

ASSESSMENT OF THE VITALITY OF AZERBAIJANI TURKISH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE USE AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AMONG AZERBAIJANI IMMIGRANTS IN TEHRAN

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Abstract: Iran is a multiethnic and multilingual country. There are 77 languages in Iran. Boundary between dialects and languages has been taken for granted. Except Persian other Iranian languages are not bestowed equal and fair quota in educational, governmental and social spheres. Azerbaijani Turkish is the second largest language of the country. Since the advent of Pahlavi in 1925, Azerbaijani speaking areas have had the highest rates of migration to central provinces like Tehran, the capital city. This study investigates the sociolinguistic situation of Azerbaijani Turkish among immigrants in Tehran. To determine whether Azerbaijani among immigrants is endangered, a questionnaire with 36 questions was administered among a randomly selected sample of 300 men and women of Azerbaijani immigrants, scrutinizing a variety of topics, including language spoken with children, different domains of language use and language attitudes. Drawing upon the model presented by UNESCO to assess language vitality and endangerment, and based on data extracted from questionnaires, study revealed that intergenerational language transmission among immigrant families is largely interrupted; Azerbaijani Turkish loses most spheres of use in immigrant families. Only respondents claimed a strong desire to preserve their indigenous language, but this view is not matched by the facts. Further research is required to examine this issue more suspiciously. Findings of this research may inform the linguistic community and cultural and educational authorities to pave the way for the better sustenance of ethnic languages.

Key Words: Azerbaijani Turkish, immigrants, language vitality, language endangerment, Tehran

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history Iran has been a country with multiple ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious minorities. This fact is reflected in the existence of approximately 77 languages and dialects according to the most recent edition of *Ethnologue* (2003). A full historical examination of the ethnic and linguistic groups in Iran is not the subject matter of this study. However, it is crystal clear that ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity goes back to pre-Islamic era.

Up until the advent of Pahlavi, the ruling dynasty from 1925 to 1979 in Iran, the country had been run in accordance with a kind of traditional confederative system called *Mamalek-e Mahruseh-ye Iran* (the Protected Countries of Iran). After the usurpation of political power in 1925, Reza Khan indoctrinated the idea of a superior monolithic racial/ethnic group, the Persian in this case, bent on destroying all non-Persian cultures. Despicable acts of linguistic and

deculturation were committed in order to achieve the chauvinistic agenda of ethnic and linguistic purity for the Persian race in Iran.

The racist project was built around the notion of one country, one nation, one language and Reza Khan vigorously set out to implement it. A major step to achieving this goal was to eliminate signs and symbols of difference and diversity that were manifested mainly in the lifestyles and living conditions of various non-Persian communities, who were largely identified in the dominant discourse as tribes and tribal groups.

In order to execute “*one nation, one language, one country*” policy, Pahlavi theoreticians and intelligentsia have adopted different strategies from deviating and distorting the historical and geographical facts to unique education in Persian and criminalization of speaking in non-Persian languages. The logic of this move was summarized in *Ayandeh*, a state organ whose first editorial proclaimed the following:

Achieving national unity means that Persian language must be established throughout the whole country, that regional differences in clothing, customs and such the like must be disappear, and that *moluk ot-tavayef* (local chieftains) must be eliminated. Kurds, Lors, Qashqa'is, Arabs, Turks, Turkmen, etc., shall not differ from one another by wearing different clothes or speaking a different language....This task can only be accomplished if elementary schools are established everywhere, and if laws are passed which make education compulsory, (Crane, K. & Lal, R. & Martini J. (2008)).

Due to suppressive and oppressive cultural and linguistic policies of Reza Shah and his son, Mohammad Reza Shah and their persistence in order to achieve to an ideal monolithic and united nation, minoritized and underprivileged non-Persian languages suffered severe and lethal injuries. As a result of such prohibitive and despotic policies and despite its historically multicultural quality, present-day Iran serves as a good example of a country which has a single official language and does little or nothing for any other language. Proponents of this doctrine simply assume that Persian is the language of Iran; consequently, they virtually ignore other languages and even do anything against them.

The formal and informal spread of Persian as a language of wider distribution has drastically limited the use of all other non-Persian languages. In fact, in most formal domains like education, administration and judiciary system Persian is dominant. The prominent role of Persian is mainly the result of its official status and the aforementioned notorious Persian only linguistic policy.

