Original Paper

Gilaki: From Language Regimes into Minoritizing

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Abstract

The effects of language contact depend on many different factors, such as language prestige, government and community support, people's preference, linguistic proximity of the languages, among other things. As such, while there are some broad potentially predictable outcomes in situations of language contact, it is important to analyze each language contact situation in its own context. The aim of this study is to examine the maintenance and social function of Gilaki in the city of Lahijan located in the province Gilan, Iran. This study also poses the question whether Gilaki is at risk of becoming an endangered language. The participants (N=395), students at a language center and their families, completed a questionnaire with 36 questions. The participants were grouped according to gender, age, educational background, occupation, and spouse's mother tongue based on a self-reported data collection style. The questionnaire, inspired by Parasher's model (1980), examined the participants' language use and preference in six social domains of family, friendship, neighborhood, transaction, education, and administration. The findings show statistically significant differences in the participants' preference toward Persian in all six social domains. This study contributes to the body of work in language contact of lesser analyzed languages and sheds light on the trajectory of minoritized languages.

Keywords

Gilaki, Persian, diglossia, bilingualism, minority and minoritized languages

1. Introduction

Without active support and efforts at maintenance, a decrease in the use of minority languages over time is common in bilingual and multilingual communities. It is critical for linguistic communities to increase awareness about the threat to minority languages that can lead to loss and death of these languages and to take steps toward language maintenance.

This study is set in the region of Gilan, Iran, and fills a gap in the literature by adding important sociolinguistic information about a little-studied language and region. More specifically, the study explores the language use and preference of Gilaki speakers in the city of Lahijan located in the province of Gilan, in the formal domains of education, transaction, and administration, as well as the informal domains of family, friendship, and neighborhood. The study further examines the effects of gender, age, educational background, occupation, and spouse's mother tongue in choosing between Persian and Gilaki among the population of Lahijan.

A review of the literature reveals that there are few studies on Gilaki, and they mostly address information regarding the nature and structure of the language (Esmailnejad Nodehi et al., 2021; Rastorgueva et al., 2012). Moving outside the region of Gilan, there are some studies on the usage of Persian and other minority languages in some other provinces of Iran. These have tended to indicate an increase in spoken Persian compared to the other languages of the area; and some are more in the nature of thesis studies on minority languages, such as Luri (Sanaee Moghadam, 1999), Bakhtiyari (Shahbakhsh, 2000), Gilaki (Mashayekh, 2003), Tonekaboni (Zandi et al., 2011), Ardabili (Zandi et al., 2015). Studies on minority languages in Iran show that Persian is the dominant language of the region, and many minority languages have become endangered (Fereidoni, 2003; Mashayekh, 2003; Sanaee Moghadam, 1999).

Languages in Iran

Iran, with a population of 88,580,516, has significant language diversity, there being eighty-six actively spoken languages. These are primarily Indo-Iranian languages, belonging to the Indo-European language family. The formal language of Iran is Persian (also known as Farsi). The name *Persian* comes from *Pars*, the area around *Persepolis* on the southwestern edge of the Iranian Plateau. In the middle of the seventh century, Arabic-speaking powers occupied the country, and the language was gradually changed by the influence of Arabic. Later, the word *pars* changed to *fars* because Arabic has no /p/ consonant in its alphabet, and the name of the language shifted from *Parsi* to *Farsi* as well. English speakers use both "Farsi" and "Persian" to refer to the language spoken in Iran. Technically speaking, Farsi is an endonym, namely the name of the language in that language. Persian, an exonym, is the name of the language spoken in Iran that should be used when speaking English. Other examples of endonyms and exonyms are "Deutsch" vs. "German" and "Magyar" vs. "Hungarian." Farsi is more commonly used outside of academia, and Persian is more commonly used in academic publications. It is also interesting to note that in the1980s, the International Society for Iranian Studies declared a formal position against the use of the word Farsi in English (Spooner, 2012). In this study, we will call the language spoken in Iran "Persian".

Persian has gone through significant changes since the 1930s, when Arabic vocabulary and loan words began to be introduced into the language, largely for political reasons. This Arabicized standard language has turned into the language of education, multimedia, trades, politics, and almost every

formal language mode of the country. Although Persian and Arabic use the same alphabet, they are not even from the same language groups and families; Persian belongs to the Indo-Iranian family, while Arabic is a Semitic language from the Afro-Asiatic language family. Persian is the only official language in Iran, and though Article Fifteen of the Iranian Constitution mandates that minority languages and their literature be used in mass media (Mirvahedi, 2012), their representation is very rare.

The most spoken languages of Iran are Persian (62.1% of speakers), Azari (13.6%), Kurdish (7%), Gilaki (3%), Mazandarani (2.8%), Baloochi (2.4%), Arabic (1.6%), Qashqai (1.2%), Tati (1.1%), Turkmani (0.9%), and Taleshi (0.4%). Other minority languages – each with a population of less than 0.2% – include Armenian, Georgian, Neo-Aramaic, and Khuzestani Arabic (Anonby et al., 2020; Moradi, 2019).

Gilan and the Gilaki Language

The term language can be defined in different ways, and there are still debates around the concepts of language and dialect. Language can be defined as a standard form with official significance in the context of nation and state (Dalby, 2002); as the variety spoken in urban centers and that has political power (Pakpour, 2015); or as a collection of dialects (Coulmas, 2005). In contrast, Wardhaugh (1987) describes a dialect as informal, rural, or lower-class speech, standing outside the language and excluded from polite society. Although different definitions exist, most linguists agree that language varieties exist on a continuum. For its part, despite some similarities to Persian due to language contact, Gilaki is in an independent language (Owens, 2015), and its speakers are bilingual speakers of Persian and Gilaki.

There are thirty-one provinces in Iran. The Gilak people, an Iranian ethnic group native to the northern Iranian province of Gilan, live in the southern and southwestern coastal regions of the Caspian Sea. There are a total of sixteen cities in the region of Gilan. Gilaks call themselves Gilani which means "from Gilan." In this study, Gilak refers to the people who speak Gilaki in the Gilan province or any other region.

Gilaki is part of the Caspian subgroup of Northwest Iranian languages and includes two groups of dialects in the west and east of the Gilan province of Iran (Stilo, 2001). Furthermore, the Gilaki language includes several dialects that are different enough to make communication among Gilaki speakers challenging. More than 2.8 million Iranians are Gilaki speakers (Simons & Fennig, 2017). Persian reigns in Iran as the language of schooling, trades, and media, and it is becoming more common across all social domains (Fereidoni, 2003; Mashayekh, 2003; Rastorgueva et al., 2012; Sanaee Moghadam, 1999; Shahbakhsh, 2000; Zandi et al., 2011). One study indicates that over 75% of secondary school students use only Persian in all contexts of their everyday life (Rezayati Kishekhaleh & Hamidoost, 2014).

