Language and Society in the Middle East and North Africa

Studies in Variation and Identity

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CHAPTER EIGHT

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE PLANNING IN IRAN AND TAJKISTAN

John R. Perry

1. Historical Background

The language communities of Arabic, Persian and Turkish extend far beyond the Middle East and Mediterranean regions, scenes of their classic political and cultural achievements. Not counting the overseas diasporas, Africa and Central Asia are present-day regions with active and expanding speech communities and literary ties to the contiguous "heartland" of the major languages of Islamic culture. Since the disintegration of the USSR, Central Asia and some areas of European Russia which had been detached from their Islamic orbits must again be studied in conjunction with the central Islamic region from the perspective of contemporary cultural development. Language is again one of the force fields involved. Both the Turkic-speaking and the Persian-speaking lands of the newly independent states look respectively to Turkey and Iran for models in refurbishing their enfeebled titular languages as fully functional media and symbols of a new national identity - more than they seek guidance from them in the political or economic realms.

During the past century, Persian language reform movements and government language planning have played a role in the sociocultural development both of Iran, the cultural centre of gravity, and of Tajikistan, the once and future satellite - though in significantly different ways, which the present survey will attempt to highlight.

Although in pre-modern times the range of literary and spoken Persian - from the Zagros and Caucasus foothills across Iran into Central Asia and India - covered an area increasingly subject to Turkish settlement or rule by a Turcophone élite, the inevitable Turkicisation was tempered by three factors. The first of these was the continuing literary status of Persian as a language of poetry, diplomacy and informal belles-lettres, even among Turcophone rulers (the Safavids, Afsharids and Qajars in Iran, up until 1925; the Shaybanids, Janids and Manghit Uzbeks in Transoxiana, until 1920; the Mughals in north India, until 1857). In Iran especially, the traditional bureaucratic class throughout these four centuries, the mirzás, comprised mainly urban Persians. They ensured the dominance and routinisation of Persian as the state language of government and letters in symbiosis with, on the one hand, spoken Turkish and Iranian vernaculars, and on the other with literary Arabic (written chiefly by Persians) as a medium of specialised doctrinal scholarship. Secondly, the large population of native speakers of Persian scattered throughout the Iranian plateau identified their language (however low their overall level of literacy, and however different their spoken dialect) with literary Persian, and maintained a strong oral tradition of Classical literature, especially poetry. This solidarity in turn tended to draw speakers of regional Iranian languages who shared other cultural ties - the Pamirs and Caspian dialects, Kurdish, Baluchi - into the orbit of Persian as a contact language and supra-regional vernacular. A further result of this upward leveling has been the comparative absence of diglossia in Persian. The third factor was the emergence on the western Iranian plateau of a territorially stable nation state under the Qajar dynasty, which consolidated literary and linguistic trends established under the Safavids or earlier and established modern Iran as the cultural qibla of the Persophone world.

Outside the state of Iran, the position of Persian was more tenuous. In India it had no native-speaker basis, aside from a minority of literate Iranian immigrants, and competed not so much with Turkish (Chaghatai, or eastern Turki, was no longer spoken at the Mughal court from at least the early eighteenth century) as with Hindi and subsequently English. With the rise of Urdu, a vigorous Hindi-Persian hybrid, and the ascendancy of English in government, Persian lost its raison d'être throughout its traditional range in poetry, belles-lettres and bureaucracy. By the middle of the 19th century, Persian in the Subcontinent had become a dead language.

The continuum between the spoken Persian of Iran and of Central Asia was interrupted definitively from the sixteenth century by a broad band of Turkic speech. In the Uzbek khanate (later, emirate) of Bukhara, Persian speakers (called Tajiks) were soon outnumbered by
Turcomophone settlers in most regions of the Oxus basin, where Persian was replaced by Uzbek in all but a few rural regions. Spoken Persian survived mainly in the Pamirs foothills on the borders of Afghanistan and in the ancient oasis cities of Bukhara and Samargand. Despite the continued reinforcement offered by literary Persian (which was practised even by the Uzbek chancellery and some of the educated Uzbek elite), spoken Persian was everywhere succumbing to the uneven competition with Uzbek. In Bukhara and the northwest, Persian fell so strongly under Uzbek influence (not only phonological and lexical, but syntactic) that it has been characterised as "an embryonic Turkic language" (Doerfer 1967:57).

The subjugation of the Uzbek emirate by imperial Russia in 1865 had no immediate effect on the indigenous languages. However, the Russians were initially tolerant of the Jadid movement, the liberal Islamic educational reforms introduced to Central Asia around the turn of the century by Tatar intellectuals of Kazan and Astrakhan, whose followers advocated and produced vernacular modern textbooks in a simplified style of Turki and Persian. Then, with the advent of Bolshevik rule in 1921 and the demarcation of the former emirate ethnolinguistically into Soviet socialist republics, complex questions of language and national identity took on an urgent political form.

