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A Critical Reading on Language Endangerment: Focusing on Endangered Languages in Iran

Linguistics Society of Iran

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ABSTRACT

Endangerment of diversity is among the great problems of modern era, deterioration of linguistic diversity of the world being among its clear illustrations. This study is based on this idea that causes of deterioration of biodiversity and sociolinguistic diversity are similar, not to say being the same. Therefore, after explanting the "introduction", "review of the literature" and "theoretical base of the research", we have focused on Iran's endangered languages, to present some suggestions seeming to be suitable for increasing the vitality of these endangered languages. This study underlines the importance of the size of a speech community, the declining prestige of the language, and the decrease of the usual functions of it as the main factors leading to the endangerment and ultimate demise of a language. As a result, increasing the solidarity of a speech community, maintaining the usual functions of endangered languages, and promoting their prestige among their speakers are among the ways mentioned for preserving such languages and dialects of Iran.

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1. Introduction

It is reasonable to claim that throughout the history, there has never been similar discussions about the endangerment of a group of phenomena related to humans' way of living, including: cultural diversity, biodiversity, linguistic diversity, and so forth. Sometimes, the problem is argued to be so severe that it is estimated that, in case of the continuation of the present conditions, most of the cultural, biological, and linguistic diversity of the world may disappear just a few decades ahead. Moreover, in case of the environmental condition of the world, even we hear that the globe can be uninhabitable for humans and surely for other living creatures.

At the linguistic face of the problem, missing "linguistic aesthetic" of the world, disappearing of evidence of the evolution and change of humans' language (recoverable from endangered languages), fade of accumulative experiences of the human society along history (coded in endangered languages), and elimination of a large part of the evidence of historical change of human's social life (hidden in endangered languages) are only a number of the factors that make language endangerment a real critical problem not only for linguists but also for sociologists and anthropologist. This particularly happens when we know that, as a whole, today, languages deprived of political, economic, social and religious power and prestige, move in the path toward disappearance and elimination. This has started in the 19 century, and factors such as colonialism, underdevelopment and globalization have been among its main accelerators untill now.

The question of "why the only planet known to support life in the universe has reached such a position" can receive different answers based on different argumentations. However, if we take a holistic approach to each of the aforementioned problems – which can be called fundamental problems of modern human –, we can say that all of them are consequents of a number of known phenomena: from absolute boundless dominance of human on earth to boundless growth of its population, industry, agriculture and urbanization, to the increasing pressures of the species on the planet resources, and to the rapid rise of consumerism all over the globe.

Regarding what is done to protect or save endangered languages, based on Fishman (2001), it is necessary to put emphasize on a point at the very beginning. After mentioning that theoretical and practical studies about "reversing language shift" are both descriptive and prescriptive endeavors, Fishman continued to speak about the consequences of globalization for languages and cultures of the world, since it is something with two constructive and destructive dimensions. In addition, Fishman believed that, culturally, globalization is not neutral at all, and in our time, it means globalizing "pan-western culture". Although Fishman considered globalization the main cause of language shift in the world, he mentioned that the aim of the activities done to stop

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language shift is not to return to the past golden age, but to reach more power to control the sociocultural changes that globalization has created (p. 2-6).

With such a view in mind, in this article, we have a critical look at the problem of language endangerment. In other words, we do not know this problem as something different - better to say separated - from other great problems of modern time, and we do believe that those factors in other fields of human life, which have put "diversity" in danger, are the main factors for endangerment of "linguistic diversity" too. Consequently, and particularly based on the author's studies, personal observations, and fieldworks about a number of Iran's languages and dialects, such as Nanaji dialect, Malayeri Dialect, Natanzi, Velati, Talysh, some varieties of Turkish and Khalaj languages, and close interaction with their speakers, the main questions of this research were formulated as follows:

a. What are the threatening factors of linguistic diversity in Iran?

b. What must be done to protect linguistic diversity of Iran?