The strong impact of Persian in the country and its detrimental effect on the use of non-Persian underprivileged ethnic languages is a generally acknowledged fact. Details of gradual marginalization and deterioration of minority languages were analyzed and published in different

studies by authors like Shahbakhsh (2000) for Baluchi language, Zoulfaghari (1997) for Bakhtiari in South western city of Masjed Soleiman in Khoozestan province, Mashayekh (2002) for Gilaki in Rasht, the center of Gilan province, Bashirnezhad (2008) for Mazandarani in northern city of Amol in Mazandaran province. My own MA thesis (Nouri, 2010), covering 300 sample people from five Azerbaijani speakers from Ahar, Marand, Tabriz, Zanjan and Qeidar, described the sociolinguistic status of Azerbaijani Turkish as the second largest language of Iran.

There is not much known about the exact population figures for each ethnic community in Iran. The Iranian censuses do not consider the question of ethnicity and diversity (Hooshmand, 2005). It is believed that population of Azerbaijani Turks -Iran's largest and the most important non-Persian ethnic group- is between 20 to 30 million (Price, 2005, p. 289). Estimates of the Azerbaijani population in Tehran range from one-third to one-half of the capital's total population (Shaffer, 2002, p. 224). According to Mafinezam & Mehrabi (2008), about a third of Iran's population, close to 25 million, speak Turkish as mother language (p.188). It is noteworthy that other Turk groups like Afshar, Qashqai and Turkmen live in Iran and all of these groups speak a language from Oghuz branch of the Turkic languages. Geographically, Azerbaijanis mainly live in East and West Azerbaijan, Zanjan and Ardabil, noticeable number of Azerbaijanis live in Tehran, Gilan, Gazvin, Hamedan, Khorasan and Central province.

Azerbaijanis migration to Tehran, capital city started and was particularly intensified by the establishment of Pahlavi dynasty in 1925 due to uneven modernization of the socioeconomic structure of the country and political centralization. This study investigates language transmission, language use and language attitudes among Azerbaijani immigrants in Tehran, the capital city of Iran. Tehran has been selected because of its cosmopolitan nature. Azerbaijani Turkish has been selected since there had been no sociolinguistic study conducted to scrutinize language maintenance/shift and also patterns of language use among immigrants and within Azerbaijani households living in Tehran so far. Accordingly, almost no reliable sociolinguistic information was available about the vitality or endangerment of Azerbaijani in Tehran.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data collection and respondents

Like many other similar investigations, a questionnaire with 38 multiple-choice and some short-answer questions in Persian was designed to obtain indicators of language attitudes in order to develop an accurate description of the current language use situation among Azerbaijani immigrants in Tehran. Six educated persons, university students and school teachers, were selected to distribute and gather copies of questionnaires within four days. The questionnaire covered a variety of questions, including but not limited to demographic information, self evaluation of linguistic competence in Azerbaijani Turkish, patterns of language use at home, in society and neighborhood and language attitudes. Questions were evaluated on a five-point

Likert scale. In this research only those questions which were directly related to the subject of the study were extracted manually and were analyzed in order to determine the extent of language vitality or endangerment.

The total number of the respondents is 300 Azerbaijani immigrants living in Tehran drawn randomly from two different districts of *Yusof Abad* and *Khani Abad-e No* of Tehran in order to reduce or avoid any probable impact of characteristics such as socioeconomic status or class. The respondents were female and male, over the age of 25, employed, married and had a child, employment for female was not a requirement. It is important to note that subjects were from different educational backgrounds ranging from primary to university level.

2.2. Data Analysis

2.2.1. Introduction

Table: 1

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	175	58.3%
Female	125	41.7%
Total	300	100%

Gender of the Respondents

As table (1) illustrates 58.3 percent of the entire sample population are male and 41.7 percent of the participants are female.

Table: 2

Age	Frequency	%
25-30	80	26.7%
31-40	115	38.2%
41-50	65	21.7%
51-60	35	11.7%
61+	5	1.7%
Total	300	100

Age of the Respondents

Table 2 illustrates the age of participants. 26.7 percent of respondents are between 25 and 30, 38.2 percent are between 31 and 40, 21.7 percent are between 41 and 50 and percent are between 51 and 60, 1.7 percent of respondents are older than 60. The fact that only 13.4 percent of the

participants are more than 51 years means that overall data may better reflect the situation of language among "young" or "middle-aged" immigrants rather than elderly immigrants.