In an effort toward minority language maintenance Gilaki Cultural Association (Anjoman-e Farhangi Gilaki) was founded in 1995. This organization is dedicated to promoting and preserving Gilaki culture and language. It conducts research on Gilaki language and culture, organizes cultural events and festivals, and works to raise awareness about the importance of Gilaki language and culture. Despite such efforts and other recent ones to support Gilaki in broadcast, local magazines, and regional arts, it is still not the common language in education and media of the people of Gilan. The Iranian government only recognizes Persian as the official language and excludes education in other languages. As a result, there are no Gilaki classes or courses at schools and universities, and none of the teachers and professors teach in Gilaki. This is not unexpected, as speakers of non-dominant languages often display a preference for the dominant language and use it in educational, cultural, and multi-dimensional interactions for the sake of social status or sociolinguistic identity. It is not uncommon for parents to encourage their children to speak Persian in all domains. So, it is with Gilaki: speakers of all ages may avoid using it in social and educational communication because of its low status (Mirshahidi, 2017).

Even though Persian and Gilaki are two distinct languages, both are Indo-Iranian, and due to this shared origin as well as language contact over many centuries, we find many similarities between them. Persian, the official language of Iran, includes 23 consonants and six vowels in its alphabet. The Persian vowels are /æ/, /e/, /o/, /ɒː/, /iː/ and /uː/. Gilaki's consonants are the same as in Persian, but the vowel system in Gilaki is somewhat more complicated to summarize due to many dialectal variations. According to Rastorgueva et al. (2012), Gilaki includes the following vowels: close (/i/, /iː/, /u/, /uː/), mid (/e/, /ə/, /o/), and open (/a/, /ɒ/). Persian and Gilaki words follow this pattern: the Persian /æ/ changes into /e/ in Gilaki (e.g., Gilaki /khək/ vs. Persian /khak/ for "soil") or Persian /e/ into Gilaki /i/ (e.g., Gilaki /dil/ vs. Persian /del/ for "heart"). The Persian /o/ changes into /u/ in Gilaki (e.g., Gilaki /durust/ vs. Persian /dorost/ for "correct") (Rastorgueva et al., 2012).

The general structure of Gilaki's syntax is more like English than Persian. The word order in Persian is Subject-Object-Verb (SOV), and the adjectives come after noun, while in Gilaki adjectives are before noun as English. (Persian: "Man ketâb-e âbi-râ didam"; Gilaki: "âbi ketâb-e -bedem" for "I saw the blue book"). The nouns can be made plural by the suffix (hâ), and a plural noun does not change its form (Persian: "*se tâ ketâb*"; Gilaki: "*Su te ketâb*" for "three books"). In Persian, possession is made by adding suffixes to nouns; the same suffixes can also be used as object pronouns. For the third person, these are gender-neutral (unlike in English). For example, (*ketābaš*) could mean "his book" or "her book", while in Gilaki (as in English) the possessive object can come before the noun (*une ketāb*). The possession in Persian can also be expressed by prepositions: *ketāb-e šomā ru-ye miz e* "your book is on the table". Unlike Persian, in Gilaki, the structure of preposition and noun is like English: *ti ketāb miz e sar nay.* Other syntactic differences between Persian and Gilaki are not limited to but can include these examples:

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English: Go home (Verb + Noun)

Gilaki: Boshu Khone (Verb + Noun)

Persian: Be Khane boro (Preposition + Noun + Verb)

Use of possessive adjectives or prepositions in Gilaki follows the English pattern rather than that of the equivalent Persian words:

English: My house

Gilaki: Mi Khane

Persian: Khane ye man

It is the same for the adjective/noun pattern, which is like English in Gilaki rather than like Persian:

English: big house (adj + N.)

Gilaki : polo khane (adj + N.)

Persian: khane ye bozorg (N. + Preposition + adj.)

As can be inferred from the last example, when some words between the two languages are similar, it is easy for there to be miscommunication between Persian and Gilaki speakers. The word "khane" is the same in both, but a Persian speaker will not know the meaning of the Gilaki /polo/ as "big".

In most Gilaki verb patterns, there is a prefix, infix, or suffix added that may completely change the meaning. For example, "Did you eat?" is "khordi?" in Persian versus "bokhordi?" in Gilaki. In some cases, the verbs in Persian and Gilaki may be completely different for the same concept. For example, "went" is "raft" in Persian and "bushu" in Gilaki. In these cases, there would be a lack of comprehension between the Persian speakers who are not familiar with Gilaki patterns for the different roots, lexical items, and grammatical structures.

Language Contact, Diglossia, and Bilingualism

Persian had a period of relatively less contact with other languages before the Arab Invasion of Iran. In the middle of the seventh century, with Arabs entering, the linguistic landscape of Iran changed dramatically (Marzban & Chahardahcherik, 2015). There are limited studies related to language contact in Iran, and most of them focus on the impact of Persian on minority languages and communities. In most minority languages, contact-induced structural change is evident on a gradual basis (Anonby et al., 2020). In situations of language contact, the minority language will start borrowing the lexicon, semantics, phonology, and syntax of the majority language, and over time, there will be a language shift (Gholami, 2020).

Diglossia, as defined in sociolinguistics, is a term used for communities in which two distinct varieties of one language have different functions and are used in different situations (Ferguson, 1959). Traditional diglossia involves communities that are much larger than a single speech community, and several languages or dialects may appear based on the needs of the communities (Snow, 2013). In diglossia, a certain, fixed form of language, called the primary language, lives with another valid language with rich literature and high cultural and social value. Often, the fixed or standard form of

language is acquired and used by formal education but not everyday conversations of any social group (Ferguson, 1959). The language of formal lectures, religious speeches, news, and many formal speech forms are different from the informal modes with family and friends for their specific communicative needs. In diglossia, a language or dialect may be intentionally used in a different form in various situations (Gumperz, 1972, 2009).

In Iran, two types of diglossia can be observed. The first one is characterized by High and Low varieties of the same language used in society, each having a distinct, complementary role (Ferguson, 1959; Holmes et al., 1993). This form of diglossia applies to the Persian language, in which two different written and spoken forms exist, depending on the formality of the situation. This is also known as diglossia without bilingualism. The social factors, the characteristics of the speakers, the topic of the speech, and the context of the conversation may have significant roles in the choice of High and Low varieties. Persian speakers use the High variety in formal settings, lectures, and media while using the Low variety in everyday conversations, informal communications, and business.

The other form, also known as diglossia with bilingualism or "extended diglossia" describes the co-existence of Persian and Gilaki (Fishman, 1967). Gilaki speakers can be called bilinguals as they are born and raised in bilingual families in which parents speak Gilaki at home but Persian in formal interactions of their daily life. Many Gilaki speakers, of course, may be also in the category of multilinguals, having become proficient in a foreign language like English and French or having been born to parents with native languages like Turkish or Kurdish.

Minority, Minoritized, and Endangered Languages

A language may gradually become endangered when the speakers use it less than before, when they use a High variety in educational and social domains, or when they fail to teach it to new generations. Iran, a country of many languages, has one standard language for schools, social interaction, and official business at the country level. Several languages spoken in Iran today are endangered, and unfortunately, there are no policies for them to be recorded, described, and ultimately, maintained (Gholami, 2020).

