THE DILEMMA OF MULTILINGUALISM IN IRAN

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Abstract: Iran is a multilingual country with linguistic and cultural diversity. Minority languages such as Turkish, Kurdish, Baluchi and Arabic are spoken in Iran which constitutes part of the culture and ethnic identity. Iranian community is dominantly a bilingual community. Persian as an official language used as linguistic and cultural homogenization while minority languages are not used in education system. The controversy bilingual education and programs to serve language minority students is complex and puzzling for education authorities. On the other hand one of the challenges Iranian faces is how to reconcile conflicting perspectives of bilingual education regarding globalizing of English. Currently, most of parents prefer their children to learn English as it is the language of business, aviation and scientific research. In contrast according to Iran's comprehensive scientific plan, Persian should be scientific language of the world in the near future. In this research, challenges, perspectives and solutions of bilingual education in Iran were analyzed. The results indicate that conflicting of minority, majority and international language is an important challenge and developing, promotion and expansion of Persian is a future outlook. Furthermore some suggestions and solutions to reconcile bilingual education were made.

Keywords: *bilingual education, minority, majority and international language*

INTRODUCTION

It has been estimated that approximately two-third of the world's population is either bilingual or multilingual; that is, more than half the people in the world routinely use two or more languages in their daily communication. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are social facts of this new century, which can be seen in most classrooms and playgrounds. People use the term bilingualism in different ways. For some, it means an equal ability to communicate in two languages.

For others, it simply means the ability to communicate in two languages, but with greater skills in one language. In fact, it is more common for bilingual people, even those who have been bilingual since birth, to be somewhat dominant in one language. Calling someone a bilingual is therefore an umbrella term. Underneath the umbrella rest many different skill levels in two languages. Being bilingual is not just about proficiency in two languages. There is a difference between ability and use of language. Someone may be quite competent in two languages, yet rarely or never use one of those languages. Such a person has bilingual ability but does not act or behave bilingually.

Iran, a multicultural society, is home to a number of language communities speaking Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic languages among others. Many children learn and speak their first language at home and study all of their courses in Persian throughout their education. It means that many children

didn't receive any education in their native languages; the majority of the students were members of an ethnic or linguistic minority, whereas the school was dominated by the mainstream language and culture. It means that educational curriculum is based on Persian, the majority language.

Based on this evidence, it can be said that this curriculum not only been ineffective for the non-Persian speaking students, but it also has created a problem of bilingualism of home and school for the non-Persian speaking populations. It seems that bilingual in Iran is kind of subtractive bilingualism. Unlike additive bilingual that a child is allowed to develop a certain language, s/he is learning in a community where both languages and cultures are valued, then the child is most likely to develop additive bilingualism in the sense that the second language and culture are added to the first language and culture and both L1 and L2 complement and enrich each other.

One the other hand, subtractive bilingualism means that the child learns a second language at the expense of the first, and in this case the learning of L2 deletes or subtracts L1. According to Arefi and Alizadeh (2008) being bilingual in Iran doesn't help them to develop cognitive development because of all of the children come from subtractive bilingual programs which may have mitigated and potentially positive impact the children's bilingualism might have had on cognitive development.

Khadivi (2010) states that as long as one can become a balanced bilingual; reach the third floor (high level) of proficiency, one can benefit from more positive effects. The purpose of the present paper is to make the case for the

need to address the problem, and seek a rational solution to it.

The specific research questions that the present study addresses are the following:
1. What is the language planning policy in Iran?
2. What is the status of minority languages in Iran?
2. What are language challenges in Iran?
3. What are language perspectives in Iran?
4. To what extend Persian can be an important scientific lingua franca in the world?

Bilingualism of home and school in Iran has even been recognized as a problem by the very curriculum planners at the national level. It can also be argued that bilingualism is a problem because it, or the national planners' concocted solution, does not necessarily lead to balanced bilingualism and may even cause dilemmas that could be harmful. As such, bilingualism of home and school in Iran creates serious challenges for the Iranian educational system.

The first challenge that Iranian educators face is shown by the two international studies that Iran has participated in: TIMSS and PIRLS. In both studies Iranian students ranked almost last. In the international reading comprehension study of 1970 Iran ranked 14th among fifteen participating countries, and in PIRLS 2001, 32nd among the 35 participating countries (Karimi, 2003). At the same time Iranian bilingual students got lower scores than monolingual in reading comprehension test (Karimi and Kabiri, 2010).