Table: 3

Education	Frequency	%
Illiterate	10	3.3%
Fifth degree to High School	155	51.7%
Diploma and Associate of Arts	80	26.7%
Bachelor's degree and higher	55	18.3%
Total	300	100

Degree of Education

As table 3 indicates, 3.3 percent of respondents are illiterate. Relative majority (51.7 percent) of the respondents have fifth degree to High school. 26.7 percent of the respondents have a high school diploma or A.A. 18.3 percent hold bachelor's degree and higher degrees.

2.2.2. Intergenerational Language Transmission

In this section, we will investigate the language that participants like their children to learn and speak. Such an analysis will give a clear picture of the future of Azerbaijani Turkish in Tehran. This is because if parents find it necessary for children to learn the group's language, they will spare no effort to achieve this goal and consequently will do their best to maintain their language.

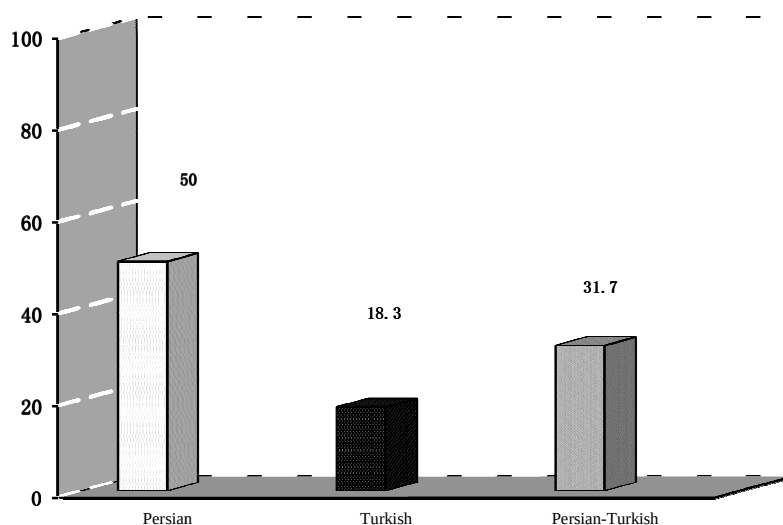
According to UNESCO (2009), an endangered language is one "on the path to extinction" in which all speakers of the language choose not to speak the language, parent-child transmission of the language is completely or partially interrupted, and domains of language use progressively decline.

As Figure 1 shows Persian is the most used language with children. 50 percent of the respondents speak Persian with children; 31.7 percent of participants speak both Azerbaijani Turkish and Persian with their children whereas only 18.3 percent use Azerbaijani Turkish.

Higher percentage of Persian use with children may represent a gradual trend towards greater use of Persian in the home domain, probably motivated at least partially by parents' desire to see

children succeed in their education which is conducted solely in Persian. With half of parents reporting use of Persian with their children, there is some concern that this could threaten the future transmission of Azerbaijani Turkish to the children.

Figure: 1

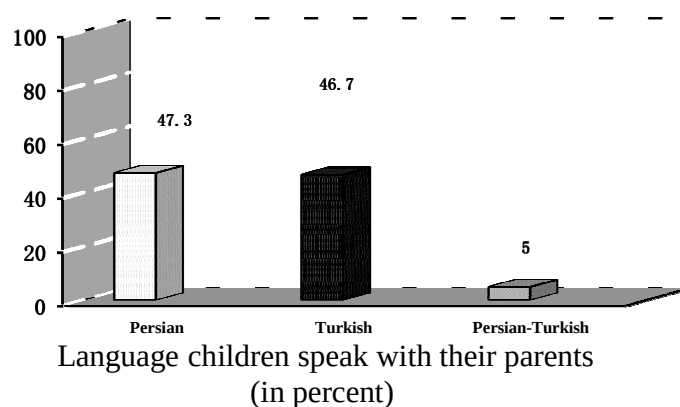


Language spoken with children (in percent)

As a counterpart to the previous question, participants were asked in what language children spoke with them. A brief look at the Figure 2 reveals that transmission of Turkish to new generations is incomplete. Most of children, 47.3 percent, speak Persian with their parents. 46.7 percent use Azerbaijani Turkish whereas 5 percent of children speak both Turkish and Persian with their parents.