Meanwhile in Iran, the Qajar dynasty was overthrown in 1921 by a military despot, Reza Khan (from 1925, Reza Shah Pahlavi), whose agenda of centralisation and modernisation of society (modeled largely on that of Kemal Atatürk in Turkey) was likewise to encompass the national language. The period of the later 1920s to the 1940s were thus to witness the first concerted language planning applied to the two literary standards of Persian whose users had just attained "modern" nationhood. In each case, the language was appreciated by some as a cultural vehicle and by others was pursued as a political fetish. The whole process is replete with ironies and paradoxes.

Much more than the language as such, it is the cultural and especially the literary tradition - expressed primarily in the shared corpus of epic, lyrical and mystical poetry, for which the language is a vehicle - that unites Persian speakers, of whatever adventitious "nationality" they may be. This common literary tradition has undoubtedly helped to maintain the noticeably slow rate of language change in New Persian over the past millennium of its existence, and in modern times has promoted transliminal comprehensibility among educated speakers of different standards in much the same way as the shared tradition of literary Arabic has helped overcome the barrier of regional vernaculars in the Arabic-speaking world. The year 1921 marks a third and arguably more significant event in the linguistic history of Persian: the publication of the first collection of modern Persian short stories, Farsi shekar ast, by Mohammad 'Ali Jamâlzâdeh, prefaced by a literary manifesto advocating a more naturalistic and vernacular style of Persian prose. The writer had barely beaten the politician to the starting gate. (A further portent of modernisation is that some of the early Jadid textbooks, and Jamâlzâdeh's book, were printed in Germany, in Arabic script with movable type.)

The language planning of the 1920s to the 1940s is not merely of historical interest, for the question has recently resurfaced with a new urgency for both Iran and Tajikistan. Both the regimes under which these programs were conceived, the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) and the Soviet Union (1922-1990) have collapsed spectacularly, only two to three generations after the putative implementation of their respective programmes of national cultural engineering. The ideologies that in part inspired both language reforms have been automatically discredited, though their legacies, as we shall see, have survived in strikingly different ways in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in independent Tajikistan. Language remains emblematic of ethnic identity and national cohesion for Persian-speakers in both countries, but goals and stakes have changed considerably since the first half of the century. Let us examine just two arenas of the reforms as applied to Persian and Tajik: the writing system, and the lexicon.

2. The Writing System, 1920s-40s

From the middle of the nineteenth century, various internal reforms of the Arabic script or Latin orthographies for use in Persian and the Turkic languages had been proposed. Around the turn of the century, the reformed Arabic option was championed by the Jadids. Competition between the various systems, however, delayed any consistent application of a new orthography in educational curricula or the Tatar press (Baldauf 1993:130-34, 191-225). Nevertheless, it became axiomatic for all Turcomophone reformists that simplification of the Arabic script or a change of alphabet must precede systematic educational reform, and was the key to modernisation of Islamic society in general.
This obsession was based in part on the "alphabetical fallacy" - the assumption that alphabetical writing is intrinsically superior to logographic or morphographic scripts, with its corollary that a synchronically accurate phonographic system (one-sound-per-character) is simpler to learn than an anachronistic one tied to a historical etymology. This belief in turn breeds a pseudo-scientific conviction that it is fundamentally the complexity of a writing system or its application to an alien language that inhibits the acquisition of literacy, and thus compromises all consequent cultural and scientific progress in a society. We now know, and can demonstrate with examples ranging from Japanese to English, that this is not necessarily so: that proper goals (reading and writing for informational rather than devotional purposes) and efficient pedagogy can compensate effectively for the mechanical shortcomings of a writing system and produce a functionally literate populace with correlated skills and attitudes.

In one respect the reformists had a strong case: the semi-cursive nature and contextually changing forms of Arabic characters were difficult to apply in the current technology of movable type, and inhibited the development of the press. To the frustrated heirs of an apparently decadent Islamic culture labouring under colonialism or in unequal competition with print capitalism, the Arabic script was a natural scapegoat for the backwardness of their society at large.

The best-known proponent of a reformed Arabic alphabet for Persian, Mirza Malkam Khan, presented his proposal first (in 1870) to a special session of the jam‘iyat-e ‘ilmiye-ye ‘osmaniye (Ottoman scientific society), which had involved itself in the evaluation of script reform and Latinisation projects. This body rejected his scheme as too conservative (according to Malkam, they feared the end of Islam). The Iranian minister in Istanbul sneered that Malkam had done well to present his scheme to the Turks, since Iranians already had the perfect system, viz. nasta‘liq, shekaste and naskhi! (Baldauf 1993:69). This attitude was to dominate debate over reform of the Perso-Arabic script in Iran, even when - from the early 1920s - the focus of the still Turkish-led movement had shifted to Latinisation. As early as the 1890s Arfa‘ ol-dawla, the Iranian minister to the Scandinavian countries, published a pamphlet in which he proposed a limited pedagogical use of Latin transcription for Persian; this was vehemently opposed by the ‘ulamâ (Christensen 1970:42). Subsequent suggestions for Latinisation by individual Iranian writers - Kastravi, Nafisi, Taqizadeh, Hedayat - failed to win the support not only of the conservative clergy but of most secular intellectuals in Iran.