The bilingualism seems to have contributed to the high rate of retention and grade repetition. Therefore, the use of minority languages is the need for

revamping the educational system in order to bridge the identified gaps. The second challenge refers to sociopolitical factors. Majority languages don't play any role in Iran's education system. The challenge arises when these majority languages are major or official language in neighborhood countries.

Every one is bilingual. That is, there is no one in the world who does not know at least a few words in languages other than the maternal variety. Iranian non-Persian children face some problems, the grade repetition and retention rates among these populations are higher, as are the drop-out rates, in comparison with the Persian speaking population. An example is in the largest Turkish (Azary) speaking province, the repetition rate is much higher in first grade compared to the fifth, countryside compared with the cities, and in areas less exposed to Persian (due to lack of electricity/television) than other areas.

Addeeb (1993) has also found that among all school subjects, the language courses have a greater contribution to grade failure/repetition than non-language courses. Given the bilingualism problem, both the educational system and the individual teachers have been challenged to come up with some sort of solution. Analyzing bilingualism and given the experience of other countries similar to Iran in population composition and the case for implementation of some form of bilingual education must be made what this paper addresses.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Iran is a home for many cultural/linguistic groups speaking Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish. Yet the official language for school instruction is Persian, the language of the majority groups, creating a problem of bilingualism of home and school for millions of non-Persian speaking children.

According to article 15 of the Iranian constitution which emphasizes the basic right of all these language groupings to use their mother tongues in their schools and in the promotion of their native cultures but the national educational and curriculum planners do not seem to put much stock in the latter part of the said article. From a dialectical constructivist perspective, language is considered to be a significant social tool for overall development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Children's construction of knowledge is initially guided by their mother tongue and then by the language of formal instruction if it is in fact other than their first language. However, if the child learns and uses two languages simultaneously, i.e. if he/she is bilingual, the two languages would collectively provide an even better tool for development.

Until the 1960s, it was commonly assumed that bilingual students who were learning in their second language must inevitably have been at a disadvantage. This notion began to be challenged in the 1970s and 1980s. A closer examination of the results of bilingual students across various subject areas, including mathematics, showed inconsistent results. Although it seemed to be true at times that bilingual students as a whole did not perform as well as their monolingual peers, there were also some results that showed bilinguals excelled.

There are a number of notions that need to be considered: whether the students are balanced bilinguals, the

level of proficiency that the bilinguals have in each of their languages, and the environment in which they learn. Balanced bilinguals are bilinguals who have equal proficiency in their languages.

Bilingualism of home and school is a worldwide phenomenon and as such has been dealt with rather positively in countries like Singapore, Canada, Switzerland, and many more, through introduction of some system of bilingual or multilingual education (Lambert, Genesee, Holobow, and Chartrand, 1993). Students in Singapore, a country with four official languages, face no difficulties in regards to bilingualism of home and school. The same can be said about China wherein the curriculum planning has been successful in remedying the problems that existed in this area. In contrast it is problematic in other countries even in Europe.

BILINGUALISM IN IRAN

The current population of Iran is more than 75 million people which makes it on the most populous countries in the Middle East contains whiten itself different languages and ethnic minorities. Yet the official instructional language of all Iranians is Persian, the language of the majority grouping. The second greatest language grouping in Iran is that of the Turkish speaking people, the authors are members of this group; their community size in the northwestern provinces of Iran is fairly large and comparable to the number of Persian-speaking area.

If it is not the majority group in the whole of Iran; the Azerbaijanis are clearly both the majority and the culturally dominant group in the northwestern part of the country. Kurdish, Arabic, and Baluchi are spoken in Iran too. Surely, there are smaller groups who have no specific geographical location like Armenians and Aasooryans speaking people. An interesting point in Iran is that some of the provinces in this country are named based on the dominant cultural-linguistic group residing in them (e.g., Fars, Kordestan, Lorestan, Baluchestan, etc.).

We should note that most regional languages are related to Persian and belong to a larger Iranian family, a branch of Indo-European. Turkish, the major non-Iranian language, spoken in the northwestern part of the country, is greatly different from Persian and is branch of Altaic language. In some parts of the country, this linguistic diversity coupled with religious differences has led to ethno-political difference (e.g. in the province of Kurdistan).

For a long time, bilingualism was considered a negative factor threatening the national unity in Iran (Afshar 1989). Now it is going to be appreciated that the different cultures, languages, and varieties that coexist in Iran and are acquired in the natural process of socialization constitute an important part of the national wealth, and that cultural-linguistic diversity can be a valued resource for continued social development and renovation and the maintenance of social health in a rapidly changing society.