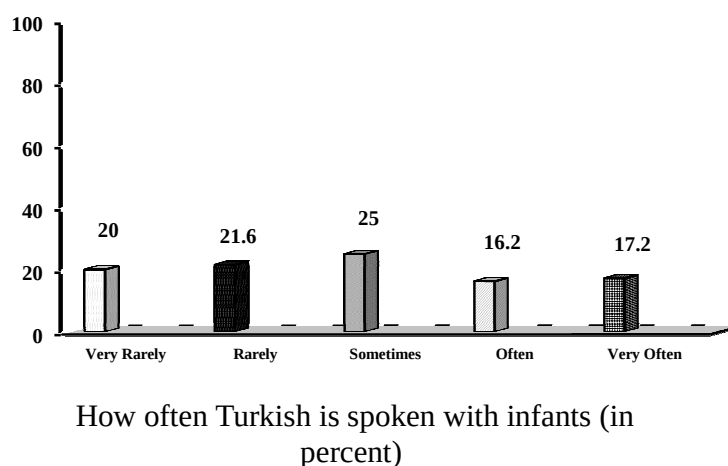
These figures are different from the results given for question above, asking which language parents use with children, with half of the respondents reporting they use Persian with children, we would expect to find more children reporting they use only Persian with their parents. This difference can be attributed to the respect of the children to parents or preference of children to use Turkish in more intimate situations or other factors which remain to be investigated.

Figure:2



As Figure 3 illustrates, in response to the question “how often do you use Azerbaijani Turkish in talking with infants?” 20 percent of the sample population reported that they speak Azerbaijani Turkish with infants *very rarely*. 21.6 percent of the responses was *rarely*. 25 percent of the respondents reported that they *sometimes* speak Turkish with infants. 16.2 percent *often* used Turkish with infants whereas 17.2 percent reported that speak Turkish *very often* with infants.

Figure: 3



2.2.3. Domains of Language Use

Domains of language use refer to "spheres of activity representing combinations of specific times, setting, and role relationship (Romaine, 2001). Participants were asked many questions about their linguistic habits in a variety of social settings to establish patterns of language use.

This section looks at language use in and outside of the home, focusing on various formal and informal, traditional and modern domains of language. Home is a core and often the last domain where a language manages to exist. The use of a language in this domain provides an indication about the level of endangerment of a language. When a language encounters adversarial situations in a country, home becomes the last resort where the speakers can create a meaningful resistance.

Respondents were asked which language they speak with their spouses. As can be seen in the Figure 4, 36.6 percent of the population reported Azerbaijani Turkish as their preferred language for talk with their spouses. 36.7 reported they speak Persian with spouses whereas 26.7 selected both Azerbaijani Turkish and Persian in this intimate domain. As Figure 5 demonstrates, in response to the question “What language do your children use at school?” 19.3 percent of respondents reported children speak Turkish

Figure: 4

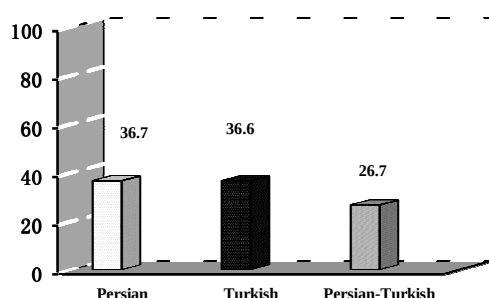
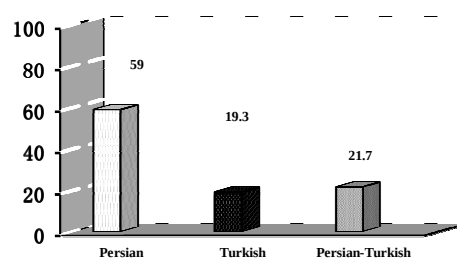
Language spoken with spouse
(in percent)

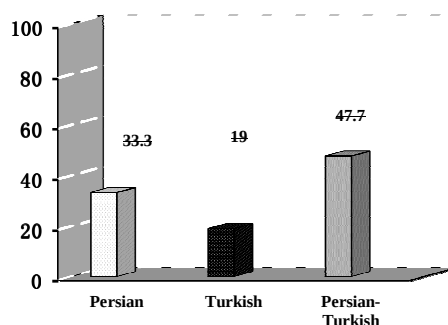
Figure: 5

Language children speak at
school (in percent)

with friends at school. 59 percent of the children use Persian whereas 21.7 percent of them use both Turkish and Persian in speaking with classmates and friends at school.

