Ethnic Language Maintenance: A Case Study of Second-Generation Iranian Americans in the Northeastern States

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ETHNIC LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE: A CASE STUDY OF SECOND-GENERATION IRANIAN AMERICANS IN THE NORTHEASTERN STATES

BY

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A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, the City University New York

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

ETHNIC LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE:
A CASE STUDY OF SECOND-GENERATION IRANIAN AMERICANS IN THE NORTHEASTERN STATES

By
Maryam Moeini Meybodi

Adviser: Professor Mehdi Bozorgmehr

As a relatively new, highly educated and professional group, Iranian Americans show distinctive language usage patterns. Using data from the American Community Survey (ACS) and 48 interviews with East Coast Iranian Americans, this thesis explores the attitudes and behavior of children of Iranian immigrants and their parents toward learning and preserving their native language: Persian. Although the literature points to the erosion of parental language among the second generation and its extinction by the third generation, the results of this study suggest otherwise, at least for young children. Findings show that parents and children had positive attitude and behavior toward the preservation of Persian. As transnational families, parents have created a tool kit to ensure that Persian will persist at least through the second generation. Keeping transnational ties, attending weekly cultural and religious events, providing Persian instruction, and controlling over the children’s language use at home were among the most important mechanisms of ethnic language maintenance.
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Basi ranj bordam dar in saal si
Ajam zende kardam bedin Paarsi

For thirty years, I endured much pain and strife, with Persian I gave the Ajam\(^1\) verve and life

-Ferdowsi\(^2\)

INTRODUCTION

Language is an important indicator and preserver of ethnicity among immigrants. The maintenance of a language, therefore, is not just a transfer of literacy skills to the next generation. It is rather a matter of transferring *and* instilling a love and admiration of one’s mother tongue. It is an unfamiliar process for the children of immigrants. A fragile process of bond-making to a language belonging to a distant land that some of them have never seen and may not be able to see in the near future. The secret to the vitality of an immigrant language through the generations is then not just becoming literate but to also learn to appreciate it. It is the transfer of cherished memories and heritage, and the hopes of their survival.

This thesis aims to shed light on Iranian Americans’ quest for keeping the Persian language alive, and subsequently their cultural heritage. Language and cultural heritage are inseparable for this immigrant community. This is reflected in the current study through the participants’ struggle to teach Persian to their children, i.e., the second-generation Iranian Americans.

Ethnic language maintenance has been a struggle for many immigrant families, especially the first and the second generations. But studies and research in the area of ethnic language retention among the second generation have been scarce and skewed toward issues relevant to bilingualism. In general, studies on second-generation immigrants have mostly focused on young

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1 Ajam means non-Arabic speakers. Ferdowsi is referring to Persian speakers.
2 Abul Qasim Ferdowsi (935-1020), one of the most revered Persian poets.
adults and adolescents (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Schauffler 1994). They have touched on issues such as ethnic identity, educational achievement, occupational aspirations, and assimilation to the host society, etc. This holds true for studies on second-generation Iranians as well (Bozorgmehr and Douglas 2011; Daha 2011; Mahdi 1998; Mobasher 2012).

While it is important to understand this young cohort, it does not justify the lack of research on young(er) children (by children I mean those who have not reached adolescence). Part of this shortcoming might be due to the fact that research on children in the field of immigration studies is difficult and at times problematic, especially when the validity of responses comes into the picture. However, it is possible to mitigate this problem through the usage of multiple data collection methods or, depending on the topic, through the collection of data from different agents of socialization (e.g., parents and teachers), then comparing and contrasting the data collected in order to ensure their validity. As it will be discussed in the methodology section, I have also resorted to such a methodology in my study of attitudes and behaviors of second-generation Iranian American children toward learning and preserving Persian. Regardless of this difficulty, researchers in the field should not ignore childhood as a critical developmental period of second-generation immigrants. After all, this is the period where important cognitive abilities, attitudes, and preferences are developed. Not only will research in this field help us understand the children in terms of their views toward their native language and cultural heritage retention, but it will also provide insights into the struggles and problems second generations may face in their youth. Fortunately, researchers have shown some interest in issues pertaining to children of immigrants. Among the many issues they study, education, in particular language acquisition and language retention, has become a burgeoning field (Filmore
Nevertheless, reviewing the limited literature in this field, it becomes evident that researchers have left out children of immigrants who come from more recent and highly educated, professional-specialty occupation family backgrounds. The case of Asian Americans is an exception since they are one of the largest panethnic groups in the United States. Furthermore, as we will see, these studies have mainly focused on language in terms of the extent of bilingualism prevalent among second and higher generations. While children from high socioeconomic (SES) status family backgrounds might not be facing any serious problems, studying them could definitely broaden our understanding and contribute to the existing literature on the second generation. The Iranian American population is a prime example of such a group.

With these issues in mind, this study will focus on exploring the attitudes and behaviors of second-generation Iranian American children and that of their parents, in particular Muslim families (both practicing and non-/semi-practicing), toward learning and preserving their ethnic language (Persian).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Second Generation

Scholars in the field have agreed on a broad operational definition of the new second generation, i.e., children of immigrants that are either born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent, or immigrated prior to the age of 13 (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Since the 1990s, the second generation has received a great deal of attention from social scientists, especially those in the field of immigration studies. The manner through which they assimilate into the host society will predict the path that future generations will take. As stated by Portes and Rumbaut:
“Less attention has been paid so far to another key aspect of the new immigration, namely, its transformation over time into a variety of new ethnic groups as the first generation gets settled and the second generation comes of age. The experiences of adult immigrants are important for the future of these ethnicities, but even more decisive is the fate of their children…the U.S.-born second generation grows up American, and the vast majority of them are here to stay. Their common point of reference is life in this country, and their relative educational and economic achievements will set the course of their respective ethnic groups for the long term” (2001:17).

The authors further explain that compared to children of immigrants who arrived in the United States in the early 1900s from southern and eastern Europe, the children of the more recent immigrant groups from the late twentieth century from Latin America and Asia have received far less attention. Moreover, they state:

“…the experiences and situation of children of the more recent arrivals are less well known. Because not only their countries of origin but also the society receiving them has changed…the United States today is a very different place from the society that greeted southern and eastern Europeans in the early twentieth century. These differences interact with the racial, educational, and cultural characteristics of first-generation parents to produce very different adaptation outcomes” (2001:18).

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) use personal stories and mainly survey data analysis to support their claim that the process of assimilation is quite different for each immigrant group and depends on the socioeconomic characteristics of the group and the social context that receives them. They conducted the first comprehensive study of second-generation immigrants called the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS). They drew their sample from second-generation children attending 8th and 9th grades in schools located in Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and in San Diego, California. This longitudinal study followed these children by conducting three waves of surveys: (1) at the age of 14, (2) when they were about to graduate, and (3) when the respondents had reached early adulthood, around the age of 24. This longitudinal study enabled Portes and Rumbaut to follow the adaptation process of these children into the American society.
Even as far back as 1990, based on data provided by demographers, an estimated 9.8% of the U.S. population were the children of immigrants, i.e., the second generation. Because of the continuing influx of immigrants, this number has increased and is expected to grow even more so in the future. The second-generation population is the fastest-growing sector of the total population of children under the age of 18 in the U.S. By 1997 one out of every five American children was second-generation immigrant. This population, of course, is considered to be the “old second generation” who were the children of pioneer immigrants and have reached their adulthood by now. However, the “new second generation,” children of later waves of immigrants (post-1965), are living in a completely different and highly diverse society as new groups of immigrants come in. As a result, these children are growing up in environments that are foreign both to themselves, due to their relatively young age, and to their parents. Their adaptation process and outcomes will be challenging, difficult and dependent on factors such as: “…school performance, language knowledge and use, ethnic identities, the level of parent-child generational conflict, and the extent to which peer relations reach beyond the ethnic circle” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:22). The authors also stress the importance of studying young second generations as findings will ultimately give insights to this cohort’s social and economic stability in their adulthood.

*Segmented assimilation*

Contrary to popular belief, the process of assimilation into the host society is not a relatively smooth and optimistic one. The integration of the newcomers through increasing contact with the host society is not always the outcome of assimilation (Alba and Nee 2003). Portes and Rumbaut stress the important role that familial and contextual factors play in this process:
“In reality, the process is neither as simple nor as inevitable. To begin with, both the immigrant population and the host society are heterogeneous...Depending on the timing of their arrival and context of reception, immigrants find themselves confronting diametrically different situations, and hence the course of their assimilation can lead to a number of different outcomes” (2001:45).

Hence, they propose a more specific model of assimilation, namely *segmented assimilation*: “…where outcomes vary across immigrant minorities and where rapid integration and acceptance into the American mainstream represent just one possible alternative” (45). They account for four decisive factors in this process: (1) history of the group’s immigration; (2) the rate of acculturation among the first two generations; (3) structural and cultural barriers faced by the second-generation youth; and (4) availability of family and community resources that assist the confrontation of these barriers. Each of these four factors varies for different immigrant groups. More specifically, the condition of each of these factors for the first generation significantly affects the ways through which the second-generation children assimilate to the host society. Aside from the “extent” of assimilation, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) stress the need to realize to what “segment” of the society the second generation assimilates. These outcomes are further influenced by what scholars call the *human capital* that immigrants bring with themselves. Human capital consists of the educational attainment, skills, and language knowledge and plays a critical role in immigrants’ economic adaptation.

In their extensive discussion of segmented assimilation, Portes and Rumbaut analyze each of the four factors listed above within the two largest groups of immigrants: Latinos and Asians. Much of their discussion is indirectly relevant to the present study and therefore out of the scope of this thesis. What is of our interest, however, is their discussion on different types of acculturation and how it applies to Iranian Americans.
Acculturation is the first step in the process of assimilation and involves the learning of the host society’s language and norms. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) distinguish among five types of acculturation: *Consonant acculturation, Consonant resistance to acculturation, Dissonant acculturation (I), Dissonant acculturation (II), and Selective acculturation*. Out of these outcomes, *consonant acculturation, dissonant acculturation, and selective acculturation* are very important. They define each type as follow:

“*Dissonant acculturation* takes place when children’s learning of the English language and American ways and simultaneous loss of the immigrant culture outstrip their parents’. This is the situation leading to role reversal, especially when parents lack other means to maneuver in the host society without help from their children. *Consonant acculturation* is the opposite situation, where the learning process and gradual abandonment of the home language and culture occur at roughly the same pace across generations. This situation is most common when immigrant parents possess enough human capital to accompany the cultural evolution of their children and monitor it. Finally, *selective acculturation* takes place when the learning process of both generations is embedded in a co-ethnic community of sufficient size and institutional diversity to slow down the cultural shift and promote partial retention of the parents’ home language and norms” (2001:53-54).

The last two types yield more promising results, with *selective acculturation* promising smooth integration into the host society while maintaining certain cultural and linguistic values of immigrants’ native country. The Iranian American experience falls somewhere between *consonant* and *selective acculturation*. Iranian Americans have very high human capital and are therefore able to provide their children with enough resources to ensure their smooth integration into the American society through *consonant acculturation*. Yet at the same time their distinctively diverse characteristics and aspirations of going back to Iran one day seem to push them toward *selective acculturation*, especially for those with religious backgrounds. For example, religious Iranian families tend to be more traditional, and therefore, prevent *consonant acculturation* to the host society’s culture by promoting the maintenance of their native country’s
language and culture. However, the irony is that Muslim Iranians, especially those in the Northeast, do not possess a concentrated, strong and large ethnic community as they tend to be highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, religiosity, and political views (see Bozorgmehr 1997). They, nevertheless, seem to lean toward selective acculturation, and Persian language plays an important role in this regard. As a tool for transferring cultural heritage to the second generation and influencing them in their ethnic identity formation, Persian language fills that vacuum by connecting the second generation to their ancestral background. Unfortunately, as we will see below, neither the field of ethnic language studies nor the field of Iranian American studies has touched on this issue.

Foreign Languages in the United States and the Second Generation

Language means much more than words or the ability to communicate with other individuals. It is the defining force behind national identities and the driving force behind ethnic solidarity. Portes and Rumbaut state: “Through use of the same language, individuals learn to identify each other as members of the same bounded cultural community. Common inflections and a common accent in the same language tightens this sense of ‘we-ness’ and links it firmly to a common historical past” (2001:113). However, when it comes to immigrants, language is considered as one of the major barriers to successful integration into the host country, creating a paradoxical dilemma:

“On the one hand, the languages that they bring are closely linked to their sense of self-worth and national pride. On the other hand, these languages clash with the imperatives of a new environment that dictate abandonment of their cultural baggage and learning a new means of communication” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:113).