2. Review of Literature

Crystal (2014) has tried to explain the nature of "language death" in the modern era and to introduce ways for halting its process. The same patterns can be seen in many other studies done about language endangerment. In other words, after explaining the different aspects of the problem, particularly the importance and value of preserving linguistic diversity of the world, a section as "what can be done" is presented to the reader.

Wurm (1991) presents factors such as death of all the speakers of a language, cultural contacts, and change in ecology of languages as causes of death and endangerment of languages (p. 2-4). Mühlhäusler (2003) has a more holistic view towards the problem and explains endangerment of languages in relation to such things as environmental problems and threats of uniculturalism. Mühlhäusler (1992) mentions factors like number of speakers and their relations to the speakers of other languages and their attitudes towards their native language and the language being supported institutionally important in preserving a language (p. 164). In speaking about the problem of language endangerment and international institutes established for preserving them, Newman (2003) reaches to the difficulty of the task and the amount of hope you can have in doing this (p. 1-2).

Some sources have looked at the problem through investigating its details. *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization*, for example, approaches the problem theoretically and practically, and considers experiences of revitalization of languages in different parts of the world.

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Nettle and Romaine (2000) in *Vanishing Voices, The Extinction of World's Languages* pay attention to correlations of bio-and-linguistic diversity, and put emphasize on the importance of preserving biodiversity and linguistic diversity.

Expanding the "Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale" of Fishman, Lewis and Simons (2010) provide their "Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale" (EGIDS) based on UNESCO six levels framework for assessment of language endangerment ("safe", "vulnerable", "definitely endangered", "severely endangered", "critically endangered", "extinct") and Ethnologue's five criteria for assessing vitality of languages ("living", "second language only", "nearly extinct", "dormant", "extinct"). The result is a thirteen levels scale for assessing language endangerment: level 0: international, level 1: national, level 2: regional, level 3: trade, level 4: educational, level 5: written, level 6a: vigorous, level 6b: threatened, level 7: shifting, level 8a: moribund' level 8b: nearly extinct, level 9: dormant, and level 10: extinct. Based on the identity functioning of the language in question, its vehicularity use, its intergenerational transfer condition, its place in education, and age of its speakers, Lewis and Simons also have provided five questions and by answering them, we can assess the level of endangerment of the language in question (p. 113-117).

In addition to those studies, which tried to present the problem or indicate the importance of preservation of endangered languages, there are studies done to provide ways for documentation of such languages. Haig et al (2011), for example, consists of 14 chapters, each of which paying attention to an aspect of "documenting endangered languages".

In Iran, a number of studies have been done on preservation and protection of the country's languages and dialects. Bashirnezhad (2004, 2007), for example, has studied problems like causes of language death and language shift in relation to factors like attitudes of speakers, bilingualism, and particularly, the kind of relationship that exists between regional languages of Iran and Persian as the formal language and lingua franca of the nation. Borjian (2013) has reviewed the historical route of the disappearance of languages and dialects of Iran's central plateau and has tried to explain the way they are substituted by Persian. He also has studied the present condition of "Velayati" or "Velati" in the region and has analyzed "the causes and factors of language shift" in Isfahan and its surrounding regions. Mahmudi Bakhtiari (2010) has looked at regional languages and dialects as "cultural heritage" and regarding the rapid rate of their elimination, put emphasize on the necessity for their study and documentation.

Considering the age, gender, occupation, level of education, and spouse's mother tongue variables, Zandi et al. (2011) studied the use of Persian and Tonekaboni dialects in family and friend's relations, neighborhood business, and educational and official affairs. In reviewing the

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literature of their research, including also dissertations done about the use and status of Iran's regional languages like Mazandarani, Baluchi, Gilaki and Azari Turkish, they concluded that "… in a great majority of such researches, …we see the use of prestigious languages in formal situations is more than their use in informal situations" (p. 45).