Figure 6 portrays the pattern of language use among children in neighborhood. Language spoken with peers in neighborhood in 19 percent of the cases is Turkish. 33.3 percent declared that children speak Persian in neighborhood whereas 47.7 percent of the children use both Turkish and Persian in their communications with friends. In the case of language choice, children's decision for or against their own language could be a death blow or an important go ahead for language. The vitality of Azerbaijani Turkish also heavily depends on a positive approach to its maintenance.

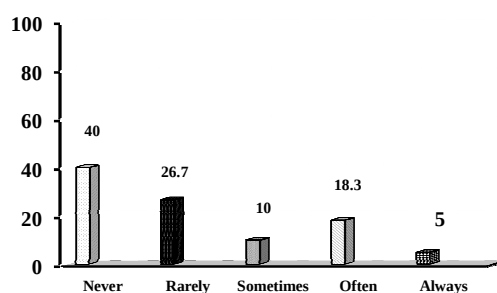
Figure: 6



Language children speak with peers in neighborhood (in percent)

As Figure 7 indicates, in response to the question "How often do you read book, newspapers and periodicals in Turkish?" 5 percent of respondents answered they *always* read Turkish books, magazines and newspapers. 18.3 percent *often* read Turkish materials. 10 percent of the participants declared they *sometimes* study such books. 26.7 percent of the responses was *rarely*. Relative majority, 40 percent of respondents stated they *never* read Turkish books, magazines and weeklies or dailies. This situation can be attributed to the lack of printed material in Azerbaijani Turkish, to name only one probable cause.

Figure: 7

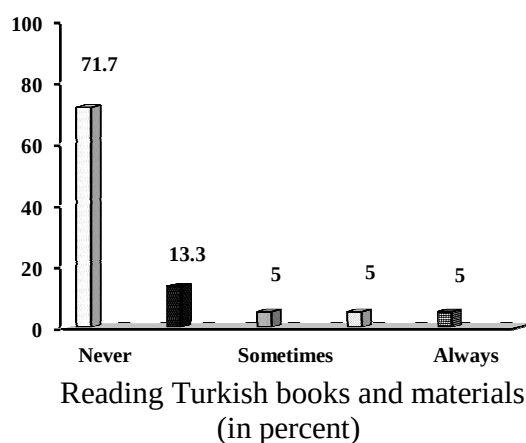


Reading Turkish books and materials (in percent)

As figure 8 illustrates, in response to the question "How often do you use Turkish in writing letter, to friends and relatives?" Overwhelming majority of the respondents, 71.7 percent, reported they *never* use Turkish in this domain. 13.3 percent of respondents wrote they *rarely* use Turkish in this field. 5 percent stated they *sometimes* use Turkish in writing letter. 5 percent *often* use Turkish in these areas, 5 percent of the respondents *always* make use of Turkish in this

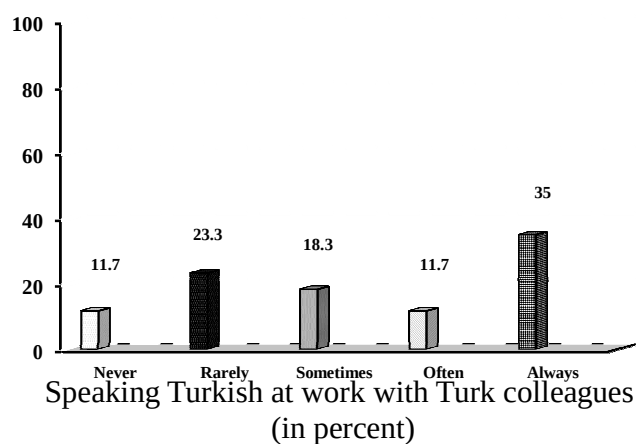
domain. Lack of education in Azerbaijani Turkish can be one the main reasons of dwindling use of this language in this important domain of use.

