educated elite are most often the architects of the social and political policies generated by the Persian government, and these policies are often colored by Persian ethnocentrism. Education has reinforced Persian chauvinist attitudes because a far greater proportion of Farsi speakers than non-Farsi speakers have gone to institutions of higher learning, which reconfirms the prevailing Persian preconception and bias that

non-Farsi speakers are less intelligent than Persians.

## 4:5 Education

Widespread educational opportunity is a necessity in a developing nation, but many subtle areas of possible disagreement exist between groups in a multinational society with regards to subject matter and language. Some problems of Iranian education have been explored in Section III, but it is important to analyze it in a more focused way. It should be mentioned, however, that the Iranian school system is presently in such disarray that its future course is difficult to acertain at this point.

8a) Percentage of Minority Students--The ethnic composition of Iranian schools parallels the geographical distribution and percentages of the Iranian population. In my junior high school in Saravan (Baluchistan), approximately 230 out of a total enrollment of 250 students were Baluch. Perhaps only in the cities of the Arab oil-producing province of Khuzistan do Farsi speaking students approach the number of non-Farsi speaking students out of all non-Persian provinces.

8b) Average Years of School Attendance--The average is less in non-Persian provinces than in the major Persian provinces of Tehran, Isfahan, Fars and Khorassan, etc. The exigencies of nomadic life, as well as life in small villages,

makes it incumbent upon able-bodied boys and girls not to stay away from their families too long. The Pahlavi regime instituted a material incentives program as a means to help persuade parents to let their children attend school longer. In my school, dates, oranges and/or pistachios were distributed for lunch (replacing the usual student fare of hard bread and onions). Western clothes were handed out in conjunction with an edict banning traditional Baluchi dress in Baluchistani public schools passed in 1973. The enforcement of this rule was inconsistent, and student families frequently confiscated the clothes to sell them. This program was instrumental in the steady growth of both the length and regularity of school attendance.

8c) Student Command of the Dominant Language--It was quite poor in Baluchistan, and from talks I had with Peace Corps volunteers and Persian educators in non-Persian provinces, this generally seemed to be the case all over Iran. One reason for this is the late age at which non-Farsi speaking students are first introduced to Farsi. Non-Persian students often entered school late--I had an eighteen year old boy in an eighth grade class. Ironically, the national push for "Farsiization" was undermined by the multilingual focus of the school curriculum--Farsi, English and Arabic (for religious studies).

This type of multilingualism can be a hindrence for languaguage students. Learners of English in developing nations will sometimes have this multilingual exposure, but

teachers of English as a Foreign Language may be unaware of the extent of the linguistic and psychological interference inherent in this situation. As an example, my students were learning Arabic and Farsi concurrently with English, and learning three languages at age twelve or thirteen can be a very frustrating experience. The bilingual education movement in this country uses the argument that having the same language as both the object and means of study is often a block to optimal learning, and this is the case with Farsi in non-Persian provinces.

In more political terms, a foreign language will be seen as an adjunct of the dominant language if the government is suppressing the non-dominant language speakers' own mother tongues; in other words, the foreign language is promoted by the government at the expense of the students' own languages which are prescribed. In Iran, English was sometimes identified by all Iranian groups, including Persians, with the Pahlavi regime's repression. Westernization, with English as one of its most visible characteristics, is being called increasingly into question by traditional Eastern peoples.

8d) Percentage of Total Possible Students in School--In lower grades it is higher than in high school. Regional schools often necessitate long daily trips by the students, with their primary transportation being by foot, donkey, or the back of a pick-up truck. Due to the home responsibilities mentioned earlier, the older a student becomes, the more

his/her help is needed by the family. In Saravan, I would estimate the size of the freshman class in high school as one half the size it was in the last year of junior high school.

8e) Contacts with Dominant Language After School--It depends on the province, but because of traditional language attitudes, generally few but the highly educated in all Iran's non-Farsi speaking groups care to seek out dominant language contacts. Persian chauvinism merely reinforces this attitude. The same holds true in school; after being in an environment where the dominant language is an overt tool of culture suppression, and students who speak the dominant tongue as their native language receive preferential treatment by dominant tongue teachers, it is not surprising that subordinate tongue students keep social contacts between themselves and dominant tongue speakers to a minimum. The parents of Farsi speaking children in the provinces do not want their children associating with non-Farsi speakers anyway. Cultural barriers are thereby reinforced.

