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an intermediate 'conveyor' language), can we object to 'Persian' on linguistic grounds?"

Joseph Bell, Professor of Arabic and Middle-Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of Bergen in Norway is stronger in his condemnation [65] [61] "No one would seriously consider substituting Deutschland for Germany, or Deutsch/Deutscher for German in English. 'Deutschland' exists, of course, in English, but with connotations for which a high price was paid. . . But to use the word [Farsi] as the normal term for the national language of Iran has to be classified as one of the greatest affronts to great cultures in our time."

He goes on to examine the negative cultural implications of the usage of this term [66] [62] :

"Saying Farsi instead of Persian robs the language and the culture of all the sense of splendor the name Persian has taken on in western languages through two and a half millennia of war, trade, religious and cultural influence, and other forms of confrontation or subtle interaction".

This is underlined by the Academy of Persian Language and Literature (Farhangestn-e Zabn va Adab-e Frs) in Iran which clearly advocates the use of the word 'Persian' not 'Farsi' [67] [63] :

"Persian has been used in a variety of publications including cultural, scientific and diplomatic documents for centuries and therefore it connotes very significant and cultural meanings. Hence changing Persian to Farsi is to negate these important established precedents. Changing Persian to Farsi may give the impression that it is a new language, and this may well be the intention of some Persian users."

Hossein Samei, Linguistics Professor at Emory University in Atlanta, argues that [68] [64] :

"Persian, alongside the name of a language, may be used as an adjective for the other aspects of our history and culture. For example, we can speak about 'Persian Literature', 'Persian Gulf', 'Persian Carpet', 'Persian Food'. In this way, 'Persian' may be [seen as] a common concept and function as a link between all aspects of Iranian life, including language. 'Farsi' does not have such a characteristic".

Franklin Lewis, Professor of Persian Language & Literature at University of Chicago, reaffirms [69] [65] :

"As there is no such thing as Farsi carpets, Farsi literature, Farsi cats, Farsi food, etc., it seems rather ridiculous to use this English neologism as a general adjective for the language".

Hossein Nasr, Professor of Persian literature at George Washington University in the US, asserts that [70] [66] :

"The synthesis of Persian culture has not changed with the Iranian revolution. . . classical Persian culture, philosophy and religious thought are still intact. . ."

He also suggests that: "Persians are aware of their uniqueness in the Islamic world".

The use of the word 'Farsi', however, dilutes this distinctive quality and undermines Iranian culture. Kamyar Abdi, Professor of Anthropology at Dartmouth College in the US, emphasises the importance of the Persian language and its association with Iranian national identity and unity [71] [67] :

"Perhaps the most vital factor in this cultural continuity and the hallmark of Iranian national identity is the Persian language. Having been used in Iran at least since the time of Achaemenids in the sixth century B.C.E., the Persian language has assumed a distinctive Iranian character and become intertwined with Iranian national identity and unity. Not surprisingly, in recent times the Persian language has been one of the most important contexts in which Iranian nationalism has flourished". Professor Ehsan Yarshater, the Editor of Encyclopaedia Iranica, hammers the point home [72] [68] :

"[The word 'Farsi'] has no foundation in the English language and its relationship to the identity of Iranian civilisation and culture – as reflected in phrases such as 'Persian literature', 'Persian art' and 'Persian poetry' – is not at all clear. . . As well as the linguistic points, when the word Farsi is used in English for the Persian language, it ignores all the positive cultural connotations of the word Persian."

WHO IS PROMOTING THE WORD 'FARSI' AND WHY?

Some of those using the word 'Farsi' may be ignorant or have misunderstood. A Wall Street Journal editor, for example, naively surmises [73] [69] :

"Supporters of the name Iran prefer calling the language Farsi, it seems, while the supporters of the historical name Persia prefer Persian".

Professor Geoffrey Lewis tries to be charitable [74] [70] :

". . . hard though it is when dealing with the Farsi-merchants. Some of them probably use the term because they feel uncomfortable with the seemingly fuddy-duddy 'Persian' and are deterred by some spark of good sense from calling the language of Persia 'Iranian'. For that is a family name which covers many other languages besides Persian".

Professor Bell asserts that the problem is lack of knowledge and respect [75] [71] :

"If we know a people well enough to respect them, we will not tamper with the corrupt forms of their names, their place names, and the names of their languages. It is only when we do not have sufficient respect that we yield to the urgings of the mapmakers and revert to the 'native' form."

Considering those who may have other reasons, however, there are three main groups worthy of further discussion: those in the West; Islamic fundamentalists and pan-Arabists; and, perhaps most worryingly of all, the Iranian diaspora.

Those in the West

Professor Franklin Lewis reflects that [76] [72] :

"The term 'Farsi' began to creep into English in the 1960s, mostly as a result of foreigners in Iran hearing it from native-speakers who, presumably, did not know English well enough to know that the English name of their language had always been Persian."