There were solid reasons for this, beyond the pious abhorrence of tampering with the medium of holy writ. Literate Iranians feared the loss of their huge and valued corpus of Classical Persian literature, which was much more central to the cultural solidarity and national identity of Iranians than was the existing body of Turkish literature for Turks. Both the Ottoman and the Chaghatay classics were highly Persianate in lexicon, style and genre; though prized by traditionalists, they were sacrificed without serious opposition (and even this was mollified by selective preservation of a far-from-bulky corpus) when political and cultural dictatorship called for the creation and buttressing of a new national idiom in the republics of Turkey and Uzbekistan. More than this, Iranians feared the destruction of the linguistic tradition, which was bound up inextricably with the literature and culture. Written Persian was so imbued with Arabic vocabulary, idiom, and the literary arts that (as one otherwise cosmopolitan Persian intellectual put it) "the use of Arabisms demands Arabic script - it is a plant that will not grow in the soil of Latin script" (Christensen 1970:44). One has only to look at a modern Turkish text, where recognition of Arabic vocabulary and the recovery of prosody can be difficult at best, to appreciate this fear. If the one-phoneme-one-grapheme principle were to be strictly applied in Latinisation of Persian, the Arabicate metrical system of Persian poetry, ‘aruz - which is subtly at odds with present-day Persian phonology - would vanish too, and poetry would have to change radically.

From a strictly pragmatic viewpoint, as the Iranian minister at Istanbul had intuitively realised, the Arabic script is surprisingly well adapted to Persian (even though much less suited to Turkic languages, with upward of eight vowels and a system of vowel and consonant harmony). The three overt (plene) and three covert (diacritic) vowels of Arabic correspond schematically to the six vowels of Persian, even though the system of opposition is qualitative rather than quantitative; Persian morphology and phonotactics are intuitively sufficient to resolve most potential ambiguities; the etymological spelling of Arabic loanwords is no more of a nuisance than the historical orthography of Latin, etc., in English and French; and - to bring things up to date - modern printing techniques have largely done away with objections based on ligatures, contextual forms and ugly fonts.
So, although the obligation remained on the statutes of the Farhangestán (the first Iranian Language Academy of 1935-1948, q.v. below) to study proposals for the reform of the Persian script (Christensen 1970:44), this step was never seriously considered in Iran. Persian language reformers — even if not entirely for the right reasons — had rejected the seduction of the alphabetical fallacy.

The Tajiks, in contrast, were thrust willy-nilly into Latinisation. In the last years of the nineteenth century, Bukhara city and Samarqand had a large Persian-speaking population and a certain literary tradition. By 1907 indigenous reformists in Bukhara, notably Sadriddin Aini and Abdulvohid Munzim, had founded a Jadid school for Tajik boys and broken decisively with the conservative clerical establishment of the madrasas. By the early 1920s, when the emirate fell to the Bolsheviks in collaboration with native reformers-turned-revolutionaries, both Uzbek and Tajik intellectuals (who were bilingual and in most respects biliterate) enthusiastically took up the cause of modernisation and Latinisation of their shared languages.

The debate between the Arabic script reformists and the Latinists had still not been settled in 1917, when the Bolsheviks adopted Latinisation — as being one of the progressive trends of the age (it was even rumoured that Russian was scheduled to adopt the Latin alphabet) — as part of their platform in Muslim Asia. In this they benefited from considerable (but far from total) native intellectual support, and a general perception that in rejecting the use of Cyrillic (which had previously been tried out by missionaries in Russian Christian schools in Central Asia) the Bolsheviks were genuinely repudiating the Russian imperial past. Lenin declared, "Latinisation is the Revolution in the East!" and from then on the growing power of the Soviet government was thrown behind a concerted programme of Latinisation, not only of the Turkic languages for which it had been conceived but of all non-Christian Asian languages using other than a Latin or Cyrillic system (cf. Baldauf 1993:496-8). The alphabetical fallacy had acquired an invincible institutional matrix.

For all the participation of most Tajik intellectuals in what they saw as the wave of the future and the key to the twentieth century, the "Tajik people" were not free agents during this crucial formative period of 1924-29. With the national delimitation of Central Asia into four ethnic Turkic republics, "Tajikistan" was for the first five years of its existence an autonomous republic within the Uzbek union republic, doubly subject to Tashkent and Moscow, its national (Persian) language policy obliged to march in step with that decreed for Uzbek. The latter was a minimal revision of the Pan-Turkist programme of Latinisation and vernacularisation of late Chaghatai. The remaining supporters of Arabic script, whether pristine or reformed, were ridiculed as reactionary religious fanatics. In 1927 and throughout 1928, which saw the triumph of Latinisation in Atatürk's Turkey, Uzbek and Tajik writers daily expected Afghanistan and Iran to declare for Latinisation of their Persian languages too, and even hoped for a unified system (e.g., Alef Dāl in Rahbari donish 1928 No. 7:31-2, Rahim Mīn in Rahbari donish 1929 No. 2:3-46-7, 50).

