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What about Translation? Beyond “Persianization” as the Language Policy in Iran

Against the background of language policy research on Iran, and drawing on insights from recent scholarship on the role of translation in language policy, this article calls into question the claim that “Persianization” of non-Persian peoples is the main element of language policy in Iran. In so doing, the article examines closely the role of translation as enacted in two legal instruments: the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Law of Parliamentary Elections. The study illustrates that although official communication between Iranian authorities and citizens is a prototypical example of monolingualism and non-translation, voluntary translation happens between Persian and non-Persian speaking individuals, acting as a viable and cost-effective bottom-up alternative for the inclusion of non-Persian speaking peoples, far more effective than an impractical, top-down language policy reform implicitly found in the “Persianization” claim.

Language and Translation Policy

Generally speaking, from the fifteenth century onwards language has progressively become a state matter, when “the rulers of centralizing states and European colonial authorities began to feel the need to directly claim the allegiance of their subjects, and to link this to the idea of one unifying language—and even to some extent one national culture.” Language became a national symbol, a community-building tool and the basic principle for democratic legitimation and participation: citizens had the right to communicate with (and control) the authorities, to understand the laws taken in their name, to vote, to receive and understand official documents, etc. This means that language had to become institutionalized through language policies, defined here as legal rules for language use in public education, in legal affairs, political institutions, administration and the public media. Often these policies were—and still are—an embodiment of the democratic ideal of one language for one people in one nation-state. However, this monolingual ideal is at odds with the linguistic variety.

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on the ground: worldwide, authorities were—and still are—confronted with multilingual populations and thus face the challenge of adjusting their language policies in order to secure the allegiance and integration of their multilingual populations. This is where translation becomes part of the picture. Indeed, any language policy presupposes a translation policy: determining the rules of institutional language use presupposes determining the rules for translation within these same institutions. Translation policy will be defined here as a set of legal rules that regulate translation in the public domain: in education, in legal affairs, in political institutions, in administration, in the media. Such translation policies can act as a tool for integration or exclusion of speakers of minority languages and therefore deserve special attention. Discussion of language policy from the point of view of translation might also act as a “compromise between the lofty aspirations of language rights and the tough choices of language policy.”

However, among the numerous studies on language rights, on language policies or on the integration of minorities and immigrants, the key role of a translation policy as part of any language policy is not taken into consideration. In the field of translation studies, the links between language and translation policy are explored from time to time, but synthetic accounts on translational justice are still lacking.

Prototypical linguistic and translational policies. Inspired by the works of scholars who have called for various linguistic rights for minorities, and following van Parijs’s definition of “linguistic territoriality regime,” Meylaerts has identified four prototypical linguistic and translational policies for the communication between authorities and citizens in a given context:

1. Institutional monolingualism, i.e. one official language regulates communication between authorities and citizens in public education and public settings. This language policy requires a strict translation policy. On the one hand, it entails obligatory translation of allophone documents and messages in order to become official or legally valid, while on the other hand there is a (sometimes official) ban on translations into minority or immigrant languages in public education and public settings. Speakers of these languages are thus supposed to learn the national language and become multilingual. Promoters of this policy claim it is favorable for minorities’ integration and for national cohesion. Opponents think it leads to a deplorable elimination of minorities’ languages and cultures, high dropout rates or poor school results, high unemployment rates, exclusion in health and social services.

2. Institutional multilingualism with obligatory multidirectional translation in all languages for all. This policy would aim to make all languages institutionally equal within a given territory so that all people have access to legal, political and administrative institutions and education in their mother tongue. Thanks to institutional translation, citizens can remain monolingual: multilingualism of institutions enables monolingualism of citizens. Of course if authorities were to implement this policy for each and every allophone indigenous or immi-
grant, it would go against what is known in the legal field as the principle of proportionality: a translation service should be reasonable and justified, i.e. proportional to the relative size of speakers of a language. Next to financial and organizational issues, it is therefore claimed to involve an increased risk of ghettoization, impeding social cohesion and national identity.

3. Institutional monolingualism combined with occasional and temporary translation into the minority languages. In comparison to the two above described extremes, this is an intermediate policy which allows for translation in well-defined situations—e.g. to obtain a translated document or an interpreter in court, in health care, in administration, at elections, etc. Still, translation remains a granted exception, not even always explicitly enacted in law but rather the implicit result of other obligations such as non-discrimination or equal access to institutions. As such, translation does not endanger the dominance of the institutionalized language. However, opponents of this restrictive translation policy still claim that it hinders integration and instead furthers linguistic and other ghettoization.