Portes and Rumbaut stress that this abandonment of the immigrant’s language is not merely due to instrumental reasons but also to symbolic ones. Linguistic assimilation signals the immigrant’s
willingness to seek admission to the new society by letting go of the past loyalties to his or her native language, and acquiring new ones such as loyalty to the host society’s language and norms.

Qualitative studies on immigrant attitudes and behavior toward language maintenance have been scarce compared to studies on other aspects of immigrants’ assimilation process. This trend holds especially true for the second-generation “children.” As we will see below, the majority of available studies have been concerned with the extent of language assimilation and bilingualism of the second generation (usually adolescents or young adults) and their effects on different socioeconomic outcomes. Almost no published study has focused on the attitudes and behaviors of second-generation children toward learning and preserving their mother tongue.

Any researcher conducting a sociolinguistic study on language maintenance and language shift in the United States has come across Joshua Fishman’s numerous works. Fishman’s publications (1966a, 1966b, 1985b) on ethnic minority language maintenance and language shift have shed light on the ignorance and negligence of the American society and government toward the perseverance of non-English languages of its immigrant and native populations. He argues (2004) that instead of focusing on adult foreign language programs in higher education in colleges and universities, we must provide conditions that are welcoming toward the preservation of the burgeoning immigrant languages. He believes that encouraging multilingualism and ethnic language maintenance is in favor of the nation’s interest rather than threatening its uniformity.

Fishman (1985a) identifies four community resources that contribute to ethnic mother tongue maintenance: (1) Ethnic mother tongue (EMT) press; (2) Non-English radio and television broadcasting; (3) Non-English EMT schools; and (4) Local religious units (LRUs) utilizing
languages other than English. Among these resources, local religious units could be extremely important “ethnic mother tongue defenders and maintainers” as they tend to encourage maintenance of traditional values and behaviors. Although these resources and institutions can be important maintainers of language, they cannot do it alone. He states that these institutions:

“... may contribute to language sophistication and even in small part of the total language maintenance effort, but they can do so only if family and community processes are strongly oriented in that very direction and only if, as a result of such an orientation, the sociocultural/interactional boundaries on which language maintenance depends are adequately maintained” (1985a:68).

Fishman (1966a) has further contributed to the field by bringing attention to the rapid loss of non-English languages in the United States which include the indigenous languages, colonial languages, and the immigrant languages. These languages are not just words or sentences, they are the body and soul of ethnic and national identities that immigrants bring with them. They hold in themselves the vast and diverse cultural heritage of these groups. However, the United States and its assimilative forces have been detrimental to the maintenance of these languages. In other words, there has been a rapid language shift over the immigrant generations. The first generation continues to speak their native language. The second generation becomes bilingual by learning their parents’ native language at home and English outside; however, by their adulthood they will have a higher preference and proficiency in English rather than their parents’ language. As a result, the third generation, the grandchildren of the immigrants, will be English monolinguals as their parents tend to speak English at home (Fishman 1972, 1966a; Veltman 1983). This takes us to the works of more recent researchers who have focused on the extent of bilingualism and English monolingualism among generations of immigrants.

Immigrants’ languages are considered as an economic and personal asset, in other words part of the “human capital” they bring with themselves. By preserving one’s language and
acquiring the language of the host country (i.e., becoming bilinguals), immigrants will have a higher chance at getting decent jobs in the labor market, especially in such a globalized world where businesses and economies are increasingly interdependent. Nativists, who are the main advocates of English monolingualism, are often concerned about this ability of immigrants, especially the first and second generations. They see it as a threat to the native monolinguals:

“Knowledge of more than one language represents a resource in terms of both expanding intellectual horizons and facilitating communication across cultures. This resource and its associated advantages can come to represent a serious threat to monolinguals, who must compete in the same labor markets” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006:234).

Therefore, anti-multilingualism/bilingualism advocacy has an economic incentive as well. As Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 2006) state, anti-bilingual attitudes have deep historical roots and are stronger in the United States than any other country studied. The United States lacks common elements to ground a sense of national identity among its citizens, therefore, pressure toward linguistic assimilation is greater here than in any other country: “Made up of people coming from many different lands, lacking the unifying symbols of crown or millennial history, the common use of American English has come to acquire a singular importance as a binding tie across such a vast territory” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:114). According to the same authors, up until the early 1960s bilingualism was viewed as a negative ability that threatens the nation’s uniformity by handicapping the newly arrived immigrants and their children, the second generation. They believed that maintenance of one’s native language was considered a serious setback to the process of assimilation. These pressures against bilingualism had not only political backing, such as the nativists’ attitude, but also scientific studies that “proved” the negative intellectual and educational effects of bilingualism on the immigrants and their children.
Much of the literature and research on ethnic language maintenance has been connected to the extent of the viability and desirability of bilingualism in the United States and disproving the nativists’ argument. Furthermore, as I will discuss below, these studies have concentrated on the largest ethnolinguistic groups of immigrants: Asian Americans and Latinos. This is largely due to the sizeable population of these groups, and thus the large sample size they provide and the concerns they provoke on behalf of the monolingual activists.

By drawing on CILS data (Alba 2004; Portes and Hao 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Schauffler 1994; Rumbaut, Massey, and Bean 2006; Tran 2010), and examining the linguistic adaptation among the children of immigrants, researchers have come up with a list of common conclusions. Although bilingualism is common among second-generation children: (1) knowledge of English is near universal among the second generation; (2) the use and preference for English increases overtime; (3) as use and preference for English increases, a simultaneous loss of fluency in parental language also occurs; (4) third and higher generations will be predominantly English monolinguals; and (5) social, familial, and other contextual factors play an important role in determining the immigrant children’s bilingual fluency and language maintenance. Relevant to the latter finding is the study conducted by Alba and his colleagues (2002) where they compared the process of Anglicization of recent immigrant groups (Latinos and Asians) with that of previous Europeans. They came to the conclusion that Asians’ process of linguistic assimilation happens at almost the same pace as the Europeans did (quite rapidly), whereas Latinos take a bit longer. Their analysis demonstrated the importance of supportive familial and communal contexts for the maintenance of one’s native/parental language. These factors and the extent to which children maintain their bilingualism have a two way relationship and determine the type of acculturation the children choose.
Expanding on their discussion on acculturation, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) bring forth the theoretical relationship between language ability and types of acculturation. Their analysis presents two important points:

“First, when parents are fluent in English, the expected outcome is consonant acculturation regardless of children’s language loss. Parents are able to accompany the acculturation of the children and to maintain open channels of communication in all circumstances. Second, when children are fully bilingual, selective acculturation is the expected outcome, regardless of parents’ language learning. Children in this situation preserve significant elements of the parental culture as well as full communication with their parents” (2001:145).

Portes and Hao’s (2002) study, proving the above quote, portrayed the positive effects of fluent bilingualism on the personalities of the second generation and their relation with their families which in turn results into either consonant or selective acculturation (both positive forms of acculturation).

Rumbaut and Massey (2013:141) discuss how the United States has been both a “polyglot nation” with a great linguistic diversity and also a graveyard of languages: “...in which immigrant tongues fade and are replaced by monolingual English within a few generations.” They believe that changes within linguistic communities is what causes the language extinction rather than any form of imposition or compulsion: “This demise occurs not because of an imposition or compulsion from outside, but because of social, cultural, economic, and demographic changes within linguistic communities themselves” (2013:142). They believe that maintenance of immigrant languages, hence bilingualism, in the United States is dependent on whether immigration continues or not. Their analysis shows no support for nativists’ argument that mass immigration will result into a “fragmented and balkanized linguistic geography.” In fact they found that European and Asian languages fade away faster, and whether Spanish and other foreign languages persist in the U.S. will depend on future immigration trends: “…whether
enough first-generation language speakers offset the rising tide of linguistic deaths in the 2.5 generation and above, and, if current trends were reversed, on whether fluent bilingualism might come to be valued rather than eschewed in the larger economy and society” (153).

Reviewing these studies reveals several key points. For one, bilingualism has positive outcomes both in terms of cognitive abilities and in terms of assimilation of immigrants into the host society. It also facilitates communication between the first and second generations. However, evidently there exist societal forces that discourage and push the descendants of immigrants toward English monolingualism, turning the United States into a “graveyard” of non-English languages.

The question is where do Iranian Americans fall in this picture? As a highly diverse, educated, and professional group Iranians are vulnerable to assimilation, especially linguistic assimilation. What does it take for them to preserve their native language? How far are they willing to go to raise their children, the second generation, as fluent bilinguals? As this study shows, this sample of Iranian Americans has developed various mechanisms to protect their language and pass it on to the second generation.

Iranian Americans

The Iranian immigration to the U.S. happened during at least two phases: the first phase (1950-1977) also known as the pre-Revolution phase and the second phase (1978 to present) also known as the post-Revolution phase. Prior to 1950, very few Iranians immigrated to the United States. Starting in 1950 and especially during the 1960s there was an increasing demand in skilled labor in Iran. As a result, many Iranians moved to the U.S. in order to receive higher education. This was due to the new industrialization program and a relative lack of higher educational institutions in Iran. The majority of Iranians in the United States were
nonimmigrants (mostly students) at the time (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988). The number of Iranians abroad, particularly Iranian students, increased up until 1977. However, the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 resulted in a change in the number and characteristics of Iranian immigration. There was a noticeable increase in the number of Iranians in the U.S. after the revolution from 121,000 in 1980 to 285,000 in 1990, and to 338,000 in 2000 (Bozorgmehr and Douglas 2011). According to the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) data analyzed by Bozorgmehr and Strumbos (forthcoming), in 2012 there were about 472,114 Iranians, 56% of whom were first generation; 34% second generation; and 10% 1.5 generation.

In terms of settlement patterns of Iranian immigrants, the most up-to-date aggregate ACS data, from 2006 through 2010, show that the state of California contains the highest number of Iranian residents (48%), followed by Washington DC/Maryland/Virginia (8%), New York/New Jersey/Connecticut (7%), and Texas (7%) (Bozorgmehr and Strumbos forthcoming).

As mentioned earlier, Iranian Americans are considered to have very high human capital. They are one of the most highly educated immigrant groups in the United States. This is because many of those who entered as students remained or returned after the 1979 Revolution, and the influx of elite exiles. According to Bozorgmehr and Strumbos (forthcoming), 64% of Iranian American males and 53% of Iranian American females have a bachelor’s degrees or higher. These data include both first- and second-generation Iranian Americans. Furthermore, as a reflection of their high educational attainment, many Iranians hold professional-specialty occupations. The top three occupational categories among Iranians are: managerial and professional, technical and administrative, and sales (Bozorgmehr and Douglas 2011), resulting in median earnings of $68,100 for males and $52,000 for females (Bozorgmehr and Strumbos forthcoming).
Considering that Iranians are regarded as a relatively new immigrant group, there has not been much research on them in comparison to other immigrant groups in the United States. The existing literature has hardly paid any attention to their language use and maintenance. Moreover, the limited published studies on second-generation Iranian Americans have focused on the older second generation who are now well into adulthood. These studies have focused on issues such as ethnic identity, educational achievement, occupational aspirations, etc. (Bozorgmehr and Douglas 2011; Daha 2011; Mahdi 1998; Shavarini 2004). Others have dedicated either a chapter or a small section of their books/articles to the second-generation Iranians (Ansari 1988; Mobasher 2012), again mostly discussing this cohort’s adjustment to the American society. Moreover, the majority of participants in these and other similar studies have been adolescents or young adults, not younger children. There is definitely a dearth of research on the second generation’s language acquisition and preservation, specifically during their childhood years. Furthermore, the majority of the studied samples are from non-practicing Muslims that are part of the Iranian exile that either cannot or do not intend to travel to/visit Iran. On the other hand, some of the most recent Iranian immigrants and nonimmigrants (e.g., students) come to the United States mostly for educational and economical reasons; hence, they tend to be more transnational and in some cases more religious than the previous group. Therefore, the “new second generation” may essentially be different from the old ones, and due to its more transnational nature, it is expected to be more attached to and thus preserve its cultural heritage. These somewhat different characteristics of the new second-generation Iranian

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3 For the purpose of this study, I have chosen a very robust definition of transnationalism, i.e., regular travel to homeland. Transnational families in this study are defined as individuals who reside in at least two societies and move frequently between the two. They are considered active participants of both their homeland and the host society (Light 2010).
Americans will highly influence their educational attainment, occupational aspirations, and more importantly their assimilation process.