Figure: 8



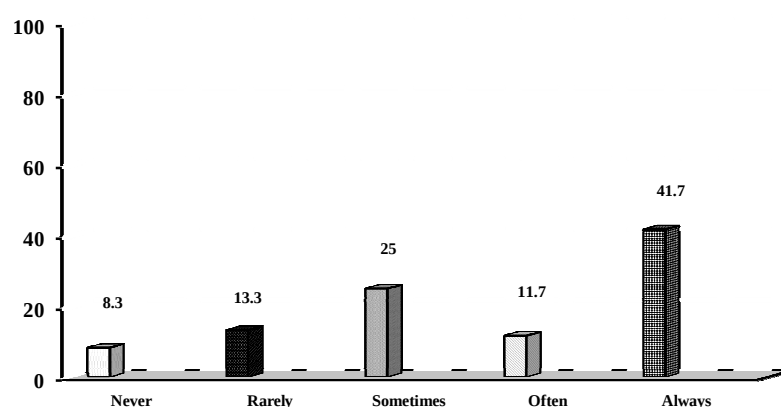
Participants were also asked how often they speak Azerbaijani Turkish at work with their Turk colleagues. As illustrated in Figure 9, 35 percent of the respondents stated they *always* use Turkish when they speak with Azerbaijani colleagues. 11.7 percent of the sample population declared that they *often* use Turkish in such situations. 18.3 of the participants stated they *sometimes* speak Turkish with Turk colleagues. 23.3 percent of responses were *rarely* whereas, 11.7 percent of the responses was *never*.

Figure: 9



As Figure 10 shows, 41.7 percent of the respondents *always* use Turkish when they speak with Azerbaijani neighbors. 11.7 percent of the population reported that they *often* speak Azerbaijani Turkish with Turk neighbors. 25 percent *sometimes* spoke Turkish with neighbors. 13.3 percent of the subjects declared they *rarely* prefer Turkish to speak with Azerbaijani neighbors, whereas 8.3 percent reported they *never* use Turkish in communication with neighbors.

Figure: 10



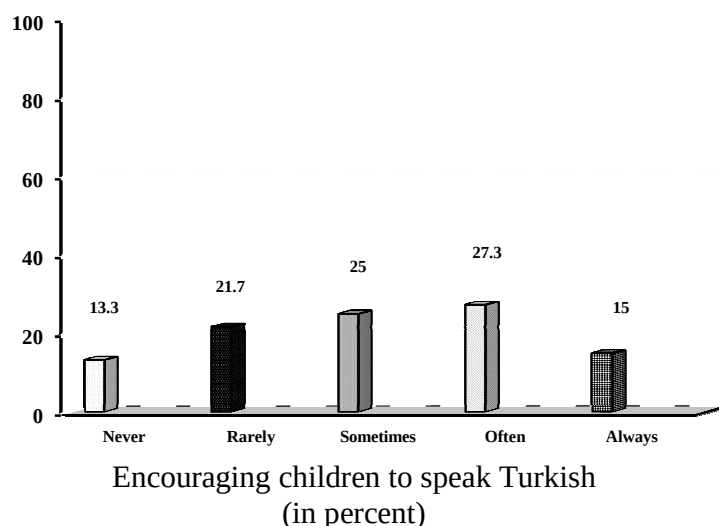
Speaking Turkish in neighborhood among parents
(in percent)

2.2.4. Community Member's Attitudes towards Turkish

Language attitude refers to "the feelings people have about their own language or the language of others" (Crystal, 1992, p. 25). Various indicators could be incorporated in the questionnaire in order to extract respondents' attitudes towards their own language. I used the following indicators: encouraging children to speak Azerbaijani Turkish, importance of Turkish in boosting familial ties, significance of knowing Turkish.

As Figure 11 indicates, 15 percent of respondents *always* encourage their children to speak Turkish. 27.3 percent of them *often* do this. 25 percent of the respondents *sometimes* encourage kids to use Turkish. 21.7 percent of them *rarely* inspire children to speak Turkish and 13.3 percent of the parents *never* encourage their children to speak their mother tongue.

Figure: 11



In response to the question "How much do you believe that Turkish is important in strengthening familial relations?" as illustrated in Figure 12, relative majority, 41.7 percent of the respondents, answered Turkish has very much importance in boosting familial ties. 20 percent of respondents attributed much significance to Turkish in respect to familial relations. 23.3 percent declared Turkish have little importance in reinforcing family relations. 3.3 percent reported that Turkish is of very little importance in strengthening familial ties. 11.7 percent believed that Turkish has no role to play in respect to familial ties.