4. The fourth policy is a combination of monolingualism (1) and multilingualism (2), according to the level of governance concerned: institutional monolingualism at the local level and institutional multilingualism with multidirectional mandatory translation at the superior (e.g. federal) level. Or vice versa: monolingualism at the superior level and multilingualism at the local level. This policy is mainly applied in countries with indigenous minorities, e.g. in Belgium or Canada where the federal state is officially multilingual, whereas the local level (respectively regions or provinces) is (predominantly) monolingual. The UK government, on the other hand, is monolingual, while the Welsh government and institutions are committed to bilingualism.

The above typology aims to be global and as such should be able to describe the particularities of whatever type of policies are adopted by (local, regional or national) authorities worldwide to communicate with their allophone minorities. There is a pressing need for such empirical studies, which would then allow analysis of which policies further or hinder minorities’ integration and socialization in terms of access to key services, such as government services, health and social care and legal services. For the moment, due to a lack of empirical research, clear-cut, research-based answers are lacking. This study wants to contribute to this need by describing the language and translation policy of modern Iran in government settings.

"Persianization" in Iran

Officially called the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979, Iran is one of the few countries in the world with a unique political structure, derived from the state religion, Shia Islam. According to the 1979 Constitution the country comprises several closely connected political institutions. Some of them are unelected, but the president and the
members of parliament and city and village councils are elected by universal suffrage. The Supreme Leader is the highest religious and political authority. He is the commander in chief of the armed forces and appoints the leaders of the judiciary and the heads of state broadcast media (IRIB), and has to approve all laws. Government legitimacy is thus based on popular sovereignty—albeit restricted—and on the rule of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

The country has been criticized for its record on human rights, political rights and minority rights. The way it deals with minorities will be relevant in our analysis of language and translation policy. Although the 1979 Constitution guarantees a wide range of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in practice “there are a number of serious impediments to the full protection of human rights and the independent functioning of the different institutions of the State.” In particular, Iran’s ethnic minorities (see also below) are reported to be subjected to socio-economic and cultural–linguistic discrimination. Iran, however, has repeatedly denied such claims by arguing that they are “procedurally wrong and rationally unjustifiable.” In the following, we would like to focus on the role of translation policies as part of language policy in Iran. Specifically, we aim to show that translation policies can be a tool for integration or exclusion of speakers of minority languages in their contact with authorities and participation in the life of the state, and therefore deserve special attention.

Research on language policy in Iran has focused until now on either language planning or linguistic purism or certain minority languages with politicized orientation; research on the possible role of translation in language policy in Iran is, not surprisingly, missing. For example, in a special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* in 2011 on aspects of sociolinguistics in Iran, the editors saw bilingualism and multilingualism as two “important areas of sociolinguist research” in Iran. However, translation policy in Iran or its role for Iranians abroad were mainly overlooked: one scholar studied how two ethnic groups, i.e. speakers of Armenian and Turkish who are exposed to diglossic bilingualism have different patterns of language use, for example in intergroup and informal face-to-face communication in the capital Tehran (see later in this article), and the other called for “stronger cultural motivations” on the part of second-generation Iranian immigrants in the United States to resist Americanization. More explicit views on language policy in Iran, however, come from a group of Iranian linguists with minority backgrounds. For example, recently, the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* published a special issue (2012, no. 217) on the minority language of Kurdish. The editors of this issue pinpointed the complicated nature of research on the politicized issue of the Kurdish language; however, translation policy was left out again. Because of this we have to start from a broader approach and then move to a more narrow approach. This means we have to start from previous studies in the field of sociolinguistics, Persian/Iranian Studies, and more explicitly those on language policy in Iran. But first an historical overview of the Persian language and the ethnic and linguistic make-up of Iran is needed.

An Iranian linguist argues that “Persianization of non-Persian peoples continues to be the building block of the Islamic regime’s language policy.” Taking the case of Kurdish in Iran, the author leaves no room for translation as a tool for so-called
Persianization. This argument raises a number of questions, all worthy of our attention. Who are these "non-Persian peoples"? What kind of policy is the language policy of Iran, and why should "Persianization" be the core element of this policy? More specifically, what is the role of translation policy therein? And what does this mean for the inclusion of allophone minorities? With these questions in mind, we aim to describe and examine translation policy in modern Iran, i.e. from the late Qajar era in the twentieth century to the present day. As already mentioned, we will deal with translation in the government settings, particularly as enacted in two legal instruments, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Law of Parliamentary Elections. As translation policies are often implicit (cf. above), we need to extract them from these official documents and examine their concrete implementation in the context under study.