The acquisition of the English language is highly relevant to the acquisition of the new culture’s norms and values. This pattern holds when reversed as well, meaning a strong attachment to one’s native language could signal an unsuccessful path of integration into the host society. By investigating the attitudes of second-generation Iranian American children and parents’ toward the preservation of their native language, we will be able to glean insights on their attitude toward acculturation. As Hoffman (1989) states:

“The cultural adaptation, acculturation, and cultural change among members of a cultural minority group inevitably affect and are affected by the ways language is used by members of the community. In cross-cultural contexts language use carries meanings and messages whose analysis offers a significant but relatively underinvestigated source of insight into processes of cross-cultural learning” (119).

Even though this thesis does not intend to investigate the cross-cultural learning and acculturation process of the second-generation Iranian Americans, it is hoped that results will be useful for future studies of this sort.

“This is America; speak Persian!”

As discussed in the previous section, learning English and becoming proficient in it is one of the signs of successful integration into the larger society. On the other hand retention of one’s native language could be a sign of resistance to these forces such as those living in “linguistically isolated” communities. However, this trend is not prevalent among Iranian immigrants and other recently arrived immigrant groups. There is no evidence as to whether later generations of Iranian Americans have been able to preserve their native language, but based on Portes and Rumbaut’s study (2001) the possibility is very low. By the third generation the native

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4 Quoted in Diane M. Hoffman (1989).
language disappears and the grandchildren become “outsiders” to their ancestral heritage. Thus, it is not clear whether the same pattern of native language extinction will hold true for third-generation Iranian Americans as well.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Persian language ranked 18th among the 20 languages frequently spoken in U.S. households. More recent ACS data analyzed by Bozorgmehr and Strumbos (forthcoming) reveal that 82% of first-generation and 45% of second-generation Iranians speak Persian at home. While a high usage of native language among immigrant households may sometimes yield a low English proficiency, this is not true of Iranian Americans. According to these authors, 80% of first generation and 98% of second-generation Iranians have reported that they speak English either well or very well. This reflects the distinctive characteristics of this new immigrant group: their desire to return to Iran someday and their relatively higher socioeconomic status (SES) compared to other immigrant groups, which in turn pushes them toward becoming bilinguals rather than linguistically isolated or monolingual English speakers. Bozorgmehr and Douglas (2011) pointed out that Iranian immigrant professionals and entrepreneurs tend to be fluent bilinguals. They know the positive impact of bilingualism on their children’s academic performance, and thus encourage their children to make active use of their ethnic language, especially at home. According to the ACS data analyzed, 40% of the second generation reported speaking Persian, 42% speaking English, and 6% speaking another language such as Armenian at home (Bozorgmehr and Douglas 2011). The expected decline in Persian language usage from the first generation to the second generation validates the general view that native language usage decreases across generations. Nonetheless, Persian has a higher percentage of U.S.-born speakers (20.5%) compared to many other non-
English speakers such as Korean (19.3%), Filipino Tagalog and related (12.9%), Hindi, Urdu, and related (18.6%), and Russian (17.4%) (Rumbaut and Massey 2013).

Reviewing the literature on Iranian Americans and ethnic languages, it becomes evident that research on Persian language has been quite scarce, and even more so when it comes to the second-generation children’s attitudes and behaviors toward learning and preserving Persian. Existing studies on second-generation Iranian Americans (mainly adolescents or adults) only briefly mention Persian language as an ethnic identity reinforcer, i.e., a tool to preserve Persian culture (Daha 2011; Mahdi 1998). I was able to find only two published studies that directly dealt with language. Modarresi (2001) talks about the status of Persian in the United States and briefly reviews the ways through which Iranian Americans, specifically the first generation, have been trying to preserve their “linguistic and cultural heritage” and transfer it to the second generation. The other article is an exploratory case study of the sociolinguistic practices of Iranian Americans in New York City by Shirazi and Borjian (2012). This study explores how and why Iranian Americans in NYC use and learn Persian. I will review each of these studies below in detail.

Modarresi (2001) begins by stating that linguistic maintenance and transfer are done through different means such as events at cultural and religious centers, Persian radio and television programs, newspapers and other periodicals, and Persian language instructional courses. Reiterating previous researchers’ concerns, he mentions that these resources are not strong enough to combat or prevent the forces of Anglicization and language shift that the second generation face.

He further states that Iranian exiles’ initial belief of a temporary stay was one of the main reasons why they were not “serious” about establishing institutions in the early years after their
arrival. This has been further complicated by the highly diverse ethno-religious characteristics of the Iranian immigrants which have prevented the establishment of big and strong ethnic communities, with the exception of those in Los Angeles. Furthermore, since the pioneering Iranian immigrants were mainly students who did not come to the United States with their families, they were not worried about preserving or transferring their linguistic and cultural heritage (Modarresi 2001). But this mentality started to change in the 1980s as the number of Iranian immigrants increased. Cultural institutions called “Anjomanhaye Farhangi” started to be established and have continued to up until today. Modarresi believes that the main functions of these institutions and the purpose behind their establishment are to preserve and transfer the cultural and linguistic heritage to the second-generation Iranians. However, providing programs and environments that are attractive to the second generation is hard, especially those in Persian language:

“This dominance of English in the linguistic behavior of the second generation of Iranians can be generally observed in other ethnic groups. However, the command of Persian in the second-generation Iranians seems to be relatively poor. Ansari has also noted that the phenomenon of language loyalty found in some other immigrant groups has not prevailed among Iranian immigrant children, who show some resistance to their parents’ attempts to teach them Persian” (Modarresi 2001:104).

Although true to a large extent, it should be noted that earlier samples studied by these researchers were characteristically different from the more recent samples of this study. Back then the population of Iranians, especially second-generation children, was quite small and, as mentioned earlier, there was a lack of cultural and religious centers fostering the use and maintenance of Persian. Furthermore, the 1980s were years when anti-Iranian sentiments were quite high and so identifying with the Persian language or attempts to preserve it tended to be less or not publicly viable. Nonetheless, as time has passed, Iranians have established various
cultural and religious institutions that are considered the most important sources of linguistic and cultural heritage maintenance. Other resources such as Persian news and media also play a role in this process but they tend to be geared toward other Iranian audiences rather than the second generation. Even if they did target second-generation Iranians, they would not be successful as many second-generation adults and adolescents are not highly proficient when it comes to reading or writing complex texts.

Modarressi (2001) then briefly reviews the conditions of each source of Persian language maintenance, of which I will only briefly summarize three while adding my own personal observations:

**Sociocultural Groups:** These groups include cultural centers or community groups that organize various programs in celebration of national holidays and cultural events such as Nowruz, Yalda, Mehregan, etc. These gatherings are part of the handful public and communal instances where the second-generation Iranians are exposed to the Persian language and are able to put it to use. However, this usage usually happens when speaking with other elder Iranians and not the second generation themselves. Furthermore, the programs (lectures, presentations, movie screenings, etc.) taking place at these gatherings are mostly geared toward the first-generation Iranians. Therefore, the chances that the children attend the programs voluntarily are quite low as they are often brought by their parents.

**Religious Centers:** Religious centers are among the most important cultural institutions for the observant members of the Muslim Iranian community. These centers aim to not only transfer religious practices to the second generation but also cultural and linguistic values. The sense of being a Muslim and Iranian are so intertwined for this group that it is hard for them to distinguish between the two. Therefore, aside from holding religious ceremonies these centers also celebrate
national and cultural events such as Nowruz, Yalda, Chaharshanbeh Souri, etc. As a result, children attending these centers will have twice more chances of exposure to the Persian language.

Interestingly, many of the events at these centers (both cultural and religious ones) are organized and performed by second-generation youth and children (often with an elder supervisor) in Persian. Many even have youth groups that facilitate the preparations for different celebrations, and organize children/youth-related programs and lectures. However, often these programs (the ones geared toward second generation) are in English, unless some 1.5 or first-generation youth are also involved (they tend to prefer Persian over English).

**Persian Language Instruction:** Modarresi (2001) mentions that two main ways of Persian language instruction have been through courses offered by universities and classes offered outside the universities. These course and classes are taught at different levels. Those at the university level are geared toward adult learners from different nationalities, not necessarily Iranians. Classes offered outside the university settings are usually aimed toward second-generation Iranians. These are classes held at cultural/religious centers or at Persian language schools. They vary in the levels they teach and the materials they use. Some do not even teach literacy and only concentrate on speaking Persian and learning cultural norms. Furthermore, these programs are usually held during the weekends, thus, limiting the hours of Persian language education these children receive. In terms of the materials used at these schools, Modarresi (2001) mentions three possible ways: “a. the textbooks published in Iran after the 1979 revolution; b. the textbooks published and used in Iran before the revolution; c. materials prepared or selected by Persian language instructors in the US” (2001:107-108). Fortunately, the students and teachers interviewed for this study fall among all the above categories.
Modarresi emphasizes the role of mothers and grandparents in teaching Persian and valuing its maintenance. He also underlines the important role that “active contact with people back home” plays in the process of language maintenance:

“In the last several years, the Iranian immigrants in the US have had close contact with their homeland and their relatives back home. Annual or biannual visits to Iran are still a common practice…Such mutual relationships, as mentioned before, provide an excellent opportunity for the kids to practice Persian and help maintain Persian in the next generations” (2001:113-114).

As it will be discussed in the findings sections, parents in this study have also realized the important role transnationalism plays in their children’s Persian language maintenance. Regular travel to Iran and communication with family and relatives back home and in the U.S. are among the different mechanisms first-generation Iranians use to preserve the Persian language.

Shirazi and Borjian (2012) conducted a case study of a small sample (N=9) of Iranian-American residents (including parents and Persian language educators) in New York City in order to understand their sociolinguistic practices and views regarding language and culture. All, but one, were first-generation Iranian Americans. Through their interviews they find two main ways of learning/teaching Persian: schools and home learning. The schools are divided into institutionally affiliated schools, community-based programs and weekend classes. The latter two are usually established and organized by parents, and include playgroups as well as creative modes of learning through such programs as theatrical performances. The different learning modes that each of these parents had chosen reflected their different views on why their children should learn Persian. Shirazi and Borjian (2012:167) conclude that: “The desire of parents in this study to teach Persian can be understood as a wish to provide additional avenues of expression to their children, additional connections to their families, additional exposure to cultural diversity and additional resources to further their intellectual development and academic proficiency.”
Having reviewed studies on second-generation immigrants in general, ethnic language studies, and Iranian-American studies in particular, certain research gaps become apparent. Although researchers have been studying the children of immigrants, they have mainly concentrated on high school-aged children from Latino and Asian American communities. Furthermore, they have focused on specific geographical locations where the aforementioned communities concentrate. As a result, groups such as the recently arrived Iranians have been left out of such studies. This lack of research is partly due to the relatively small size of the Iranian American population, their internal diversity (which has contributed to the lack of a strong/concentrated co-ethnic community outside of Los Angeles), and their high socioeconomic status which have resulted in a relatively smooth process of incorporation into the American society and economy. However, as mentioned earlier, the special characteristics of this group, their attachment to the native language and culture, and their desire to one day return to Iran have turned them into a case whose study could theoretically contribute to the existing literature on language shift and language maintenance.

Studies on Iranian Americans have hardly paid attention to issues pertaining to language maintenance and use, especially among the second generation. Research on second-generation Iranians has mostly focused on educational attainment, occupational aspirations, and ethnic identity development. More specifically, the samples of these studies have been either adolescents or young adults residing in the West Coast. Thus far, I have found no published study that directly deals with young children’s attitude and behaviors toward learning and preserving their native language (Persian), especially those that live in Northeastern states that lack the services and resources available to Iranian communities in the West Coast.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This is an exploratory case study of second-generation Muslim Iranian Americans and their parents’ attitudes toward learning and maintenance of the Persian language. A secondary objective of the study is to explore the challenges and difficulties Iranian families and Persian language educators face while teaching Persian in the selected Northeastern states of New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. These states were chosen mainly because of my access to and acquaintance with the Iranian families residing there.