Then an Iranian commentator blames the western media [77] [73] :

". . . [during the 1979 Revolution] a bunch of western journalists who didn't speak the language were sent to Iran to report about the revolution. Using this exotic word 'Farsi' instead of Persian might have made the impression that they knew what they were talking about, which very often they didn't. I was just a teenager at that time, but I still remember. In most cases they were hanging out in the Hotel 'Marmar' and drinking beer, then reproducing bar gossip as authentic reports from the heart of the revolution."

Frances Pritchett, Professor of Modern Indic Languages at Columbia University in the US believes that the use of the word 'Farsi' was further propagated by Urdu-speakers living in West [78] [74] :

"All my Urdu-speaking friends refer to Persian as 'Farsi', which is its Urdu name; they tend to transfer that name into English quite naturally. I picked up the habit directly from them".

Now the habit is becoming institutionalised at the highest levels. The Guidelines for UK Government websites [79] [75] as well the British Embassy in Tehran [80] [76] currently describe Persian as 'Farsi'.

The BBC, with its long-established 'BBC Persian' radio service, is launching a range of TV channels for the Middle East in 2008. This includes a Persian language service which is to be called 'Farsi TV'. Interestingly, the Arabic counterpart is named as Arabic TV – rather than 'al-Arabiya TV'. Many Iranians still remember the partisan posture taken by the BBC in both 1953 (supporting the coup against Dr Mossadegh's democratically elected government [81] [77]) and also in 1979 [82] [78] (as what became widely known as the 'Ayatollah BBC' [83] [79]). With these events in mind, it is difficult to interpret the BBC's choice as anything other than a conscious decision.

Across the Atlantic, despite the US Library of Congress Standards recommending the use of the word 'Persian' [84] [80], 'Farsi' is used in the United States for Security Initiative Programmes of language teaching [85] [81], [86] [82], [87] [83] as well as in other official documents and websites [88] [84], [89] [85].

American usage of 'Farsi' instead of Persian has not only has created confusion, but even suggests division amongst Persian-speaking peoples. For instance, according to the CIA's 'World Fact Book', the language of Iran, Afghanistan and the UAE states as Persian, while Bahrainis' speak 'Farsi' [90] [86].

Islamic Fundamentalists and Pan-Arabists in Iran

On the other side of the ideological divide, things are not very different. In post-revolutionary Iran, news agencies [91] [87], English language journals [92] [88], textbooks issued by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, and resources for foreign tourists often refer to Persian as 'Farsi'. Since the coming of theocratic regime to power in Iran, the regime leaders have dedicated significant resources to restructuring Iranian culture and values. Iranians are now vigorously-encouraged to choose Arabic/Islamic names for their children [93] [89], and a large number of Iranian names have been outlawed [94] [90]. Many pre-Islamic historical and archaeological sites have been devastated under the cover of development projects: destroyed as part of highway [95] [91] and railway track construction [96] [92]; contaminated irreparably by chemical factories [97] [93]; undermined by nearby hotels [98] [94]; obliterated as part of mining [99] [95]; or submerged beneath dam reservoirs

[100] [96]. There have even been threats to bulldoze Persepolis [101] [97]. In general, pre-Islamic Iranian heritage has been downplayed and undermined in favour of the promotion of Islamic culture [102] [98], the Islamic way of life, and above all the Arabic language. There have even been systematic attempts to change to 'Farsi' the name used in the international community for the Persian language – as a political statement [103] [99].

Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic regime, publicly made no secret of his contempt for pre-Islamic Iranian culture – deriding everything Iranian from Noruz to the Persian language. According to Roya Hakakian [104] [100] :

". . . [Khomeini] made no secret of his contempt for the non-Muslim dimensions of Iranian life. He injected Persian with so many Arabic words that it confounded the ordinary listener, something for which he compensated by repetitiveness."

This attitude was mirrored in the views of many other prominent members of the Islamic regime. Although the Friday Sermons organised by the Islamic Republic say little about the Persian language – indicating its perceived relative lack of importance – a detailed and explicit statement was made in 1981 by Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in his role as the Islamic Republic's Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council. On that occasion, he linked the fate of the Persian language directly to that of Persian nationality: in his view of the future, both shall vanish [105] [101] :

". . . we believe that the future [is] Arabic, not Persian. . . on the day the united Islamic government is established, certainly its language cannot be anything but Arabic".

Some senior regime members are less negative – at least in their words, if not in their actions. Ali Khamenei, then the state President and the current Spiritual Leader of the Islamic Republic, emphasised the importance of the Persian language in 1988 in a speech entitled "*The Greatness of the Persian Language and the Necessity of Protecting it*" [106] [102]. He spoke about:

"[the] revolutionary duty to promote the national language, and [how] that national language constitutes the most important and original determinant of cultural identity for any nation".

He then asserted the past and present international importance of the Persian language in the Islamic world, and especially in India and Central Asia, concluding that:

"[Today,] Persian is the language of true. . . and revolutionary Islam".