**The Ethnic and Linguistic Make-up of Iran**

Iran’s official language is Persian (New Persian or Farsi). New Persian has its roots in Iranian languages—i.e. “the western group of the larger Indo-Iranian family which represents a major eastern branch of the Indo-European languages.”

Prior to the seventh century, Middle Persian or Pahlavi, the language of the Sasanian Empire (third–seventh centuries CE), was in use in Iran, and Iranians were mostly Zoroastrians. Iranians accepted Islam in the seventh century, and Arabic became the language of religion (cf. the use of Latin in mediaeval Europe); nevertheless, as Meskoob highlights, “after suffering defeat at the hands of the Arabs and after converting to Islam, the Iranian people also returned to the past ... Like Arabs, Iranians were now Muslims, but they had a different language.” Although Arabic remained the language of science and of religious scholars in Iran (the first Persian translation of the Quran appeared in the eleventh century), scholars used Pahlavi and later Persian in their oral contact with the faithful. The return to the past mentioned above took place with the rise of New Persian between the seventh and ninth centuries, and a number of instruments including the Persian epics, the most exemplary being the classic work of Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh (completed c. 1010), and lyric poems of, say, Shahid-Balkhi, Kasa’i Marvzi and Abu Mansur Daqiqi. These works and the emergence of New Persian formed significant parts of what came to be known as the Iranian/Persian identity. One example illustrates the importance of language in this common identity. Today, an educated Persian-speaker can still read and understand classic Persian texts from the ninth and tenth centuries, which are still widely available in Iran.

In addition to New Persian, several other Iranian languages continued to exist. The history of Iran tells us that Persian enjoyed official status for a number of dynasties from the tenth century on: it was the language of the Mongol Ilkhanid empire in the thirteenth century, and even the Safavids, who ruled Iran from 1501 to 1722, used it as their administrative and literary language, though they spoke Turkish at court and at home. A recent study also shows that with a general policy of integrating religious and ethnic minorities during the Safavids, the first two Safavids rulers held a moderate
policy towards Kurds. Persian served as the language of administration in a large geographical area, from today’s Bosnia in the fourteenth century to the Indian subcontinent where it worked as a lingua franca and the administrative language of the English East India Company prior to the imposition of English in 1835. The general nationalist movement across the above territory in the nineteenth century, coupled with more significant political events, all influenced by the colonial powers in one way or another, gradually pushed Persian to its present borders. In Iran, as Spooner argues, the status of Persian has been “jealously guarded” through various campaigns on the one hand, and academically challenged on the other.

Modern-day Iran is however all but a monolingual country. According to Ethnologue: Languages of the World, “the number of individual languages listed for Iran is 78. Of those, 75 are living languages and 3 (i.e. Avestan, Classical Mandaic and Salchuq) are extinct.” According to the estimates of July 2012 by the World Fact Book, 78,868,711, people live in Iran, of whom 61 percent are Persian-speaking, 16 percent Azeri, 10 percent Kurd, 6 percent Lur, 2 percent Baluch, 2 percent Arab, 2 percent Turkmen and Turkic tribes, and 1 percent are known to have other ethnic backgrounds (Table 1).

In terms of the linguistic make-up, the same reference reports that the first language in use in Iran is Persian (the official language) 53 percent, followed by Azeri Turkish and Turkish dialects 18 percent. Next comes Kurdish 10 percent, Gilaki and Mazandarani 7 percent, Luri 6 percent, Baluchi 2 percent, Arabic 2 percent, and the rest 2 percent.

Geographically speaking, ethnic Iranians live throughout Iran. Azeris live mainly in the northwest; Kurds, who have traditionally kept a nomadic lifestyle, generally live in the mountain areas of the west; Lurs are scattered in various provinces of the west and south of Iran; Arabs mainly live in the western and southern border of Iran; and Balochs live mainly in the province of Sistan va Baluchistan in the southeast border region. Given the considerable mobility of Iranians inside Iran in the last decades, this geographical division is no longer as sharp as it was, since people of various

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Numbers (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>48,109,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azeri</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12,618,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurd</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7,886,871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lur</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4,732,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baloch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,577,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,577,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmen and Turkic tribes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,577,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>788,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>78,868,711</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from World Fact Book, “2012. Middle East: Iran.”*
ethnic backgrounds have been living visibly across the country. This mobility, however, is not something recent, because people in Iran have a history of movement that some argue should be attributed to “linguistic” reasons above all. For Frye, who otherwise sees the political history of Iran playing its part, language is the most important historical factor in this and he finds evidence in, for example, the Tat speaking minority in the northern part of Azerbaijan, among others.42