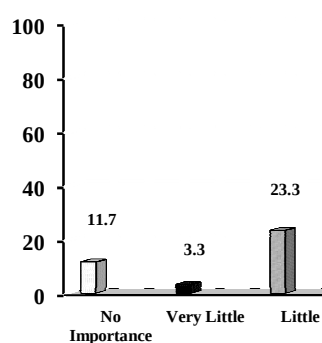
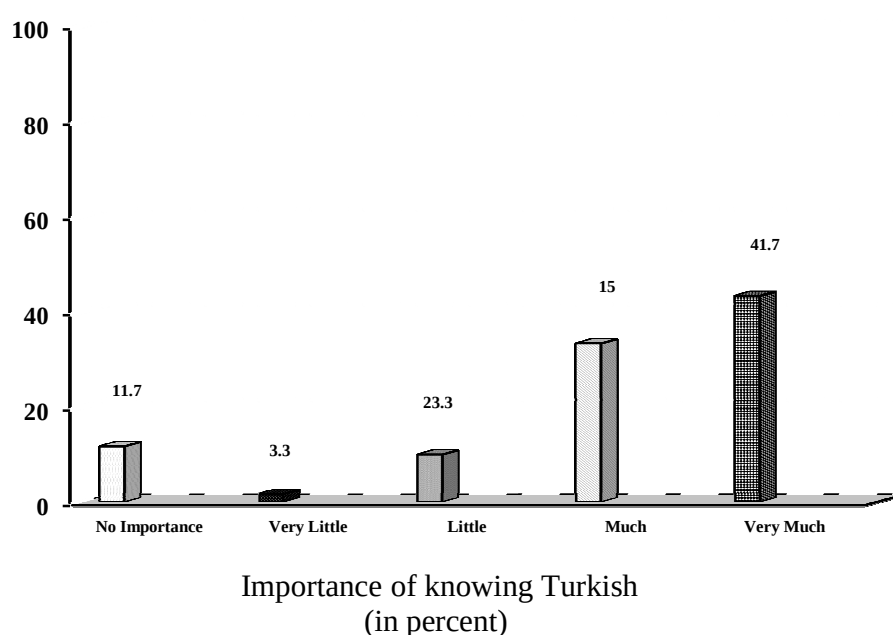


Figure: 12

Importance of Turkish in boosting familial ties (In Percent)

In answer to the question "How much knowing Turkish is important for you?" as Figure 13 demonstrates, relative majority, 43.3 percent, of respondents declared that (knowing) Turkish has *very much* importance for them. 33.3 percent stated Turkish to be of *much* significance for them. 10 percent of the respondents believed in *little* importance of Turkish. 1.7 percent stated Turkish has *very little* importance for them. 11.7 percent declared knowing Turkish had *no* significance for them. Participants seem to indicating a much higher value for the maintenance of their ethnic language.

Figure: 13



3. Conclusion

Government does not formally and practically tolerate any non-Persian indigenous language in education. Azerbaijani is still spoken at home with adults and children, but proficiency and command has been stagnating, since Persian focus in school keeps children away from consolidating oral proficiency in Azerbaijani Turkish.

Although there seems to be a slight decline in the usage of Azerbaijani Turkish and attitudes towards Persian may be more positive now than in the past, Azerbaijani Turkish is still the primary language of the immigrants in the home. Furthermore, Azerbaijani Turkish is being passed to next generation by most of the families. In this context, Azerbaijani Turkish can not be defined as an immediately endangered language.

Though Azerbaijani Turkish is not currently endangered, like most minority languages in Iran, it is under pressure from Persian. This pressure comes primarily through the perceived need of the immigrant families for their children to succeed in school, and the fact that thus far all school and educational material are exclusively in Persian.

Though bilingualism need not lead to complete shift away from the heritage language, if speakers have a strong desire to preserve widespread use and development of their own language, then a strategy may be needed to show how the community can negotiate the transition into stable bilingualism. So that important domains still remain primarily in first language. The most important need is that the community itself, place a high value on the language; without that, no amount of expert help or resources can protect the language.

Assuming that current gradual Persianization trend continues among immigrants, it remains to be seen how they will balance their value for the language and culture with their need to communicate with outer settings and to succeed in the educational system.

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