8f) Attitude of Dominant Language Teachers Towards Subordinate Languages--The teachers in the Literacy Corps (Sepāh-e Dānesh) were most often Farsi speaking, and the most likely to be sent to isolated schools in remote areas of Iran. This was usually the only opportunity these areas had to get any teachers at all, at least until a new generation of locally-educated teachers grows up and chooses to stay "down on the

farm," not a foregone conclusion in a country in which money flows in the cities, but not in the countryside. The farther out the village, the less likely it is for highly qualified teachers to go there, since professions in Iran are highly status-oriented, and teaching in non-Persian provinces is anything but that in Iran. But whether it is a soldier-teacher with no qualifications except his/her own literacy (in Farsi) or a highly qualified teacher, their attitudes towards non-Farsi speaking students tend to be arrogant, chauvinistic and condescending. I often heard my Persian co-workers express surprise when Baluchi students did well. There is little cross-cultural awareness in Iran, but this isn't surprising when members of one culture have traditionally been considered as enemies of other cultures, or else seen as barbarians. This would be a very fertile area for teacher training seminars in Iran.

8g) Educational Opportunity Beyond Primary Level--The Iranian school system was geared around an intense effort to weed out superior students for future roles as doctors, technicians and scientists, etc., and let the other students muddle through or get low-level vocational training. (Bribing for passing grades is an epidemic in Iran.) The stress, of course, was laid on finding Persian students who could move into the elite work force, but certainly potentially qualified non-Farsi speaking students, such as the graduates of the Qashqa'i tribal high school, were recruited and sought

after; indeed, "Persianizing" non-Farsi speaking elites has always been a major thrust of Persian policies. Unfortunately, little effort or money was spent either in setting up a wider range of tribal high schools or expanding Iran's system of higher education to include quality programs in non-Persian provinces. Certainly very few of my Baluchi students seriously entertained higher education as an option readily available to them. On the other hand, the trend in all nations seems to be a steady rise in the level of attained education, and there is no reason to believe the same will not happen in Iran. But it is important to note that the preponderance of students selected out of the educational system have been Persian Farsi speakers.[31]

8h) Use of Non-Dominant Languages in School Related Activities--Only Arabic and English (and sometimes French) could be spoken other than Farsi in Iranian schools.

Literacy is another aspect of education vitally important to developing nations where the literacy rate had been very low, as in Iran. The Iranian literacy campaign accomplished a great deal, but for non-Farsi speakers it was an attempt to teach them Farsi as a Second language rather than how to read and write in their own native languages. There was a lot of resistance to the idea of being taught Farsi in Baluchistan, at least, where Literacy Corps teachers were not allwed in smaller villages by the Baluch until several years after the Corps was formulated. In Politics of Cultural

Pluralism, Crawford Young concludes that language is important for delineating cultural fields but not permanent for a given culture, and that it is well within human capabilities to master more than one language and even change the primary system of communication. In Iran, it appears that language is much more symbolic than only for delineating cultural fields, and that mastering another language is fraught with political and cultural implications, let alone changing the primary system of communication. In literacy programs, ethnic groups which are on the receiving end of chauvinistic propaganda and cultural bias symbolized at a very deep level by language are being asked to change their system of communication to the language which is the tool of their oppression.

On the other hand, linguistic minorities must be aware of the complexities involved in planning literacy programs; such questions as the number of available teachers of minority languages, the national goals of a country's literacy programs (i.e., political and/or cultural), and the means and distribution of available funds must be answered by all groups together if a multinational society like Iran is to accomplish the goal of social and cultural equality in its literacy and educational programs. In Iran, the demands of different groups have too often been fragmented to achieve any type of unity or consensus, regardless of the many common goals they share.