In this they were disappointed. Nevertheless, a concerted Soviet educational programme produced in a few years a dramatic rise in literacy in the new alphabet. This predicted miracle was enough to justify the Party zealots' destruction of manuscripts and books in the old Arabic script and their denunciation of those slow to learn the new alphabet as "bourgeois nationalists" and saboteurs. Thus, though Latinisation of Tajik Persian was begun as an afterthought to that of Uzbek in the mother republic, it was completed after 1929 in the new union republic of Tajikistan by the Tajik intelligentsia, ostensibly as a necessary and beneficial development of the language.

In its motivations, goals and results, Latinisation as effected in Tajikistan is comparable to that of Turkish under Atatürk during the same few years (cf. Perry 1985). The results were exactly what the Bolsheviks had hoped: instant literacy, an apparent raising of the consciousness of the proletariat and the promise of a native Soviet intelligentsia and bureaucracy within decades. They were also exactly what most intellectuals in Iran had feared: the cutting of the umbilical cord with Arabic-Islamicate literary culture, spelling not only the end of contact with transliminal Persian writing but the imminent loss of access to the Classical literary heritage. As the older generation of madrasa-educated readers and writers (hardly numerous to start with) died off, the rising graph of literacy in Soviet Latin-script "Tajik" was matched by a falling line of literacy in Arabic-script Persian. This was offset to a small extent by the continued training of a few native orientalists(!) in the philology streams of the universities, though the editions of surviving manuscripts have mostly ended up on the shelves of Russian and other foreign scholars; and by the later publication of some Persian classics in transcription-Cyrillic transcription, that is, after 1940 (see below). Arabic-script versions of Soviet Tajik literature were indeed printed, but strictly for export to Iran and Afghanistan. The
vocabulary and diction of Classical literature was stigmatised as archaic and bourgeois, and since the traditional long and short vowels were not distinguished in the new alphabet, 'aruz prosody became largely opaque to the new generation; older Tajik scholars who survived the purges of the Stalin era prudently concealed their chagrin at the MacGonagalesque efforts of younger poets until the era of glasnost' (Perry 1996:284).

Thus leftist Tajik intellectuals of the twenties, in order to gratify their internationalist and progressive urges, were obliged, as they emerged from subjection to the emirate of Bukhara, to subordinate their nationalist aspirations (both political and cultural) to a new Uzbek political elite, ostensibly an arm of the Party and a surrogate of Moscow but with its own narrowly nationalist agenda. In order to be progressive in terms of the pan-Turkist Latinisation movement (now co-opted by the Communists of Tashkent), they embraced the alphabetical fallacy rejected by their counterparts in Iran and regressed (from a Persian cultural perspective) to a pre-literate, vernacular base from which to re-invent their literary language. Just as they had too little political input into the territorial gerrymandering of their republic during 1928-29 (Masov 1995:170-73, 191-93), Tajik intellectuals were inadequately represented in the making of their own alphabet. The version settled on was a compromise between the proposals of Abdurrauf Fitrat, an Uzbek ex-Jadid (linguistic, but at this period an outspoken pan-Turkist) and A. Freyman, a Russian scholar of German extraction.

Even so, once the Tajik SSR was freed from the Uzbek embrace (a freedom paid for by the forfeiture of the principal urban cultural centres, Bukhara and Samarqand), a more Persian literary culture might have been promoted. Two of the most prestigious Tajik scholars and (of necessity) politicians, Sadriddin Aini (president of the Writers' Union, later of the Academy of Sciences) and Bobojon Gafurov (First Secretary of the Party, later director of the Oriental Institute), somehow retained Stalin's favor and from their positions were able to ensure that the Tajiks preserved a modicum of cultural and literary consciousness throughout the most oppressive period of Stalinism. The debate over details of the new Latin alphabet was still simmering, and the influx of new literary blood from the central and southern regions (whose dialects were not so heavily influenced by Uzbek) might have eased the stranglehold of the Bukharan style. In 1938, however, Stalin - having already jettisoned Lenin's time-serving internationalism in favor of

"Socialism in One Country"-decreed that all the languages Latinised less than a decade earlier should now be Cyrillicised, in order to facilitate their speakers' learning of Russian and consolidate his new imperial version of the Soviet Union. This time there was none of the lively debate and competing proposals that had characterised the change to Latin: the switch was effected virtually overnight, without argument.

Orthographically and prosodically, this compounded the problems that had been introduced by the Latin alphabet. The latter, at least, had been a scholarly, neutral system on the basis of one character per phoneme, even if some of the vowel phonemes were debatable. The Cyrillic system was not neutral, but Russian-specific with a few extra diacritics: it used the Russian characters for palatalised vowels e ia iu, and the facultatively palatalised l, to represent the adventitious Tajik combination of consonant /yl/ plus a vowel, but in some cases used e and i as simplex vowels and i kratkoe for consonantal /yl/. And of course it incorporated the other Russian characters alien to Tajik for the sake of the ever-increasing number of Russian loanwords, which it was decreed must be spelled as in Russian. Soviet Tajik linguists proclaimed with a straight face that this system had benefited from the results of research in the intervening years, and was superior to the Latin script. In reality it employed almost as many approximations, compromises and ruses - and of the same kind - as had the partially morphographic Arabic system (Perry 1996:281-2). Which in practice perhaps made little difference, but is a notable example of political hypocrisy couched in linguistic terms.