So, despite the fact that half of the population has a mother tongue different from Persian, Persian continues to be the official language of Iran—i.e. in all official settings, in administration, in education and in legal affairs. This is the result of an historical evolution which we shall briefly discuss below, but prior to that a few words are needed about diglossia in Iran. Iran is not a diglossic society in the strict sense used by Ferguson, i.e. “the use of two or more varieties of the same language” in a single community.43 Iran is rather a special case, mainly due to high literacy rates within its borders. Although Persian language usage fits the diglossia pattern, Spooner calls our attention to a number of other significant elements that distinguish it from that pattern. He finds fault in Ferguson’s overlooking “the larger context of Persian usage, historical and modern.” In addition to high literacy rate, Spooner points to the growing significance of past history of Persian in today’s Iran as a further evidence.44

**Figure 1. The Linguistic Make-up of Iran**

![Figure 1. The Linguistic Make-up of Iran](image)

*Source: Adapted from World Fact Book, “2013. Middle East: Iran.”*

Historical Overview of Language and Translation Policy in the Government Settings in Iran

In modern Iran, i.e. from the late Qajar period, or more precisely from the Constitutional Revolution (1905–11), Persian, the mother tongue of the majority of
Iranians, became the official language of the state. According to article 4 of the Electoral Law of 9 September 1906, those elected must have the following qualifications: “they must know Persian, they must be able to read and write Persian, they must be Persian subjects of Persian extraction,” among others.45 This is probably the first legislative enactment of language policy in modern Iran. Kia argues that in the Supplementary Fundamental Laws of 7 October 1907, compulsory instruction in Persian had to be regulated by the Ministry of Sciences and Arts. However, evidence shows that there is no mention of “Persian” in the law.46 In the Fundamental Law of 1906 or its supplement in 1907 there was no room for translation, and Persian was the official language of the Iranian state, administration, political institutions and judiciary. It is therefore reasonable to expect that there was virtually no translation into the minorities’ languages to facilitate communication with the authorities. Further enactments and development of language policy occurred in the following period.

Reza Shah took power in 1925 and succeeded in bringing back political stability to Iran through his military power and tribal policy. In this policy, informed by his pan-Persian nationalist and centralizing sentiments, tribal life and culture was damaged, and power was centralized in Tehran, from where Persian-speaking governors and mayors were sent to Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic provinces,47 a tradition that is still relevant. Moreover, Reza Shah and his successor Mohammad Reza Shah were also equally determined to modernize Iran along the European lines, a policy which “proceeded hand in hand with secularization and Persianization.”48 The above constitution and its supplement saw further revisions up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979; however, Persian as before remained the official language of the country, administration, education, political institutions and judiciary.

While assimilation policy in the early modernization campaigns in ethnic environments on the one hand and, on the other hand, nationalism and the need for a strong state in which state-building was equal to nation-building49 formed much of the Persianization language policy in pre-Revolution Iran, for the revolutionaries of the post-Revolution era (1979–present) there was only one nation, and that was the nation of Islam. Arabic was the first language of Islam and Persian was the second.50 However, the revolutionaries soon realized that they should guard the role of Persian as an official language. According to Sheyholislami in his study of Kurdish in Iran,51 the language policy in post-Revolution Iran is thus not different from the previous two policies and is characterized by three components: “treating multilingualism as a threat to the country’s territorial integrity and national unity; restricting the use of non-Persian languages; and promoting the supremacy of Persian as a venue for unifying the ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous body politic.” In sum, the language policy of modern-day Iran, the author argues, is “Persianization of non-Persian peoples.”52 What does this mean exactly for the various autochthonous minorities in Iran? Is translation playing any role in their inclusion or integration, and by extension in their participation in democratic procedures?

The definitive legal instrument on language policy in Iran on which such views are based is Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Revolution:
The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian. (Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Although the constitution makes some provision for minority languages (see below), it is Persian that shapes the monolingual policy of Iran, the use of which is obligatory in all government settings, in administration and in education (all school textbooks are in Persian). As explained in the typology above, this policy entails obligatory translation of documents and messages not in Persian in order to become official or legally valid, while written communication between the Iranian authorities (local services, regional services, central services) and the inhabitants is subject to a non-translation policy. For public messages, for public signage, for forms, in official meetings, and so on, Persian is the only legal language. Speakers of minority languages (Turkish, Kurdish and Baluchi, to name just three), do not have the right to use their language in official communications with authorities, and they should be fluent enough to read and understand official texts in Persian. For example, for a Turkish speaker it is obligatory to file a complaint in Persian, even though he is not obliged to speak Persian to the public servant who receives the complaint. As a consequence of this policy of monolingualism and non-translation (at least for written messages) and, as mentioned in the typology above, minority speakers often find themselves disadvantaged, e.g. in terms of public employment rates. So, for example, the Baluch minority in Iran are concerned “about the low level of Baloch participation in public life, given that they are underrepresented in high-ranking Government positions.”

