

Research Article

Open Access

Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini*, Parisa Abazari

“My Language is Like My Mother”: Aspects of Language Attitudes in a Bilingual Farsi-Azerbaijani Context in Iran

DOI 10.1515/opli-2016-0018

Received May 13, 2016; accepted August 12, 2016

Abstract: The consequence of globalization in many bilingual and multilingual communities appears to be the increased endangerment of language varieties and the speeding erosion of linguistic diversity. Understanding this concern and its associated issues of language contact, conflict, and maintenance may be considerably enhanced by exploring attitudes of communities towards the language varieties they live with. In this exploratory study we investigate attitudes of a group of bilingual Farsi-Azerbaijani speakers in the Iranian city of Tabriz towards the Azerbaijani language. Based on questionnaire data and semi-structured interviews, the study explores the participants’ emotional attitudes towards Azerbaijani as well as their position regarding its application in some domains of language use. The study depicts the participants’ positive emotions and feelings towards their local language but at the same time reveals their hesitation and reservations in approving of its use in some domains of language use, education and new media in particular. On this basis, we argue that the safe status of a language even with the magnitude of Azerbaijani in Iran cannot be taken for granted and further comprehensive and in-depth research may be needed in this regard.

Keywords: sociolinguistics; language contact; bilingualism; language attitudes; Iranian languages; Azerbaijani

1 Introduction

The worldwide landscape of language varieties in the notorious era of globalization is witness to the erosion of linguistic diversity and the disappearance of varieties. Within this extremely wide landscape, the increasing theoretical discussions and empirical investigations on concerns such as language contact, conflict, shift, endangerment, and death are to be understood as part of broader socio-cultural, economic, and political considerations (Blommaert 2003; Coupland 2003; Makihara and Schieffelin 2007; Milory 2001). In the context of such sociolinguistic concerns and challenges, in bilingual and multilingual contexts languages that are not recognized as *official* and those lacking a writing system and an associated educational system with educational materials and courses might be more vulnerable.

Although the vulnerability of such unofficial and oral language varieties is not inevitable and a natural given, in the specific sociolinguistic landscape of Iran as the context of the current study, apart from Farsi as the official national language, almost all other local varieties which are situated in bilingual Farsi-local linguistic settings, may be susceptible to processes of endangerment, erosion, and leveling. Such

*Corresponding author: Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of), E-mail: mirhosseini@alzahra.ac.ir

Parisa Abazari, MA Graduate, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

susceptibility has already been shown to be probable in the case of a few language varieties in bilingual situations in Iran based on investigations of speaker communities' attitudes and linguistic culture (e.g. Bashirnejad 2004; Mirhosseini 2015; Samar et al. 2010).

Within this national linguistic landscape, Azerbaijani is a language with millions of speakers all over Iran and is hardly viewed as endangered. Nonetheless, in the absence of considerable sociolinguistic research on Azerbaijani, there are a few issues that make this language an important case of research in terms of its status and attitudes towards it in Iran: it is not an official language; its speakers in Iran do not usually read and write in Azerbaijani; and it is not the language of education and neither is it even taught as a school subject or university course. Therefore, to probe some aspects of the hitherto under-investigated situation of Azerbaijani in Iran, this study explores the attitude of a group of Iranian Azerbaijani speakers towards their language in their bilingual Farsi-Azerbaijani community and investigates their emotional attitudinal stance towards Azerbaijani as well as their positions regarding its application in some practical domains of language use. In addition to the contribution of the study to understanding aspects of this specific research setting, it may also contribute to the current knowledge of language status in the case of widely-spoken languages that happen to be *unofficial* (Barrena et al. 2007).

2 Theoretical background

Language is the symbol of belonging and it is through language as the mirror of the mind and soul of a people that culture is shared and transmitted (Fishman 1996; Hale 1998). A shift in language and culture may be seen in many ways as a change of ethnic identity and in the life and individuality of the people in a community (Agha 2007; Withers 2004). Language change gains particular significance in bilingual and multilingual situations of contact between languages with different degrees of attributed prestige where social pressure may cause the erosion and leveling of overshadowed varieties (Mufwene 2008; Wendel and Heinrich 2012; Wheelera 2015). Therefore, language contact usually encompasses various degrees of language conflict as well (Nelda 1987; Ostler 2011; Potowski 2013).

In dealing with language conflict, shift, and endangerment, various theoretical and policy-level considerations as well as practical and community-level issues related to language maintenance, language revitalization, and 'reversing language shift' have been discussed (Fishman 1991, 2013; Grenoble 2013; Ostler 2011). However, a profound understanding of such concerns, and basically concerns over the changing status of languages in contact situations in almost all cases can be enriched by a better understanding of attitudes of language communities (Baker 1992; Cavanaugh 2013; Garrett 2010; Garrett et al. 2003). With a view of *attitude* as a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a given set of objects, understanding language attitudes may be seen as a window into ideological orientations regarding language use as well as "social position and experience of a group and... social relationships in a specific society" (Hsiao 1997: 304; cited in Brubaker 2003), especially in bilingual and multilingual settings.