Considering the nature of this study, my preliminary research questions were formulated in such a way as to provide a picture of the language learning and preservation attitudes, language use and preferences of the sample, and the problems parents and educators face in general. Such questions include, but are not limited to, the following: What are Iranian Americans’ attitudes toward learning and preserving Persian? What are, if any, some of the differences in parents’ (first generation) and children’s (second generation) views on the importance of learning Persian? Will the same patterns, a relatively high Persian language usage by immigrants, be prevalent among the second generation? Considering that school-aged children are under far more peer pressure, will they still be using Persian language at home? What are the different modes of learning/teaching that parents and teachers use to teach Persian? What are the difficulties and challenges they face? (See Appendix for a full list). Last but not least, some of these families come from a religious background (they consider themselves devout, practicing Muslims) and are transnational, meaning that they travel to Iran very often for short visits. Would such characteristics hold any different results on the parents’ decision to teach their children Persian? Would their attitudes be the same toward learning the language and being literate in it (ability to read and write Persian)? Even though questions were designed to
give an exploratory view of the studied population, I was able to generate four major hypotheses based on the above questions:

**Hypothesis 1:** Children (second generation) will have a lower tendency of Persian language usage than their (first generation) parents. Children will spend far greater hours outside the home and the intimate circles of the family and the Iranian community. As a result, they will have a higher preference to communicate in English whenever possible. This hypothesis also leads us to a more specific one.

**Hypothesis 2:** Children will use Persian language at home, but only with their parents and their extended Iranian family. Children prefer using English with their siblings at home and with their Iranian friends or any Iranians that have the ability to speak English outside.

**Hypothesis 3:** Transnationalism, i.e., frequent visits to Iran and communication with relatives back home, could be another strong incentive for language learning and language maintenance. Furthermore, literacy (being able to read and write Persian) will be of high importance to these parents because they want their children to be able to communicate with family and relatives in Iran.

**Hypothesis 4:** Religiosity could have a positive effect on the decision to preserve Persian language. More specifically, learning Persian will be considered as a way of learning religious teachings and cultural norms.

**METHODOLOGY**

The current study uses an exploratory research design. Due to the relatively small sample size, I chose to conduct in-depth interviews asking general questions on attitudes toward language preservation and language use/preference in different settings. As a secondary objective, I attempted to survey the challenges and difficulties Persian language educators face in
these states where no concentrated ethnic community exists. Furthermore, the majority of the scarce data available on this topic comes from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) which only asks three questions: “Does this person speak a language other than English at home? What is the language? And how well does this person speak English?” (Rumbaut and Massey 2013). These data are gathered and used mainly for studies on bilingualism, hence the dominance of their studies in the field, and do not provide a more qualitative/detailed information. For example, we do not know to what extent, with whom, where, and why these respondents speak a non-English language at home (or even outside). Therefore, to be able to understand the attitudes, behaviors, and practices of these families in the Northeastern states, I heavily relied on in-depth interviews with the families (parents and their children) and teachers. The interview questions included a mixture of close-ended and open-ended questions. A short survey was also given to the children in order to supplement their interview answers. The interviews with the parents and teachers took between 40 to 60 minutes each, and 20 to 40 minutes with the children (including the survey).

The sampling method used for this study was a mixture of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Firstly and most importantly, this sampling strategy was used due to the fact that I wanted to look at a specific section of the Iranian American community (the Muslim population). Secondly, I hoped to avoid the various problems and difficulties of conducting interviews among Iranian Americans, as discussed by Higgins (2004). These problems usually include getting access to an Iranian community to be able to find potential participants, gaining the trust of the participants, assuring confidentiality and anonymity, and being able to record the conversations when the study involves interviews. Having been exposed to these problems before, my primary participants were chosen based on personal acquaintances, only six families
and four teachers were introduced through snowball sampling strategy (i.e., by the participants, teachers or other friends).

As an active participant in the Muslim Iranian American community and a Persian language educator, I did not have any trouble approaching practicing-Muslim families in any of the states. However, many were concerned about the mentioning of their real names. I assured them that all names would be changed and that no identifiable data would be collected. At first, I was not comfortable about approaching semi- and non-practicing families. However, since I was introduced by other trusted families and teachers who had participated in the study, I did not face any serious problems. The only issue that caused difficulties was the busy schedule of parents. A couple of parents signed consent forms and gave me their contact information to schedule an interview, but when I contacted them they would either not answer or keep postponing the appointments. As a result, I dropped these families out of the study.

Knowing the sensitivities of the Iranian community I was very careful at designing my interview protocols and included questions that would not intimidate any of the participants or make them feel uneasy. I assured them that they can opt out of answering questions they deemed too personal. All participants answered all the questions and even shared many personal stories. The only exception was one father who found demographic questions and questions on religion too personal and was dropped from the study.

Except for the couple of cases mentioned, my overall research experience was very positive. Parents and educators were very welcoming. Some even e-mailed me with encouragement, expressing their gratitude for choosing such an important topic for my thesis.

After drawing the samples, I contacted each family and set up an interview schedule with them. Based on their place of residence and schedule, the interviews varied between in-person
interviews, phone interviews and Skype interviews. Only one interview schedule was e-mailed to the participant due to conflict of schedule. All interviews started with basic demographic questions. Interviews for parents included questions on language usage and attitudes, the role of the community in teaching and preserving Persian, and questions on the importance and role of religion in their life and in the process of Persian language retention/learning. Interviews for teachers included questions on their teaching experience and training, the resources and services available at the school they currently taught, teaching methods, topics taught in class, and the role of the community. Finally, interviews for children included the same questions as those posed to parents excluding questions on religion and the role of community. After finishing their interviews the children were given a one-page survey with a list of 27 statements regarding Persian language and were asked to choose their opinions toward it: whether they agreed, disagreed, were not sure, did not understand, or had no opinion. I adopted the survey statements from a pilot version of a survey for German language students aged 8 to 12 (Stracke 2011). However, I was unable to find any measurement methods or explanations about the survey. Therefore, I resorted to simply finding the frequency of each choice among the statements. Please refer to the Appendix for a complete list of the questions. Finally, all interviews were recorded after participants granted their permission and transcribed once the data gathering was finished.

I should also mention that interviewing children, especially the younger ones, was at times challenging. As a researcher I had to keep them focused and provide them with more explanations if they did not understand the question. Sometimes parents would be present either in the interview room or “hide” somewhere behind the computer (during Skype interviews) or phone in order to suggest answers to their children. Even though their presence was distracting at
times, it was also useful because they would explain the question or the answers further and facilitate the interview process.

*Characteristics of the Sample*

The criteria for selecting the participants were that children must be second-generation Muslim Iranian American between the ages of 7 and 12 who were either born in the United States or immigrated by the age of 12, had at least one Iranian-born parent, and be residents of one of these states: New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. I screened for the religion of families by asking the parents what their religion was before conducting the interviews. Moreover, many of participants were personal acquaintances or referred by other Muslim Iranian Americans. Therefore, I had no problem finding only Muslim Iranian Americans. Parents must be first-generation Muslim Iranians and residing in New York, New Jersey, or Massachusetts. Finally, since I focused on attitudes toward learning and preserving Persian language, the participating children were required to be receiving some form of Persian language instruction, either at home or at a community center school. This could be either learning how to speak, or learning how to read, write, and speak in Persian. For teachers, the only criterion was to have at least five years of teaching experience with second-generation children at either a complementary school or a community center school in the three states. The five-year criterion was to make sure that teachers were exposed to the Persian schools in those states enough in order to provide a clear idea of the challenges and difficulties they faced while teaching.

The study included a total of 48 participants: 20 children (12 females and 8 males), 17 Iran-born parents (14 females and 3 males), and 11 Iranian Persian language teachers (all females). Parents were interviewed in order to verify the children’s answers, while comparing and contrasting their answers as well. The distribution of the sample by states is shown in
Table 1. Majority of participants were residents of New York. Furthermore, there were far more female participants than males. Parents were between the ages of 31 and 54, with an average age of 43. Table 2 shows their highest level of education completed. As shown in the table, majority of parents (7) had bachelor’s degree followed by doctorate degree (4). Furthermore, the average length of time in the U.S. for participating parents was 15 years. When asked about their reasons of migration, nine (all females) mentioned marriage, six (three males, three females) mentioned because of studies and work, and two (both females) mentioned “just migration” as their reason. Finally, out of the 17 Muslim Iranian families, nine identified themselves as practicing, six as “semi-practicing”, and two as non-practicing Muslims. For the purpose of data analysis I have combined the semi-practicing and non-practicing families together. All of the families, whether religious or not, traveled to Iran frequently for visits. Only one parent had not traveled since her last visit 14 years ago but had her family visit her from Iran quite often. Therefore, all participants are considered to be robustly transnationals. Another theoretically important issue that needs to be mentioned is whether all families were intact families or not. Out of the 17 parents, only one father was divorced and one mother was widowed. There also was one mother who was married to a non-Iranian man.

Table 1. Geographical Distribution of Participants by State and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Massachusetts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 By “semi-practicing” I mean families who did not necessarily follow all the religious regulations and fell between the two ends of practicing (i.e., religious) and non-practicing (i.e., not religious).
Teachers were between the ages of 27 and 65, with an average age of 54. The average length of stay in the U.S. for teachers was also 15 years. Their highest level of education achieved is also reported in Table 2, with the majority having a master’s degree. Six teachers immigrated due to work and education related reasons; four as a result of marriage; and, one just “migration.” Finally, similar to the families, these teachers often traveled to Iran.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Associate</th>
<th>Bachelor’s</th>
<th>Master’s</th>
<th>Doctorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FINDINGS**

In order to be able to better understand and analyze the results, I have divided this part into “Parents,” “Children,” and “Teachers” sections. Each section is further divided into subsections based on the interview question topics. It should be noted that although the language of the interviews was English, participants, especially parents and the teachers, would often codeswitch, meaning switch back and forth between Persian and English. As a result, many of the answers were translated from Persian to English. Finally, in order to protect participants’ privacy their names have been changed.

**Parents**

*Language skills and fluency*

All parents, except for one who immigrated to the United States 34 years ago, considered themselves *very fluent* in speaking, writing, and reading Persian. This is mainly because majority of these parents, first-generation Iranians, received most of their education in Iran (i.e., in

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6 Iranians usually call this speaking in “*Finglish,*” a combination of “*Farsi*” (Persian) and English.
Persian). However, they felt that their Persian was not as good as it was when they lived in Iran. This was a popular answer especially for the mothers who migrated as a result of marriage with Iranians who already lived in the United States. These women mentioned that they felt their “Farsi” (Persian) skills deteriorated as they tried to communicate with their husbands who had better English speaking skills. Zohreh, a mother of two who holds a master degree, immigrated to the U.S. 15 years ago as a result of marriage. She mentioned that she was very fluent at first but as she tried to communicate with her husband, who had spent more years in the United States, her skills weakened a bit: “I must say that when I came here my husband’s Farsi got better as my command of English got better trying to communicate with him [laughs].”

The majority of the parents considered themselves either very fluent or fluent in speaking, reading, and writing English. However, they distinguished among the areas in which they considered themselves very fluent. One father who is a research engineer mentioned: “When it comes to technical discussions, I’m fluent but in terms of chatting I’m not very comfortable with English. For example, I can give a lecture in English but won’t be comfortable chatting about football with a colleague” (Saber). In other words, these individuals found themselves very proficient in English when it came to topics relevant to their field of study or work. This reflects the high educational attainment of this immigrant group that has been echoed in other studies cited earlier. This is also interesting because while these parents received most of their education in Iran in Persian, they consider themselves quite fluent in English. 

*Importance of learning Persian*

Parents in general believed that learning a second language helps their children’s cognitive development and opens more doors of opportunity to them. With every language the children learn, they become a new person and have access to different “worlds.” One might think
that Persian would not really open any doors for these kids since they have settled their lives in United States where Persian is not that useful. However, opening doors to the world of their “motherland” is exactly what learning Persian is doing. The physical distance is filled by learning how to read Persian literature. Many of these children were learning Persian, their mother tongue, as a second language. Even their parents, except a couple, considered English as their children’s primary language and the language they are able to communicate with easily. However, learning Persian surpassed the mere reason of cognitive development. It meant something more. Persian for these parents had both sentimental and instrumental value.

All parents believed that learning Persian is highly important for their kids. Most important reasons were being able to communicate with family and relatives, and understanding and educating one’s self about their cultural heritage. Other reasons included access to the rich and vast body of Persian literature and hence helping their cultural identity development. Mahroo, one of the mothers who identified herself as non-practicing and who had a bachelor’s degree in math and computer science, wanted her children to learn Persian in order to be independent in their communication with other Iranians, especially those in Iran, and to facilitate their Iranian identity development:

“Well first of all I want them to be bilingual doesn’t matter what the second language, and it’s umm their mother language…I consider that as Persian language, and I want them to be able to speak and write and read if they go back for visit to Iran or even if they want to stay there. I want them to be able to connect with people, family, and grandparents…Just want them to be Iranian not just American. I want them to have an Iranian identity and culture besides their American identity.”