The number of speakers of a language is not the only measure of whether it is endangered. One predictable way minority languages become endangered is when younger generations cease to use it. Krauss (2015) ranks languages on a scale between "safe" and "extinct." In this system, the languages are evaluated according to degree of usage in various communities. In this evaluation, we can observe whether the language is spoken by all community members and all children, by only some children, by only parental generations, only grand-parental generations, or has no speakers anymore (Krauss, 2015). A "safe" language would be spoken at least by 5% of its population in educational, social, and multimedia domains. Languages spoken less than this can nevertheless remain "stable" if children use them at home with parents and siblings. A language that meets neither of these criteria but still has some native speakers is categorized as an "endangered" language (Krauss, 2015).

The rapid decrease in use of many minority languages in Iran is not principally due to voluntary

abandonment by their speakers but is mainly because of the linguistic policy of the country since the 1980s, that being promoting a standardized language across society to facilitate official and social relationships. On the one hand, this policy may indeed create language conformity, but on the other, it may lead to the gradual disappearance of some languages. If the language of a region is on the verge of disappearing, the whole linguistic community may be endangered. This is because a language is not merely the speaking and writing system of the community, but the fabric that undergirds social, cultural, religious, educational and many other aspects of a society. When minority languages receive little or no support from governments, it may be more accurate to call such languages *minoritized* languages. Such is the case with Gilaki.

The Domains of Study

The linguistic practices in monolingual and multilingual environments vary from community to community based on the communication needs of a population. Each member of a society can belong to more than one speech community, and it is possible that people join new speech communities and leave their old ones. Speech communities are based on factors including geography, religion, age, and gender; language speakers are immersed in a language from their first awareness of the world around them (Teemant & Pinnegar, 2019).

For this study, Fishman's (1972) use of the term "social domains" was adopted. He generalizes the term "domain" as a sort of grouping of social conditions (Fishman, 1972). For example, the six social domains used in the present study are family, friendship, neighborhood, transaction, education, and administration. The language choice was examined in these six social domains correlated with gender, age, educational background, occupation, and spouse's mother tongue. The research aimed to explore the answers to the questions as: what language do the speakers prefer to use in formal and informal conditions in Lahijan city? What gender, age, and educational groups speak Persian compared to other groups? Do the parents speak Persian or Gilaki to each other and their children? Do the factors of gender, age, educational background, occupation, and spouse's mother tongue have any effects on the speakers' choice of language?

The Context of Study

The participants of the study were selected from the city of Lahijan. Lahijan is in the eastern part of the Gilan province in Iran with an area of around 1470 square kilometers (551 square miles) and bordering on the Caspian Sea in the north. This city is called "The Bride of Gilan" because it is higher in elevation than other cities in the north of Iran. According to the public census of population and dwellings in 2016, the population of Lahijan was 167,544 (IDP, 2016).

2. Method

2.1 Participants and Instruments

In this study, 395 participants were selected from an educational setting, and a questionnaire that was inspired by Parasher's research model (1980) was distributed to the students and their families. The survey questions covered the six social domains of family, friendship, neighborhood, transaction, education, and administration. The domains were ranked from the most informal (i.e., family) to the most formal (i.e., administration). The questions allowed for answers with four adverbs of frequency, being always (4), often (3), sometimes (2), and never (1). A translation of the questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

Three hundred ninety-five completed questionnaires were received and analyzed in this study. The questionnaires were distributed on paper. The participants were selected from a language center where participants of all age groups, educational backgrounds, and occupations were represented. The researcher asked the language learners to read the questionnaires for illiterate participants if there were any in their families. The participants were grouped based on the factors of gender (male, female), age (under 10, 11-16, 17-25, 26-65, and over 65), educational background (illiterate, elementary school, middle school, high school, Associate of Arts/Science (A.A./ A.S.), Bachelor's degree (B.A./B.S.), Master's degree (M.A./ M.S.), and Ph.D.), occupation (business, education, administrative, other) and the mother tongue of spouse (Gilaki or non-Gilaki).

The language preference was analyzed by each domain of family, friendship, neighborhood, transaction, education, and administration. A code was selected for each factor of gender, age, educational background, spouse's mother tongue, and occupation. Two codes were designed for each of the questions: one for Persian and one for Gilaki. Participants were then asked to answer for both languages and choose one of the frequency adverbs for "A: Persian" and "B: Gilaki". Questions 1 through 6 focused on the family domain, questions 7 to 12 on friendship, questions 13 to 18 on the neighborhood, 19 to 24 on transaction, 25 to 30 on education, and questions 31 to 36 on administration. The purpose was to investigate the participants' language preference in these six target social domains of the study.

2.1.1 Data Analysis

Once the questionnaires were returned, the data were analyzed electronically by SPSS. Paired-Samples t-test, Independent-Samples t-test, and One-Way Analysis of Variance were applied for data analysis by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Three variables were assigned for the study including independent, dependent, and controlled variables. The independent variables were gender, age, educational background, occupation, and spouse's mother tongue. The role of these variables on language preference in different conditions was analyzed in different fields of the dependent variable that was the participants' preferred language. The controlled variable was the participants' mother tongue which was Gilaki. The data were analyzed in all the six domains. As the participants could

choose two codes, a Paired-Samples t-test was applied.

To understand the language preference according to the factors of gender, age, educational background, occupation, and spouse's mother tongue, One-Way Analysis of Variance was applied because there was a dependent variable (language preference) with five independent variables (gender, age, educational background, occupation, and spouse's mother tongue). The social domains were ranked from informal to formal, the raw data were analyzed in SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), and the results were represented in tables and figures. The data analysis represented the language preference in the six social domains of family, friendship, neighborhood, transaction, education, and administration.

3. Result

Persian and Gilaki in Six Social Domains

The average use of Gilaki and Persian in the six social domains as presented in Table and Figure 1 with the Paired-Samples t-test, shows a significant difference between the use of Persian and Gilaki in all domains of family, friendship, neighborhood, transaction, education, and administration ($p < 0.05$). Namely it is evident that in all domains Persian is used more than Gilaki. In the family domain, Persian is used the least, and Gilaki the most in comparison to other domains. In the education domain, Persian is used the most, and Gilaki the least in comparison to other domains.

Table 1. Paired Samples t-test for Language Choice in Social Domains

Variable	Persian		Gilaki					
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*		*t*	p-value
Family	3.08	1.12	1.92	1.12	394		10.26*	.000
Friendship	3.23	0.99	1.77	0.99	394		14.64*	.000
Neighborhood	3.20	0.98	1.79	0.99	392		14.24*	.000
Transaction	3.47	0.76	1.54	0.81	393		24.30*	.000
Education	3.70	0.55	1.31	0.59	383		40.89*	.000
Administration	3.46	0.84	1.54	0.86	380		22.00*	.000