Table 8: Two Types of National Entities and Language Policy

| CLUSTER B | CLUSTER C |
|---|---|
| One Great Tradition at National Level | Several Great Traditions Seeking Separate Socio-Political Recognition |
| Language Policy: | |
| a) selection of national language governed by considerations of sociocultural authenticity, nationalism, etc. | need to compromise between national integration and separate authenticities |
| b) adoption of language of wider communication (LWC) transitional, for modern functioning | LWC chosen as unifying compromise |
| c) language planning (LP) is modernization of the language | LP is modernization of several languages |
| d) bilingual goal is national, transitional to indigenous monolingualism | bilingual goal is for regional and national bilingualism |

## 4:6 Section IV Summary

The checklist used in this section to examine the nation-wide impact of Iran's language policies graphically demonstrates the qualitative educational gap between Farsi and non-Farsi speakers, social imbalances and ethnic mistrusts. All this not only reflects, but also perpetuates language inequalities. It also illustrates the complexity of the problems inherent in national language selection in a multi-ethnic society.

Joshua Fishman has created a topology of national language policies in multicultural states,[32] and this schema penetrates to the heart of Iran's language imbalances and conflicts. It is reproduced in Table 8. Basically, Iran has exhibited "cluster B" language policies even though it is a "cluster C" nation. Of course, a major stumbling block is that Farsi speakers believe that Iran is a nation composed not of several "Great Traditions," but only one--their own. So, the major cultural variable of Iran's future success or failure as a unified state lies in the reconciliation by the Persian population of their own ethnocentric nation-view with the reality of Iran as a multicultural, multilingual nation. Backtracking to the actual point of contention, all groups must compromise on longstanding grievances, notwithstanding the pervasive historical sense of insecurity and mistrust in Iran. Compromise means that Persians must abandon the idea of Iran as "their" nation, while at the same

time non-Farsi speaking groups must not "go for the jugular" if some of their preliminary demands are met. Recently the Persian government under Āyăt̄ollăh Khōmeīnī has made some tentative agreements with the Turks and Kurds regarding language issues in an attempt to defuse their demands for full regional autonomy. They have been made, however, only in the context of those particular struggles. If the Persian government decides that the Turkoman and Baluch (who are sporadically fighting government troops like the Kurds), as well as the Qashqa'i and others, also are pressing for similar demands, there will probably be a backlash to avoid a nation-wide deterioration of Farsi's present status, which would imply a similar deterioration of the Persians' status in general vis-a-vis other Iranian groups.

Two psychological factors which have only been touched upon so far, but which actually determine a group's willingness to compromise or not, are the social implications of loss of face and group tendencies towards taking advantage of perceived weaknesses on the part of other groups. Concerning the former in Iran, publically retreating from a heavily invested position is a great loss of face, and therefore unacceptable; regarding the latter, historically all groups in Iran have filled whatever vacuum of power presented itself. Thus, any attempt at compromise on language issues requires the circumvention of two highly symbolic, non-group specific, status-oriented social interactional styles which

are the antithesis of compromise. If these attitudes are not changed, latent sources of mistrust will be activated and the wheel of conflict will be spun yet again. It is more a particular society's psychological attitudes regarding interpersonal and intergroup relations than historical "facts" themselves which determine the ultimate resolution of language conflicts. Social attitudes regulate the pace and success of negotiation, but are not of themselves negotiable.

Realistically no group would advance a program enhancing the social status of other groups at the expense of its own, especially in a highly polarized society like Iran. In other words, minorities must agitate until their demands are met. Accordingly, the more apparent an acceptance of the language status quo by linguistic minorities, the harder it will be in the future to undermine the standing of the national language. It is a delicate balancing act, because subordinate language speakers in Iran must tread a fine line between learning and using Farsi to advance professionally and economically, and not accepting the prescribed status of their own languages in schools and in government.

Perhaps Iran's best course of action is to designate Azari Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic and Baluch as regional official languages wherein they would be the official language of the regions' educational, political and legal systems. At the same time, they would be systematically developed along with tribal Turkish and Persian languages to a

functionally modern status. Farsi could remain the official national language, to be learned in non-Persian schools as a required second language but not as the language of instruction. With Farsi retaining its status as the language of all national systems, Persians need not lose face or feel their general position in society threatened, even if in reality much would change. But this is a dream now. The reality is quite different.

