

A Sociolinguistic Analysis on the Status and Usage of Mazandarani and Persian in Mazandaran¹

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Abstract

Statement of the problem: Social, economic, political, and cultural changes in recent years, along with the development of technology and communication have made the native speakers of some languages or dialects to learn standard language which is generally considered to be formal and more prestigious; this trend, which is the case for Iranian local languages and dialects, can weaken the status and threaten the survival of such languages and dialects. Mazandarani, a vernacular in the north of Iran, has long been the mother tongue of inhabitants and dominant language in Mazandaran Province. Nowadays, its usage has declined in various contexts and its acquisition as a mother tongue has decreased among younger generations. This study tries to gather information about the social status of Mazandarani and its usage, along with Farsi, in different contexts in Mazandaran; other factors influencing the usage of Mazandarani or Farsi in different contexts are also studied

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including speakers' attitudes toward Mazandarani as well as social factors.

Theoretical framework, questions and hypotheses: The present study has adopted the domain analysis method introduced by Fishman (1966) in which the language usage is measured in terms of setting, subject and interlocutors. In this study, language use in 6 domains – family, school, office, street, religion, art & hobbies- is investigated. The main questions raised are: 1- In which domain does Mazandarani have the most usage? 2- Do the majority of subjects acquire Mazandarani as their first language in family domain? 3- Do the majority of young people acquire Mazandarani as their first language in family domain? 4- Is there any correspondence between the age of parents and encouraging their children to acquire Mazandarani? 5- Can the age of subjects be an effective factor in acquiring or using Mazandarani? 6- Is there any correspondence between the sex of subjects and using Mazandarani in different domains? 7- Is there any correspondence between urbanization and using Mazandarani in different domains? 8- Does the usage of Mazandarani vary in different cities of Mazandaran? 9- What kind of attitudes do the subjects have toward Mazandarani? 10- In general, does the evidence imply a case of language shift or maintenance? The following hypotheses are formulated: 1- The usage of Mazandarani in family domain is more than that of other domains. 2- Most people acquire Mazandarani as their first language. 3- The minority of young people acquire Mazandarani as their first language. 4- There is a direct correspondence between the age of parents and encouraging the children to acquire Mazandarani. 5- The usage and acquisition of Mazandarani in older generation is more than that of younger one. 6- The usage of Mazandarani by women is less than that of men in various domains. 7- The usage of Mazandarani by urban people is less than that of rural people in

various domains. 8- The cities studied in this research have similar conditions in terms of using and acquiring Mazandarani. 9- Most subjects don't have positive attitudes toward Mazandarani. 10. In general, the evidence implies a case of gradual shift of Mazandarani to Farsi.

Research method, statistical society, gathering and analyzing data: This research is a field study that describes and analyzes the data gathered through questionnaire, interview, and observation. The questionnaire includes 36 closed questions which investigate the usage of Farsi and Mazandarani in different domains; it also investigates the attitudes of speakers toward these two languages. 1200 subjects were randomly selected from urban and rural regions of 5 cities – Amol, Behshahr, Ramsar, Sari, and Noor – in Mazandaran Province. The subjects were equally divided into three age groups – 14-18, 30-40 and over 50 years old – they were also divided according to their sex. The researcher also observed 240 cases of communication context in Amol. The data are classified in tables and diagrams; it's described and analyzed through k square as well.

The findings of research: The analysis of data shows that the most usage of Mazandarani belongs to family domain and the increase of the formality of context leads to decrease in usage of Mazandarani. Mazandarani acquisition varies according to the type of family and its members. In general, 60 percent have acquired Mazandarani as their first language, but in younger age group (14-18 years old), just 25 percent have acquired Mazandarani as their first language. The kind of language people apply for communicating with other family members depends on their age. For instance, 48 percent of young group use Mazandarani for talking to their grandparents. In contrast, 38 percent of this group speaks with their parents in Mazandarani. In communicating with their

younger brothers or sisters, only 24.75 percent of them use Mazandarani.

As the formal educational language at school is Farsi, it's obligatory to speak in Farsi at school. 97 percent of students have claimed that they speak in Farsi with their teachers in classrooms and 97.5 percent of them use Farsi in speaking to the headmasters at schools. 81.25 percent of students apply Farsi in communicating with one another in classroom.

The streets and marketplaces form another domain which is wider than other domains and include various participants. The kind of language used in this domain is highly influenced by the situation, social status, age and sex of the interlocutors. Farsi is mostly used in formal situation, in the case that one of the interlocutors is of higher class or he/ she is a young or unknown person. For example, 29.49 percent of interviewees speak with their neighbors in Farsi, while 72.58 percent of them use Farsi in conversing with a young stranger.

The office domain is a formal domain and this formality necessitates the higher usage of Farsi. 63.91 percent of customers use Farsi in talking to clerks at their offices. Facing a doctor at his/her office, or a receptionist, 77.58 and 73.74 percent of them use Farsi, respectively.

Domains like religion and art are defined on the basis of subjects rather than situation or participants. The investigation of language use in artistic and aesthetic affairs such as, poetry, fiction, theater, movie, and music shows the general dominance of Farsi, but in some cases like poetry and music, the majority prefers Mazandarani to Farsi. In general, 52.41 percent of people prefer Farsi for radio and TV programs. As for religion, approximately half of the subjects use Farsi to worship and pray.

The information gathered through observation in Amol, to a large extent confirms the data gathered via questionnaires and interviews. As an example, the questionnaire data demonstrate that 56.25 percent of students use Farsi in conversation with one another at school and the observation shows that 51.66 percent of them use Farsi in this context.

Age, sex, education, and urbanization are influential in language use in different domains. Young people more than older ones, women more than men, urban people more than rural ones and educated people more than illiterate people use Farsi in different contexts.

Conclusions: On the whole, the findings of the research indicate the gradual loss of Mazandarani in the region. The argumentations that support such a claim are as follows:

- 1- The youngsters' tendency to acquire and use Farsi implies the reduction of native speakers of Mazandarani in the future.
- 2- The girls' tendency to acquire and use Farsi means the increase of Farsi acquisition by next generation, because these girls as future mothers have a crucial role in transferring language to the next generation.
- 3- The tendency of educated and urban group to acquire and use Farsi indicates the increase of Farsi-speaking population in the future, since both literacy and urbanization are spreading.
- 4- Employing Farsi as the language of instruction and the only medium of communication in educational domain could lead to the creation of negative attitudes toward Mazandarani.
- 5- Mazandarani is not mostly used in religious affairs, whereas religion is one of the last domains for an eroding language.

- 6- Lack of positive attitude, interests and devotion to Mazandarani signifies the lack of collective determination to maintain this language.

Keywords: language contact, Farsi, Mazandarani, language use, social status