It may be argued that understanding language attitudes can also crucially shape part of the foundation of knowing linguistic contexts more profoundly in terms of *language ideologies* (Blommaert, 1999; Schieffelin, et al., 1998; Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994; Wortham, 2002). Possibly based on such a perspective, the concern over language attitudes has been fairly extensively explored by many scholars in various contexts and from different perspectives. Among the research issues studied in this area are bilingualism, language revival, social class, and ideology of modernism (Bell 2013; Brubaker 2003; Chakrani 2013; Lai 2010; Santello 2015). The diverse linguistic contexts that have been researched include Paraguay, China, Spain, Fiji, Lithuania, South Africa, and Cyprus (Bangeni and Kapp 2007; Choi 2003; Gao and Park 2012; Hogan-Brun and Ramonien 2005; Hugué et al. 2008; Papapavlou 2001; Shameem 2004).

However, *true* attitudes towards languages are complex social-psychological features which are difficult to define and more difficult to determine. Studies on language attitudes have been attributed to two general perspectives known as the *behaviorist* and the *mentalist* ones. Based on a behaviorist view, attitudes towards languages are said to be viewed as a unitary concept and are tried to be understood through observing the actual behavior and responses to the use of languages in different social situations

(Appel and Muysken 1987; Fasold 1984). With a mentalist approach, however, attitudes are stated to be perceived not only as related to observable behavior but as more complex and deeply-residing *mental states* and *feelings* people have about the language varieties around them (Appel and Muysken 1987; Baker 1992). Although the problem of the accord between language attitudes in speech communities and their actual linguistic behavior has always been a concern (Garrett et al. 2003), a considerable body of research on language attitudes has subscribed to mentalist, rather than behaviorist, positions (e. g. Cargile and Giles 1998; Hoare 2001; Ihemere 2006; Redinger 2010; Zhou 1999).

Although this behaviorist–mentalist dichotomy is mainly based on a hypothetical divide rather than an actual distinction, a mentalist theoretical perspective seems to present a more comprehensive research approach, which we will adopt in the present study. Such an approach provides a repertoire of research procedures including ethnographic inquiry, the direct method of employing questionnaires and interviews, and an indirect method known as the matched guise procedure (Baker 1992; Fasold 1984). Despite concerns about the trustworthiness of direct methods that hardly make them any substitute for in-depth ethnographic and linguistic-anthropological research (Ferrer and Sankoff 2003; Redinger 2010; Romaine 1995), in the context of this exploratory research on a language rarely studied from a sociolinguistic perspective (Bashirnejad 2007), an early study based on questionnaires and interviews can be justified.

3 Azerbaijani in Iran

Iran is a multilingual country with a diversity of language varieties spoken along with Farsi (Persian) which is the official national language. Apart from Azerbaijani explored in this study as the second widely-spoken language in Iran, Kurdish, Lori, Baluchi, Mazandarani, Gilaki, Arabic, Turkmen, and Armenian are some of the well-known local languages roughly estimated to be spoken along with Farsi by more than half of the population of the country (Ahmadipour 2011; Haddadian-Moghaddam and Meylaerts 2015; Safaei Asl 2013). According to the Iranian Constitution (Article 15) Farsi is recognized as the language of official texts, correspondence, and textbooks but the teaching of local languages and using them in the media is allowed. Therefore, although Farsi is known as the language of national *unity*, and by some accounts it might have been subject to *purist* attempts (Marszalek-Kowalewska 2011), the overall policies regarding local varieties are generally supportive (Haddadian-Moghaddam and Meylaerts 2015) and public attitudinal positions towards them are believed to be positive (Ghamari and Hassanzadeh 2010; Safaei Asl 2013). This positive attitude, of course, does not necessarily entail a preference for the use of local varieties in all actual situations of language use which tend to be overshadowed by Farsi (Mirhosseini 2015).

Azerbaijani (Azarbaijani), also known as Azeri (Azari), Azerbaijani Turkish, and Azeri Turkish, is a language of the Turkic family with about 25 million speakers worldwide, out of which about 16 million reside in Iran (Omniglot 2015; Thompson 2013). The language is spoken in several countries including, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iraq, Turkmenistan, Georgia, and Russia but Iran has the largest Azerbaijani speaking population (Omniglot 2015). Iranian speakers of Azerbaijani live in various parts of the country including the capital, Tehran. Specifically, in the northwestern area which encompasses some of the most populated urban centers in the country, almost all of the residents are speakers of Azerbaijani who mostly speak the official national language of Farsi as well.

Although Azerbaijani is spoken as a *macrolanguage* (Ethnologue 2015) by about a fifth of the population in Iran, it has no official status. It is used in various domains of language use but its speakers in Iran do not largely use it in writing. The written language of official documents, important print media, textbooks, and educational materials are in Farsi, and therefore, the orthography of this language has not been standardized in Iran (Thompson 2013). Since the Iranian educational system is monolingual, all school books are in standard Farsi which is the medium of classroom communication and instruction as well. As for the mass media, which shape a determining element in processes of dialect leveling and language change in Iran (Samar et al. 2010), the medium of communication in all national television channels and radio stations broadcast from the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), is Farsi, although provincial

branches of IRIB, including the ones in provinces with Azerbaijani-speaking populations, do also broadcast programs in local varieties.

There have been various studies on Azerbaijani in Iran. Old Azerbaijani has been studied for decades (Iranbonyad 2005) and formal aspects of modern Azerbaijani have also been researched and written about from various perspectives (e.g. Dehghani 2000; Lee 1996; Vandhosseini 2013). There have also been relatively frequent studies on issues related to foreign language learning by bilingual Farsi-Azerbaijani speakers (e.g. Modirksamene and Mann 2010) as well as a few studies on aspects of the sociolinguistics of Azerbaijani in Iran (e.g. Bani-Shoraka 2005; Shahidi-Tabar and Yazdani 2013). However, to our knowledge, the specific issue of language attitudes of Azerbaijani speakers in Iran has not been studied. It is this specific concern that we explore in this research.