A similar situation characterizes political institutions. The Iranian parliament is made up of representatives (MPs) from all across the country, including representatives from areas populated by autochthonous linguistic minorities. These MPs as well as MPs from recognized religious minorities (Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians) should use Persian as the only official language in official settings, communications and in administration. Apart from the occasional use of Arabic by some MPs in their speeches (usually in the form of Qur’anic verses or Hadith to illustrate a point or to support a claim), Persian is the default language and non-translation is the official policy in the parliament of Iran, regardless of occasional translation that might be available for official, international ceremonies where non-Iranian statesmen are present. Nevertheless, none of these MPs are obliged to use Persian with their constituents, either in their offices in the parliament or in the cities they represent. However, a small test of the official websites of some of the MPs with ethnic backgrounds reveals that they are Persian-only and that there is neither bilingual content nor any translation offered (e.g. the website of Reza Rahmani, the MP from Tabriz). In other words, monolingualism and non-translation have led to
the absence of minority languages in the Iranian parliament and in written communications between MPs and their electorates. Similarly, when it comes to the most emblematic act of the democratic process, casting ballots, non-translation prevails. Although the right of voting is the legal right of all Iranians above the age of 18, there is no mention of translation in the Law of Parliamentary Elections as a tool for active participation of ethnic groups. In sum, it is through a fairly strict policy of monolingualism and non-translation that Persian remains the only official language in Iran, regulating communication between authorities and citizens.

Indeed, article 15 sees Persian and Persian script working as a lingua franca for Iranian people who might otherwise be bilingual (mother tongue plus Persian). In other words, the policy of non-translation and language learning go hand in hand in Iran. The Iranian authorities rely on learning Persian “as the common language of communication among all Iranian ethnic groups,” and thus as a community-building tool between the different autochthonous minorities. And although language is one of the strongest symbols of shared culture and identity, Meskoob does not consider the use of Persian by such minorities, whom he sees as Iranians after all, as a threat or negation of their “cultural identity.” He moreover argues that:

- the adoption of Turkish, Kurdish, or Baluch[i] as provincial languages, for example, would have significant ramifications, not only for interethnic relations with Iran, but also for Iran’s relationship with its neighbors. The whole problem has become intensely politicized, and it is within a political framework that it can be analyzed meaningfully.

It is clear that political unification is seen as a process that entails the imposition of one language, entirely in the traditional spirit of one language for one people in one nation-state and that language diversity is seen somehow as a menace. We agree with the author about the political nature of problem, not to mention some politically slanted research so far; nevertheless, a political framework alone might not pay attention to the role of translation. Meskoob also added that he would not advocate a monolingual policy at the price of other minority languages. In other words, Persian should continue “as the common language of communication among all Iranian ethnic groups” while other ethnic languages “exist and thrive alongside each other.” Indeed, in practice complete monolingualism and non-translation are rather utopian policies because they risk hampering communication between authorities and minorities, impeding accessibility of services, and endangering integration and inclusion. Thus, according to article 15 of the constitution, “the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.” This means that although ethnic minorities are still required to learn the official language, they are no longer required to abandon their own language and culture. Article 19 of the constitution further maintains that “all people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.” So all Iranian
ethnic groups (Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, etc.—see Table 1) are born in Iran, are Iranians by law, and therefore have equal rights. However, several sources report a discrepancy between the law and the practical implementation. For example, there are some reports that Kurds experience problems in the public display of their ethnic culture, language or traditions. Moreover, according to Amnesty International, Iran’s ethnic minority communities also have problems using their languages in government offices (in written form) and for teaching in schools, which remain prohibited. Similarly, although Azeris are said to be well integrated in government and society, they complain about their language being banned in schools.