## SECTION V: CONCLUSION

Language conflict develops along two lines. One concern is language itself: how it has evolved in history, its group symbolism, intergroup contacts, and its place in a nation's political, economic, educational and communicational systems relative to the linguistic composition of society as a whole. But language also serves as a symbol of much wider and deep-rooted ethnic conflicts. Certainly these two issues are the same phenomenon at their base; however, it is the importance of language as a symbol of group identity which causes the resolution of language conflicts to be so difficult to achieve. When a subordinate group perceives a dominant group attempt at suppressing its language, the reaction is to view it as an attack on that group's very ethnicity, not only the language per se. Language suppression is merely one manifestation of a more general cultural suppression. This is why language issues are so often in the forefront of group conflicts in a multicultural society.

To refer to questions posed in Section IV about the necessity of defining a nation along a historical continuum, and then selecting on "representative" point before any fair language decisions can be made, in day-to-day human exchange it is extremely unlikely that one ethnic group would accommodate other groups at the expense of its own preeminent

position, especially those groups with which it has historically been in conflict. Whoever rules a nation makes decisions based on sociopolitical and ethnocultural self-interests (and most often only for the relevant elites). However, nations evolve, and in this evolution languages, rulers and conditions do not remain static. Over a period of time, justice is served; in other words, dominant languages often naturally become subordinate, or even die out altogether. For instance, today Persian students in a non-Persian province are a privileged minority in a school system which employs their mother tongue as the medium of instruction; tomorrow, if a region gains autonomy or even if some preliminary language demands are met, those same students will be a minority in a school system whose language they do not understand, and may be at the receiving end of ethnic chauvinism.

This is not to justify language suppression, nor does it suggest that language conflicts cannot be solved, nor does it imply that groups should not even try. What it does state is that if groups wish to resolve language problems, certain difficult questions must be asked and attitudes must change, or the problem will deepen even as groups try to resolve their differences. If this paper has emphasized one point over any other regarding the dynamics of language conflict and problem resolution, it is that Iran's particular situation clearly illustrates the necessity of realistically defining a nation in cultural terms and examining socio-

psychological attitudes concerning change and compromise before any language conflict can be resolved completely. Otherwise, language conflicts are seldom solved short of violence. Violence is ultimately the only channel open to linguistic minorities that ensures the attention of the nation, especially when intense chauvinism characterizes the relationship between dominant and subordinate groups. This refers to another point emphasized in this paper, which is that ethnic groups must at least seem to be willing to try to reform racial and chauvinist biases before specific aspects of conflict between ethnic groups can be resolved. This is somewhat akin to white America's experience with its own racism during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's. Iran's situation shows that these attitudes' bearing on language conflict cannot be overemphasized because language is so symbolic of individual and group identity.

The United States should keep these facts in mind as many non-English speaking communities become more conscious of their mother tongues and the possiblity--even right--of bilingualism. Only by being aware of the full scope of language conflicts and seeing other societies in the midst of conflict can we gain valuable insights into how to best address our own language problems. Iran throws many of our own concerns into sharp focus because of the intensity and length of its group conflicts, the symbolism of its diverse languages, and the psychological factors which inhibit compromise and change.

A veneer of apparent linguistic unity has been peeling off a number of western, developed nations: in Spain, the Basques and Catalans are fighting for language rights, while Canada's French-English conflict lies right on our borders. With Iran's language conflict in its "raw" state, as is the case with many other multicultural developing nations, it would serve all linguistically heterogeneous nations well to observe the dynamics of Iran's conflict and the mechanics of its possible resolution.

In a slightly different context, these problems are relevant to teachers going abroad to developing nations. If it is true that a teacher should be aware of the blocks to his/her students' optimal learning, English teachers abroad should be aware that language suppression could possibly be a very big student concern. For students in a multicultural nation, English may not be a second language, but rather a third or fourth or fifth. Not only does this imply a great deal of possible linguistic interference, but also hostility if English has been forced upon the students whose own languages are proscribed. In this case, English is a symbol of dominant group aggression, and the teacher, unwittingly or not, is the agent of that oppression. Perhaps an English teacher in the future will face this attitude in Hispanic areas of this country, for example, if bilingual issues are not resolved in favor of bilingual rights.