4 Method

This study investigates aspects of a group of Azerbaijani speakers' view of the use of their language within the Iranian linguistic landscape where Farsi is the official language. Specifically, the problems of concern are the general emotional attitudes and feelings of the participants towards Azerbaijani as well as their perspectives regarding the use of this language in different domains of application. Considering the limited scope of the study, we decided to focus on four most intimately experienced domains of language use: everyday conversation with immediate and extended family members; religion-related language use; language use in education; and language use in media.

4.1 Context and participants

Tabriz was selected as the setting of the study as it accommodates the largest population of Azerbaijani speakers in Iran and its important economic, political, and social role as the fourth largest Iranian city (Markaz-e Amar-e Iran 2011). Tabriz is a bilingual city and its residents live with the official national language of Farsi as well as Azerbaijani. The city, in fact, is home to the second largest urban population of Azerbaijani speakers in the world. The city was a historical capital of Iran and is the current provincial capital of East Azerbaijan province and also a major Iranian industrial and manufacturing center (www.tabriz.ir). Based on this significant socio-cultural, economic, and political status, the city was determined to be suitable for an early study on the issue of language attitudes towards Azerbaijani in Iran.

As the study is an early exploratory research of its type in this context, the scope of the project is rather limited. With *convenience* being an important consideration in sampling, a group of 104 Azerbaijani speakers living in Tabriz participated in the study. The participants did not shape a large group and are not claimed to have provided full representation of all social strata in the community of concern. Therefore, this convenience sample of research participants comprised primarily educated and professional Azerbaijani speakers in the urban area of Tabriz, including students (n=30; 29%), teachers (n=23; 22%), business people (n=11; 10.5%), housewives (n=10; 9.5%), and a miscellaneous group (n=30; 29%). In terms of gender, age, and education, the participants included females (n=68; 65%) and males (n=36; 35%); the age group under 30 (n=55; 53%) as well as 30 and above (n=49; 47%); and, with university education (n=64; 62%) and without (n=40; 38%).

4.2 Data collection

The bulk of data explored in the study comprises two parts. The first body of data was based on a researcher-designed sociolinguistic Likert-type questionnaire. It consisted of three major sections: the first section intended to collect demographic data about the participants' age, profession, education, etc. The second section aimed to probe their overall feeling towards their language and included five questions related to

different dimensions of their general emotional attitudes. The last section, which shaped the major part of the questionnaire, focused on language preferences and the perspectives of the participants about the application of language in the four language use domains of family conversation, religion, education, and media. Considering the limited scope of the study, only a small number of domains could be considered, and based on our previous research experience (e. g. Mirhosseini 2015) these four domains were selected as the ones most intimately experienced by the participants. For each domain of language use, five questionnaire items asked the respondents to express their strong agreement, agreement, neutrality, disagreement, or strong disagreement with an aspect of the application of Azerbaijani in that specific domain.

To gain further qualitative insight into the perceptions and perspectives of our research participants, interviews were also conducted with some of them. A semi-structured interview scheme was used to allow us to track some of the issues noticed in the questionnaire data and at the same time to create space for possible emerging notions. Interviews were conducted with thirteen participants that included both males and females, those with and without higher education, the younger and the older generation, and at least one representative of each one of the five professional groups. The interviews were conducted by a female interviewer and in Azerbaijani to provide a comfortable and more trustable atmosphere so that the interviewees were able to express their ideas more conveniently. There were, however, occasional Farsi code-switched utterances in the interviews. Each interview took about half an hour and all of them were recorded with the permission of the interviewees.

4.3 Data analysis

Upon the return of the questionnaires, they were examined one by one and item by item in search of the participants' attitudes and positions. The total number of responses to each questionnaire item was recorded, that is, for each item the overall number of the selection of each choice (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) was calculated and the percentage was computed for each figure. Since it was difficult to put aspects of the overall position of each one of the participants together, it was not possible to meaningfully assign the participants to categories like those with positive stances and those with negative ones. Therefore, the overall understandings and interpretations were made based on the respondents' collective perspective about each notion as reflected in their collective responses to each questionnaire item.

The interviews provided more in-depth data about the same issues that were reflected in the questionnaire. To explore the interview data, the transcripts were scrutinized in search of further information on what the questionnaires revealed about the participants' attitudinal stances as well as their view of language use in different domains. Applying thematic coding (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), the attitudes of the interviewees were extracted and categorized based on the five categories of feeling, family, religion, education, and media as the major themes that already existed. The thematic notions extracted along the lines of these major themes were put next to the questionnaire-based findings to provide a more comprehensive image of each one of the five research concerns. (We understand that focusing on attitudes of different groups in terms of gender, age, education, and profession and also scrutinizing the views of outliers in the case of each questionnaire item could have been informative. However, within the limited scope of this early exploratory study we decided to avoid diving into the depth of these considerations. Naturally we do limit the interpretation of the findings according to these delimitations.)

5 Findings and discussion

In this section we present the findings based on the questionnaire and the interview data. These findings and the related discussions are presented in five sections, comprising a section on general emotional attitudes and feelings and four sections on different domains of language use, namely, family, religion, education, and media. In each section, an overview of questionnaire-based findings related to that section

is presented followed by a table including the numerical representation of the related questionnaire results. Then, we discuss how the interview outcome sheds light on the information provided by the questionnaire, and present some illustrative examples of interview extracts.