* $p < 0.05$

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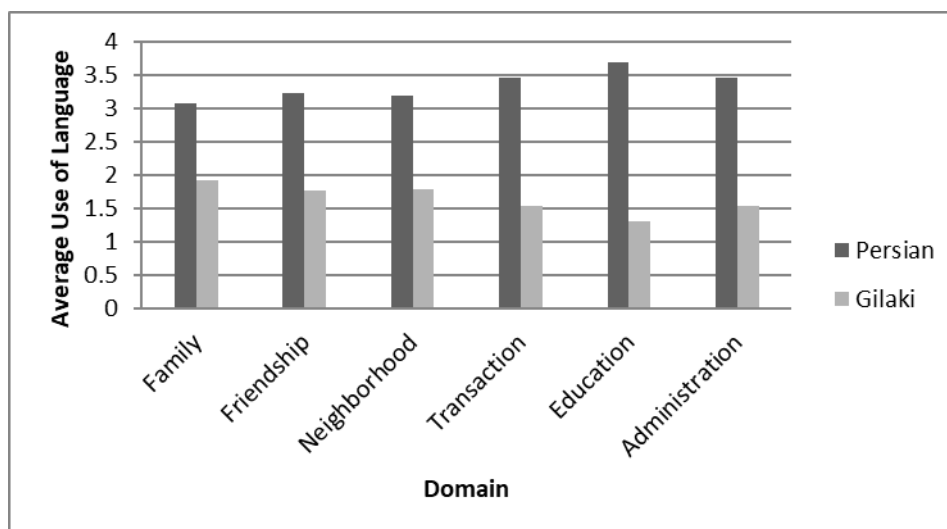

Figure 1. Average Use of Language in Six Social Domains

Language Preference and Gender in Different Domains

As presented in Table 2, Figures 2 and 3, there is a significant difference between the average use of Persian and Gilaki in men and women in all social domains ($p < 0.05$). In all these domains, women selected Persian more than men, and men used Gilaki more than women. In the educational domain, the difference in the use of Persian between men and women was less than other domains. In other words, both men and women used Persian in education more than the other domains.

Table 2. Independent Paired Samples t-test Based on Gender for Language Choice in Social Domains

Domain	Male		Female				
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	p-value
Family							
Persian	2.83	1.16	3.28	1.04	352	-4.01*	.000
Gilaki	2.18	1.16	1.72	1.05	354	4.01*	
Friendship							
Persian	2.90	1.08	3.49	0.82	318	-5.95*	.000
Gilaki	2.10	1.08	1.51	0.83	320	5.83*	
Neighborhood		1.02					
Persian	2.91	1.03	3.42	0.88	343	-5.15*	.000
Gilaki	2.04		1.58	0.89	343	4.69*	
Transaction		0.86					
Persian	3.20	0.92	3.68	0.61	303	-6.13*	.000
Gilaki	1.81		1.33	0.64	298	5.89*	

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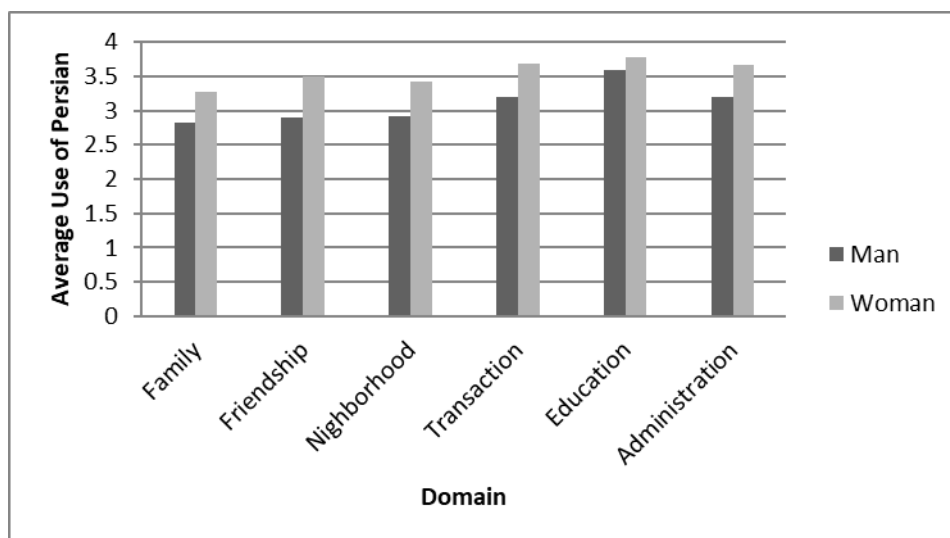|							
Education		0.64					
Persian	3.59	0.69	3.78	0.45	286	-3.32*	.000
Gilaki	1.42		1.23	0.50	290	2.98*	
Administration		0.96					
Persian	3.20	0.97	3.66	0.67	286	-5.29*	.000
Gilaki	1.80		1.34	0.69	290	5.24*	

* $p < 0.05$

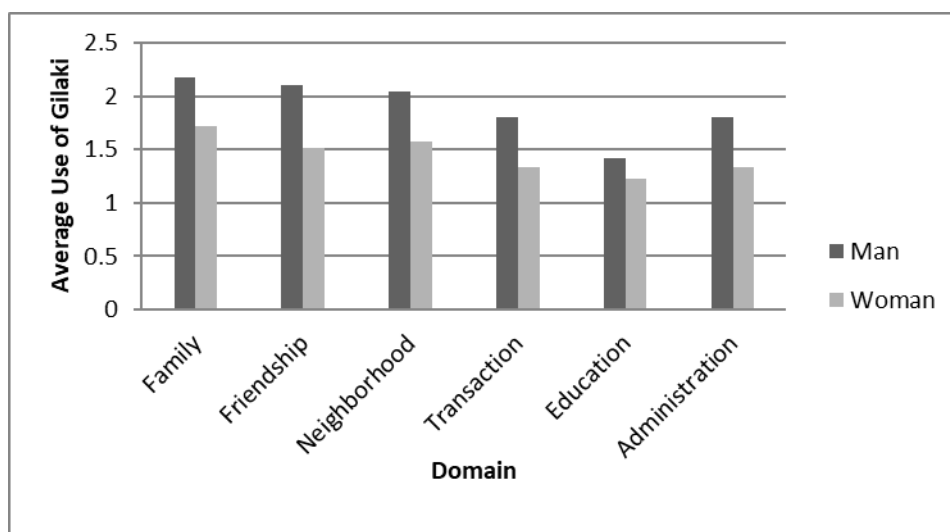**Figure 2. Average Use of Persian with Gender in Different Domains**

Figure 3. Average Use of Gilaki with Gender in Different Domains

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Language Use and Spouse's Mother Tongue in Different Domains

As presented in Table 3, Figures 4 and 5, the participants with Gilak spouses use Persian less than those with non-Gilak spouses. In other words, the participants with Gilak spouses use Gilaki more than those with non-Gilak spouses.