Noori and Zarei (2020) have studied "social status of Karingani", an Iranian language used in Karingan and some other villages in Varzaghan county of East Azarbajjan province, with a focus on the domains of the use of the language and its speakers' attitudes towards their mother tongue. Their study shows that Karingani is going to give its status to Azari Turkish in the region:

> Data of the research indicate this bitter reality that speakers of Karingani getting older and number of younger speakers of the language decreases increasingly. The language used to speak with children, in 56% of cases is Turkish, and in 25% of cases we see a kind of bilingualism. In other words, continuation and intergenerational transfer, as one of the most important factors of preservation and survival of languages, is severely damaged for the language in question. … . (p14).

> Nevertheless, results of some studies are promising. Zolfaghari (2002), for example, shows that "… despite the excessive worries about the increasingly rapid deterioration of regional dialects in Iran, use of Bakhtiari, a variety of Lori, is relatively good. That is to say approximately all of the male and female speakers of the study, in different age, education and occupation levels, use Bakhtiari in home, street, family relationships and so forth, more than Persian" (p. 137). In a similar vein, Noori (2014) says that "… Azari Turkish is not in danger of deterioration and degeneration", and because of "high population of speakers and vast geographical territory of the language, speaking of whole deterioration of Azari Turkish in Iran is nonsense" (p. 50).

3. Theoretical Considerations

In doing this research, the author has had Joshua A. Fishman's views about language endangerment in his mind. Fishman (1991), in *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*, after reviewing different dimensions of the problem, in comparison to "Richter Scale" for measuring intensity of earthquakes in which "high numbers are indicative of stronger tremors, i. e. of greater disruption established, normal geological strata and, accordingly, of greater threat to those living in the vicinity of the quake" (p. 87), provides a similar scale for measuring the degree of intergenerational continuity and maintenance of languages called "Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale" (GIDS). In this scale too, the greater the number, the greater the "intergenerational disruption" of the language in question would be, and as a result, its maintenance and survival, i. e. its transfer to the next generation, would be more severe and critical. Fishman' scale has eight degrees or stages (p. 87-107):

Stage 8: when a language is in this stage, it means that most of its remaining speakers are "socially isolated folks".

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Stage 7: when a language is in this stage, it means that although its speakers are in "a socially integrated and ethnolinguistically active population but they are beyond child-bearing age".

Stage 6: Here, the language in question is used in intergenerational oral conversations, and language community demographically is concentrated.

Stage 5: Here, the language in question enjoys literacy in home, school and its community, but there is not "extra-communal reinforcement" for such literacy.

Stage 4: The language in question is used in "lower education".

Stage 3: The language in question is used in "the lower work sphere", in intercommunity interaction of its speakers with the speakers of other languages.

Stage 2: Here, the language in question is used in "lower governmental services and mass media but not in the higher spheres of either".

Stage 1: Here, the language in question is partly used in "higher level educational, occupational, and governmental and media efforts".

If we are going to provide a program for saving or preserving a language, we must try to move it from the upper stages of GIDS to its lower stages. That is to say, moving in this direction puts the language in the preservation and maintenance route, and moving in the opposite direction leads it to the language shift and ultimately, language death (Simons 2019, p. 2).

Fishman (2001, p. 10) categorizes functions of languages as the "P" and "n-P" ones. The "P functions are those that are more powerful (employment, higher education, mass media, government, etc.)" (ibid). The "n-P functions" are related to lower levels of application of a language, i. e., "family, friendship neighborhood, community and possibly, some type of community-controlled pre-school or elementary education". Fishman shows threatened languages by "Th" to use the following notation, which indicates that the language in question has both of the aforementioned functions, i. e., all the functions a language may have. However, we know that a great number of the "threatened languages" are not in such a situation, and their situations are more like what Fishman means by the following notation:

$$\frac{p}{n-p} : \frac{n-Th}{Th}.$$

In this recent notation, "n-Th" stands for languages that are non-threatened presently to which Fishman has referred to also as "mainstream languages". Fishman continues to say that "RLSers rarely aspire to remove completely n-Th from all of its P functions. A more realistic and, certainly initially, more feasible goal would be to try to share some of the P functions, e. g. secondary education or local employment with n-Th". This is based on the following notation (ibid):