5.1 Feeling

Regardless of the actual language use in various situations, the *feeling* of an absolute majority of the participants appears to be in favor of Azerbaijani. They consider their language as central to their identity and show explicit approval of using it and passing it on to the next generation. In responding to the five questionnaire items specifically addressing emotional attitudinal perspectives, as illustrated in Table 1, agreement or strong agreement is largely expressed in favor of the Azerbaijani language: more than 94% for its likability and beauty; more than 91% for the necessity of transferring the language to future generations; more than 89% for the vitality of Azerbaijani to its speakers' identity; a less eye-catching figure of about 72% for the proud use of Azerbaijani; and a relatively smaller figure of about 55% for the necessity and suitability of the use of this language in *all situations*.

Table 1. General emotional attitudes and feelings towards the Azerbaijani language

Aspects of feelings towards Azerbaijani	Positions				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Azerbaijani is a likable and beautiful language.	76%	18%	5%	1%	0%
Our community should transfer Azerbaijani to future generations.	60%	31%	9%	0%	0%
Azerbaijani is vital to our identity and existence.	64%	25%	3%	2%	5%
The use of Azerbaijani helps me succeed and be proud.	49%	23%	15%	10%	1%
Azerbaijani should be encouraged and used in all situations.	31%	24%	23%	19%	3%

The emotional tendency in favor of the Azerbaijani language seems to be very strong. However, in expressing their positions regarding the aspects that are closer to the practical application of language use in real-life contexts, the participants seem to be rather hesitant as, in recommending the use of Azerbaijani in *all situations*, more than 45% of the respondents were either unsure or expressed their disagreement. This is probably because *all situations* is understood to include areas like education and media that the participants hardly find Azerbaijani fully fit for, as will be seen in the following sections. The more in-depth accounts of the participants' perspectives expressed in interviews also confirm the strong positive feeling of these Azerbaijani speakers towards their language. Showing patterns similar to those emerging from the questionnaire data, interviews also illustrate very strong emotional attitudes towards the language as well as some rather neutral positions.

In stating positive feelings towards the language, the interviewees refer to features such as the “sweetness” of the language and its communicative applicability in other countries including in communication “*with many people in Europe*”. They also state emotional attitudes such as having “*grown up with the language*” and their desire to “*to pass it on to children*” in order to protect their “*rich culture*”. There are also some heated emotional positions like the view of one of the participants that expresses “*a strong tendency towards Azerbaijani language*” and states that: “*I am not interested in speaking the Persian language at all.*” The two interview excerpts below are further examples of such feelings towards Azerbaijani (translation of original interviews in Azerbaijani):

- *My language is like my mother, I would never let anyone or any culture take it from me...*
- *... [even] if we lost everything in our life, we wouldn't lose our language.*

The emotional *language–mother* analogy and the defensive position against the loss of the language might be indicative of a vague sense of threat from the official language and/or foreign languages. However, not all participants are so ardent about their local language. Some participants do refer to notions like “*mother tongue*”, having “*grown up with*” the language, and feeling “*more comfortable to speak Azerbaijani*”, but their main position, put simply, is that: “*I have no problems with speaking in other languages*”. They tend to maintain that the language one speaks is not really important and that what matters is “*being able to communicate with the world*”. One of the participants even goes as far as denying any sense of specific belonging or emotion towards Azerbaijani by stating that: “*I don’t think my language has priority over other languages*”. Nonetheless, the overall positive attitude of the interviewed participants can be confidently judged to be strong enough, as in the case of positions depicted by the questionnaire data.

5.2 Family

In actual domains of language use, everyday conversation with family members is an important area as it may be associated with the expression of people’s most intimate feelings. Therefore, views towards the preferred language in family communication may indicate some of the most deeply residing perceptions about language use. The questionnaire section focusing on this domain asked respondents about their position on the appropriateness of the use of Azerbaijani in communicating with different members of their family. As shown in Table 2, agreement or strong agreement in this regard is almost unanimously expressed in the case of talking with parents, that is, the older generation. With siblings, the spouse, and extended family members, agreement or strong agreement considerably shapes about 91%, 89%, and 93%, respectively. In the case of the appropriateness of Azerbaijani in talking to the younger generation, however, a relatively smaller proportion of about 77% of the participants adopt such a position.

Table 2. Positions towards language use in family conversations

Family members	Positions				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Parents	84%	15%	0%	0%	1%
Siblings	77%	14%	2%	7%	0%
Spouse	76%	13%	5%	3%	2%
Relatives	73%	20%	4%	1%	2%
Children	60%	17%	7%	8%	8%

There appears to be a very high tendency towards the application of the language in communicating with various members of the immediate and extended family. However, opting for the Azerbaijani language as the language of talking to one’s children is not as strongly supported as in the case of other family members. Although more than three quarters of the participants do prefer Azerbaijani as the language of communication with their children, the vitality of the issue of transferring the language to the next generation makes it important to be sensitive to the relatively small size of this figure. Interviews also indicate that the participants obviously prefer Azerbaijani as their family language, not only because they feel more at-home with it but also, for a conscious attention to keeping the language vibrant.