Since the minority languages are not used in education system it has made some educational problems. Educational authorities proposed different solutions such as a month-long special course for non-Persian speaking children. But it can hardly be adequate for this purpose, as it cannot make up for the six-year long exposure to the mother tongue. More ever, the absence of the native language from the curriculum

during the school years is certainly not a step toward such bilingualism.

On the contrary, this would lead to what Santrock (2002) has called semilingualism, or lack of proficiency in either one of the two languages. According to Hameedy (2005) the academic gap between the Persian and non-Persian speaking students have not been bridged even after four years of schooling.

LANGUAGE PLANNING IN IRAN

The literature on language planning and language policy is extensive and includes both theoretical studies and rapidly expanding case studies of specific language policy and planning efforts in various parts of the worlds. Language planning has been in existence, as a field of inquiry; for six decades but it did not become a sharply salient issue until sociolinguistics began to focus attention on the speech forms, problems, and aspire solve these problems. In the past decades, language planning attracted increasing attention toward research.

Language planning in Iran has emphasized the need for Persian to have a well-defined language policy that integrate the status of Persian in the psyches of Iranian and be aware of the use and spread of foreign language. In the United Kingdom prior to the 1980's when the general policy of the educational system was that of single language instruction as well as the benign policy of linguistic assimilation (Paulston, 1988), the same type of policies, it can be said, is still used in Iran.

There is no policy of supporting the majority languages in education system and priority is not given in teacher training, curriculum development and school time tables to local languages, regardless of supporting them in the media such as newspaper, TV and radio. Iran is a bilingual country and as a brief chronology illustrates, modern education in Iran is relatively young. Despite the educational system of centuries ago, the first modern school is no more than 150 years old. In the first European-modeled school, Darolfonoon; modernized education in Iran some foreign languages such as; French, Russian, and later English were taught.

Regarding the Islamic Revolution in 1979 led to the implementation of Islamic values in the all area even in language planning, however it seems that there is no comprehensive language planning in Iran.
As Riazi (2005) states:

> The major problem after the
> Islamic Revolution, however,
> has been the lack of an official
> language-planning blueprint
> in the country to determine the
> status of available languages,
> as well as expectations from
> language teaching and
> learning curricula in the formal
> education system. (P.107)

During the post-war period in Iran different roles for the native languages in the educational system have been defined. But the oldest and most common model has been the learning of the Persian language as a curriculum subject by both the native and non-native students.

PERSIAN AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Twentieth century is characterized by an obsession with nationalism, often on the basis of one state per ethnic group per language. Language interlocks with

national identity. As a consequence, Persian plays an important role in the formation of national identity in Iran. A threat to independence of different regional of the country in the late twentieth made a special focus on Persian as linguistic and cultural homogenization.

According to Mehrmohammadi (1992), this centralization in the control of unique culture and language was a solution for independence. Yet the issue of bilingualism is seldom addressed and its conditions and consequences are rarely studied in Iran partly because of the fear that it might give rise to separatist movements and hence threaten the national cohesion, vis-à-vis security.

Furthermore, while most countries around the world have already responded to the issues of globalization, internationalization, and competition among multinationals by endorsing bilingual and multilingual educational systems, Iran has not been willing to move in this direction in order to keep national unity and identity among the young school generation (Farhady 2008).

This in part can be accounted for by the fact that countries like Hong Kong, India, Japan, and China see English as the key to the international world of commerce; whereas, Iran is more conservative when it comes to foreign language policy. The main reason for this is the politicization of the language issue after the Islamic Revolution and the fear that English presents a threat to the Persian language and Islamic culture (Khubchandani, 2008).

However, attempts have been made to promote the majority languages. For instance, everyday a lot of newspapers are published in majority language in Iran, local radio and

television programs regularly broadcast everyday which attract many listeners and provide primary and secondary employment for the minority language speakers. The question, however, is how local broadcasting alone can save a language which is losing its functions within the family domain. Although radio and television alleviate the pressure, they are only short-term remedies for the dying language. Media cannot uproot the source of the problem. When the older generation vanishes, the media will hardly attract the younger generation in any significant scale.

Iran is an old developing country, as it originated nearly 25 centuries ago, and over its entire history, Persian (Old, Middle, New) has functioned as the standard language. This lingua franca has always coexisted with other varieties and regional languages (Schmitt, 1989). This co-existence is the result of the political and sociocultural integration of an old developing country whose various ethnic groups want to be connected with and unified under their Great Tradition.