3. The Lexicon and Syntax, 1920s-40s

Lexical morphology and etymology are always the chief targets of purist movements and state language plans, for both practical and aesthetic reasons. Iranian students had been returning from European universities since before the turn of the century, unable to express the specialised terminology essential to their careers and to their country's development except in a lexical smorgasbord of French, German and English. In Iran of the 1920s, as in Turkey, the initial impetus for relexification came from the military: from 1924, both Atatürk and Reza Shah needed to modernise and standardise not only the hardware, tactics and administration of their forces, but also the terminology and
style of the new manuals. During 1924–25 a committee made up from the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Education compiled a list of 300 neologisms, including direct borrowings (bomb, < Fr. bombe) and calques (vâ-baste-ye nezâmi < Fr. attaché militaire; hava-peymâ < Fr. aéroplane, replacing the Arabicate Ottoman ʧəyərə). In 1933 Iran's teacher training college, the dār ol-mo'allemin, formed a society to suggest new terms in the arts and sciences: 3,000 words were soon listed, of which 400 were adopted by teachers and in publications. The society continued to function until 1941, thus overlapping with the official Academy. In 1934 the Ministry of Education collaborated with the Medical College to expand and standardise medical vocabulary. This included some everyday terms such as mariz "sick" and mariz-khâne "hospital," which were to be replaced by bimâr and bimârestân: the new term for the institution has indeed replaced mariz-khâne in general usage, but mariz is still the more usual word for "sick," with bimâr in the literary register.

By this time the language bazaar had been flung open to the literate public in general. Although there was never a concerted effort by the government to involve the people in the language question per se, the intensity of chauvinistic propaganda in other spheres of social activity generated a sympathetic flood of letters to the press in 1934–36 from persons with nativist, purist or pan-Iranist linguistic axes to grind. One target was the use of Latin-script copy in Persian publications, such as the advertisement for ROLLS RAZOR that appeared, by chance or design, next to one such letter. Other correspondents focused their wrath not on the West but on the Arabs and Islam, excoriating Arabic loanwords as insidious secret agents that had helped destroy the Sassanian empire and should now be expunged before it was too late. Others yet blasted all non-essential foreign vocabulary, from French mûdbûzel to Turkish khânom (ifiantat, 3 Esfand 1313/22 Feb. 1935; 11 Esfand 1313/2 March 1935; Perry 1985:300-301).

However, by the end of 1934, moderate voices were increasingly heard from the academic establishment. At the millenary celebrations of the national poet, Ferdowsi, Professor Reza'âdeh Shafaq pointed out that although Ferdowsi in his Shâhnâmeh had used little Arabic vocabulary, he had accepted the Arabic alphabet and the principle of Arabic loanwords; reform of Persian should be based upon his "measured path" (râh-e sanjideh). The following year was established, by royal charter, the Farhangestân or Persian Language Academy, a body of Iranian scholars (and some distinguished foreign academics).

This proved to be a moderate, not to say conservative and elitist enterprise, modelled on the Académie française; it neither sought nor needed a broad range of public opinion, and on occasion even fell foul of its royal sponsor for its dilatoriness. Beyond the publication of two lists of suggested neologisms and a tentative spelling standardisation, it produced no solid collective contribution to the language question. It failed to respond to the two tasks of interest to this survey, namely, the compilation of a modern Persian dictionary and a study of projected reforms of the writing system. By 1948 it had virtually ceased to function. It was revived under Reza Shah's son and successor, and although it published periodic lists of neologisms and sponsored a bulky frequency list of written Persian, it seems never to have caught the imagination of the public.

Persian prose in Central Asia at the turn of the century was every bit as Arabicate in vocabulary and florid in style as that of Iran or India. Soviet Tajik linguists routinely claim that the autobiographical Navodir ul-vaqoye' (Amazing Events) of the late nineteenth-century Bukharan polymath Ahmad Donish exhibits a simplification in style and a vernacularisation of idiom that prefigure Soviet literary Tajik, but this is hard to justify. There are, however, instances of spoken Tajik idiom in between the lines of laboured bureaucratese in turn-of-the-century Bukharan chancellery memoranda which show that an important dialect did have the potential to invade a debased variety of the international standard (Unpublished mss. in the personal collection of Prof. Senzil Nawid, University of Arizona). From about 1900, Jadid reformers sought consciously to develop a simplified written Persian in order to educate children and propagate their ideas in the press. After the revolution in Bukhara came a wave of purism in the early Communist press of Bukhara and Samarqand (initially in Arabic script). Like the purists of Iran, writers sought primarily to replace Arabic words and collocations with Persian. Loanwords from European languages, processed through Turkish or Russian, were not yet numerous. Tajik writers, being intimately linked with their Uzbek colleagues and the hybridised Persian of Bukhara, did not think to purge the many Turkic words and idioms that made the transition to print in the journalistic Persian of the oasis cities.