Others felt that it was necessary for their kids to learn Persian so they could communicate with each other better. They often mentioned that since Persian is their own native language it would be easier for them to communicate with their kids in that language rather than in English. Sanaz,
a mother of two who holds a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering, was among the many parents who emphasized this in her response: “Learning a language does not solely involve language. It involves the transfer of a whole set of cultural values and I don’t want my children to lose that. It is a culture that I am aware of, and I’d like to transfer that [the values etc.] to my child.” Therefore, language had also an instrumental role. It was thought as a tool for transferring cultural, religious, and moral values which in turn reinforces the children’s Iranian identity.

A subtle difference rose between practicing and the non-/semi-practicing parents in this section of the interview. The difference was in their rank order of factors of the importance of learning Persian. Usually, the non-/semi-practicing parents would stop answering after mentioning the following reasons: communicating with family (parents and extended family), earning language credits for their college, and learning about their culture. Most of them would not discuss access to Persian literature and cultural education until I had suggested it to them, whereas practicing-Muslim parents would list all the factors (e.g., communication, learning about one’s culture, access to the vast body of Persian literature, and future job opportunities) together. This slight disparity, I believe, is due to the religiosity of the families and the extent to which they are willing to assimilate to the American culture, and the fact that the practicing families tend to be more traditional and attached to the Iranian cultural norms. The semi-/non-practicing families will have an easier time blending into the American society as they would not have religious markers (e.g., the Islamic covering) that practicing families do. Therefore, for them learning Persian would suffice at being able to communicate with family, get college credits, and learn about one’s culture. But for the practicing families learning Persian meant something beyond communication and college, it meant a gateway through which they could transfer a whole set of cultural norms. It is a way of assuring that their traditions will prevail. In
other words, for more religious/traditional families learning Persian had both sentimental and instrumental reasoning, whereas the less religious/not religious families thought of it in more instrumental terms.

Responses of parents shed light on two different approaches to the reasoning behind learning Persian: sentimental and instrumental. Although these reasons are, in reality, often interconnected, for analytical purposes, it is useful to treat them separately. Even though I mentioned that practicing families had both sentimental and instrumental reasoning, it should not be interpreted in a way that semi-/non-practicing families have no feelings or attachment to the Persian language. What I am implying is that these families think more about how useful Persian will be for their children in the United States.

**Learning how to read and write Persian**

Parents considered learning how to read and write (literacy) in Persian as important as speaking it. These families wanted their children to become “fluent bilinguals,” who would have a strong command of both English and Persian. Ameneh, a mother of two and a community college instructor, reiterated other parents’ opinion in regard to literacy: “Very important because to me, a person who does not know how to read and write in a language, is illiterate in that language.” Other parents mentioned reasons such as being able to understand and read the rich Persian literature and enjoy it. They did not consider English translations as reliable as the original versions. Furthermore, as transnational families who visit Iran regularly, they considered learning to read and write in Persian as a tool that will be useful for their children. In other words, it would make communication and involvement in the Iranian society easier for them and make them more independent. Shima, a mother of four who helps out her husband with his office work said: “When my children went to Iran for visit they were able to read all the signs
themselves…they liked reading the signs and this made them more motivated to learn Persian.” Other parents also wanted their children to be literate in Persian in order to be able to virtually communicate (e.g., through Facebook and E-mails) with their relatives in Iran and keep the affective relationship between them alive.

**Difficulties learning Persian**

Parents did not see any major difficulties in the children’s learning process. However, many often mentioned their child’s lack of Persian vocabulary or their confusion of the different versions of “S”s, “T”s, “Z”s, and other Persian letters that sound the same but are written differently. Still, parents did not seem to view these as serious learning obstacles. They believed that “practice makes perfect,” and that if children reviewed their lessons on time they would not have much problem. During this section of the interview, the lack of Persian vocabulary was brought up more often than the problems with the letters. A limited vocabulary (word bank), I believe, is due to the lack of communal resources and limited interaction with other Iranians in these states. The Iranian communities in New York (with the exception of the Jewish Iranian American community in Great Neck), New Jersey, and Massachusetts are geographically dispersed. As many scholars have mentioned, Iranians are quite a diverse group of immigrants in terms of their religion, ethnicity, political beliefs, legal status, etc. Therefore, other than the confines of their homes, children have little or no exposure to their mother tongue. This also reflects the fact that a large portion of the burden of Persian language maintenance is on the parents, especially the mothers who as caregivers spend more time with the children. Morteza, a father of an eight year old daughter and a post-doctoral researcher, was concerned about this lack of exposure and believed that a language shift to English would happen quite soon: “She is not exposed enough to this language, and as a pattern I’m seeing it as they grow…, and because they
spend most of their time in school, they would switch to English and almost all of them prefer to talk in English.” Another parent, Saber, also touched upon the problem of children growing up and not wanting to learn Persian, and their increasing preference for English:

> “Justifying why I should learn Persian becomes more difficult as the child grows, and especially when they reach the higher level Persian books [books used in junior high schools in Iran] and would say that these high level lessons are not something I can put to use…and the presence of cultural programs and community support makes justifying these issues a bit easier.”

The community as a justifying factor and source of motivation will be discussed further in the last subsection on the role of community.

*Language use in different settings*

Parents reported that they use strictly Persian at home and with their Iranian friends and acquaintances, unless the persons did not know Persian that well. It did not matter when, where, or about what they were speaking, they mostly used Persian with their immediate family members, especially the children. The instances that they would not use Persian would be around non-Persian speakers, or when trying to explain a homework problem. One parent, Zohreh, a semi-practicing Muslim, mentioned that she would speak in English with her children outside the house, especially when picking them up from school, because she did not want them to feel embarrassed when she speaks Persian in front of their classmates. This raises the issue of the liability of being identified as a Muslim in post-9/11 America through the use of one’s ethnic language. However, as discussed so far, except for Zohreh’s case no other parents would switch to speaking English outside unless the conversation included a non-Persian speaker. This indicates that a majority of participants either already had a marker that would identify them as Muslims (e.g., a particular dress or headscarf) or that they lived in highly diverse neighborhoods that would not discriminate or differentiate among various groups. Only one parent, Arash, who
is a divorced father of two and an electrical contractor, spoke both Persian and English with his kids. He explained that his ex-wife, who is first-generation Iranian, prefers speaking in English and since the children spend most of their time with her, their command of Persian is very weak and he often has to explain things in English. This reflects the role of family cohesiveness that others have found to be an important factor in ethnic language maintenance among children of immigrants (Luo and Wiseman 2000).

To have a better sense of language usage among this group, I also asked the parents about the language in which they expressed their emotions, and the language in which they thought and dreamt in. Of course, they all mentioned that they expressed their emotions and dreamt in Persian more often and much easier. Two parents mentioned that although they usually dreamt in Persian, there were also instances that they would speak English in their dreams. Interestingly, they would speak English very well and proficiently when dreaming, better than in the real world! The only instance they would use English was when they would think about their English courses/studies or work related issues. Only one parent, Zohreh, mentioned that she thinks about her children in English, and even dreams about them in English! Nonetheless, usage of Persian was preferred over English whenever possible.

The parents’ emphasis on using Persian at home might be another sign that they value learning and preserving Persian. In other words, they are indirectly reinforcing Persian usage at home or in the areas that they have control over, such as Persian language schools and community centers.

*Attitudes toward language*

When asked whether they thought of speaking both Persian and English as an advantage, all parents answered yes. They believed that it opened more doors of opportunity and enabled
their children to be able to connect with more people and learn about both cultures. Furthermore, they deemed it highly important to preserve Persian while living in the U.S. Many of them mentioned that one cannot predict the future and maybe one day they have to go back to Iran, so their kids must learn Persian. Another interesting answer was that knowing Persian might help their children land a good job in the future (instrumental reasoning), reflecting their understanding of the positive outcomes of bilingualism in today’s globalized economy. In other words, the more languages they know the more opportunities they would have. Some might think that Persian language is not that useful in today’s global market and if these parents had to choose a language Arabic might have been more useful. However, one should read these responses while trying to understand the mentality and the characteristics of these parents. For one, these are transnational families who move back and forth between two societies. Secondly, there is the desire to return that is common among many Iranian immigrants: they all still wish to move back to Iran one day or understand that conditions might change and that they would have to go back. Therefore, they want to make sure that their children do receive at least some preliminary education in Persian. Furthermore, parents believed that if they did not know Persian, they would definitely miss out on parts of their culture and religion. Most of the parents believed that English translations of literatures and poems did not have the same effect as the original Persian piece, and that they could not transfer the emotions and feelings involved in the Persian version. However, a couple of parents believed that their children could relate more to the English versions and translations because it was considered their “primary language,” and that there was a lack of Persian books targeted toward Iranian children living abroad. Furthermore, all parents mentioned that they would prefer using Persian over English in most situations whenever possible, and identify themselves with Persian and the people that speak it.
These answers again reflect the fact that all the parents are first-generation Iranians who had immigrated to the U.S. in their early adulthoods hence spent most of their lives in Iran and felt a strong connection to it. It also shows that one’s age at the time of immigration is also quite important. The later one immigrates to another country the more attachment he or she has to his or her home country.

Finally, when asked what language they would choose if they had the liberty to choose the language their child would be educated in, majority of parents said English. They believed that since their kids lived in an English speaking country it would be wiser to choose English. Faezeh, who is a dietetic technician and mother of three, mentioned: “This is really a hard question, because when you are living here and want to survive, you need to know English. If I were to choose Persian, I’d rather leave and go back to Iran.” Few parents expressed that if there were equal opportunity and quality bilingual schools that taught both Persian and English they would definitely send their children to those schools.

*Role of Community*

In this last section of the interview, I intended to get an overview of the parents’ view on the role that the Iranian American community, and more specifically, Persian schools played in teaching/preserving Persian and the children’s learning process. This section of the interview revealed a lot of shortcomings and weaknesses of the dispersed and disunited community of Iranian Americans, especially in these Northeastern states. However, I will not go into much detail about these shortcomings as they are out of the scope of this study, and definitely need a much closer look and examination.
The Iranian American community (including religious/cultural centers)

Parents believed that the larger Iranian American community plays an important part in providing Persian language resources and encouraging Persian language preservation. For these families the community included their local Persian mosque, cultural community center, and the circle of Iranian friends they socialized with. Parents believed that attending these centers’ events or gatherings at their Iranian friends’ houses (usually both religious and cultural gatherings) was a good incentive and reason for their children to put their Persian language skills to use: “They are encouraged to put their Persian skills at use and show it off. This encourages them to want to learn more Persian” (Shima). Often children would perform a short program, such as reciting a poem, for the community members at different cultural and religious celebrations. The applause they receive motivates them to excel in their Persian language learning and not be scared or ashamed of using it. Aside from putting their language skills to use, the children are also exposed to the cultural traditions of the Iranian community. Parents also believed that in these community settings children could see other children like themselves and relate to them: “When seeing others learning and using Persian, children no longer feel that their native language is a dead [useless] language…but unfortunately exposure to these kind of environments are usually limited to three-four hours in the weekends” (Morteza). Paradoxically, parents admitted that children’s use of Persian in these settings is limited to their conversations with elder Iranians, but when talking amongst themselves or with other children they would switch back to English.

Perhaps part of the reason for the latter problem is that often these community centers’ programs and events are geared toward older, first-generation, Iranian immigrants and not children who are constantly exposed to the American culture. Parents were often critical of the
community centers’ weak (outdated) programs and the types of resources they provide. They believed that programs and classes did not cater to the needs of children living in America.

*Persian Saturday schools*

The roles that Persian schools play are similar to the roles of the community centers as they usually take place at the same premise. The schools provide settings where children can learn Persian in a more serious environment. Parents who had tried homeschooling mentioned that Persian Saturday schools provided a more organized manner of teaching and the fact that other students with similar backgrounds (i.e., other second-generation Iranian children) attend the schools would make the children a bit more eager to learn Persian. However, parents complained about the teaching methods and materials used at the schools. For example, books and methods used at majority of these schools, especially those with a religious background, are books and methods used in Iran. Parents complained that children cannot relate to the topics used in these books and the methods that must be used with immigrant children should be completely different with those used in Iran as these children live in two fundamentally different environments with different needs and limitations: “There needs to be creativity in the ways teachers teach Persian. They need to use materials that are relevant to everyday experiences of these children. The children cannot relate to the topics and issues that are being raised in Persian books used in Iran” (Sanaz). Teachers also complained about this issue but mentioned that they had no other choice because there is no centralized institution or center that is willing and financially/professionally able to prepare such materials.