One point mentioned by several participants in their interviews is the convenience of expressing ideas in their local language. This is noticed when they state that: “*I can express my thoughts and words better*”; “*we can convey meanings better*”; and even “*there are some words and expressions in the Azerbaijani language which cannot be expressed in other languages*”. Moreover, one participant seems to consciously consider the concern of preserving the local language in communicating with family members in Azerbaijani: “*The least that I can do to save my language is speaking it with my family members.*” The case of children that appears to stand out in questionnaire data, receives special attention in interviews, too. Although there are

indications of the importance of teaching “*this language and culture to children*”, probably it is the concern over language-life in a linguistically challenging national and international situation that raises positions like: “*I would teach other languages to my children beside this language.*”

5.3 Religion

The next domain of language use examined in this study is the preferred language in different involvements related to religious practices, rituals, and ceremonies. The questionnaire respondents were asked about the degree to which they agreed with the suitability of Azerbaijani language in five different types of religion-related usage. As Table 3 illustrates, in mourning for religious leaders, celebrations, and speeches, about 88%, 76%, and 75% agree or strongly agree with the application of the Azerbaijani language. Praying (*Do'a*) by Muslims is in many cases performed in Arabic, and perhaps that is why a smaller group of about 55% view Azerbaijani as the appropriate language for praying. Finally, in the case of books on religion only about 48% of the participants find it appealing to write and read religious books in Azerbaijani. This might be an indication of the concern that, despite the strong positive feelings towards the language, in more formal contexts of language use Azerbaijani speakers may be hesitant about the use of their language and may probably prefer the more established religious language of Arabic (as the language of original religious scripts) or the official language of Farsi (as the language of almost all contemporary written texts of religious instruction).

Table 3. Positions towards language use in the domain of religion

Aspects of religious language use	Positions				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Religious mourning	47%	41%	8%	4%	0%
Religious celebrations	35%	41%	16%	8%	0%
Religious speech	34%	41%	16%	9%	0%
Praying (<i>Do'a</i>)	33%	23%	20%	20%	4%
Religious books	15%	33%	23%	23%	5%

The interviewed participants clarify some aspects of the positions reflected in questionnaire data. Recognizing that the language of Islam is Arabic, there is hardly any indication of the tendency to view Azerbaijani as the language of religion as such. It is not believed to be the right language of traditional Islamic texts “*due to the fact that they have been in Arabic since the beginning of Islam*” and Arabic is “*the language of the Holy Quran*”. However, the interviewees in some cases prefer Azerbaijani in praying (*Do'a*), in religious ceremonies and mourning, and even in thinking about the Quran, since it is believed to help with “*deeper comprehension*” and “*deep impression*”. More examples of this position are reflected in the following interview data excerpts:

- *...having religious matters in other languages seems intangible to us and for comprehending them we need first to translate them in our mind...*
- *Praying in our mother tongue, we can grasp the meaning of what we say to Allah better, so we can feel closeness to him...*

5.4 Education

In the domain of education, five different applications of language in educational matters were focused on: general conversations at school, classroom instruction, textbooks, school projects and homework, and tests and exams. Positions in favor of the use of Azerbaijani for these purposes are clearly not as

strong as those for the two domains of language use discussed above. Apart from the 80% agreement or strong agreement with the use of the local language in general conversations at school, which are not educational activities as such, the other overtly-educational activities are seen by only about half or less than half of the participants to be appropriate venues of Azerbaijani language use. In the case of classroom instruction, 59% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the use of Azerbaijani but in the case of textbooks, homework, and exams the figures are 38%, 35%, and 22% respectively, as seen in Table 4. Like the case of language use for religious purposes, more sophisticated and technical issues of textbooks, projects, and tests are not easily perceived to be properly functioning with the use of this language.

Table 4. Position towards language use in education

Aspects of language use in education	Positions				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
General conversations	55%	25%	10%	7%	3%
Classroom instruction	26%	33%	10%	26%	4%
Textbooks	16%	22%	19%	33%	10%
Projects and homework	12%	23%	23%	32%	10%
Tests and exams	9%	13%	22%	42%	14%

Interviews illustrate an overall support for the teaching of Azerbaijani as a school subject but provide indications of why a considerable proportion of the questionnaire respondents have reservations regarding the appropriateness of the language for educational activities and involvements. Some of the interviewees compare their language situation with other multilingual parts of the world by referring to “*many countries in the world*” and “*countries with different languages in which each state has education in its own language.*” They also seem to be interested in being “*able to read and write*” in their “*our own language*”. Moreover, a few participants strongly support the position that “*the language of education at both schools and universities must be the Azerbaijani language*”. In line with such standpoints, one participant mentioned that:

- *Books in our own language should be included in our education as well. For instance, Shahriar is an Azerbaijani poet but unfortunately most of us are unable to read his poems written in Azerbaijani.*

Nevertheless, the participants have reservations about the language of education in their bilingual community. In addition to neutral positions stated by those who believed that the language of education “*doesn’t make any difference*”, there are several participants who state that while “*Azerbaijani should be valued*”, students “*should be*” educated in “*Farsi, the national language of our country*”. Moreover, “*education only in the Azerbaijani language*” is not supported based on the argument that in a period of time when people need to communicate in a changing world, knowing one language does not suffice and “*Farsi, English, etc. should be taught to students*”.