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As a result, in most cases, the goal of "reversing language shift" is "*elevation of Th from n-P to P functions*" (ibid, p. 11). Another important point raised by Fishman is that for "mainstream languages", in contrary to the threatened languages, their functions at best are in an established stable condition, functions may have a spreading movement that may be towards fields specified to the threatened language (ibid). Having Fishman's GIDS' eight stages, and what he has said about "P and n-P functions" of languages in mind, in what follows, the problem of language endangerment was analyzed in Iran.

4. Language Endangerment in Iran

Iran is an ancient multilingual country located in the west of Asia, in the region known as Middle East. Different languages and dialects are used all over the country, in large or small communities. Iran's languages can be grouped into five categories: 1. Indno-European, including a. Iranian: including the majority of the country's languages, namely lingua franca of the nation, Persian, and Kurdish, Baluchi, Mazandarani, Gilaki, Laki, Lori, Talysh, Tati, Sangsari, Semnani, Natanzi, etc. b. Indo-Aryan language of Jadgali; and c. Armenian language. 2. Turkic: Azari Turkish, Turkman, Kazak, Khalaji, and other varieties of Turkish. 3. Semitic: Arabic, Mandaic and Neo-Aramaic. 4. Kartvelian: Georgian. 5. Dravidian: Brahui.

The high cultural and linguistic diversity of Iran is because of the ups and downs of its long history. The high linguistic diversity of the country, located in one of the crowded junctions of the world, has been preserved till the contemporary time, and if there has been any change in some of its aspects, it has been because of the cultural or natural literary promotion of a language, tribal movements, or the entrance and settlement of a huge number of speakers of a language to the country. In other words, causes of the expansion of languages and dialects, or their decline and deterioration, has been restricted to some specific ones. As Bartold (1997) has put it, a clear example of this can be seen, on the one hand, in the expansion of "literary Persian" in Central Asia that leads to retreat of other Iranian languages and dialects, and, on the other hand, in the expansion of Turkish in Central Asia that leads to the retreat of Iranian languages and dialects, even literary Persian, in many parts of the region.

Since about a century ago, because of the necessities imposed by attempts for modernization of the country, the Iranian society came to experience new changes in its way of life, an aspect of which appeared as a decrease in the linguistic diversity of the country. In this process, the speed of the decline has not been the same for all languages and dialects of Iran. In other words, the great languages and dialects of Iran, opposite to the smaller ones, although has been influenced by the formal standard language of the country, are preserved, or at least have maintained large parts of their territories. In addition, a second group of the country's languages are preserved; since they are located in regions that their interactions with other linguistic communities have been minimum.

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However, a remarkable number of the country's languages and dialects have been in the route towards decline and deterioration; thus, today, a large number of them have received the label "endangered language".

In the *UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the world's Languages in Danger*, in Iran, 25 languages are known to be endangered: Ashtiani, Bashkardi, Brahui[1], Dari, Dzhidi, Gazi, Hawrami Hulaula, Khalaj, Khorasani Turk, Khunsari, Koroshi, Lari, Lishan Didan, Mandaic, Natanzi, Nayini, Semnani, Senaya, Sivandi, Soi, Suret, Talysh, Tati, Vafsi[2]. Whan we look closely at the names of these languages and information provided about them in aforementioned atlas, we first understand that the names of many of the other endangered languages and dialects of Iran are absent among them, and second, most of the mentioned languages are at the stage of "definitely endangered" languages, meaning that children no longer acquire them as their mother tongue at home.