Table 3. Independent Paired Samples t-test with Spouse's Mother Tongue and Language Choice in Social Domains

| Domain | Non-Gilak | | | Gilak | | | | |
Variable	*M*	*SD*		*M*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	p-value
Family								
Persian	2.80	1.07		2.07	1.00	149	3.28*	.001
Gilaki	2.20	1.08		2.96	0.99	149	-3.45*	.001
Friendship								
Persian	3.06	1.07		2.37	0.96	149	3.18*	.002
Gilaki	1.88	1.06		2.65	0.98	149	-3.48*	.001
Neighborhood								
Persian	3.08	0.96		2.36	0.87	149	3.71*	.000
Gilaki	2.87	0.96		2.64	0.89	149	-3.87*	.000
Transaction								
Persian	3.38	0.76		2.92	0.80	149	2.60*	.010
Gilaki	1.62	0.87		2.13	0.87	149	-2.64*	.009
Education								
Persian	3.60	0.69		3.38	0.67	141	1.45	.149
Gilaki	1.41	0.74		1.64	0.73	141	-1.41	.160
Administration								
Persian	3.34	0.93		2.82	0.94	147	2.47*	.015
Gilaki	1.72	1.00		2.18	0.96	147	-2.15*	.033

* p < 0.05
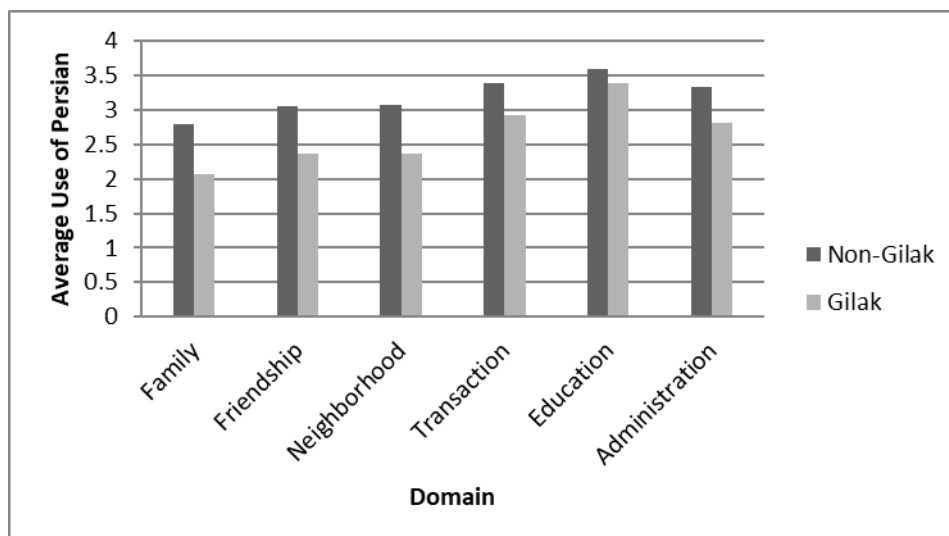
Figure 4. Language Use and Spouse's Mother Tongue in Different Domains
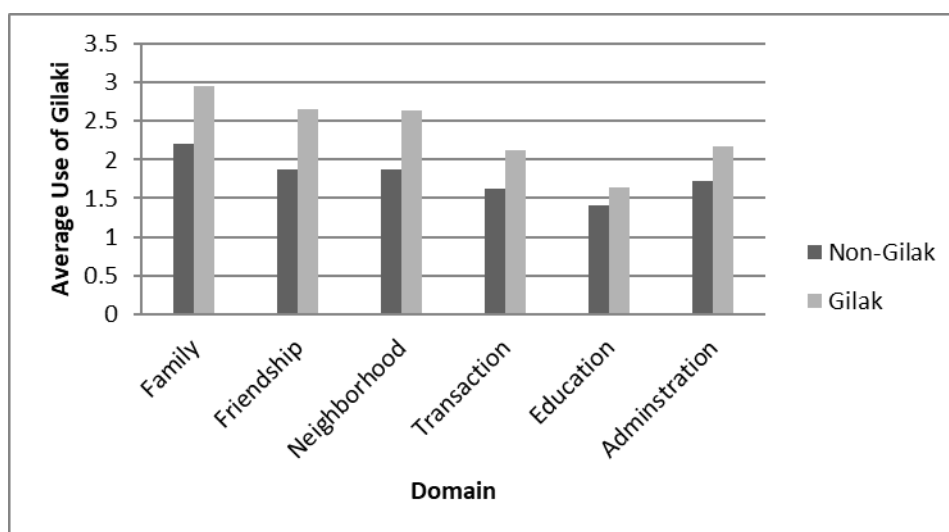

Figure 5. Language Use and Spouse's Mother Tongue in Different Domains

Language Use and Age Groups

As presented in Table 4, Figures 6 and 7, the One-Way Analysis of Variance shows a significant difference in the average use of Persian and Gilaki in different age groups, indicating that age has a significant influence on the average use of language. In other words, older people in all domains of the study had a higher average use of Gilaki, while the younger participants had a higher average use of Persian.

Table 4. Analysis of Variance for Age and Language Choice in Social Domains

Domain Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Family					
Persian Between Groups	224.8	4	56.2	80.6*	.000
Within Groups	271.9	390	0.6		
Total	496.7	340			
Gilaki Between Groups	224.4	4	56.1	78.6*	.000
Within Groups	278.3	390	0.7		
Total	502.7	340			
Friendship					
Persian Between Groups	148.1	4	37.0	60.3*	.000
Within Groups	239.4	390	0.6		
Total	387.5	394			
Gilaki Between Groups	147.7	4	36.9	58.6*	.000
Within Groups	245.4	390	0.6		
Total	393.1	394			
Neighborhood					
Persian Between Groups	133.1	4	33.2	52.2*	.000
Within Groups	247.1	388	0.6		
Total	380.3	392			
Gilaki Between Groups	135.8	4	33.9	53.0*	.000
Within Groups	248.1	388	0.6		
Total	383.9	392			
Transaction					
Persian Between Groups	58.7	4	14.6	32.8*	.000
Within Groups	173.8	389	0.4		
Total	232.5	393			
Gilaki Between Groups	66.8	4	16.7	33.3*	.000
Within Groups	194.9	389	0.5		
Total	261.8	393			
Education					
Persian Between Groups	20.8	4	5.2	20.4*	.000
Within Groups	96.9	379	0.2		
Total	117.8	383			
Gilaki Between Groups	23.9	4	5.9	20.0*	.000

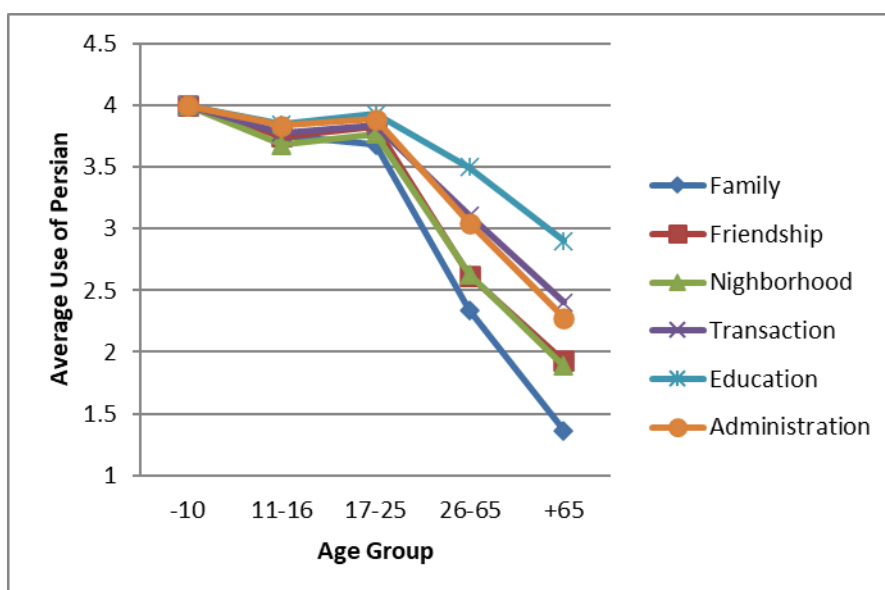|					
Within Groups	113.4	379	0.3		
Total	137.4	383			
Administration					
Persian Between Groups	75.0	4	18.7	35.8*	.000
Within Groups	197.0	376	0.5		
Total	272.0	380			
Gilaki Between Groups	78.9	4	19.7	36.6*	.000
Within Groups	203.2	376	0.5		
Total	282.2	380			