5.5 Media

The final domain which we explored is language use in media. Participants were specifically asked about their position regarding the use of the Azerbaijani language in television/radio news, documentaries, movies, newspapers, and the internet. As Table 5 illustrates, about 66% of the participants agree or strongly agree that television/radio news programs should be broadcast in Azerbaijani. As for documentaries and movies, these figures are about 55% and 52% respectively. In the case of written media the tendency towards the use of the Azerbaijani language is clearly lower than the audio-visual media. About 31% agree or strongly agree with its use in newspapers and only 19% in the case of the internet.

Table 5. Position towards language use in media

Types of media	Positions				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
TV/radio news	31%	35%	14%	11%	9%
Documentaries	25%	30%	16%	18%	11%
Movies	32%	20%	19%	19%	10%
Newspapers	19%	12%	24%	32%	13%
Internet	10%	9%	29%	34%	18%

Perspectives reflected in interviews depict further aspects of the positions regarding the use of Azerbaijani in different media. There are strong positions supporting the broadcast of television programs “*all in the Azerbaijani language*” at the same time that the official national language is also acknowledged. For the Azerbaijani-speaking audience, some interviewees believe, “*having TV programs in this language would be much better*”. However, there are opposing positions as well, either based on the personal taste of those who do not “*enjoy watching any programs in Azerbaijani*” or based on the argument that “*the national language of our country is Farsi*” and that “*most Azerbaijani people are bilingual*” and they understand Farsi. In the case of the internet, as also seen in the questionnaire-based findings presented above, Azerbaijani is not largely seen as a suitable language for this kind of media and it is argued that “*it is an international medium and a national or international language is required for that*”.

6 Conclusion

The bodies of data explored in the study depict a two-sided image of the attitude of our research participants towards the Azerbaijani language. On the one hand, the participants showed strong positive *emotional attitudes* and *feelings* towards Azerbaijani by stating that they like it, are proud of it, see it as part of their identity, and believe it should be transferred to future generations. It is this positive side of the attitudes that gives rise to heated expressions like “*my language is like my mother*”. Milder versions of such perceptions are also expressed regarding some aspects of the four domains of language use investigated in the study: in the domain of family conversations, Azerbaijani is almost unanimously preferred as the language of talking with parents; in the domain of religious language use, less than five percent of the participants disagree with the use of Azerbaijani in religious mourning ceremonies; in education, only about ten percent disagree with its use as the language of general conversations at school; and in media, only twenty percent of the participants see it inappropriate as the language of news on television and radio.

On the other hand, apparently conflicting attitudes are observed regarding the use of Azerbaijani in certain areas of different language use domains. As the discussion of the findings based on the questionnaires and the interview data shows, there are some hesitations about an all-out support of the use of Azerbaijani in all situations. This is partially in line with the positions of participants in a study on Mazandarani, another local language in Iran, who also expressed “*emotionally very positive orientations towards their local language in terms of viewing it as loveable and relating it to their identity*” but their position on their preferred language for actual functional purposes appeared “*to be all but in favor of a full embracement of Farsi as the dominant language of use in almost all areas of social life*” (Mirhosseini 2015: 165).

Change in language situation is viewed as a natural and inevitable phenomenon and judging the direction of language change as *progress* or *decay* is known to be hard (Aitchison 2013). Moreover, the more specific concerns of language attitudes are complicated both in terms of behavior as well as deep residing ideologically-loaded mentalities (Garrett 2010; Garrett et al. 2003; Ostler 2011; Potowski 2013). Therefore, these complex and somehow conflicting attitudes towards Azerbaijani are by no means easy to interpret. Nonetheless, against a backdrop of the overall positive attitudes, a focus on particular spots of language use domains in which the language appeared to be judged as the least appropriate, might provide hints at some aspects of the circulating language attitudes possibly along with insights on more deep-seated

linguistic culture (Schiffman 1996, 2006) and conscious or unconscious language ideologies (Schieffelin et al. 1998; Wortham 2002) in the bilingual context of concern.

Beginning with the emotional attitudes towards the Azerbaijani language, next to the impressive endorsement of the beauty and likability of the language, the participants appear to be hesitant in supporting its functionality in *all situations*. In the domain of family conversations, along an almost total favor of Azerbaijani in talking to the older generation, about a quarter of the participants are hesitant about or even against the use of the language in talking to their children. Moreover, in the case of religious books, less than half of the participants strongly agree or agree with the use of Azerbaijani, and for print media and the internet the figure is about a quarter. In the case of education, especially with regard to educational texts and materials, the conflict with the backdrop of positive emotional attitudes is even more obvious. This can illustrate a milder version of the positions of Mazandarani speakers in the study mentioned above. In that case, despite an almost unanimous sentimental favor of the local language, its use in education was almost unanimously disapproved of (Mirhosseini 2015).

One might understand such a mix of attitudes as reflecting traditionally-rooted sentiments in favor of the language but at the same time various degrees of struggling tendencies towards modernist constructs like education and media that may imply a need for some level of detachment from strict adherence to the *mother tongue*. At least within the scope of this early exploratory research in an urban center, one may understand that the Azerbaijani language is well respected despite the apparently all-influencing processes of globalization and standardization accompanied by the effects of modernization, a monolingual educational system, and mass media. At the same time, in light of the understanding that the number of speakers alone is not the most important element in gaging the safe status of a language, and considering the vital role of the intergenerational transmission of language in this regard (Barrena et al. 2007), there appears to be a need for not taking the safety of the language for granted. More profound explorations and understandings of the life of the Azerbaijani language may be needed in an age of rapid erosion of language varieties to create more awareness on the part of the bilingual community of Azerbaijani speakers in Iran to continue to cherish and *live* their language.