On the *Endangered Language Project* (ELP) website, through searching "Iran", we reached names of fifty languages[3]. But, on the map of endangered languages of the world, available on the website, on Iran's map, we saw the names of fifty-six languages. This difference seems to be because of mistakenly registering some languages not related to Iran on Iran's map: Jewish Azerbaijani, Judo Iraqi-Arabic, Judo-Moroccan Arabic, Natchez[4], and Judo Yamani-Arabic. On the ELP website, languages are categorized based on their degree of vitality as "unknown", "safe", "at risk", "vulnerable", "threatened", "endangered", "severely endangered", "critically endangered", "awakening", and "dormant". Based on this categorization, among Iran's endangered languages, 12 are in the "unknown" condition, four are at risk, 14 are vulnerable, 20 are threatened and endangered, and four are severely endangered. If we look closely at the geographical distribution of Iran's endangered languages registered on the ELP map, we discover that in some provinces of the country, as Isfahan (with 14 languages), Ardabil (with 11 languages) and Semnan (with 7 languages), the number of endangered languages are significantly more than other provinces of the country. Particularly, for some vast provinces of the country such as Kerman and Fars, there are only one or two languages on the map, and some provinces are not represented on it at all.

According to Ethologue, there are eighty languages in Iran. The alive languages of Iran are categorized as indigenous (65 languages) and non – indigenous (14 languages) ones. In the Ethnologue categorization of Iran's languages, six languages have "institutional" use, 10 are "developing", two languages are "vigorous", and nine languages are "dying". In the Ehnologue list

[1] In Unesco's map, Brahui, Suret and Talysh are located out of Iran's borders, respectively in Pakistan, Iraq and Republic of Azarbaijan, apparently because of the fact that these languages have speakers in those countries too.

[2] http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php (5/October/2019)

[3] http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/search/#/?endangerment=U,S,AR,V,T,E,CE,SE,AW,D&sample_types=N,A,V,D,I,G,L&locations=known,unknown&q=iran&type=code&countries=Iran

[4] According to *Ethnologue*, this language has speakers in some regions of the United States of America: https://www.ethnologue.com/language/ncz

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of Iran's languages, we see languages like Georgian and Kazakh which are absent in other reviewed resources. Iranian Georgians[5] and Kazakhs[6] are very small island-like communities, the history of settlement of which in Iran returns back to the Safavid era and the first decades of the twenty centuries, respectively. In the Ethnologe index of Iran's languages, we also see languages like Aymaq, Saljuq, Fars Northwestern[7], and Fars Southwestern[8] that are not known clearly to us.

If we compare the data given about Iran's endangered languages in aforementioned sources as the first point necessary to pay attention to, we see that they are different, and sometimes, there are significant differences between them. Therefore, in studying the country's endangered languages, first of all, it is imperative to identify endangered languages and dialects in all parts of Iran through standard fieldwork to be able to determine their level of endangerment, and, as latter steps, to have suitable planning for their protection, preservation, or reviving. We also see that sometimes, data provided about Iran's endangered languages are vague or incorrect. Thus, researchers must exercise caution in referring to such data. Moreover, for Iranian researchers, it is better to refer directly to language communities for studying those languages. The next point is that a number of languages, e. g. Mandaic, in all resources are mentioned to be at the upper stages of endangerment; thus, these languages must be given due priority in research and probable programming of the focus on saving or documenting the country's endangered languages.

The other important point about the data provided in aforementioned sources is the neglect of numerous dialects and accents of Iran as the names of a great majority of such language varieties of the country are absent in them. This is definitely important because most of Iran's dialects and accents are going to be replaced by powerful language varieties of the country, mostly because of the increasing wave of immigration to larger cities and urbanization. In fact, a large number of such varieties are not known even to linguists to be introduced to sources like Unesco, Ethnologue or ELP. For example, we do not see the name of "Abdolmaleki" or "Owmaleki", a variety of Kurdish, used in a small language island consisted of only four villages of Zaghmarz, Zinvand, Amirabad, and Hoseinabad in Behshar county of Mazandaran province. Or, although "Natanzi" can be seen in sources mentioned above, there is no sign of its varieties such as