In sum, official communication between the Iranian authorities and citizens seems to be a prototypical example of monolingualism and non-translation (category 1), despite the presumed risks for minorities’ access to government services and overall integration. Keeping their institutions monolingual, Iranian authorities expect their minorities to be (come) bilingual (mother tongue plus Persian), illustrating the general sociolinguistic principle that minorities learn the majority language and not vice versa. Here the role of public education is crucial. Generally the children of ethnic minority families grow up in a bilingual environment in which both their language and Persian are spoken and used to varying degrees. However, once they start public education at the age of six, they are exposed only to Persian as the language of instruction and of textbooks. The Persian language and Persian textbooks are the main educational resources throughout studies up to university level. From the age of six onwards, children from minority groups are thus exposed to a monolingual education. This approach, the argument runs, puts these students in an unequal situation of double learning: learning Persian and general literacy. However, it goes against an international trend towards “the recognition of the fundamental importance of language and culture for indigenous people” during the last three decades. Moreover, “study after study confirms that indigenous children almost universally have among the highest dropout rates and the poorest academic results.” According to a 2008 report of the Iranian Minorities’ Human Rights Organization (IMHRO) many non-Farsi-speaking children leave school before they should and the literacy rates of minorities are very low. Other studies have however shown that there is no significant relationship between the learning style and the student’s educational advancement of Persian monolingual students and bilingual students, i.e. Kurdish and Azeri students. Additionally, indigenous peoples themselves are not always in favor of education in their mother tongue. Still, research has shown in this respect that although the use of Persian is more rewarding for bilingual Azeris in Tehran, there is a growing sense of what Bani-Shoraka calls revitalization of this particular minority language and culture. While the jury is out on the pros and cons, minorities’ additional difficulties in following Persian in school are illustrated through an interesting translation practice. Quite often, pupils or their teachers find themselves translating between Persian and minority languages. As far as the educational level is concerned, volunteer translation is thus used as a tool for linguistic inclusion of the autochthonous linguistic minorities.

Volunteer translation into the minority languages also takes place when it comes to official communication between authorities and citizens, especially in cities with con-
siderable ethnic groups, like Tabriz, Yasuj and Sanandaj. The translators here can be bilingual public servants, close family members of the individuals in need of translation or others who are bilingual. The same happens at elections. Because the ballot is in Persian, considerable volunteer translation again happens between Persian and minority languages in the country’s most democratic exercise. In the absence of empirical data, the exact extent of this type of translation remains unmeasured however. Though translation in the official setting happens in reality, it is not regulated (neither forbidden nor imposed) by the authorities and is left to private initiative. The response to the official non-translation policy is circumstantial translation by circumstantial bilinguals. It may illustrate the utopian character of complete non-translation and citizens’ need for effective communication with the authorities.

What does the above translation policy mean for the immigrants and their languages? The current statistics show that the number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Iran, from Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, is 863,350. Moreover, since 2006 around 1.2 million Afghans have remained in Iran, despite various repatriation policies in collaboration with the UNHCR, Afghanistan and often Pakistan. Many of these refugees were generally able to communicate in Persian; therefore, the language does not seem to be an impediment to their integration. Some studies, for example, have shown that the second generations of these groups, who have been exposed to Persian as the language of education, have drawn on their educational achievement and occupational skills for better integration in Iran. With Persian playing no major role in the integration of Afghani immigrants in Iran, other key factors such as state restrictions on certain occupational categories available for immigrants, the unattractiveness of labor jobs for the Iranian workforce and, above all, a deteriorating economy are seen as factors influencing integration, as indicated by one study, which nevertheless can be seen as more effective than language and translation policy in this case. It is in this view that the issue of integration as it is understood in Europe is different in case of immigrants in Iran.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to describe and examine the nature of translation policy in government settings in modern Iran, i.e. from the late Qajar era in the twentieth century to the present day.

The discussion showed that Persian has remained the core element of language policy in Iran. On the one hand, it forms a major part of Iranian identity, and on the other hand it masks the heterogeneous reality of various ethnic groups living in Iran. It was also shown that assimilation of ethnic groups up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was the underlying political and linguistic policy in Iran, and learning Persian was a tool for the inclusion of these groups. The post-Revolution policy was nonetheless shown to be more nuanced and flexible in granting these groups the use of their languages in the press and mass media, and for teaching their literature in schools. However, some scholars see this as no different from the previous policies and tend to see “Persianization” at its core.
The examination of translation policy in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in the Law of Parliamentary Elections showed that legislative enactments do not have provisions for translation as a possible tool either for maximizing citizens’ participation in the democratic processes or for their inclusion in the majority. Inclusion or integration for that matter was said to have different implications for Iran, which has historically been a melting pot of various ethnic groups, and has ideologically used both religion and nationalism as two powerful tools to resist separatist campaigns.

In addition, despite the apparent lack of institutional translation, there is a considerable volume of volunteer translation happening in practice, the implications of which are important for Article 15 of the constitution and the role of institutional translation or lack of it in the inclusion or integration of minorities. This further confirms the theory that there is no language policy without translation policy. Without using the word translation, the language policy in Iran neither provides provision for translation, nor prohibits its non-official practice, i.e. volunteer translation.