According to (Fishman, 1968) the ancient literatures, legal codes, heroes and leaders of the past command admiration; the old developing nations can withstand much greater linguistic diversity and unrest as a result of integration. Thus, based on Fishman's theory, in Iran, the stable and widespread coexistence of separate dialects or languages with the standard language is indeed natural and expected.

Therefore, linguistic division alone is not a vital factor to inflame political conflicts within an old must be involved. However, the analysis of Nercissians (2001) study for two groups; Armenian and Azerbaijani community residing in Tehran shows that despite

the considerable difference in the language behavior of the two groups, important common patterns could be seen to exist. Both groups value the knowledge of Persian, the common language used in day-to-day communication as well as the official language used in the educational and other formal establishments.

At the same time, both groups express strong desire for the retention and use of their mother tongue. We should note that religious, Islam as an umbrella, has played a significant role in language identity. Some 85% of Iranians are Shiite. This linguistic diversity with religious similarities has promoted political relationship between language groups. This is another reason why in Iran linguistic division has not led to political conflicts (Borjian, 2004).

In Iran, the impact of external factors, which have promoted linguistic challenge, can easily be detected amongst the minority languages which are major languages in the neighborhood countries. Turkish, spoken in northwestern of Iran, is the official language of neighboring Turkey and the Azerbaijan Republic, who regularly broadcast radio programs for Turkish speaking minorities abroad. The programs aim at encouraging the speakers to see themselves as part of a transnational Turkish speaking nation. Baluchi, however, belongs to the larger Iranian language family spoken in the southeast of Iran. Although Baluchi is not a dominant language anywhere, there are a lot of speakers who live in Pakistan.

WESTERNIZATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

After World War II, English began to spread around the world and was taught in most countries as either the sole foreign language or as one of the foreign languages. During the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979), close political, social, economic, and military relationship between Iran and the US speeded up the westernization in the country (Riazi, 2005).

We should consider that deciding on a language to be taught as a foreign language in a country is not a matter of pure academic choice but a matter of government policy often motivated by political, social, economic, and educational factors. English became an important requirement in the Iranian military because a good command of English was needed for the army personnel to go to the US for further specializations.

In addition, teaching English became a social need and private language schools mushroomed in the capital and many large cities. Farhady (2008) stated that knowledge of English became an essential requirement for many job opportunities for the younger generation. Thousands of Iranian students were sent to US universities to get higher educational degrees. Many Iranian universities created sister-ship relations with American universities, which facilitated the allocation of scholarships for students to complete their degrees in American universities.

In contrast, after Islamic revolution in 1979, due to the absence of political relations with the US, the educational policy makers formulated a plan to promote learning and teaching of five foreign other languages including German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Russian.

However, due to insufficient number of teachers and a low number of applicants for these languages, English

has been the most dominant foreign language taught at the high schools. An interesting point is that while teaching English was almost banned early after the revolution, it has been given the same number of credit units as other main subject matter areas such as biology and chemistry in high schools in Iran.

PROMOTING PERSIAN AS A INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

Globalization seems as a threat for language of the countries. Crystal (2003) shows that the phenomenon of globalization, coupled with the increasing leadership of English has motivated many nations to consider their language planning policies. Those nations opt to strengthen the preeminence of their own language within their national borders and worldwide. In this regards, according to Iran's comprehensive scientific plan, Persian should be scientific language of the world in the near future.

Persian has played and still plays an overriding role in Muslim society competing with Arabic. In addition, defending in fact the language of the degree of necessity for English and status of English and Persian in Iran is very important. Some study reveals that the degree of necessity for Persian is increasing during the past decades. The functions of English and Persian are clearly-defined without any seeming competition in contrast the past which there was struggle between Persian and English.

However, seeking native resources for coping with technological transformations has become an important sociopolitical goal in Iran, where the contemporary world condition is viewed as a cultural-invasion attempt by the west. In addition to its importance in the general area of language planning, and the associated areas of culture planning and identity planning, the study of bilingualism in Iran is of important for educational planning in the corresponding speech communities.

One part of influence of Persian depends on influence of Islam. Bhatia and Ritchie (2006) stated that Persian was viewed as an imposed language in much of India; thus, with Moughul patronage, Persian "became a marker of Islam". As a consequence, after independence in 1947 when India and Pakistan became independent nations, the influence of Persian continued to regenerate in Pakistan, a Muslim nation, while it reached a state of fossilization in India. In contrast, after independence Sanskrit began to regenerate its original impact in India due to its associate on with Indian culture.