*Religion*

The questions regarding the role of religion were only asked from parents who identified themselves as either “practicing Muslims” or what I earlier called “semi-practicing Muslims,”
and disregarded for those who identified as “non-practicing Muslims.” The semi-practicing group would mention that they do not follow all the rules or practice everything but rather practice religion in their own way (i.e., pick and choose what they want to practice and what not).

Role of religion in daily life

All the practicing and semi-practicing participants considered religion as a vital part of their everyday life. Religion is so intertwined with their daily lives and in who they are that it was hard for them to describe its role or to distinguish certain specific ones. Saber expressed the difficulty of trying to distinguish any specific role(s) that religion played in his life: “It is a tough one; I don’t know…it is difficult because I think subconsciously it has a lot of influence and consciously…it certainly plays a large part. I don’t know how to quantify it. Everything we do, even if we don’t think it is related to religion, it is. Because that’s how we were raised.” Arash talked of religion as a survival kit: “It has kept me on my feet and has made me happy.” As practicing Muslims, these parents viewed religion as something that was present in their lives and directing them morally and spiritually. Semi-practicing parents also echoed the same answers in regard to the role of religion in their lives.

Parents generally viewed religious teachings as an important aspect of their children’s ethical upbringing. They often complained about the lack of any moral, not necessarily religious, teachings in the American education system and deemed it necessary for their children to learn at least the basics of Islam. Shima said: “It is very important because kids need to be raised with a belief so they can have a goal/purpose (hadaf) in their lives. They need to receive ethical education and realize the importance of religion in their lives. If it [religious teachings] didn’t exist, then they might do anything possible [meaning they might turn to crimes].” Interesting
answers came up when I had discussions with three of the semi-practicing parents. The initial prevailing belief among Iranians is that semi-practicing parents would rarely discuss let alone teach their children about religion, especially if the children are born in the United States where they receive most of their socialization. These children usually tend to be away from a religious environment and their extended families who would teach them about their beliefs. However, these parents regarded religious teachings as a serious part of their children’s lives, and, contrary to dominant belief, would send them to weekly religion classes (held outside a mosque setting). Haleh, a mother of two who holds a bachelor’s degree but is currently a housewife, mentioned that having faith in a superior power (i.e., God) is very important to her:

“I think…actually we were just talking about it with them… I think…the religion umm because of the faith… faith is very important. You have to have faith… doesn’t matter what religion you are practicing just the faith it’s a cause of improvement, believe on a punishment or rather than like you know praising it or something like that… and I really want my kids to believe that there is a higher power… and I think just believing in God… it just helps them and guide them to walk through the hard times… have a faith… have a faith to pray and asking the Higher Power to help them… and I tell them if I’m not watching you, God is watching you and then you know they believe it which I like it [laughs].”

Other semi-practicing parents also echoed similar reasoning. However, only three of the practicing families mentioned that their kids also attended religious classes on the weekends along with their Persian classes. We can relate this subtle difference to the communities that these two groups belong to and socialize in. The children from practicing Muslim families have their parents as role models, often attend mosque programs on a weekly basis, and their Iranian friends also tend to be from practicing Muslim families; they thus have a larger support group that would reinforce the norms and to some extent the teachings of their faith. However, the ones from semi-practicing families often lack such support groups or have them to a lesser extent.
Relation between learning Persian and learning religious teachings

One of the reasons I brought up religion in my interview questions was to see whether parents’ decision to teach Persian to their children had any religious basis. In other words, I wanted to see whether they considered learning Persian as a way of learning religious teachings as well or not. Contrary to what was expected in Hypothesis 4, which stated that religiosity could have a positive effect on the decision to preserve Persian language, and specifically, that learning Persian would be considered a way of learning religious teachings, 10 out of the 15 practicing and semi-practicing parents did not consider learning Persian as a way of learning religious teachings. They regarded these two as completely separate issues:

“Oh no, they are separate, I think learning Persian and religious teachings are completely separate. They [children] have to learn Persian and that is in my belief necessary because they want to communicate with their families back home...keep heritage, and that is [a] completely secular decision and has nothing to do with religion. On the other hand they have to have basic religious teachings and they can get that through parents, some from weekly visits to the community center...I don’t use Persian as a way to teach religion” (Saber).

This group of parents considered either English, because it was easier for their children to understand, or Arabic, because it is the main language of Islam, as the language through which they preferred their children to learn Islamic teachings. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was rejected.

The other five parents that saw a relation between learning Persian and religious teachings believed that since their own native language is Persian then they can communicate and answer religious questions better. Shadi, who is a nurse and a widowed mother of two, said: “Yes, I see a connection, because it is easier for me to communicate with my kids about these issues. An Iranian should know what Islam is about and should be able to describe it in Persian. I would prefer that they learn it in Persian rather than Arabic or English. I would be able to explain it to them more easily.” Yet, Faezeh believed that there are valuable resources about Islam in
Persian. As a Shi’a Muslim (the dominant sect of Islam in Iran) it would be necessary that her child knows Persian to be able to access those information. However, she was not sure if Arabic would be a good choice: “I can’t tell you why not Arabic, but if I get the resources why not? Since I am a Persian speaker myself, it would be easier for me to help my child. And I am not sure whether she’ll be able to receive the quality information that she needs in Arabic.”

Overall parents viewed religion and religious teachings as an important part of their and their children’s lives. They viewed religion as a medium through which their children received ethical and moral education. Surprisingly, a majority of them did not consider learning Persian as a way of learning religious teachings. Those who did believe so considered religious teachings and explanation easier in Persian because it was their own native language.

Parents’ responses also enable us to see whether Hypothesis 3 holds true or not. In discussing the importance of learning Persian and becoming literate in it, parents mentioned factors that reflected the families’ transnational nature. Important factors such as communicating with family and relatives, learning about one’s cultural heritage, earning college credits, accessing the vast body of Persian literature, and being able to communicate when traveling to Iran show that transnationalism plays as an important incentive in parents’ decision to teach Persian to their children. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

**Children**

Majority of the children in this study were born in the United States, and only four were born in Iran. Furthermore, those born in Iran immigrated to the U.S. at a very young age, age four being the oldest, and therefore received all their education in the United States. When asked how they would identify themselves 13 said as Iranian Americans, three as Americans, two as
Iranians, one did not respond, and one mentioned “American Iranian” because he was “born in America and not in Iran.”

Children’s questions were similar to those of their parents with minor changes of wording to fit their age. Their answers were almost similar to that of their parents with slightly different factors of importance (i.e., reasons why learning Persian is important).

*Language skills and fluency*

Almost all children considered English as their primary language even though the language their parents speak with them is Persian. As second-generation Iranians, the children considered themselves more fluent in English than in Persian. They classified themselves as *very fluent* in speaking, reading, and writing English, but as either *fluent* or *somewhat fluent* in speaking, reading, and writing Persian. It should be noted that these children would rate their fluency level based on their own judgments and based on the Persian level they were studying, which tended to be at the beginner level. Only three children felt that they were *not fluent* in reading and writing Persian. From my own assessment based on the interviews and informal conversations the children were very good at speaking Persian except for a few who had just started attending Persian school (these were older children attending first grade level classes). Usually, reading and writing in Persian were the areas they had the most problem with—this is a reflection of the fact that they are still learning Persian (at an elementary level) and do not have the opportunity to use their Persian literacy skills as much as their English literacy skills. An interesting case was a boy, Elyas, whose father is not Iranian. One would expect to see various problems in his Persian language skills; however, amazingly his Persian skills were far stronger than his English skills. This could mainly be due to his young age, seven, and the fact that he had recently started school and therefore had little exposure to the American society. It can also be a
reflection of the strong role his mother played in his upbringing and Persian language preservation. The role of mothers as caregivers and someone the child spends most times with is quite important in language maintenance. He also visited Iran more frequently, usually twice a year; therefore, exposed to Persian language more than other children in the study.

Importance of learning Persian

When asked how and why it is important that they learn Persian, almost all first answers were to be able to communicate with family and relatives in the U.S. and in Iran. Secondary reasons given were being able to learn about the Persian culture, history, and literature. Zeinab who is in fifth grade and spoke perfect Persian throughout her interview said: “It is important because I can learn my country’s language, culture, and religion. I can communicate with my family and relatives.” Younger children, viewed learning and knowing Persian as something “cool” that they can brag about to their non-Iranian friends. For example, Sara, a second-grader girl, would teach Persian words to her friends: “Because I can teach others ‘Farsi,’ like my non-Iranian friends. It’s cool to know Persian. They like it when I speak Persian to them.” Others thought of Persian as a “code/secret” language that they can use when they do not want others to understand what they are saying. This was a strategy used by their parents to encourage them to learn Persian. Only one respondent, Samira, a fifth-grader girl from a semi-practicing family, mentioned that another incentive to learn Persian was to be able to date and marry a Persian guy in the future: “My parents want me to date and eventually marry an Iranian…so learning and preserving Persian will help me communicate with that person. If I only knew English, I wouldn’t be able to find someone.” Interestingly, her parents wanted her to date an Iranian person in the United States, meaning that they expected him to be able to communicate in Persian as well.
The only child who did not like to learn Persian was Arash’s son: “I don’t like to speak Persian…I don’t know much about it. I might not be using it as much. I only use it when I talk with my grandmother” (Armin). Armin’s answer could be related to the fact that his parents are divorced and his mother, whom he spends most of his time with, does not really emphasize speaking in Persian. This again brings forth the important role that mothers play in their child’s upbringing and language socialization.

*Learning how to read and write Persian*

Like their parents children reiterated that being able to read and write in Persian is as important as speaking it. They believed that it would help them to better communicate with family and to “survive” when traveling to Iran, so they would not be dependent on anyone’s help. They also thought that it would help them read Persian literature. Majid, a seventh–grader boy, felt that it could also help him to write letters to his relatives: “It is important because we can write letters to relatives overseas and be able to read Persian literature and poems that teach morals and how to be good.” Furthermore, older kids mentioned that “truly” knowing a language (i.e., being literate in it) would look good on their college résumés and help them find good jobs in the future. Potential jobs could include working as translators in international organizations, or as instructors in academic settings. For example, one of the parents (not interviewed) was a doctor and his wife discussed how his knowledge of Persian and other languages has helped him in his career, especially dealing with patients who had a weak command of English. Younger kids on the other hand believed that by learning how to read and write they would learn “more Persian.”
Modes of learning Persian

The children in this study attended Persian schools in two different settings:

*Persian Saturday Schools:* Four of the children in this study attended a Persian Saturday school in Long Island, New York. The organizers would rent out parts of a Quaker school and hold their classes there. This school was a non-religious school and used books published prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79. Aside from teaching Persian, they would educate the children about different national holidays and hold celebrations for events such as *Nowruz*, *Yalda*, and *Mehregan*.

*Religious Community Centers:* Ten children currently attended Persian classes held in mosques or a community center that was rented for religious and cultural gatherings. Classes in these settings used Persian books published in Iran after the Revolution. They either had separate religion classes or briefly discussed it during the classes. Usually once the school was over the parents would stay with their children to attend weekly gatherings for different cultural and religious occasions.

Classes in both settings were formal and structured with short breaks between periods. During and between classes, parents and teachers would speak Persian to the students. The only instances when they would switch to English were when a concept or word was difficult to understand.

Discussing different modes of learning Persian with the children revealed interesting results. Out of the 20 children, 14 attended Persian Saturday schools, two had tutors, and four were homeschooled (one of which was just learning to speak Persian and planned to attend a school in the future). Those that were being homeschooled had structured weekly lessons by their parents. When asked how they preferred to learn Persian, majority liked to attend a
Saturday school because they would be learning with their Iranian friends and have experienced teachers. Many of the children who attended these schools had the prior experience of being homeschooled and complained that it was hard for their parents to teach Persian from “scratch.” Only six children preferred being homeschooled. They mentioned factors such as comfort and higher level of confidence as their reasons. Negar, a seventh grader girl who had the experience of attending Saturday schools, echoed this reasoning: “I guess being comfortable doing it is very important so I would probably choose being homeschooled or learning with a friend group. It makes me feel more confident.” Majid also preferred to be homeschooled, but it was because of the problems a multi-level classroom caused: “…because it is more comfortable. In class there were different levels of students in the same room so it was annoying because we kept on repeating lessons.” However, this was not the case for Armin, who preferred to attend classes at a community center: “I just…ah…I just feel like if I do it at home and make a mistake my grandmother will laugh at me. So I will be more comfortable at a community center where there are other people like me.”