References

- Agha, Asif. 2007. *Language and social relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ahmadi-pour, Tahereh. 2011. Toward a framework of national language policy (In Farsi). *Zabanshenakht (Language Studies)* 2(1), pp. 1–16.
- Aitchison, Jean. 2013. *Language change: Progress or decay?* (4th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Appel, Rene and Pieter Muysken. 1987. *Language contact and bilingualism*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Baker, Colin. 1992. *Attitudes and language*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Bangeni, Bongsi and Rochelle Kapp. 2007. Shifting language attitudes in linguistically diverse learning environment in South Africa. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 28(4), pp. 253–269.
- Bani-Shoraka, Helena. 2005. Code-switching and preference marking: Disagreement in Persian/Azerbaijani bilingual conversation. In Cohen, James, Kara McAlister, Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan (eds.), *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, pp. 186–198.
- Barrena, Andoni, Esti Amorrortu, Ane Ortega, Belen Uranga, Esti Izagirre, and Itziar Idiazabal. 2007. Does the number of speakers of a language determine its fate? *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* no. 186, pp.125–139.
- Bashirnejad, Hassan. 2004. Iranian local languages and the danger of extinction (In Farsi). *Farhang-e Mardom-e Iran (Culture of Iranian People)* 2(5-6), pp. 65–84.
- Bashirnejad, Hassan. 2007. Iranian local languages and the future horizon (In Farsi). *Zaban va Zabanshenasi (Language and Linguistics)* 3(1), pp. 115–126.
- Bell, Jeanie. 2013. Language attitudes and language revival/survival. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 34(4), pp. 399–410.
- Blommaert, Jan. (ed.). 1999. *Language ideological debates*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Blommaert, Jan. 2003. Commentary: A sociolinguistics of globalization. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7(4), pp. 607–623.
- Brubaker, Brian Lee. 2003. Language attitudes and identity in Taiwan. Unpublished Master’s Thesis. University of Pittsburgh, USA.
- Cargile, Aaron and Howard Giles. 1998. Understanding language attitudes: Exploring listener affect and identity. *Language and Communication* 17(3), pp. 195–217.

- Cavanaugh, Jillian. 2013. Language ideologies and language attitudes: A linguistic anthropological perspective. In Auer, Peter, Javier Reina, and Goz Kaufmann (eds.), *Language variation - European perspectives IV*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 45–56.
- Chakrani, Brahim. 2013. The impact of the ideology of modernity on language attitudes in Morocco. *The Journal of North African Studies* 18(3), pp. 431–442.
- Choi, Jinny. 2003. Language attitudes and the future of bilingualism: The case of Paraguay. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 6(2), pp. 81–94.
- Coffey, Amanda, and Paul Atkinson. 1996. *Making sense of qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coupland, Nikolas. (2003). Introduction: Sociolinguistics and globalization. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7(4), pp. 465–472.
- Dehghani, Yavar. 2000. *A grammar of Iranian Azari, including comparisons with Persian*. Munich: Lincom Europa.
- Ethnologue. 2015. Azerbaijani: A macrolanguage of Iran. Retrieved on April 13, 2015, from <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/aze>
- Fasold, Ralph. 1984. *The sociolinguistics of society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ferrer, Raquel and David Sankoff. 2003. Identity as the primary determinant of language choice in Valencia. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7(1), pp. 50–64.
- Fishman, Joshua. 1991. *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Fishman, Joshua. 1996. What do you lose when you lose your language? In: Cantoni, Gina (ed.), *Stabilizing indigenous languages*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University, pp. 80–91.
- Fishman, Joshua. 2013. Language maintenance, language shift, and reversing language shift. In Bhatia, Tej, and William Ritchie (eds.), *The handbook of bilingualism and multilingualism* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 466–494.
- Gao, Fang and Park, Jae. 2012. Korean-Chinese parents' language attitudes and additive bilingual education in China. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 33(6), pp. 539–552.
- Garrett, Peter. 2010. *Attitudes to languages*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Garrett, Peter, Nikolas Coupland and Angie Williams. 2003. *Investigating language attitudes: Social meanings of dialect, ethnicity and performance*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Ghamari, Mohammad Reza and Mohammad Hassanzadeh. 2010. The role of language in national identity (In Farsi). *Zaban Pazhuhi (Language Research)* 2(3), pp. 153–172.
- Grenoble, Lenore. 2013. Language revitalization. In Bayley, Robert, Richard Cameron, and Ceil Lucas (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 792–811.
- Haddadian-Moghaddam, Esmaeil and Reine Meylaerts. 2015. What about translation? Beyond “Persianization” as the language policy in Iran. *Iranian Studies* 48(6), pp. 851–870.
- Hale, Ken. 1998. On endangered languages and the importance of linguistic diversity. In Grenoble, Lenore, and Lindsay Whaley (eds.), *Endangered languages: Language loss and community response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 192–216.
- Hoare, Rachel. (2001). An integrative approach to language attitudes and identity in Brittany. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5(1), pp. 73–84.
- Hogan-Brun, Gabrielle and Meilut Ramonien. 2005. Perspectives on language attitudes and use in Lithuania's multilingual setting. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 26(5), pp. 425–441.
- Huguët, Angel, Cecilio Lapresta and Jose Madariaga. 2008. A study on language attitudes towards regional and foreign languages by school children in Aragon, Spain. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 5(4), pp. 275–293.
- Ihemere, Kelechukwu. 2006. An integrated approach to the study of language attitudes and change in Nigeria: The case of the Ikwerre of Port Harcourt City. In Arasanyin, Olaoba and Michael Pemberton (eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 36th annual conference on African linguistics*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, pp. 194–207.
- Iranbonyad. 2015. Bibliography of research on old languages of Azerbaijan (In Farsi). Retrieved on May 14, 2015, from <http://www.iranbonyad.ir/index.php/zaban-parsi/zaban-pajohi/65-2014-08-05-07-25-04>
- Lai, Mee Ling. 2010. Social class and language attitudes in Hong Kong. *International Multilingual Research Journal* 4(2), pp. 83–106.
- Lee, Sooman Noah. 1996. A grammar of Iranian Azerbaijani. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. University of Sussex, UK.
- Makihara, Miki and Bambi Schieffelin. (eds.). 2007. *Consequences of contact: Language ideologies and sociocultural transformations in Pacific societies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Markaz-e Amar-e Iran (Iran Statistics Center). 2011. The General Census of 1390. (www.amar.org.ir)
- Marszałek-Kowalewska, Katarzyna. 2011. Iranian language policy: A case of linguistic purism. *Investigationes Linguisticae* (Vol. XXII) (pp. 90–103). Retrieved on December 5, 2015 from www.staff.amu.edu.pl/~inveling/pdf/Marszalek-Kowalewska%2022.pdf
- Milory, James. 2001. Language ideologies and the consequences of standardization. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5(4), pp. 530–555.
- Mirhosseini, Seyyed-Abdolhamid. 2015. Loving but not living the vernacular: A glimpse of Mazandarani-Farsi linguistic culture in northern Iran. *Language Problems and Language Planning* 39(2), pp. 154–170.

