


## BOOK REVIEW

*Language in Society* (2024)  
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ANOUSHA SEDIGHI (ed.), *Iranian and minority languages at home and in diaspora*.  
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Reviewed by RASOUL JAFARI   
School of Education, Deakin University  
221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, VIC 3125 Australia  
[R.jafari@deakin.edu.au](mailto:R.jafari@deakin.edu.au)

Anousha Sedighi's book is a contribution to the scholarship on the sociolinguistic aspects of overlooked Iranian and non-Iranian minority languages. The book is the culmination of efforts by authors who depict the multilingual façade of Iran. As the title of the work indicates, the ultimate objective of the editor is to collect chapters written by well-known as well as emerging scholars who are researching the status of minority ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious groups.

The edited book comprises three parts, each contributing to the themes that span the entire book. The first section of the book consists of five chapters, in which the authors discuss minority languages—namely Gilaki and Mazandaran languages in the north, Balochi language in the east, and Bakhtaiari language in Southwest—that are typologically categorised as Iranian languages and geographically distributed across Iran and adjacent countries. This entails that the context of research in this section is not limited to the sociopolitical borders of contemporary Iran as some of these languages, Balochi for instance, are spoken in the neighbouring countries. The second section of the book comprises four chapters, each elaborating on the status of typologically non-Iranian languages such as Azerbaijani Turkish (referred to as Azeri), Turkmen, Mandaic, and Armenian languages that are spoken in Iran by sizeable number of people. The final section of the book capitalizes on the sociolinguistic status of typologically Iranian languages of Wakhi, Pashto, and Persian in diaspora vis-à-vis mainstream language and culture in three separate chapters. Methodologically, chapters draw on both qualitative and quantitative designs. The authors' primary data collection tools are interviews and questionnaires.

Thematically, the primary focus of each chapter is to highlight the language practices as well as attitude of the minority language speakers in/towards their heritage language, vitality and maintenance of minority languages, shift to the mainstream language of the target countries including Persian in Iran and English in the US and Canada, and literacy skills of minority language speakers. As stated, Part 1 of the book is dedicated to Iranian languages. Research on Iranian languages regarding their 'typology, language description, and syntax' (2) is well-established; however, social significance of these codes is understudied. Contributing authors



for Part 1 are Maryam & Habib Borjian; Hassan Bashirnezhad; Carina Jahani; Ehsan Majidifard, Mohammad Mahdi Hajmalek, & Saeed Rezaei; and Sima Zolfaghari. In this part of the book, the chapter authors reach shared findings that speakers of Gilaki, Mazandari, Balochi, and Bakhtiari languages hold a very positive attitude toward their heritage languages. The authors note that even though the participants' home languages have favourable status, their usage varies across different domains. Minority languages, to a large extent, are utilized in internal family interactions, specifically with older generations. The patterns of language usage are skewed toward Persian in more formal domains and among the younger generations. Overall, the authors agree on the finding that intergenerational transmission of minority languages has been disrupted in favour of Persian as younger generations prefer to speak in Persian.

Similar results have been found by the authors who, in Part 2 of the book, examine non-Iranian minority languages spoken within the political borders of Iran. Contributing authors to Part 2 are Hamed Zandi; Tahmine Sheikhi & Faryar Akhlaghi; Soheila Ahmadi; and Saeed Rezaei & Maryam Farnia. We learn that Azerbaijani Turkish, Turkmen, Mandaic, and Armenian language speakers are very keen to preserve their languages. They depict this by showing positive attitudes toward their languages. Despite such an affirmative perception, due to the market value of the Persian language, at the practical level, all of these languages experience a shift toward the dominant language of the country, most likely in the formal domains of language use such as educational and administrative contexts. It is believed that the main reason for the shift from minority languages (both typologically Iranian and non-Iranian) to the only official language is the lack of institutional support and 'marginalization by successive Iran governments' (Ahmadi, chapter 9, p. 265). In the absence of comprehensive institutional support, the writers clarify that online platforms and websites, specifically Wikipedia, are conducive to ethnolinguistic minorities' enhanced awareness regarding their heritage language. Social media also eases their access to content in minority languages and facilitates attempts to standardize orthography of minority languages.

In the last section, the authors examine typologically Iranian heritage languages, that is, Pashto, Wakhi, and Persian within the diasporic context of the West. Contributing authors to Part 3 are Ross Perlin, Daniel Kaufman, Habib Borjian, & Husniya Khujamyorova; Farid Saydee; and Anousha Sedighi. Comparable to the previous sections, their objective is to clarify the status of heritage languages as well as home culture among first- and second-generation migrants. It is not surprising that the usage of the heritage language and mastery of the home culture has diminished in the diaspora. Younger generations have gravitated to the mainstream language and culture of the US and Canada as a part of acculturation and for upward social mobility. Broadly speaking, literacy skills of second and third generations trail behind their speaking and listening skills. In the meantime, families' reluctance to pass down their cultural and linguistic knowledge to the next

generations, coupled with the lack of quality education in the minority languages, are cited to be the main reasons for the decline in the status of home language and culture intergenerationally.

Alongside the literature, Sedighi's book visualizes the sociolinguistic landscape of Iran. It is a valuable source for scholars with a background in sociolinguistics, sociology, and anthropology who are researching Iran's ethnolinguistic and cultural ecology. The volume showcases invaluable findings regarding the status of the Gilaki, Mazandarani, and Mandaic languages, which have rarely been researched sociolinguistically in Iran and in diaspora. The first two sections of the book specifically can be read as an alternative narrative of Persian-centric homogenizing discourse which evolved after the modernization of Iran where orthodoxy of the Persian language and Persian-centric national identity left little room for formation of dialogue on the cultural and ethnolinguistic diversity, and vitality and maintenance, of minority languages. The chapters of these sections spell out the multilingual and multiethnic make up of contemporary Iran and demand immediate action to improve the disenfranchised status quo of ethnic minority groups. I also found the last section of the book promising and as an unintended invitation for the investigation of the intranational sociolinguistic diversity in the Iranian diaspora. Literature on the sociocultural and linguistic composition of the Iranian diaspora has long been awaiting the emergence of studies addressing ethnolinguistic and cultural diversity. Although Sedighi's primary concern was typologically Iranian languages in the diaspora, her scholarly work can be continued by future research to capture linguistic and ethnic diversity within the Iranian diaspora among the ethnic groups who originate from the Iranian national polity. *Iranian and minority languages at home and in diaspora* is a well-crafted and richly detailed book, yet structurally it would be ideal to conclude with a reflective chapter to critically review and synthesize shared themes emerging from the preceding chapters and to clarify the future trajectories of the research that can stem from this work.

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