Some conflicts of language refer to language group inequality. Inglehart and Woodward (1972) analyze language conflicts as a function of group inequality. They state that in almost all bilingual and multilingual societies, there is an upper language and one or lower languages. While the upper language represents prestige, power, and a higher status of the speaker, the lower languages signify the opposite.

Linguistic divisions will lead to political conflicts when a dominant language group obtains the social, political and economic power within the society and blocks the social mobility of the minority language groups. Therefore, based on Inglehart and Woodward's point of view, language conflict has its roots in the unequal economic, political, and social status of a language group. It is true that bilingualism makes some

serious problems for non-Persian students but Iran's linguistic diversity has not led to political conflicts as there is no distinctive economic, political, and social inequality.

In order Persian be the lingua franca in the world the following administrative reorganization take place. Iran is a big country with large number of students accommodated by the state-governed universities and higher education: public universities, Islamic Azad University(more than 500 branches), Payame Noor University (Long Distance Education), private universities, and evening sessions at the public universities, plenty of faculty members, researchers who are as sources to produce scientific research in Persian.

Whereas European colonialism that began in the fifteenth century in the east country reduced the influence of Persian (Abolghassemi, 2009), in contrast in recent years, economic, technology, medicine, and industries of Iran cultivated. As we know language expansion depends on economic, political, and social development. So the developed society of Iran can promote its language. For example, the need for traveling to Iran from different parts of the world such as Middle East, Azerbaijan republic, Iraq, Syria, and some other Arab countries and influences of Iran on these countries increased leadership of Persian, as they need to learn Persian in order to communicate properly. It shows growth of Persian speakers in the world.

However in order to Persian be the lingua franca in the world it faces with some challenges. According to Iran's comprehensive scientific plan, Persian should be scientific language of the world in the near future. This document is well-designed in print but applying is difficult.

First, the community should assume responsibility towards a change from quantity oriented to quality-oriented promotion of Persian. This requires cultivating all Iranian minds.

Second, the government should assume responsibility toward providing clear, practicable, and reasonable language policies, and should subsequently support the implementation of the policy. In this regard, fund, personnel, and other requirements should be made available to the people involved in promotion of Persian. Iran hasn't got even a Noble Prize for Literature to indicate of Persian flourishing.

Handwriting of Persian is another problem, using it as language of Math, Chemistry, and Physics, using it for car license plate seem difficult as it is written from the right. Considering the phenomenon of information and communication technology with English instruction and increase communications equipment such as mobile, satellite through them Iranian use English alphabet instead of Persian is a new problem. Meanwhile, Persian which is used in other countries such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan influenced by Russian or Pashto culture and language which vanish the homogenization of Persian in the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

Bilingualism of home and school in Iran creates serious challenges for the educational system of Iran. Results of international studies prove this phenomenon. In international studies Iranian students ranked almost last. Curriculum planners always search for

ways to remedy this problem. For example, they have designed a one month preparatory course for the non-Persian speaking students or they try to design Persian text-books according the non-Persian speaking students abilities (Kalantari, 2010).

But none of these solutions are effective for improving the non-Persian students' drop-out rate. Because the academic gap between native and non-native students complete even after several years of schooling. The study of language groups in Iran shows that despite the considerable difference in the language behavior all groups value the knowledge of Persian, the common language used in day-to-day communication as well as the official language used in the educational and other formal establishments. At the same time, all minority groups express strong desire for the retention and use of their mother tongue.

Therefore, education authorities in Iran should design such curriculum that value not only majority language but also minority languages. It seems that if some day, English constituted a threat to Persian in various in Iran. Today Iran, while recalling with pride their historical dominance in the sciences, are not now struggling to foreign languages i.e. English is neither an indication of westernization or culturalism, nor an indication of and imitation of or assimilation to western value. As Iranian attitude have changed about the learning of English.

They believe that in order to gain new technology, communicate with the world, and to success in business, it is necessary to learn English. As a consequence, parents prefer their children to learn English as soon as possible. Mushrooming lots and lots of governmental or private English institutes in Iran even in small cities proves this claim. Iran is an old country and Persian has functioned as the standard language. This lingua franca has always coexisted with other varieties and regional languages. According to Iran's comprehensive scientific plan, Persian should be scientific language of the world in the near future. To reach this important aim it faces with some challenges, some of them are linguistically the others are socio-politically.

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