More recently, various Islamic commentators have been somewhat less committed to the Persian language. For example, in 2003, Naser Pourpirar [107] [103] demanded that the national language of Iran should be replaced with Arabic [108] [104] :

"It is very unfortunate that we cannot put the Persian language aside and replace it with the language of Qur'an. However the future of Iran is at the hand of Islamic Unity. Spreading the Arabic language among Iranian youths and incorporating it more seriously into the education system. . . can make a foundation for such Islamic Unity."

Pourpirar has a startling range of views – including that the Parthian and the Sasanid dynasties are baseless fabrications by Jewish-Orientalists and that the indigenous peoples of Iran were wiped out by the 'savage Slavic' Achaemenids so that Iran was then free of human settlement until the Muslim Arabs arrived. He is however recognised as a scholar by the Islamic regime, who quote extensively from his written work.

Ghahreman Safavi is another of the Islamic Regime's new breed of scholars. He is based in the UK and presented a paper on 'Iranian identity' in 2004 at SOAS. This consistently used the word 'Farsi' – although unfortunately always inaccurately [109] [105] :

"Old Farsi is a branch of [the] Avestan language. . . [and the] Avesta has been written in Iranian language (Ancient Farsi) . . . [while] New Farsi, which is Dari Farsi. . ."

The Iranian diaspora

Perhaps most worrying, however, is the use of the word 'Farsi' by some Iranians, especially in the diaspora. It is difficult to understand why they might, however inadvertently, allow themselves to contribute in this way to the denigration of Iranian cultural achievements.

Professor Yarshater writes about [110] [106] :

". . . the Iranians living in the USA, when they answer questions about languages that they know in their application forms for jobs or university courses. I suspect that they even feel gratified to think that 'the known word of Farsi' can now be used in the English language. If only they knew that by using the word 'Farsi' . . . they find themselves damaging irreparably the fame and cultural status of Iran."

A number of Iranian academics now use the word 'Farsi' to refer to Persian in their English publications [111] [107]. For example, Dr Mohammed Chaichian, Professor of Sociology at Mount Mercy College, discusses the question of cultural identity in first generation Iranians – always using 'Farsi', and thereby himself diminishing that identity [112] [108].

Professor Franklin Lewis reflects on the snowball effect that this has when the media get involved [113] [109] :

"The media has accelerated and canonized [this] process with the spread of the Iranian diaspora around the English-speaking world, especially, perhaps in North America".

For those Iranians in French-speaking countries, the use of the word 'Farsi' for the Persian language is incidentally doubly incongruous since it sounds indistinguishable from the word 'farci', or 'stuffed' [114] [110].

Some diaspora Iranians have, however, at last woken up to the problem and are now proposing action. A contributor to Persian Gulf Online comments that [115] [111] :

"The significant point which unfortunately seems very difficult to get through to the Iranian Diaspora, specially those residing in the United States – by far the biggest and potentially most influential group of Iranian émigré community – is that by keeping the term 'Persian', we help preserve a 'CONTINUITY' which is an important cultural necessity."

He suggests that:

"We cannot preserve the best in our culture unless we are prepared to take care of it. I believe we Iranians have succeeded in confusing everyone about our identity and culture, ourselves included. We have diluted our identity by overeducating foreigners. We are so eager to defend the Iranian image outside of Iran that we have created confusion about the name of our country, the name of our people, the name of our seas and the name of our language."

IN Conclusion

Dr John Perry, Professor of Persian Language at the University of Chicago, emphasises the importance of language for a nation [116] [112] :

"Of all man's cultural badges, that of language is perhaps the most intimately felt and tenaciously defended".

Sadly, it seems that sizeable numbers of Iranians are not yet defending their cultural heritage stalwartly enough.

Of course, it may still not be too late – even though warnings were being issued over twenty years ago. Professor Geoffrey Lewis, from Oxford University, was outraged in 1984 by the inappropriate use of the word 'Farsi' [117] [113] :

"It may still not be too late to put an end to the grotesque affectation of applying the name 'Farsi' to the language which for more than five hundred years has been known to English-speakers as Persian."

Yarshater adds his full intellectual weight:

"We should, in order to protect our literature and ancient cultural credibility in the West, strictly avoid using the word 'Farsi' and instead use the same old and well-known word of 'Persian'. We should realise that the usage of the word 'Farsi' instead of 'Persian' acts against our national interests".

In conclusion, using the word 'Farsi' for Persian in any Western language, and in particular English, is a linguistic nonsense. Additionally, it undermines all the positive cultural connotations of the word 'Persian' for modern Iran and adds to the recent media portrayal of Iran as a strange and distant society [118] [114].

To use the word 'Farsi' instead of 'Persian' is an insult to the Iranian peoples and their culture and "one might even venture to say uneducated" [119] [115]. It is "one of the greatest affronts to great cultures in our time" [120] [116].

Bibliography given in the text (footnotes)

NOTES:

[121] [9] See idem, 'An Introduction to Old Persian (2005), <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~iranian/OldPersian/opcomplete.pdf>; retrieved June 28, 2007.

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[1] [112] John R. Perry, "Language Reform in Turkey and Iran", International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 17, No. 3, (Aug., 1985), p. 295.

[2] [113] See idem, "The Naming of Names", Bulletin British