* $p < 0.05$

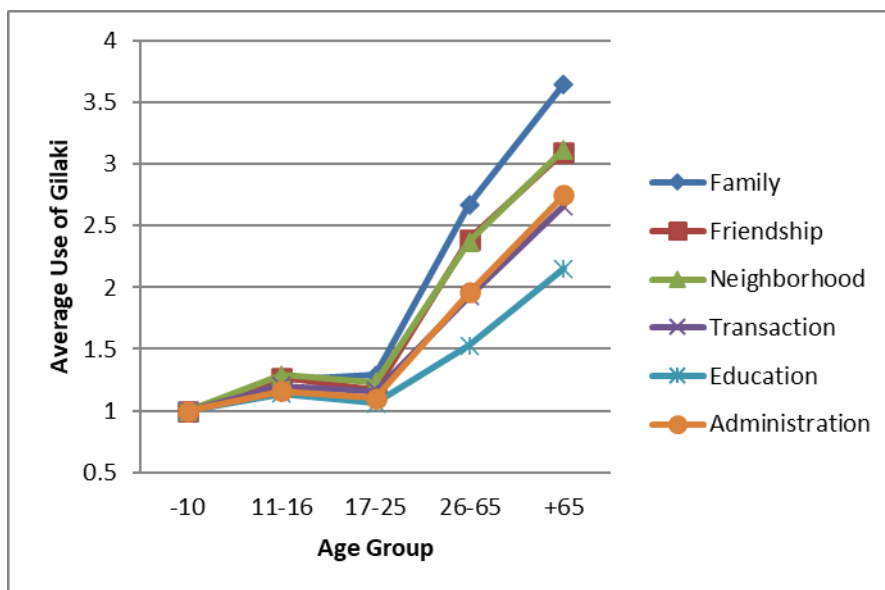**Figure 6. Average Use of Persian in Age Groups and Different Domains**

Figure 7. Average Use of Gilaki in Age Groups and Different Domains

Language use and education groups

As presented in Table 5, Figures 8 and 9, there is a significant difference in the average use of Persian and Gilaki in education groups. Based on the One-Way Analysis of Variance of the data, the level of education of the participants had a significant influence on the relative average use of Persian and Gilaki. The participants with higher levels of education used Persian more than Gilaki, and the ones with lower levels of education used more Gilaki.

Table 5. Analysis of Variance for Education and Language Choice in Social Domains

Domain Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F	sig.
Family					
Persian Between Groups	102.0	7	14.5	14.2*	.000
Within Groups	394.7	387	1.0		
Total	496.7	394			
Gilaki Between Groups	103.6	7	14.8	14.3*	.000
Within Groups	399.0	387	1.0		
Total	502.7	394			
Friendship					
Persian Between Groups	86.4	7	12.3	15.8*	.000
Within Groups	301.1	387	0.7		
Total	387.5	394			

|					
Gilaki Between Groups	83.2	7	11.8	14.8*	.000
Within Groups	309.9	387	0.8		
Total	393.1	394			
Neighborhood					
Persian Between Groups	73.3	7	10.4	13.1*	.000
Within Groups	306.9	385	0.7		
Total	380.3	392			
Gilaki Between Groups	76.4	7	10.9	13.6*	.000
Within Groups	307.5	385	0.7		
Total	383.9	392			
Transaction					
Persian Between Groups	38.8	7	5.5	11.0*	.000
Within Groups	193.7	386	0.5		
Total	232.5	393			
Gilaki Between Groups	46.8	7	6.6	12.0*	.000
Within Groups	214.9	386	0.5		
Total	261.8	393			
Education					
Persian Between Groups	18.4	7	2.6	9.9*	.000
Within Groups	99.4	376	0.2		
Total	117.8	383			
Gilaki Between Groups	25.1	7	3.5	12.0*	.000
Within Groups	112.3	376	0.2		
Total	137.4	383			
Administration					
Persian Between Groups	60.4	7	8.6	15.2*	.000
Within Groups	211.6	373	0.5		
Total	272.0	380			
Gilaki Between Groups	65.4	7	9.3	16.0*	.000
Within Groups	216.4	373	0.5		
Total	282.2	380			

* $p < 0.05$
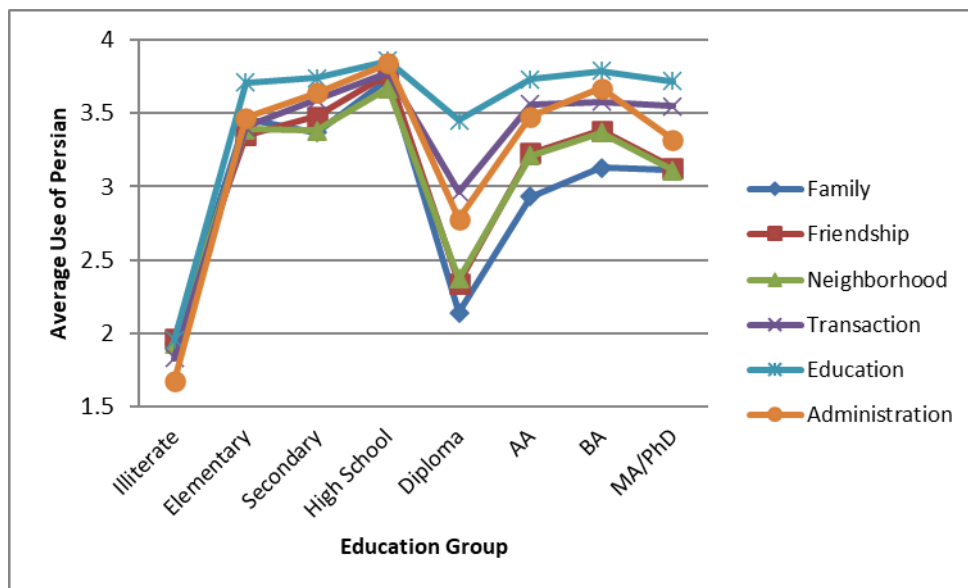
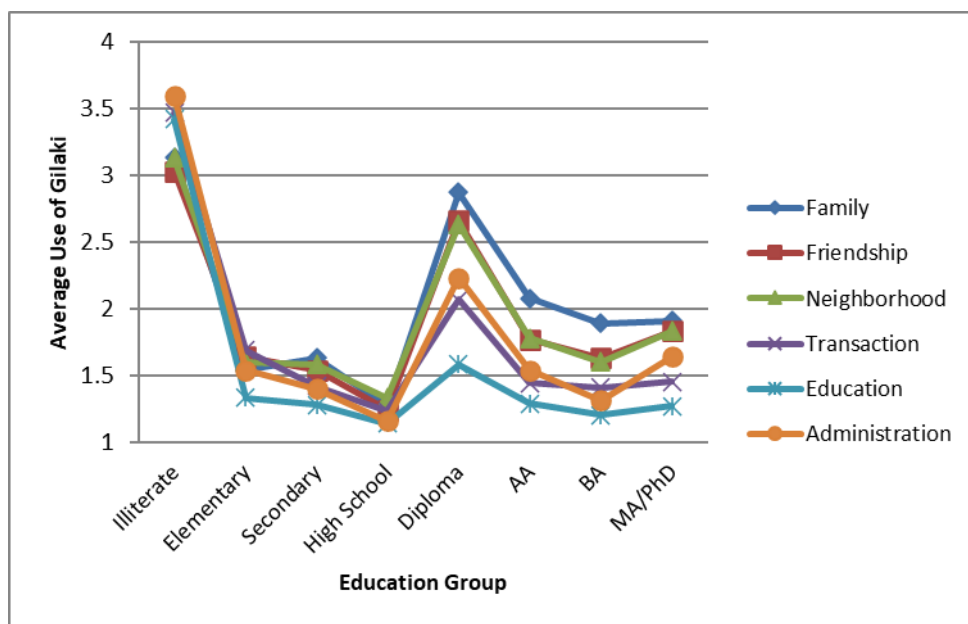**Figure 8. Average Use of Persian in Education Groups in Different Domains**