Even less did they resist the Russian vocabulary and jargon of revolution and technology, which in the following decades steadily and almost indiscriminately ousted existing Persian words. Not only did revoliutsia displace engelâb, but even everyday idioms such as ta'mir
kordan "to repair" were jettisoned in favour of remont kordan. After the establishment of the Tajik SSR, with the Russian colonial city of Dushanbe as its capital, waves of Russian immigrants accelerated the process: in 1924-25, seventy-six percent of bureaucrats and technicians were non-Tajiks, and at the radio station the count was one hundred percent. There was thus no incentive for the development of a native vocabulary in the administrative and technical domains (Vakhhob 1991:22; Perry 1996:285-6). Despite rearguard efforts by ex-Jadids such as Aini, the modern Tajik literary language was from the outset a lexical hybrid of Persian, Uzbek and Russian, with strongly Turkicised syntax. An example of the latter is the type of modal auxiliary construction rafiya [na]metavonam "I can[not] go", as against Persian [na]mitavānam beravam.

With Russification of society and Russianisation of Tajik came a loss in status of the titular language, as upwardly-mobile Tajiks sent their children to Russian schools and Russian language invaded the domestic domain. The phenomenon of a class of speakers disdaining their native tongue to use a colonial or culturally imperial tongue is well attested - ironically, of Russians in regard to French a century earlier, and in Iran throughout the modern period (mainly French, for the generation before World War II, and English thereafter; cf. Milani 1996:27-28). In Tajikistan, however (as elsewhere in Central Asia, thanks to an egalitarian educational policy) it was not merely a proportion of the élite who switched codes at will, but a broad spectrum of the populace that functioned extensively and by preference (in some cases exclusively) in Russian. The structure of educational curricula and the relative volume of publications in Russian and Tajik mirrored and reinforced this trend.

To sum up, the lexical reformers of Iran from the 1920s into the 1940s responded to linguistic imperialism of the past, that of Arabic, and of the present, of French and English, by attempting to replace as much as possible of both strata of foreign vocabulary with native words and formulae, mostly recovered from Middle Persian. One example is the large class of scientific fields of study corresponding to English -ology, -ics, etc., in which both Arabic and French loanwords were replaced by Persian compounds ending in -shenāsī (< shenākhtān "to know, be familiar with"; e.g., zamīnshenāsī "geography," zabānshenāsī "linguistics"). Where replacement proved impracticable, assimilated Arabicisms were tolerated and European neologisms admitted selectively into the Persian lexicon. Within the more captive speech sub-communities, such as the military and government bureaucracy, reflexification was extensive and compliance both rapid and guaranteed; in the academic world and society at large, the Farhangestan and other bodies enjoyed little legislative and no coercive power, so that lexical change has proceeded more slowly and erratically, by natural selection. By an accident of geography and history, language reformers among the Tajiks came chiefly from the very sector of the populace that had already been most influenced by the established stratum of Uzbekisms and were most committed to the future incorporation of Russianisms (or at least were obliged to appear so). They responded to the challenges of the new order by apparently welcoming both lexical layers with open arms, in the name of fraternal Soviet cooperation. This triple entente was from the outset, in more than merely linguistic terms, the embrace of a bear, a hare and a mouse. The more the parties protested how well they got along together, the less they were believed; but in fact a workable symbiosis was achieved through implicit respect for the political, economic and ethnolinguistic pecking order in its various permutations. The traditional bilingualism had been mildly asymmetrical: Tajiks were more likely to be bilingual in Uzbek than vice-versa, to the extent anyone bothered to make the distinction. The new, vaunted Soviet bilingualism was egregiously asymmetrical, and became steadily more so: in 1989 sixty percent of Tajiks in Dushanbe spoke Russian, whereas only 2.3 percent of Russians knew Tajik (Guboglo 1990-91:4-7). But since the ultimate aim was silianie, the withering away of ethnolinguistic distinctions, few were prepared to raise the issue. "The sooner we all learn Russian," Khrushchev had declared, "The sooner we'll build communism" (Perry 1996:286-7).

4. Revision and Reaction, 1980s-90s

Both processes seemed to many to be taking longer than expected. Suddenly, in the mid-1980s, Gorbachev's unprecedented glasnost permitted open criticism of the USSR's stultifying nationalities policy, and language became an important issue in the rush to establish viable polities as the Union threatened to unravel. A wave of national language status laws, beginning in the Baltic republics, swept across the country. The mouse roared (or at least, coughed): in June 1989 Tajikistan promulgated the first of such language laws in Central Asia, aimed at securing the status of Tajik Persian as the national language
and raising the profile of its usage against Russian and Uzbek. The hare pricked up his ears: Uzbekistan's similar language law followed within four months. And the bear? Politically speaking, he simply shrugged and shuffled away, followed by tens of thousands of his family. Linguistically, he may rest assured that his lingua franca, and the high proportion of its jargon embedded in Tajik Persian, will not be uprooted overnight.