[5] Iranian Georgians are mostly concentrated in 15 villages of Faridan county of Isfahan province, and the city of Faridan itself. Of course, in other counties of the province, like Najafabad, there are smaller groups of Georgians. As far as I have heard, Georgians live in other regions of Iran too, e. g. Firuzkuh county, Lorestan, Khuzestan, Khorasan and Mazandaran provinces, too, but there they have experienced language shift, and no longer use their ancestral language. Presence of Georgians in some parts of Iran can be traced through finding "GORJI" ("Georgian" in Persian) in some place names. For example, in mazandaran province, we have "Gorjimehale", a village, its people ethnically are Georgians, but today they have forgotten their ancestral language, and use Mazandarani, an Iranian language, as their mother tongue.

[6] The small population of Iranian Kazakhs lives mostly in "Qazaqmehale" (literally means "district of Kazakhs") of Gorgan, capital of Golestan province.

[7] In Ethnologue, this is explained as a language similar to Sivandi, used in Fars province: https://www.ethnologue.com/language/faz

[8] In ethnologue, this is explained as a language connected to Iranian Persian and Lari language, used in Fars province.

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"Bidhendi", "Badrudi", "Tærghi", "Abyanei[9]", "Tari", "Tame'i", "Tære'i[10]", … . Now all of them are going to be extinct because of immigration and missing their social prestige. The language called "Velati" is also absent in those sources. This is an old language being restricted today to only small islands like the district of Værnosfaderan in Khomeinishahr (originally being called "Sede") of Isfahan province[11]. This is so about Malayeri dialect of Malayer County in Hamedan province, although with nearly three hundred thousand of speakers, it can be argued to be endangered among the rest. This is because of its missing prestige and being replaced by standard Persian as the language of interaction by children at least in a great majority of middle-class families. Nanaji dialect of village of Nanaj, in the same county, is also absent in those sources. This is a dialect used in a small language community of less than seven hundreds of speakers, now definitely endangered under the pressure of Malayeri dialect, standard Persian and also because of Immigration and change in the life style of its speakers (for Nanaji, see Amini 2020). The name of Khamse Arabic, language of "Khamse tribes" in Fars and Hormozgan provinces in south of the country, also cannot be found in the sources in question. This a variety of Arabic influenced deeply by Persian and perhaps other Iran's languages of the region, like Lori, which needs to receive special attention because of the tribes' missing their integrity and leaving their tribal life style to inhabit in villages and cities during the last nine decades. This list can be continued by adding the names of many other languages and dialects of Iran, being now all endanger, less or more, for the same reasons mentioned above.

Endangered languages can be categorized based on different criteria. In case of Iran's endangered languages, based on aforementioned arguments, these criteria must be examined carefully to find a group of criteria for categorization of Iran's endangered languages. In providing these criteria, it is necessary to pay attention to this fact that, at least based on what came above, the number of endangered languages in some parts of Iran, significantly, is higher than the other parts. Moreover, in studying these languages, we must pay special attention to situations of language contact (in case of languages like Talysh, Tati, Hawrami and Jadgali), immigration (in case of most of the languages and dialects of the country), and climate of the region (in case of languages of central parts of Iran, as Nayini, Natanzi, Farvigi on the one Hand, and languages of Northern parts of the country, as Gilaki, Mazandarani, and Talysh on the other hand).

5. Discussion

As said in the introduction, problem of language endangerment must be examined in connection to other great problems of our time, namely, environmental degradation, decline of local cultures etc.

[9] Known as "Ozun Viyona".
[10] Known as "Ozun Tare'I".
[11] "Velati" is a cover term used in central parts of Iran in referring to local language varieties. These varieties are similar to each other, and they have preserved some of the old peculiarities of old Iranian languages like ergetivity or circumpositions now absent in Persian and most of other Iranian languages.

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This is because all of these problems are the results of phenomena like globalization and unsustainable development. Therefore, arguably, maintenance of linguistic diversity of Iran depends on sustainable development of the country instead of wild urbanization and industrialization that leads to rapid exploitation of resources and destruction of tangible and intangible heritages of the country.