Figure 9. Average Use of Gilaki in Education Groups in Different Domains

Language Use in Occupation Groups

As presented in Table 6, Figures 10 and 11, there is a significant difference in the average use of Gilaki and Persian in work groups across all six domains. The One-Way Analysis of Variance shows that participants' occupation has a significant influence on the use of Persian relative to Gilaki. Participants with the more formal occupations used more Persian.

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Table 6. Analysis of Variance for Occupation and Language Choice in Social Domains

Domain Source of Variance	SS	*df*	MS	F	sig.
Family					
Persian Between Groups	56.7	3	18.9	16.8*	.000
Within Groups	439.1	390	1.1		
Total	495.9	393			
Gilaki Between Groups	60.2	3	20.0	17.7*	.000
Within Groups	441.5	390	1.1		
Total	501.8	393			
Friendship					
Persian Between Groups	64.3	3	21.4	25.9*	.000
Within Groups	322.6	390	0.8		
Total	387.0	393			
Gilaki Between Groups	63.5	3	21.1	25.1*	.000
Within Groups	329.0	390	0.8		
Total	392.5	393			
Neighborhood					
Persian Between Groups	57.4	3	19.1	23.0*	.000
Within Groups	322.2	388	0.8		
Total	379.6	391			
Gilaki Between Groups	58.4	3	19.5	23.2*	.000
Within Groups	324.8	388	0.8		
Total	383.3	391			
Transaction					
Persian Between Groups	44.0	3	14.6	30.3*	.000
Within Groups	188.2	389	0.4		
Total	232.3	392			
Gilaki Between Groups	47.6	3	15.8	28.8*	.000
Within Groups	214.0	389	0.5		
Total	261.7	392			
Education					
Persian Between Groups	17.1	3	5.7	21.5*	.000
Within Groups	100.6	379	0.2		
Total	117.8	382			
Gilaki Between Groups	19.3	3	6.4	20.7*	.000

Within Groups	117.9	379	0.3		
Total	137.3	382			
Administration					
Persian Between Groups	57.3	3	19.1	33.5*	.000
Within Groups	214.4	376	0.5		
Total	271.8	379			
Gilaki Between Groups	60.0	3	20.0	33.8*	.000
Within Groups	221.8	376	0.5		
Total	281.9	379			

* $p < 0.05$
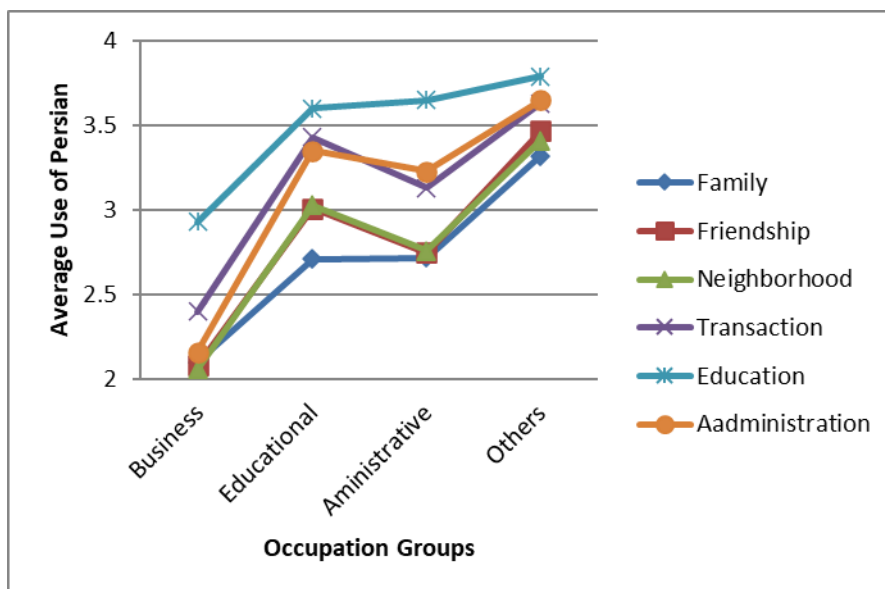
Figure 10. Average Use of Persian in Occupation Groups in Different Domains
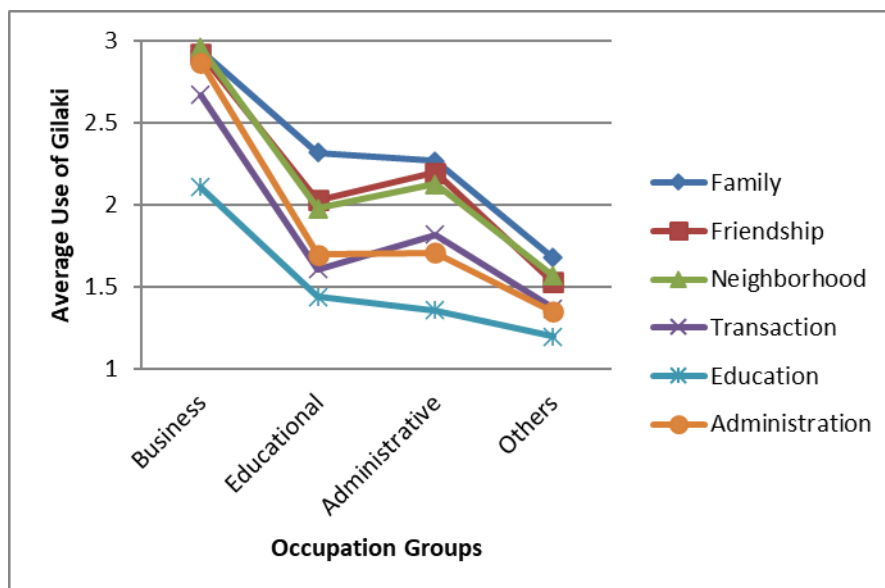
Figure 11. Average Use of Gilaki in Occupation Groups in Different Domains

In all the social domains of family, friendship, neighborhood, transaction, education, and administration, Persian was used more than Gilaki; however, there is a significant difference when looking more closely at each individual domain and when looking at the interactions between domains and the factors of gender, age, educational background, occupation, and spouse's mother tongue.