The law was redrafted in 1992, after independence, with essentially the same goals and provisions: to attempt, by legislation of the status and corpus of Tajik Persian, to reverse the trends outlined above, and to secure an active life for the national language in all the domains it had progressively sacrificed on the altar of socialist solidarity - government, education, press and publications, social and cultural life and international recognition. Suffice it here to review two realms of the corpus of Tajik Persian, the writing system and the lexicon.

Article 26 (1992 version) commits the republic to promoting the teaching of, publication in, and "in the near future," official reversion to, Perso-Arabic script. Implementation of this aim is fraught with problems, both practical and ideological. It is expensive, and will take time and commitment to marshal all the necessary pedagogic and technical resources. The project tends to be identified not only with the nationalists and pan-Iranians who initiated it but also with the Islamist opposition, and is repugnant to the neo-Communists currently in power. At the same time, there is no serious constituency for a return to the Latin alphabet (a goal announced by most of the newly independent Turkic republics), since Latinisation still smacks of a pan-Turanian plot to absorb the Tajiks into a greater Uzbekistan. The Fitrat-Freyman orthography has been somewhat simplified but, in the foreseeable future, Cyrillic will stay.

A good deal of enthusiastic but ill-coordinated relexification was undertaken by journalists in the 1980s, even before the promulgation of the language law. Many of them had served in Afghanistan or were familiar with Iranian publications, and introduced Afghanisms or Iranisms into their writings; these were criticised on the one hand by nationalist purists, who demanded an autonomous relexification (e.g., jahon-numo for "television," a term not used in Iran), and on the other by Sovietised conservatives, who complained that havo-paymo "aeroplane" or donishgoh "university" are unrecognisable in comparison with the established Russian loans samolyot and universitet. There is now an official Terminology Committee, which strives to follow a middle course between these extremes. Now that the initial euphoria of perestroika and independence has waned, with the realities of a failing economy and civil unrest claiming priority, further implementation of the language law is marking time. In the remote event that circumstances again encourage a thoroughgoing relexification and official reversion to the Arabic alphabet, it is possible that the Tajik literary language, as conceived and maintained in Cyrillic as a separate Persian standard between c.1928 and 1988, will fade away, to merge with standard Persian of Iran. As a result, the spoken dialects of Tajik, deprived of this bonding agent, will drift even further apart.

One undoubtedly good result of any language reform movement is that it makes ordinary citizens (often for the first time) consciously aware of their language and its social and political ramifications. An extra benefit of the proximity of Iran's Islamic revolution and the collapse of the USSR is that Iranian and Tajik Persophones have become more actively cognisant of their separated yet related language communities. Since 1989 the Islamic Republic has been assisting Tajikistan's language revolution by providing Arabic-script publications, both classics and modern works, and publishing volumes of Tajik poetry and essays in Arabic script for the Tajik Persian Language Foundation and other organs of re-Persianisation. Not be it admitted, without a certain smugness: for, regardless of who won the Cold War, Iranian Persian has arguably survived the serious "collateral damage" visited upon many colonised and clientised languages of the erstwhile Third World by political, economic and cultural fallout from the tussles of the other two.

The Islamic revolution in Iran brought no dramatic, politicised sociolinguistic reaction. In everyday usage there was initially some leveling of status markers and an avoidance of honorific language, a trend later reversed to some extent (Keshavarz 1988), and some of the new ideological lexicon is of course from Arabic. Resisting the temptation to throw out the baby with the bath water, the Islamic Republic has revived and even enhanced the work of the old Farhangestan in regulating and coining scientific-technical and general neologisms. Contrary to some expectations, there has been no concerted favouring of Arabic as a lexical fount. The bulk of the Persian coinages established during the 1940s onward has been retained and built on for further lexical expansion (cf. the new hameh-porsi "referendum"), and even Western loanwords, influx of which is
now identified as the number one problem, are being tolerated where they are obviously assimilated. The competing claims of neologisms in these lexical classes are settled by appeal to computerised frequency lists of recent periodical literature (Interview with Haddad 'Adel in Ettelâ'ât-e beyn-al-melali, 13 Dec. 1995:1, 4; M. Tonokhboni in Ettelâ'ât-e beyn-al-melali, 29 May 1996:5).

The Islamic régime does, nevertheless, accord an ideological dimension to post-revolutionary Persian. It has sought to raise the profile of the language abroad by means of well-publicised international conferences (Persian and the language of science; The teaching of Persian), and through publication of a Persian-language cultural periodical aimed at a readership in South and Central Asia (Ašnā). It envisions an expanded role for Persian in regional and supra-regional communications parallel to Iran's expansion of road, rail, air and diplomatic links with its former Soviet neighbours and its initiatives as peace broker in the south Caucasus and Tajikistan, and in propaganda for its conception of the Islamic state. While it is true that the old political and cultural orientations have been dramatically re-aligned - the (Islamic) Middle East, like (Catholic) Central Europe, has moved further east and north - such hopes are almost certainly quixotic, whichever way one calculates the religious and linguistic ties. Imamī Shi‘ī Iran is ideologically estranged even from co-lingual Tajikistan, while its co-religionists in Lebanon, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Pakistan have their own languages and do not, for the most part, speak or read Persian.