During the long history of the country, Persian has been used as the lingua franca and language of culture and literary creation of Iran. In Iran, as a multilingual country, other languages, dialects, and accents have been used in other fields without being threatened or replaced by Persian. During this long period of time, use of Persian as the lingua franca of Iranians, has not been something imposed by force or based on a particular language policy; instead, this language has been selected as the common language of Iranians because of the literary and cultural status giving to it not only by masterpieces created by such great poets as Rumi, Ferdowsi, Hafiz, Khayyam and Sa'di, but also by all those scientific who produced produced in this language in different fields of knowledge, ranging from philosophy to mathematics, geography, algebra etc. However, since about a century ago, because of the expansion of public education, urbanization, impact of mass media, and immigration from villages and towns to cities, other languages, dialects and accents of Iran have been Influenced by the standard Persian (based on the accent of the capital, Tehran, known as "Tehrani"), in a way that Persian's historical pattern of relation with other languages and dialects of the country has changed asymmetrically in a way that in many parts of Iran, now, "Tehrani Persian" is started to be used in those fields traditionally being the domains of local languages and dialects. Of course, here too, this is not something based on an intentional, purposeful language policy, but mostly is a social inclination towards standard language of the country that like its counterparts in other countries, has prestige and is the dominant language of science, literature, and culture.

Having that historical frame in mind, it may be argued that paving the way for languages and dialects of Iran to maintain their traditional fields of use and functions is an effective way to help them to continue their lives as before. Based on the same argument, even it can be said that it is not necessary to expand functions of these dialects and languages, because this may change their historical pattern of stability, a pattern based on bilingualism, tolerance, and cultural interaction with speakers of other languages of the country. This is important because paying attention to the condition of Iran's endangered languages makes it clear that causes of their decline are factors like increasing the decrease of their speakers and missing prestige and their communities missing of their cohesion and integrity. Thus, at least in case of Iran, it can be stated that giving "p-functions" to endangered languages is not as important and vital as maintaining or reviving their long historical pattern of stability in the country. Considering "functions", in Iran, even Persian that more than any other language of the country has "p-functions" can be categorized as a threatened

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language. This is because in fields like the use of Internet, sometimes, English is the only language which can be used, and also because there are some academic regulations, researchers, who produce works in English, receive more scores. Moreover, in the middle and upper middle classes, this language enjoys high prestige; that is why in recent decades institutes of teaching English have been developed rapidly all over the country. In addition, now, not only teaching English is part of the usual activities of kindergartens, but also its learning and use is encouraged at school and even home, at least in some middle and upper middle classes of larger cities. Advance of English is not limited to these cases, and at academic levels, sometimes, there is an inclination to use only English in production of scientific writings, and literature of some fields is heavily influenced by this language. The same can be also stated about some fields of commerce and art, such as cinema, about which in recent years, we have seen a kind of eagerness and clear tendency to use English. In addition, knowing that today in Iran, in middle and upper middle classes and in academic situations, sometimes knowing English, using its words, and even pronouncing some sounds of Persian like their counterparts in English create prestige, we can say that, contrary to what House (2003) has said, it is not easy to make a distinction between "languages for communication" and "languages for identification". This is because advancement of English to influence Persian and sometimes even to take its "functions" is something very clear that cannot be ignored.

In those parts of Iran that, because of their desert climate, human settlements are few and scattered, factors like drought and climate change have made the already severe conditions worse and deprived people of capabilities necessary for use as human settlements. As a result, these parts of the country that are home to a number of old Iranian languages, now, witness that most of their languages are endangered, and they miss their populations an as a result of which deteriorate conditions of the related linguistic communities. This is thus about a large number of those villages of Iran situated in provinces with desert climate, such as Isfahan, Yazd, Sistan-and-Baluchistan, Semnan, etc. Moreover, in recent years, transboundary haze and dust in border provinces like Khuzestan has made the situation difficult for Iranian people. It is stated that a large number of them have immigrated to other provinces or are going to do so. This will certainly have its own consequences, particularly for small linguistic communities of villages and endangered languages like Mandaic.