- Modirkhamene, Sima and Charles Mann. 2010. *EFL learners' additional language proficiency and academic achievement*. Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.
- Mufwene, Salikoko. 2008. *Language evolution: Contact, competition and change*. London: Continuum.
- Nelda, Peter. 1987. Language contact means language conflict. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 8(1-2), pp. 33–42.
- Omniglot. 2015. Azerbaijani. Retrieved on April 13, 2015, from <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/azeri.htm>
- Ostler, Nicholas. 2011. Language maintenance, shift and endangerment. In *Cambridge handbook of sociolinguistics*. Mesthrie, Raj and Walt Wolfram (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 315–334.
- Papapavlou, Andreas. 2001. Mind your speech: Language attitudes in Cyprus. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 22(6), pp. 491–501.
- Potowski, Kim. 2013. Language maintenance and shift. In Bayley, Robert, Richard Cameron, and Ceil Lucas (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press, pp. 321–339.
- Redinger, Daniel. 2010. Language attitudes and code-switching behaviour in a multilingual educational context: The Case of Luxembourg. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of York, UK.
- Romaine, Suzanne. 1995. *Bilingualism* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Safaei Asl, Esmaeil. 2013. Multilingualism in Iran; Unity or pluralism? (A case study in East Azerbaijan Province). *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3(18), pp. 83–88.
- Samar, Reza Ghafar, Hossein Navidinia, and Mehdi Mehrani. 2010. Globalization, standardization, and dialect leveling in Iran. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies* 2(1), pp. 17–30.
- Santello, Marco. (2015). Bilingual idiosyncratic dimensions of language attitudes. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 18(1), pp. 1–25.
- Schieffelin, Bambi, Kathryn Woolard, and Paul Kroskrity. (eds.). 1998. *Language ideologies: Practice and theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schiffman, Harold. 1996. *Linguistic culture and language policy*. London: Routledge.
- Schiffman, Harold. 2006. Language policy and linguistic culture. In Ricento, Thomas (ed.), *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 111–125.
- Shahidi-Tabar, Mostafa and Hooshang Yazdani. 2013. A sociolinguistic study of Turkish: Sahand villages in Zanjan. *Review of History and Political Science* 1(1), pp. 26–36.
- Shameem, Nikhat. 2004. Language attitudes in multilingual primary schools in Fiji. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 17(2), pp. 154–172.
- Thompson, Irene. 2013. About world languages: Azerbaijani. Retrieved on April 13, 2015, from <http://aboutworldlanguages.com/azerbaijani>
- Vandhosseini, Mina. 2013. Phoneme selection between /r/ and /j/ in Miandoab dialect (of Azerbaijani). *Iranian Journal of Linguistics* 24(2), pp. 105–116.
- Wendel, John, and Patrick Heinrich. 2012. A framework for language endangerment dynamics: The effects of contact and social change on language ecologies and language diversity. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* no. 218, pp.145–166.
- Wheeler, Eric. 2015. A framework for studying languages in contact: A prolegomenon to a theory. *The International Journal of Bilingualism* 61(1), pp. 75–86.
- Withers, Andrea. 2004. Hmong Language and cultural Maintenance in Merced City, California. *Bilingual Research Journal* 28(3), pp. 425–461.
- Woolard, Kathryn, and Bambi Schieffelin. 1994. Language ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23(1), pp. 55–82.
- Wortham, Stanton. 2001. Language ideology and educational research. *Linguistics and Education* 12(2), pp. 253–259.
- Zhou, Mingalang. 1999. The official national language and language attitudes of three ethnic minority groups in China. *Language Problems and Language Planning* 23(2), pp. 157–174.