Language conflict is an international problem. It is astounding that it can be the focus of so much violence and

misunderstanding in the world. But something Johann Heider wrote in 1783 still holds true today:

> Has a nationality anything dearer than the speech of its fathers? In its speech resides the whole thought domain, its tradition, history, religion and basis of life, all its heart and soul. To deprive a people of its speech is to deprive it of its one eternal good. . . With language resides the heart of a people.[33]

## Notes

[1] The figures have been synthesized from many sources, such as: Harvey Smith, et al., Area Handbook for Iran 1970 (Washington: DA Pam no. 550-68, 1971); Keesings Contemporary Archives (New York: Logman, 1980); Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran," International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 1 (1970), 291-316; Peter Avery, Modern Iran (New York: Frederick Praeger Publishers, 1965); Louise Beck, et al. The Qashqa'i People of Southern Iran, (UCLA Museum of Cultural History Pamphlet Series No. 14, 1981).

[2] Most Muslims in the world are Sunni, but the great proportion of Iran's Muslim population is Shi'a. Shi'ism is in large part a Persian creation which allowed the Persian people to maintain belief in Islam, but on their own rather than Arab terms.

[3] It should be emphasized that non-Farsi groups are not united against Farsi speakers. Each group has its own view of the reality and future of Iran.

[4] Abrahamian, p. 294.

[5] Abrahamian, p. 295.

[6] Reza Shah took the dynastic name "Pahlavi" to give his regime validity by connecting it to Iran's pre-Islamic past

and Iran's Persian kings. The word "Pahlavi" refers to the language otherwise known as Middle Persian.

[7]Phillip Salzman, "National Integration of the Tribes in Modern Iran," The Middle East Journal, No. 7 (summer 1971), p. 328.

[8]Abrahamian, p. 309.

[9]Two relevant incidents: in 1946 a music teacher was beaten by government agents for teaching his Turkish students in Azari, and a composition teacher was arrested for treason for the same reason.

[10]Abrahamian, p. 310.

[11]The names of three famous Persian poets.

[12]Abrahamian, p. 310.

[13]Abrahamian, p. 312.

[14]Abrahamian, p. 313.

[15]Qashqa'i tent schools received favorable western press, such as in William Carr, "New Ideas in an Ancient Land," Today's Education, Nov. 1970, pp. 28-29, and Ullens de Schooten, "Education Comes to Iran's Nomadic Tribes," Geographical Magazine, No. 43 (May 1971), pp. 548-555. In these articles, however, no mention of a real or possible language conflict was mentioned. In addition, the image of the tribes as exotic but archaic parts of Iranian culture was unwittingly perpetuated in the text and pictures.

[16] It is also ironic that the children of American workers in Iran could attend any one of a number of fine American and international schools in nearly all major cities, while the plurality of Iranian citizens had to learn a new language just to attend school at all.

[17] Marvin Zonis, Political Elite of Iran, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 176.

[18] Joshua Fishman, Language and Nationalism, (Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, 1972), p. ix.

[19] Crawford Young, Politics of Cultural Pluralism, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), p. 92-94.

[20] Young, pp. 94-96.

[21] Richard Cottam, Nationalism in Iran, (Pittsburgh: University Press of Pittsburgh, 1964), p. 8.

[22] Persian nationalism, of course, discounts as illegitimate (i.e., as being ruled over by non-Persians) the 1,300 years in which this status quo was tolerated, from the Arab invasion until this century (with the exception of Safavid rule).

[23] Joshua Fishman, Language Problems of Developing Nations, Joshua Fishman et al. eds., (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968), p. 40.

[24] Joan Rubin, Can Language Be Planned, (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1971), p. 24.

[25] It should be noted that the Arabic language is so symbolic for all of Iran's Islamic groups as being the language of the Qoran that its status is elevated above the

contempt shown to other languages.

[26] Serapi Ohanassian et al., Language Surveys of Developing Nations, (Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975), pp. 208-210.

[27] Heinz Kloss, "Notes Concerning a Language Typology," Language Problems of Developing Nations, pp. 82-84.

[28] Kloss, pp. 69-85.

[29] Chester Hart, "Language Choice in a Developing Society," Sociological Inquiry, No. 36 (1966), p. 245.

[30] Margaret Kahn, Children of the Jinn, (New York: Seaview Books, 1980), p. xii.

[31] Studies in Multilingualism, Neils Anderson, ed., (New York: E. J. Brill, 1969), p. 11.

[32] Fishman, Language Policies of Developing Nations, p. 497.

[33] Fishman, Language and Nationalism, p. ix.

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