Finally, and in lieu of a conclusion, the following claims can be made here, all of which call for further empirical studies:

1. Learning Persian is an essential segment of the language policy and one of the key elements of linguistic inclusion of minorities in Iran. The question of inclusion of ethnic groups in Iran should nonetheless be understood in the larger political context and growing politicized discourse of minority languages of a geographically and virtually dispersed space.

2. Non-translation policy in the government settings of Iran does not amount to the linguisicide of the minority languages in Iran per se, as some have argued. Volunteer translation works as an effective tool for the speakers of minority languages to maintain their language and resist the assumed linguisicide.

3. Translation offered in both government and educational settings in Iran largely depends on the goodwill of public servants and teachers respectively.

4. The increasing mobility, growing access of Iranian ethnic groups to modern media and the growing political conflicts in the region might bring some changes in the language policy (more specifically in the educational setting), and in Iran’s non-translation policy in the long run. This is more plausible than imagining an idealized “fundamental change in Iran’s political and administrative structure” as a precondition for such changes.

From a more general perspective, the long-term theoretical goal of these kinds of case studies is to generalize over the cases in order to complement existing theories of language policy with the key element of translation policy and to develop a model for analyzing the relation between translation policies and patterns of integration and socialization and of internal cohesion. The applied goal is to use the theoretical model to formulate best practices for authorities’ long-term strategic approach for ensuring minorities’ integration and socialization worldwide.
Notes

2. Although language policy following Spolsky is seen as language practices, language beliefs and language managements in a given context, in this paper, we define it in a more restricted way as legal rules for language use in the public domain (cf. above), see Spolsky, Language Policy; and Spolsky, “What is Language Policy?”
9. See Meylaerts, “Translational Justice,” for concrete examples of the implementation of these four prototypes.
11. See Gülmuş, Muttersprachliche Ansprache Als Integrationsstrategie; de Varennes, “Language, Rights and Opportunities.”
12. “The principle of proportionality is a well-established and practiced legal principle under the domestic constitutional and administrative laws of many countries and in international law. Essentially, it tries to balance individual and state or general public interests.” “[W]here public authorities at the national, regional or local levels face a sufficiently large number of individuals, they must use to an appropriate degree their language.” See de Varennes, “International and Comparative Perspectives.”
16. The Assembly of Experts, according to Farahi (“Assembly of Experts,” 48) is “a body of 86 scholars of Islamic law ... tasked with selecting and dismissing the supreme leader in case of the inability to perform constitutional duties or determination that from the beginning certain qualifications were not met.”
17. Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.
21. Given the specific focus of this essay, integration is here narrowly defined as access to government services and thus as communication between authorities and allophone minorities.
24. Nercissians, Bilingualism and Diglossia.
25. Modarresi, “Aspects of Sociolinguistics, 1.”
26. Modarresi, “The Iranian Community”; for an update of the situation, see Mobasher, Iranians in Texas.
27. According to Paul ("Kurdish Language"). Kurdish "is a continuum of closely related dialects that are spoken in a large geographic area spanning several national states, in some of these states forming one, or several, regional substandards (e.g. Kurmanji in Turkey; Sorani in northern Iraq). Such a definition, in addition to linguistic and non-linguistic variables, depends on a whole combination of larger social, cultural and political factors." It is perhaps because of this that there is yet no common ground among scholars on a common definition of Kurdish.


33. Ibid., 85–6.


35. Spooner, "Persian, Farsi, Dari, Tajiki."

36. See Bonakdarian, "India viii. Relations." One scholar argues that "the economic objective of the East India Company was maximal profit, and any tool that served as a stumbling block to that objective, such as the Persian language, had to be weakened or dismantled"; see Farokh, "Book Review."

37. However, Persian has continued to be either spoken as a local dialect or used as a literary language in parts of India, in Afghanistan (as Dari), in Tajikistan (as Tajiki), and in parts of Uzbekistan. Additionally, it is expanding geographically through its diaspora, and is a heritage language for second and third generation of the latter’s children.


39. E.g. Sheyholislami, "Kurdish in Iran"; Hassanpour, "The Indivisibility of the Nation."

40. Ethnologue: *Languages of the World*.

41. World Fact Book, "2013. Middle East: Iran."

42. See Frye, "Historical Evidence."

43. Ferguson, "Diglossia," 325.


45. The original Persian of the quoted section is as follows: زبان فارسی داشتند، ثانیا سواد فارسی داشته باشند، ثانیا رعیت داخله باشند. It should be noted that Browne’s translation is an example of explicitation, i.e. he makes the implicit (i.e. Persian/Iranian serf) explicit in the translation (Persian subjects of Persian extraction). See Browne, *A Brief Narrative*, 68.