On the other hand, in those parts of the country that better climate have made them destinations of migrants, such as provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran in the north and Hamedan in the west, language communities receive pressure of larger languages. For example, in Northern provinces of Iran, Gilaki and Mazandarani, at least in larger cities, gradually miss their domains to Persian as the lingua franca of the country and surely the language of prestige and power. Moreover, in the Western parts of Gilan, in recent decades, immigration from mostly Turkish speaking provinces like Azerbaijan and Ardabil have pushed Talysh language of the region to the

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corner. As a result, in Talysh speaking regions of the country, we have seen language shift to Turkish in recent decades, and now, because of the mixmarriages and daily contacts, many families are bilinguals in Turkish and Talysh. This happens in many cases because of power and also because large population of the first language ends in language shift to Turkish in the next generations. In Gilan, pressure of Turkish even can be felt on Gilaki that is more powerful than Talysh. Thus, in cases like Talysh and Gilaki, not only are they under the influence of lingua franca of the country, but also, they are under the pressure of regional powerful languages of the country. Similar situations can be seen in other parts of the country too. For example, in the Western parts of Iran in provinces of Kermanshah and Kurdistan, Hawrami seems to be under the influence of Sorani, as one of the main powerful varieties of Kurdish. In the Southeast part of Iran in south of Sistan-and-Baluchistan province, the small scatter communities of Jadgali, an Indo-Aryan language is under the pressure of Iranian language of Baluchi, and not only is Jadgali heavily influenced by Baluchi but also there are numerous cases of language shift to Baluchi. Consequently, bilingualism in Baluchi and Jadgali paves the way for language shift to the more powerful language of the region in next generations.

Therefore, based on what we now know about Iran's endangered languages, we can propose a number of ways for their preservation: first of all, in development programs, it is important to pay attention to the impacts and side effects of projects on villages and small towns of the country, since many of them are home to languages and dialects that can be categorized as endangered, and any change in their conditions can threaten their existence. Second, economically, we need to take an approach based on positive discrimination towards those towns and villages that are home to endangered languages to help them to keep their populations, i.e., speakers of those languages. Otherwise, they miss the remaining parts of their speakers as a result of immigration to cities or larger cities. Third, in educational systems and mass media of the country, especially at primary levels and programs produced for women and children, paying special attention to the importance and value of preserving and respecting "diversity", particularly the linguistic diversity of the country and looking at it as a "non-renewable resource" can be also effective, because in this way, not only can we increase knowledge of women and children about their linguistic heritage, but also we increase prestige of all languages of the country as an an important factor in using "n-P" languages in different situations and paving the way for them to be transferred to children.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that in case of Iran, we cannot reach a clear picture of the country's endangered languages by mere reference to sources like Ethnologue, ELP etc., since a great number of endangered languages and dialects of Iran are absent in such sources, and in addition, their present data about the registered languages, sometimes, cannot be confirmed. Based on what we sstated

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about the historical relationship of Persian and other languages and dialects of Iran, it is possible to say that in multilingual countries like Iran, maintaining historical relationships between languages of the country can be a good way for maintenance of all of them. This is because this strategy creates a kind of stability useful for both the "P" language and "n-P" languages, in Fishman terms. Political, social, cultural, economic factors, and in more recent decades, climate changes of the world (all can be argued to be side effects of unsustainable development in most parts of the globe) not only have influenced the historical relationships of languages, but also have deteriorated the situation for languages with small groups of speakers, languages their communities are located in regions impacted by draught and climate change, and languages their communities are in close contact with more powerful languages.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed significantly to the research process.

Declaration

We declare that this manuscript is original and has not been submitted to any other journal for publication

Transparency Statements

The authors affirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. Any additional data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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