Difficulties learning Persian

Answers to this section were similar to the parents’ answers. Children either stated no difficulties or they mentioned that they had a small vocabulary bank and often confused letters that sounded the same but were written differently. Some children did mention having trouble with pronouncing and mixing letters such as “ghaafl,” “kaaf,” and “gaaf.” Yet a few others, who were in higher levels, mentioned that they often had trouble reading new words because in higher level books no vowels are written and that they would have to have a lot of practice and exposure in order to memorize/retain those words: “If there are more communication in ‘Farsi’ and contact with more Iranians then I will learn them!” (Negar).
Language use in different settings

The children reported that they use Persian most of the times when talking with family members, especially parents, grandparents, and relatives. It did not matter when, where, or about what they were speaking, they usually used Persian except when they had a homework problem that they could not explain in Persian or if their non-Iranian friends were around. However, when talking to and playing with their siblings and other Iranian friends, they preferred to use English if the person knew English. They mostly used Persian when talking to Iranian grownups. When thinking, dreaming, and expressing their emotions and feelings, majority said that they do so in English. Those who chose Persian usually tended to use it to express their emotions and feelings and not so much in thinking.

Attitudes toward learning Persian

Survey results portrayed positive attitudes toward learning Persian. The majority of the sampled children agreed with most of the statements in the survey (please refer to the Appendix for a full list of statements). The only statements that they did not agree with were the last two: “Learning a second language is a difficult task for me,”⁷ and “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my Persian class.” Only two children agreed with the former statement and three other with the latter. This shows that learning Persian is somewhat of an easy task for the children as they speak Persian at home, and that learning with other students like themselves decreased the chances of getting nervous or confused during class. They unanimously agreed that their parents thought they should really try to learn Persian which shows the role of parents as socialization agents and reinforcers of language preservation.

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⁷ As discussed earlier, majority of these children considered English as their “primary” language; therefore, learning Persian was considered as learning a second language for them.
The main reason for using the survey was because of its accessibility. I initially thought that it would be easier for the children to answer without feeling any kind of embarrassment. But once I reviewed and compared the results of both interviews and surveys, I did not come across any significant differences in response patterns. In fact this method of “triangulation” showed that, as a methodological device, surveys might not be as advantageous as they are thought to be, when it comes to interviewing children. Interviews, in this case, seem to yield better and more useful results by providing more detailed answers.

Children all thought that being able to speak both Persian and English is an advantage and helps them in their communication and future life: “Yes it is an advantage…it is like a talent that not everyone possesses” (Zeinab). Younger kids spoke of Persian as a “secret language” that they use when they do not want others to understand what they say. When these answers are put together with the young age of these children, it could reflect the influence of parents and how they have transferred their own attitudes and beliefs toward Persian to their children. Furthermore, when asked whether the children thought it is important to preserve Persian while living in the United States, majority of the children answered yes because they still wanted to be able to communicate with families back in Iran and other Iranians living in the U.S. Zeinab gave a very interesting answer: “Yes, it is important, because you never know when Persian will come in handy. Maybe one day the Iranian president comes to the U.S. and they ask me to translate for him, or the American president goes to Iran and I’d have to translate for him” (Zeinab). They also thought that they would miss out on Persian culture and their religion if they did not know Persian because the English translations might not transfer the same exact values and feelings that the Persian texts would. There were some who preferred English, but majority preferred to know Persian. Finally, when asked what language they would choose to be educated in, if they
had the choice to do so, the majority answered English. Their reasoning was that they are living in America and need to “survive,” and they can do that through having an English education. This answer reflects the dominant culture’s influence on linguistic assimilation. Although these children highly valued learning and preserving Persian, they still had a higher preference for using English whenever possible.

Looking at the responses provided by children, it becomes evident that both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 hold true. Except when speaking with their parents, relatives and elder Iranians, the children preferred speaking in English most of the time because they felt more comfortable with it. They also used Persian at home most of the time, except when speaking with their friends or siblings. Although the majority had a positive attitude toward learning and preserving Persian, when it came to usage they preferred English.

**Teachers**

*Teaching experience, training, and available resources*

Out of the 11 teachers, only four had some sort of a formal training in teaching the Persian language. The remaining teachers all had an education degree which was not relevant to language and had gained the “necessary” knowledge through watching videos and reading books on teaching Persian. The length of teaching experience ranged from five to 30 years and usually started in Iran, before their emigration.

As new immigrants who were more proficient in their own native language than English, teaching Persian was pretty much the only job option these women had upon their arrival to the United States. Although many of them now teach other subjects in schools or colleges, teaching Persian to the second generation meant something beyond having a job. Fereshteh, a 62 years old teacher who has a bachelor’s degree in math and computer, started teaching in order to be
involved in the Iranian community and raise her children in accordance to Iranian cultural norms, but she later found other motivations to teach:

“I started teaching at a Persian school in Long Island, New York in 1995 and then started teaching at another Persian school in Queens in 1996…The main reason why I started teaching Persian was because of my own children…to be in contact with the Iranian community in order to be able to raise my kids as at least ‘Iranian American’ and not just ‘American’…at minimum Iranian American…therefore, I was very eager to be involved in the schools…other reasons were my own admiration of Persian culture and heritage…and as time passed and I got more experience I realized that my teaching experiences are beneficial for the Iranian community, then my motivation to teach Persian increased…I realized that I am doing something positive for the society, for the Iranian society [here] and this feeling satisfied me…for the first few years I went for my kids but as they grew and no longer needed Persian education, the need of the community was the pulling factor that took me to those schools.”

Therefore, as mothers of second-generation children themselves a lot of these teachers started teaching because of their own kids’ needs, and as they gained their “informal” training/experience they also taught other kids in the community. Some of these teachers also had private students, who due to either their location or schedule could not attend the weekend Persian schools.

When asked about the conditions at the schools they currently taught, teachers mentioned that because of logistical difficulties (i.e., shortage of space, funding, and experienced teachers) they often taught two or more levels in one class. Even when they had just one level, they still had students that were on different proficiency levels within that level. Therefore, it was a challenge trying to satisfy the needs of all the different level students in the short hours that they would meet.

In terms of resources and services available, all teachers without exception mentioned that aside from text books, a classroom, and some teaching supplies such as markers, crayons, and papers the schools would not and could not provide any other resources. Teachers would
supplement these meager resources to meet the needs of their students by preparing many teaching materials themselves. They would often bring back practice books or storybooks from Iran and use it in class. The only support they would receive from the community or the parents were small libraries that were built through book donations by the parents or other members of the community. Finally, they would mention cultural and religious events at the centers as another form of “support,” wherein children are exposed to the language and could put their skills to use, echoing what parents had said earlier.

Successful teaching and learning experience, and the role of the community

When asked for the critical factors that makeup a successful teaching and learning experience, teachers often underlined three important factors: (1) Cooperation from parents in terms of actually registering their children in the Saturday schools and practicing the lessons with their children on a daily basis; (2) creating an incentive good enough for the children to want to come and spend their weekends learning Persian; and (3) longer teaching hours. Teachers often complained that parents would spend hundreds of dollars on their kids’ athletic and other extracurricular activities but are not willing to spend money on their Persian language education. Nazanin, a 53 years old teacher who holds a master’s degree in early childhood education expressed her frustration over parents’ lack of attention to Persian language education: “We must encourage parents to register their kids at the schools and give as much attention to their Persian language education as they give attention to their soccer lessons. They always attend our Nowruz celebration and express their willingness to register their kids for next year…but they never show up!”

Regarding the role of the Iranian American community, teachers reiterated the same issues that parents had raised. They agreed that the existence of a supportive community
encourages the children to put to use their language skills and connect with their cultural heritage. Whereas parents complained about the outdated and unattractive events at the community centers, the teachers complained about the lack of attendance at and attention to these programs. The discrepancy between the parents’ and teachers’ opinions reflects a lack of parent-teacher (school) communication and cooperation which results in parents’ dissatisfaction with the school (and sometimes the withdrawal of their children), and the teachers’ complaints about the lack of parental cooperation and practice at home.

This back and forth criticism between parents and teachers reflects the difficulties and challenges they face. On the one hand the parents complain about the lack of creative teaching methods and materials; on the other hand, the teachers complain about the lack of attendance and attention to Persian language schools. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, many of these teachers are not regular school teachers and lack professional training in teaching languages; therefore, they are not able to prepare suitable materials for the immigrant children. However, they are doing their best to gather various materials from other sources to make the classroom experience fun. In order to satisfy both sides, the Iranian community should make a unified move to prepare materials for the second-generation children. However, because of the internal diversity mentioned throughout this paper, this seems to not happen anytime soon.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Results showed that there was no significant difference in parents’ and children’s preference toward learning Persian. However, they gave different reasons for the importance of learning Persian. Not surprisingly parents used Persian more than their children. Children talked Persian with parents and with other elder Iranians, but preferred to speak English with their siblings and other Iranians friends. In regard to attitudes toward preservation of Persian
(including literacy preservation), answers were similar and no major differences were observed between parents and children. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were proven, whereas Hypothesis 4 was disproved. Within these transnational families, parents had positive attitudes toward learning and preserving Persian because it would be useful for their children when they visited Iran, i.e., it had an instrumental role. However, for the majority of the parents, religion did not play a role in their choice of teaching Persian to their kids.

Consistent with the literature, parents, and even teachers, felt that the community was one of the key factors in reinforcing ethnic language maintenance. Therefore, the existence of fully-equipped community centers is a vital part of Persian language preservation. By providing up-to-date, creative and relevant language services, these centers not only teach the language but also encourage young Iranian Americans to use it more often. Furthermore, there is a lack of communication between the Persian language teachers and the parents. Regular parent-teacher interactions are needed to facilitate the communication in order to have more effective teaching/learning experience.

Dispersed immigrant communities who are characterized by high socioeconomic status, such as the Iranian American community under study, are expected to be vulnerable to linguistic assimilation. However, the findings of this exploratory research point to certain mechanisms that could challenge what Portes and Rumbaut, along with other scholars, have said about immigrant language erosion. The studies conducted by these researchers showed that as second-generation children grow older their use and preference for English increases. Therefore, they lose fluency in their parental language. Participants of this study, specifically the parents, showed that by using different strategies they can control the language use of their children. If these mechanisms
prove to show consistent results over time, then they could possibly present an alternative to the dominant belief on ethnic language loss.

The findings from this study demonstrate the ways in which this specific segment of the community in the Northeastern states, which lacks a large ethnic community, has attempted to preserve Persian. I believe that this is partially due to the fact that Iranian Americans, especially this sample, generally choose selective acculturation because they want to preserve certain traditional elements of their culture and be able to have full communication with their immediate family members (i.e., children and parents). There is a mutual relationship between selective acculturation and the preservation of one’s native language. As mentioned earlier in the paper, selective acculturation slows down cultural shift and promotes parental language retention. This relationship could also be true when reversed. However, this type of acculturation usually happens in large ethnic communities that the participants of this study lack. How could they then possibly achieve selective acculturation and in turn ethnic language preservation?

Another important contribution of this study is demonstrating the different mechanisms these parents use in order to preserve their ethnic language. In the absence of a strong and concentrated ethnic community, these Muslim Iranian American families have created a tool kit to ensure that Persian language will persist at least through the second generation. Keeping transnational ties (i.e., contact with extended family back in Iran and regular visits), attending weekly cultural and religious events (reinforcing traditions and increasing exposure to Persian), taking Persian language classes (either at home or at Saturday schools), and controlling over the children’s language use at home are among the most important mechanisms these parents use in order to ensure ethnic language retention among their children. Two other factors also played significant roles. The fact that parents had received most of their education in Iran made them
more comfortable with speaking in Persian. In other words, they had sufficient Persian proficiency to teach and transfer it to their children. Finally, the role of an intact family (family cohesiveness) is also highly crucial. As we saw in the case of Arash and his son, the involvement of both parents is needed in order to have a positive attitude toward preserving Persian.