5. Conclusion

During the first two decades of this century, social and political pressures encouraged writers and educators in both Iran and Persophone Central Asia to reconsider the functions of written Persian. By the time of their respective coups d'état in 1921, the literature of each country (led by the periodical press) was on a track that would lead to a more vernacular style and lexicon in the written language. Since the vernacular continuum between these regions had been interrupted and their spoken standard divergent for nearly four centuries, this led to a rapid divergence in their literary Persian, which had hitherto been virtually identical. This separation was sealed by the double switch of writing system in Tajikistan.

In the following decades, the pace of language change was accelerated by the respective political leadership. Persian was seen in Iran as the medium of an independent, modernising, centralising state, its replacement of Arabic and European vocabulary by native stock (and rejection of the Western script) at once a pragmatic empowerment of the national language and doubly symbolic - of the repudiation of traditional Islamicate trammels (though not of Islam itself), and of its defiance of Western colonialism (without renouncing Western technology and fashions). The transition from lithography (reproducing the calligraphed nastaliq of the manuscript tradition) to moveable metal type was effected early, despite the dubious aesthetics of early fonts, and has given way to offset and compuset printing in elegant naskh.

Control of the relexification movement in Iran was adroitly taken from both the militaristic government and the linguistic radicals by a conservative academy, whose "hands-off" guidance maintained a balance among the continuity of established Arabic terms, the infiltration of European neologisms, and the revival of Persian vocabulary and lexical morphology. A Pahlavi-era phrase such as tawild-konandegān-e māshin-ālar-e barqī "producers of electrical machinery" exemplifies this piecemeal approach: Persianate derivation and composition on an Arabic or Arabicate and European lexical base (tawild "generation, production" in Arabic is not restricted to an industrial context, as in Persian; Arabic ālar "tools" combines readily with French māshin; barq is "lightning" in Arabic and Classical Persian, "electricity" only in modern Persian, here with the Persian adjectival suffix -ī); and archaising or "literary" Persian morphology (plural konandegān, as against unmarked or vernacular konande-hā).

Among the Tajiks, control of the nascent relexification and vernacularisation process in Persian was surrendered to the agents of a delayed-action colonial invasion. Far from a flexing of linguistic muscle, such revival and preservation of native vocabulary and morphology as the ex-Jadid intelligentsia could manage in the 1920s and 1930s was confined to proving the existence of the speakers of the language (embedded beneath the Uzbeks in the ethnopolitical mosaic of Central Asia) as a viable natsionalnost’ in Soviet terms - a salvage operation to stave off short-term assimilation into Turcophone Uzbekistan and long-term Russianisation. Accepted as a Soviet nationality, the younger generation of Tajiks were, on the one hand, indulged in a simplistic identification of their language and literature
with that of Classical Persian and, on the other, deprived of the writing system and literary materials to study either Classical or modern transliminal Persian. The Russian alphabet was minimally and inconsistently adapted to Tajik phonology. Tajik Cyrillic typewriters were not generally available, so that most of the relatively few Tajik-language (as distinct from Russian-language) dissertations produced at the State University have made their appearance in faded Russian typescript, the diacritical hooks fudged by means of half-spaced commas.

Token toleration of Persianisation was superseded in the 1940s and 1950s not only by direct incorporation of Russian loanwords but by an indirect calquing on Soviet Russian jargon through the already partly Turkicised verbal morphology of Tajik Persian. Thus avtomobil-korkarda-baroi "automobile production" parallels Uzbek avtomobil-ishlab chigarish (both verbal complexes are, literally, "having-worked bringing-forth") and recapitulates Russian proizvodstvo avtomobilei ("leading forth," more transparent in Russian than is pro-duction in English) - pleonastically concatenating Persian morphology in an agglutinating, Turkic fashion. These excesses were to some extent repaired in the 1970s and 1980s (even before perestroika), when earlier Arabic borrowings such as istehsol and tawlid were revived for "(industrial) production."

Obviously the fact that Iran avoided direct colonisation, whereas Tajikistan succumbed to it, bears primary responsibility for the dramatically divergent fates of their languages. However alien to each other were the blueprints for Irananness drafted by the Pahlavi shahs and the ayatollahs, each is very Iranian in its recognition of the inalienability of the national language. Whereas Soviet policy for Central Asian society, by the very act of devising five "national languages" separated from each other and from their transliminal cognates, but tied to Russian, projected the ultimate alienation and demise of each national language. In the case of Tajik Persian, the plan was unwittingly abetted by a small, madrasa-formed native intelligentsia, seduced by progressivism, international socialism, and the (Latin) alphabetical fallacy, who saw Uzbek pan-Turpanianism as a greater threat to their ethnic and cultural identity than Russian communism. In Reza Shah's Iran some of the secular literary establishment evidently saw in Pahlavi fascism a greater threat to the Persian language than to Islam or other aspects of traditional culture;

their conservative, bourgeois, laissez-faire reaction was a godsend to Persian on the plateau, for which the Tajiks too may yet be grateful.

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