In all domains, men use Gilaki more than women. In both formal and informal domains, women prefer Persian to Gilaki. Persian was also preferred by younger speakers; more educated people used more Persian in formal settings; and people with high-ranking positions preferred Persian in both formal and in social domains. Many of these findings corroborate findings in other sociolinguistic studies (Gal, 1978).

4. Discussion

The study showed that use of Gilaki was greatest in family and neighborhood domains. The only local television channel in Gilan (Channel Baran) has very few followers (14% highly interested) as the people prefer to watch satellite channels for entertainment and news (Zeinalabedini, 2014). It would be beneficial to provide more TV and radio programs for families to watch in Gilaki to increase informal communication environments. Social media is popular with younger generations and can play a significant role in the preservation of a minority language. Exposure to the minority language through mass media and social media would be helpful for the survival of Gilaki (Bani-Shoraka 2005; Jahani, 2005; Sepehri, 2010; Sheyholislami, 2010). However, efforts to maintain a language should not be limited to informal domains, as this would very likely lead to the extinction of the language, as other studies have presented (Hassanpour, 1992).

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Parents' preference for their families' language use may have many influences, be they social status or economic reasons. It is not uncommon for parents to believe that using the standard language of the country will give their children better job opportunities (Mirvahedi, 2012). However, the role of parents in influencing the next generation's linguistic choices cannot be overstated. They are instrumental in choosing channels of communication and language preferences in the home, both of which could be leveraged to increase the use of Gilaki in formal domains.

There are similar and various examples from governments around the world that have done much to revitalize languages and dialects such as Basque, Bahasa Melayu, Bidayuh, Gaelic, Kinubi, Koelsch, and Polish (Adams et al., 2012; Abdullah, 2013; Awal et al., 2014; Bond et al., 2011; Coady, 2022; Dealwis, 2010; Gorter et al., 2012; Leo & Abdullah, 2013; Monaghan, 1899; Namei, 2008; Nancy, 2011; Mostafizar Rahman, 2007; Ting & Ling, 2013; Valadez, 2015).

When comparing the results of the current study with other studies on the usage of Persian and other minority languages of Iran, we found a clear preference of Persian in all social domains. The current study shows that the participants with higher educational backgrounds prefer to speak in Persian than Gilaki as was also found by Zandi et al. for Ardabili and Tonekaboni (Zandi et al., 2011, 2015), Fereidoni for Turki, Kurdi, and Armani (Fereidoni, 2003), Mashayekh for Gilaki Rashti (Mashayekh, 2003), and Sanaee Moghadam for Luri (Sanaee Moghadam, 1999). One of the significant differences that could be mentioned is the role of gender and age in the language preference of the participants that was not observed in the study by Fereidoni. In Fereidoni's study, the gender and age of participants had no significant roles in their language choice. In the study by Mashayekh in 2003, participants with higher educational backgrounds preferred Persian in different social domains as well, and parents did not have a positive role in the maintenance of Gilaki. In his study on Turki in 2015, Zandi and his colleagues found that participants employed in education and with higher educational backgrounds preferred Persian over Turki, as was observed in the current study. Also, in his study on Turki, gender had a significant role indicating that women preferred Persian more than men, similarly to what the results in the current study show (Zandi et al., 2015).

This study represents a summary of the use of Persian and Gilaki in different domains of everyday life and describes a typical diglossic region. However, it also points to patterns that could lead to a gradual decline of use of Gilaki as a minority language. The findings show a clear preference of Gilaki speakers toward Persian in all social domains. This study opens the discussion of minoritized and endangered languages and how the decrease of native speakers of a language can put its linguistic existence in danger. Considering the politics of access to languages, this study suggests providing conditions that will contribute to better language maintenance.

Parents, the education system, and media should cooperate to provide ways for Gilaki and other minority languages to stay alive and become accessible to people in various modes and formats. This study would recommend that linguists, educators, and policymakers work together to this end. The

language of a community is a significant part of its identity that should be studied as history, cherished in the present, and continue to live in the future. If parents, educators, policymakers, and experts in language and sociology do not work together, Gilaki could well be on its way to extinction.

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Appendix

Questionnaire (translated from Persian)

Suppose that you are in the following different situations, what language do you use and to what extent?

1- At home, you want to talk to your father or mother about daily shopping.

A-   Persian: Always ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Never ( )

B-   Gilaki: Always ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Never ( )

2- You want to talk to your mother about inviting some of your friends to a party tomorrow night.

3- You want to ask your brother or sister about their daily issues.

4- You are talking with your spouse to get money to buy household appliances.

5- You want to tell your child not to forget to buy bread.

6- You want to ask your grandfather or grandmother to take care of your child.

7- You are talking about the Friday entertainment program in a friendly group with your friends.

8- At the wedding party of one of your friends who speak the same language, you talk with other friends.

9- At the wedding party of one of your non-speaking friends, you talk to other friends.

10- You want to introduce your friend to another friend who does not know him.

school friends or colleagues.

12- There has been an intense discussion between you and your friends (for example, in the park) on a major issue (such as elections).

13- You want to talk to your neighbors about the appointment of local council.

14- There has been a fight with your old neighbor over a major issue (such as a child or sibling fight).

15- You are standing in line for oil or bread with some neighbors and you are talking about the price.

16- A new family has come to your neighborhood, and you want to talk to them for the first time.

17- You are talking to your non-speaking neighbor.

18- You talk to your old neighbor in the city market going to the shops.

19- You want to bargain with the shopkeeper to buy clothes (in the city market).

20- You met a stranger in the street, and you want to ask for the address.

21- You want to order food in the restaurant with your family.

22- You go to a new doctor, and you want to explain your illness to him.

23- You want to ask someone for an address in a public place such as a bus station?

24- You go to your local pharmacy to buy medicine.

25- You want to discuss a scientific topic with your classmates at school or college.

26- As a student, you want to talk to your teacher or professor.

27- As a manager or professor or secretary, you want to give a speech in the classroom or school.

28- As a client, you refer to school or university staff.

29- You talk with your friends about the topics of the day in the school or university campus.

30- As a student, you want to explain a lesson problem in front of the class.

31- You are in an office (such as the electricity department) and you want to raise your problem in that office.

32- In an administrative environment, you talk to a person who has a higher administrative rank than you.

33- In an administrative environment, you talk to a person who has a lower administrative rank than you.

34- The person in charge of your office (your supervisor) is talking to you individually.

35- The manager of your office is talking to his colleagues.

36- You are talking to a client at work.