49. Safran, "Nationalism," 78.

50. For an illustration of how "attacks on the Persian language" were provoked, see Meskoob, *Iranian National Identity*, 16.


52. Ibid. Be that as it may, this reductive view does not operate beyond a static categorization, as if there is nothing in between. If such claims are made for granting official status to any of the languages mentioned earlier (Table 1), there is no guarantee that the political problems of, say, Kurds, in the region and Iran are solved overnight, not to mention that it remains unclear whether the rights should be granted individually or collectively, each of which are open to discussion, see e.g. Mar-Molino, *The Politics of Language*.

53. To the best of our knowledge, there are no other pertinent laws, policy documents, pronouncements, etc. that deal with the languages of the ethnic minorities in Iran. The English translation of the constitution is reportedly provided by the Iranian Embassy in London, and has been referred to in various publications without much deliberation about its accuracy or translators, see the entry...
for Iran here: ICL, "Iran-Constitution." The UNHCR calls it the official translation: see "Constitution of the Islamic Republic."

55. Ibid., 33.
56. Article 16 of the constitution has made learning Arabic compulsory for all Iranian students up to the secondary level. Of course, university-level students are also obliged to take some courses such as the Quran which are in Arabic.
58. Although the judiciary is not our concern here, the Iranian judiciary, which according to the constitution is an independent power and "protector of individual and social rights" of all Iranians, has a Persian-only website and all the local websites of judiciary offices in the provinces of East Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Sistan va Baluchistan are monolingual in Persian. These three provinces are mainly populated by Azeri, Kurds and Balochs.
60. Ibid., 18, emphasis added.
61. E.g. Sheyholislami, "Kurdish in Iran."
62. Ibid., 18.
63. Various provinces in Iran receive TV and radio programs in their own minority languages. However, it is not yet clear how and through what medium the literature of these ethnic groups are taught in schools. In addition, access to the internet and the use of officially banned satellite programs in Iran have increased the access of minority speakers to a more global media. Recent studies have explored this aspect, see e.g. Sheyholislami, "Identity, Language, and New Media."
64. This was actually one of the provisions of the 1989 ILO Convention but Iran did not ratify it.
65. See for example some of the reports by Iran Human Rights Documentation Center; cf. US Department of State, "Country Reports on Human Rights." Cf. notes 20 and 85.
69. With the exception of using limited non-Persian texts for religious and cultural courses, e.g. the use of Armenian, see Nercissians, "Bilingualism and Diglossia," 65.
70. See e.g. Amirghasemi, "Kasti-ha-ye bahreh-bardari."
71. De Varennes, "Language, Rights and Opportunities," 17. The indigenous people referred to here are in the same situation as what we have called "autochthonous minorities" in the context of Iran.
72. Ibid., 30.
74. Shams-Esfandabad and Emamipour, "The Study of Learning Styles."
76. Bani-Shoraka, "The Iranian Language Policy."
77. Recommended term for community translation, crowdsourcing and collaborative translation. See Pym, "Translation Research Terms."
78. Next to issues about the quality of the translation provided by these non-professionals, this raises ethical issues which fall outside the scope of this article.
79. UNHCR, "2013 UNHCR Country Operations."
80. Abbasi-Shavazi et al., "Marriage and Family Formation."
81. Ibid., 844.
82. Whereas assimilation entails a coercive measure, inclusion is seen to be the opposite.
83. Following Chatterjee’s arguments in The Nation and its Fragments, one Iranian scholar argues that Persian nationalism is made of two domains of the material and the spiritual. The former concerns science and technology, owned by the West and desired by Iranians, the latter being Shitte Islam and pre-Islam Persian heritage in conflict with each other over supremacy, see Kia, "Persian Nationalism," 9.
84. Meylaerts, "Translation Policy."
85. Hassanpour, “The Internationalization of Language.”
86. Cf. the case of Flanders and Wales in Gonzalez and Meylaerts, “Translational Justice. For Whom.”
87. Sheyholislami, “Kurdish,” 45. As this article goes to press, there are some signs of change in Iran. For example, Gilaki is now being adopted as a working language in the city council of Rasht, and the Iranian minister of education is talking about teaching minority languages at Iranian schools. The latter has already stirred up a discussion at, say, Iran’s Academy of Persian Language and Literature, and in the Persian press, see e.g. Zare’ Kahnamuyi, “Tadris-e zaban-e madari.”

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