Evidently the greater burden of language maintenance is on parents. However, there are certain external forces which may assist in this process. One is the continuation of Iranian immigration to the United States, which will increase the number of first-generation native Persian speakers. The second is supporting and encouraging fluent bilingualism among second-generation Iranians. This is partially the responsibility of parents and the Iranian American community, and partially the larger society by creating an environment that children feel comfortable in exposing their native language.

As an exploratory study with a small sample size of subgroups the current research faced many limitations. First, as is obvious, results from this research cannot be generalized to the larger Muslim Iranian American population. Secondly, geographical dispersion made communication and scheduling of interviews difficult. A majority of the interviews were conducted over the phone, and it is clear that in-person interviews might generate more detailed and interesting results. Thirdly, parents were present during some of the interviews with children. In these cases, the parents often tried to answer on behalf of the child or tell them what to say. Future research must keep this in mind and develop more age-appropriate methods to ensure the validity of answers. These issues may be resolved by incorporating an interdisciplinary methodology (i.e., borrowing techniques from fields of child development, education, and psychology).
Other limitations were related to family patterns among participants; there was only one divorcee and one widowed parent. These two different family types had and will have significant influence on the children’s attitude toward learning and preserving Persian. To be able to reach a reasonable conclusion, a larger and more representative sample of such families need to be included.

Finally, a significant limitation was the absence of a comparison group. Limited access to different types of families that fit the specified age group prevented research that would compare two different groups and yield more useful and meaningful results. Thus, a goal for future research would be to compare two groups and see whether any major differences in attitudes and preferences exist, or at least reach out to a larger non-practicing sample in order to better distinguish how religiosity affects ethnic language maintenance.

Overall, this study identified some positive and promising outcomes in regard to the learning and preserving of Persian. However, it is uncertain as to whether the same patterns will hold true throughout the second generation’s adulthood. Will these mechanisms prove to be effective through the long run or not is another question which demands further research.

It is hoped that this study would be used as a stepping stone for future studies and be further expanded in order to serve the larger Iranian community in the United States.
APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS

CODE: P_________  Interview Date:_________

Demographic Characteristics:
1. Age:
2. Sex:
3. Place of current residence:
   a. Is it an ethnic enclave or not?
4. Religion:
5. Occupation:
6. Highest level of education you have completed:
7. Marital status:
8. How many children do you have? B.____ G.____
9. Where were you born?
10. How long have you been in the U.S.?
11. What was the purpose of your migration? For work or for education?
12. Do you intend to stay here permanently?
13. How often do you travel to Iran?
   a. Does your family (children) accompany you as well?
14. How would you classify yourself?
   a. Iranian
   b. Iranian-American
   c. American
   d. Other, specify.

Religion:
1. How religious are you?
   a. Would you consider yourself a practicing Muslim?
   b. Would you consider yourself a non-practicing Muslim?
2. How important do you consider the role of religion in your life?
   a. How often do you attend a mosque for religious purposes?
   b. How often do you attend religious events or ceremonies (outside a mosque’s environment)?
3. How important do you consider religious teachings for your child?
   a. What connection do you see between learning Persian and religious teachings? In other words, do you consider learning Persian as a way of learning religious teachings as well?
   b. Why not Arabic?

Language:
Yourself:
1. In what language did you receive the majority of your education?
2. What other languages do you speak?

Your Child:
1. Why is it/is it not important to you that your child learns Persian, especially in a country that Persian is not that useful?
2. How important is it to you that he/she learns how to read and write in Persian?
3. Is he/she taking any Persian Language classes?
   a. Where?
      i. School/Institute
      ii. Playgroup
      iii. Community based
      iv. Homeschooled
   b. Is this the primary source through which he/she is learning?
   c. What kinds of difficulties, if any, do you sense in his/her Persian learning process?
   d. (If no classes is taken) Do you intend to enroll him/her in a class in the near future?
4. Is he/she enrolled in any supplementary English classes?
   a. What kinds of difficulties, if any, do you sense in his/her English learning process?
5. What other languages does he/she speak?
6. Which language do you consider as his/her primary language?
7. In what ways do you think that learning a second/third language helps your child?

**Language use in different areas of life:**
1. What language do you mostly use when:
   **Family:**
   a. Talking with:
      i. Spouse:
      ii. Mother:
      iii. Father:
      iv. Siblings:
      v. Children:
   b. Having dinner discussions with family:
   c. Discussing personal matters or problems:
   d. When playing with your kids:
      i. At home:
      ii. Outside/at a playground:
   **Friends:**
   a. Conversing and discussing general topics with:
      i. Other Iranian friends:
      ii. Iranian acquaintances:
   b. Discussing personal matters with:
      i. Other Iranian friends:
      ii. Iranian acquaintances:
   c. Conversing with other Iranians at social gatherings:
   **Emotions and thoughts:**
   a. When expressing your feelings and emotions:
   b. In what language do you think most often?
   c. In what language do you mostly dream?
   **Language skills/fluency:**
   1. How much of your education was in Persian?
2. How fluent do you consider yourself in:
   a. Persian:
      i. Speaking:
      ii. Writing:
      iii. Reading:
   b. English:
      i. Speaking:
      ii. Writing:
      iii. Reading:

Attitudes:
1. Do you think speaking both Persian and English is an advantage? Why or why not?
2. Do you think it is important to preserve Persian while living in the US? Why or why not?
3. Would you prefer using Persian or English in most situations, whenever possible?
4. Do you identify yourself with Persian and the group that speaks it or with English?
5. If you had the liberty to choose the language with which your child would be educated in, which one would you choose and why?
   a. Persian
   b. English
6. Considering that there are a lot of literatures available in English, do you think you’d miss out on parts of your culture and religion if you didn’t have knowledge of Persian?

Role of Community:
Role of the community, Persian schools, and parents:
1. How would you situate the role of the following in the process of teaching and learning Persian:
   a. The Iranian-American community:
   b. The Persian schools/community centers:
   c. Parents:
2. Is there support in the community to preserve Persian?
   a. What kinds of supports are being offered?
   b. How do you think it has affected the level of language retention among the children? Or their attitudes toward wanting to learn Persian?
3. If you were to categorize the challenges and difficulties of teaching/learning Persian into five groups, what would they be?
   a. What difficulties have you faced yourself?
   b. What solutions/services do you think would resolve this problem?
   c. What expectations do you have from Persian schools and other Iranian-American organizations?
      i. Teaching materials
      ii. Online resources
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN

Child
CODE: C_________ Interview Date:_________

Demographic Characteristics:
1. Age:
2. Sex:
3. Occupation:
4. Grade level:
5. Where were you born?
6. (If born outside the U.S.) How long have you been in the U.S.?
7. How would you classify yourself?
   a. Iranian
   b. Iranian-American
   c. American
   d. Other, specify.

Language:
1. In what language did you have most of your education?
2. Why is it/is it not important to learn Persian?
3. How important is it to you that you learn reading and writing in Persian?
4. Are you taking any Persian Language classes?
   a. Where?
   b. What kinds of difficulties do you have while learning Persian?
   c. (If no classes is taken) Do you wish to attend a class in the near future?
5. How do you like to learn Persian?
   a. School/Institute
   b. Playgroup
   c. Community based
   d. Homeschooled
6. What other languages do you speak?
7. Which language do you consider as your primary language?
8. In what ways do you think that learning second/third languages is important?

Language Use in different areas of life:
1. What language do you mostly use when:

   Family:
   e. Talking with:
      i. Mother:
      ii. Father:
      iii. Grandparents:
      iv. Siblings:
   f. Having dinner discussions with family:
   g. Discussing personal matters or problems:
   h. When playing with your siblings:
      i. At home:
      ii. Outside/at a playground:
When playing by yourself:

Friends:
  d. Conversing and discussing general topics with:
     i. Other Iranian friends:
     ii. Iranian acquaintances:
  e. Discussing personal matters with:
     i. Other Iranian friends:
     ii. Iranian acquaintances:
  f. Conversing with other Iranians at social gatherings:

Emotions and thoughts:
  d. When expressing your feelings and emotions:
  e. In what language do you think most often?
  f. In what language do you mostly dream?

Language skills/fluency:
  1. How much of your education was in Persian?
  2. How fluent do you consider yourself in:
     c. Persian:
       i. Speaking:
       ii. Writing:
       iii. Reading:
     d. English:
       i. Speaking:
       ii. Writing:
       iii. Reading:

Attitudes:
  1. Do you think speaking both Persian and English is an advantage? Why or why not?
  2. Do you think it is important to preserve Persian while living in the US? Why or why not?
  3. If you had the liberty to choose the language with which you are educated in, which one would you choose and why?
     a. Persian
     b. English
  4. Considering that there are a lot of literatures available in English, do you think you’d miss out on parts of your culture and religion if you didn’t have knowledge of Persian?
CHILDREN’S SURVEY

CODE: C ___________ DATE: ___________

Learning Persian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>☑️</th>
<th>☐</th>
<th>☐</th>
<th>Don’t understand</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like Persian music.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>I think Persian will help me if I travel abroad in the future.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<td>I like Persian books.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can honestly say that I am really doing my best to learn Persian.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studying Persian will help me get a good job.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>I think that it is important to learn Persian in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>I think that people around me will be disappointed if I did not make efforts to learn Persian.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my life, learning Persian is very important to me.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m always looking forward to my Persian classes.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I hear Persian in movies or on the radio, I listen carefully and try to understand all the words.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I could watch (more) Persian-speaking TV stations and DVDs, I would try to watch them (more) often.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>My parents support me to study Persian.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>My parents often tell me that Persian is important for my future.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I think about my future, it is important that I use Persian.</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like Persian movies and/or TV programmes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td>😐</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>Don’t understand</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I could speak Persian well, I could make friends with more people from other countries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studying Persian will help me to understand people from Persian-speaking countries and how they live.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My parents think that I should really try to learn Persian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like Persian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I find learning Persian really interesting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studying Persian will help me get to know Persian-speaking people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My parents tell me to practice my Persian as much as possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am working hard at learning Persian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I really enjoy learning Persian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would like to take more Persian classes in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning a second language is a difficult task for me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my Persian class.</td>
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</table>
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

CODE: T________

Interview Date:_________  

Demographic Characteristics:
1. Age:
2. Sex:
3. Place of current residence:
   a. Is it an ethnic enclave or not?
4. Occupation:
5. Highest level of education you have completed:
6. Where were you born?
7. If not in the U.S., how long have you been here?
8. What was the purpose of your migration? For work or for education?
9. Do you intend to stay here permanently?
10. How often do you travel to Iran?
11. How would you classify yourself?
   a. Iranian
   b. Iranian-American
   c. American
   d. Other, please specify.

Teaching experience and training:
1. How long have you been teaching Persian?
2. Do you teach anything besides Persian as well? If yes, what?
3. Have you had any formal training in teaching Persian? In other words are you a certified Persian language teacher?
   a. If yes, where did you receive your training/certification?
   b. If not, did you have any informal training? Where and for how long?
4. Do you have any teaching experience inside Iran? If yes, please elaborate.
5. Do you have any teaching experience outside of Iran (e.g., in the U.S.) aside from where you are teaching now?

Teaching Experience at the Current School:
1. How many years have you been teaching here?
2. What encouraged you to teach Persian?
3. What levels have you taught so far? Do some of the classes include more than one level?
4. What other types of Persian language teaching experience did you have in the U.S.?
   a. tutoring:
   b. online

Current School:
1. How would you describe the resources and services available at this school? Please describe in relation to both quantity and quality of resources and services.
2. Do you receive any resources from outside? (E.g., Iran or the greater Iranian community in the U.S.). If yes, what kinds of resources do you receive?
3. What kinds of resources or support do you receive in the community?
4. How would you classify the resources and services? Are they limited to cultural and linguistic resources/services only? If not, what are the other types?

Teaching an ethnic language/second language:
1. What kind of teaching methods do you use when teaching Persian?
a. Do you rely on methods and materials based on Iran’s curriculum or do you use a separate one? Why do you use them?
b. What kinds of differences do you see in the methods?
c. Are they relevant to Iranian community in the US?

2. What kind of difficulties or limitations do you face in teaching Persian?
   a. What are the techniques, if any, you use to combat these problems?

3. What are the critical factors for a successful teaching and learning experience?
   a. What is needed from the community?
   b. What is needed from the larger Iranian/Iranian American community?

**Topics taught in class:**

1. Do you teach anything else other than language?
   a. Religion
   b. Culture
2. Do you combine them into the language curriculum or have separate classes for them?
3. How would these classes affect the language learning process?
References:


