METAPHORS IN PERSIAN LANGUAGE DEBATES: CONCEPTUALIZING LANGUAGE REFORM IN TWENTIETH CENTURY IRAN

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the role of metaphorical language in Persian language reform debates in Pahlavi Iran (1925–1979), a period when language codification became central to the Pahlavi nation-building project. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the analysis explores how linguistic purists and antipurists employed metaphors from botanical, zoological, political, and medical domains to articulate competing visions of Persian's past, present, and future. The data analyzed in the research is excerpted from a larger corpus of 130 texts written by Iranian intellectuals and published between the 1920s to 1970s. The study focuses on how abstract concepts of language contact and reform were conceptualized in diverging discourses about language through concrete, embodied experiences. The findings reveal that despite their opposing ideological positions, both camps drew from identical metaphorical source domains, demonstrating how the same conceptual mappings could serve radically different argumentative purposes. Purists depicted Persian as a garden requiring weeding of foreign elements or a sick body needing purification from Arabic contamination. Antipurists inverted these same metaphors, portraying purism itself as a disease threatening linguistic vitality. Political metaphors of citizenship and border control further illuminate how questions of lexical belonging and foreignness became representative of broader discussions about national identity. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how metaphors function as the cognitive machinery through which linguistic nationalism operates at the level of thought itself. By naturalizing ideological positions through pre-existing embodied knowledge, these metaphorical schemas reveal language reform as a site where competing visions of Iranian national identity and linguistic authenticity were negotiated through vivid figurative language that made abstract linguistic concepts tangible, emotionally resonant, and ultimately actionable.

KEYWORDS: Persian language reform, language policy, conceptual metaphors, Pahlavi Iran, linguistic nationalism, national identity

Introduction

The Persian language reform movement reached its peak during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979), when language codification became a central pillar of state-sponsored nation-building. This period witnessed increasingly contested debates about Persian's standardization, debates that reflected competing visions of Iranian cultural identity and national belonging. The intellectual elite conducted

these discussions primarily through literary and cultural journals, producing texts that functioned simultaneously as scholarly interventions and persuasive rhetoric. Arguments were frequently articulated through highly figurative language designed to resonate emotionally with readers while advancing particular ideological positions.

Language codification is not a neutral technical process but rather an ideologically charged endeavor shaped by divergent beliefs about linguistic authenticity, national identity, and cultural heritage. In Iran, participants in reform debates can be broadly divided into two opposing camps: linguistic purists, who advocated for systematic purging of foreign elements from Persian, and antipurists, who defended the enriching role of historical language contact and opposed interventionist policies. While moderate reformers occupied a middle ground between these polarized positions, the purists and antipurists articulated fundamentally competing ideologies about language that are reflected in their writings.

This paper analyzes the metaphorical language employed in these debates, examining how differing perspectives on Persian's past, present, and future were conceptualized and contested through vivid figurative imagery. The central argument is that metaphors functioned not merely as rhetorical ornaments but as cognitive infrastructure – conceptual frameworks through which abstract linguistic processes were understood, experienced, and naturalized. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the analysis reveals a striking pattern: despite their opposing ideological positions, both purists and antipurists drew from identical metaphorical source domains to articulate their visions, though they deployed these shared conceptual mappings to serve radically different argumentative purposes. Understanding Persian language reform through the lens of metaphor is crucial because it reveals how linguistic nationalism shapes cultural identity and state policy at a cognitive level. This approach addresses a significant gap in existing scholarship: while previous studies have examined the institutional, sociolinguistic, and ideological dimensions of Persian language reform, none has focused explicitly on metaphorical language as the cognitive scaffolding that structures thinking about language and nation. By tracing how metaphors from gardening, medicine, and border control naturalized particular ideological frameworks, this study demonstrates that language reform debates served as a critical arena where fundamental questions about Iranian identity, cultural continuity, and national sovereignty were negotiated and ultimately institutionalized through state language policy.

Literature Review

Language reform is fundamentally an ideological and political process with linguistic consequences. While all scholarship on language reform necessarily engages with its political dimensions, studies differ in their disciplinary frameworks and analytical focus. Researchers approach the subject either through sociolinguistics (particularly macrosociolinguistics), analyzing

language planning mechanisms, institutional processes, intervention into the corpus of the language and their linguistic outcomes, or through the lens of social and intellectual history, examining reform as ideological discourse and political debate, and the broader historical framework within which these debates unfold. However, the language reform movement constitutes a complex process involving interacting linguistic and social factors, making strict categorization difficult.

Scholarship on Persian language reform during the twentieth century can thus be categorized into three methodological approaches: sociolinguistic or institutional studies focusing on language planning mechanisms and their implementation; intellectual history studies examining the ideological debates between intellectuals and political contexts that drove reform movements; and a combined approach that integrates both perspectives to analyze the relationship between discourse and policy outcomes.

The first approach examines Iranian language academies and their word-formation activities. Early work includes Каменева/Kameneva's (1983б) analysis of both the institutional activities and lexical innovations of the first two official language academies: the First Academy – officially the Academy of Iran (*Farhangestān-e Irān*, 1935–1955) – and the Second Academy – officially the Academy for the Language of Iran (*Farhangestān-e zabān-e Irān*, 1970–1979). More recent studies devoted entirely to the academies include Rostai's documentary history of the First Academy with comprehensive lists of accepted and lost words (2006), Jazayeri's overview of the academies' development (2013), Sadeghi's historical review of language planning in Iran (2001), Davari Ardakani's century-long overview of Persian language planning (2008), Paul's evaluation of the First Academy's success (2010), Dabir-Moghaddam's historical presentation of all three academies, including the Academy of Persian Language and Literature (*Farhangestān-e zabān va adab-e fārsi*, (1990–)) (2018) and others. Contemporary sociolinguistic research explores terminology building (Акбарипур/Akbaripour, 2006) and terminology planning with reference to English abbreviations (Akbari, 2020). These studies emphasize institutional mechanisms and their linguistic outcomes, with less explicit attention to the ideological debates underlying these policies.

The intellectual history approach examines the socio-political and ideological factors motivating language reform, focusing on language's symbolic function in national identity construction rather than on intervention into the linguistic corpus itself. This scholarship contextualizes reform within Iran's broader modernization project, examining connections between language, nationalism, and purism. Representative works include Каменева/Kameneva (1983a), Karimi-Hakkak (1989), Tavakoli-Targhi (1990), Kia (1998), Minuchehr (2015), and Marszałek-Kowalewska (2011). Related research examines Iranian nationalism's ideological foundations more broadly: Parsinejad (2003) traces literary criticism's emergence, Zia-Ebrahimi (2016) analyzes Aryanism in nationalist ideology, and Fani (2024) examines literary nationalism.

Several foundational studies combine institutional analysis with ideological contextualization. Jazayery's comprehensive monograph (1979) surveys historical events, linguistic phenomena, and intellectuals' activities while reviewing press debates. Jazayery (1983) and Perry's comparative study (1985) situate institutional development within ideological contexts while analyzing lexical innovations. Hashabeiky (2005) examines orthographic standardization within the broader context of purism debates. Contemporary Iranian scholarship approaches purism through a historical lens, tracing the concept's evolution rather than investigating corpus-level linguistic changes. Sadriniya (2008), Atrafi and Afrazandeh (2009), Nikubakht et al. (2012), and Tarafdari (2020) trace purism's historical development, theoretical foundations, intensification factors, and relationship to nationalism during the Pahlavi period.

These works demonstrate that language reform scholarship crosses disciplinary boundaries, revealing how reform integrates into larger patterns of Iranian modernity and nation-building. However, no study has systematically analyzed the metaphorical language structuring these debates. This gap is significant because metaphors function not merely as rhetorical devices but as cognitive frameworks that shape how abstract concepts become emotionally compelling and ultimately institutionalized. This study addresses that gap by examining how botanical, medical, and political metaphors served as conceptual scaffolding through which competing visions of Persian were understood and contested.

Theory and Methodology

Ideas about the Persian language were negotiated in a cultural milieu where its classical literary heritage is a living tradition, and where Persian poetry is used in everyday language. In this context, it is unsurprising that polemics about language would make abundant use of tropes – hallmarks of literary language – to persuade readers of the author's position. However, this study analyzes the frequent use of figures of speech, particularly metaphors, not merely as tools for aesthetic or rhetorical effect, or as a reflection of Persian poetry's privileged status in Iranian discourse, but also as cognitive devices through which the complex processes of linguistic codification – and the debates surrounding them – were conceptualized and negotiated. In fact, I argue that to understand aesthetics without the cognitive functions necessarily yields an incomplete and faulty analysis. Unlike language planning analysis, which examines how academies codify rules without explaining why certain arguments feel compelling, or sociolinguistic approaches that document language attitudes without revealing their conceptual foundations, metaphor analysis exposes how nationalist discourses succeed through appropriating pre-existing embodied experiences. By mapping abstract ideological concepts onto visceral knowledge of bodily integrity, contamination, and spatial boundaries, these discourses operate below conscious awareness and make ideological positions about linguistic and national identity feel like natural responses to obvious threats.

Following Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which postulates that metaphors are part of the conceptual system through which we both think and act (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3) and that "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5), the analysis focuses on a limited set of metaphors, which reveal how the abstract issues of past language contacts of Persian and its contemporary challenges are conceptualized through more concrete and familiar, embodied experiences related to everyday situations. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson illustrate what they mean by a *metaphorical concept* with the example of ARGUMENT and the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4). They demonstrate how we understand arguments and the very act of arguing through lexical units from the semantic field of war and defense. Furthermore, they proceed with the claim that these metaphors are used subconsciously: "The normal way for us to talk about arguments presupposes a metaphor we are hardly even conscious of. The metaphor is not merely in the words we use – it is in our very concept of argument. The language of argument is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetoric; it is literal" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4).

According to this definition of a conceptual metaphor, one might be misled to think that the metaphors under discussion here are not conceptual precisely because they are used as stylistic devices and are deployed intentionally by authors for rhetorical and persuasive purposes. While CMT indeed largely focuses on metaphors' unconscious use, recent advancements in the field, particularly Gerard Steen's work on deliberate metaphors, have shown how the intentional, rhetorical use of metaphors can coexist with the conceptual function (Steen, 2009 and 2017). When Persian intellectuals deliberately selected gardening or medical metaphors to describe the language as "a garden in need of weeding" or as "sick", they were intentionally activating conceptual correspondences between the more familiar source domain of "weeds" and more abstract target domain of "foreign lexical elements" or between "illness" and perceived "linguistic degradation."

Furthermore, as this study is interested in metaphor use in opposing discourses, it is useful to note Kövecses's claim that "the metaphor that structures the discourse does not have to be a deeply entrenched conventional metaphor – it can be what we call "a metaphorical analogy" of any kind (Kövecses, 2010, p. 285). Metaphorical analogies of this kind recur frequently in the analysis below. Another aspect of this study is how metaphors function to provide coherence to linguistic discourses (Kövecses, 2010, p. 285). Depending on whether the metaphor connects ideas within a single discourse or across multiple discourses, it can be labeled as intertextual or intratextual (Kövecses, 2010, p. 285). Intertextual metaphors are repeated, adapted, and contested across multiple texts and bind different voices within the broader discourse. Intertextuality is thus an essential analytical tool through which texts written in Iran from the third decade of the 20th century can be connected to other texts written in the 1970s, allocating them to the same discourse evolving over time.

The paper analyzes metaphors drawn from a broader corpus of 130 texts written by Iranian intellectuals on Persian language reform between 1920s to 1970s, focusing specifically on 13 texts that provide concentrated examples of metaphorical language in reform debates (see Bibliography). While the selection prioritizes texts with rich metaphorical content rather than strict chronological proportionality, it maintains thematic balance across major reform debates. The selection criteria for corpus inclusion required texts to be: (1) explicitly devoted to Persian language issues, including reform, purification, and modernization; (2) authored by recognized Iranian intellectuals, linguists, or cultural figures; (3) published during the specified temporal frame; and (4) substantively engaged with ideological positions regarding Persian's development and future. The corpus encompasses diverse genres—journal articles from prominent literary and cultural periodicals *Āyandeh* (Future), *Mehr* (Seal), *Irānshahr* (Iranshahr), *Armaghān* (Souvenir), *Vahid* (Vahid), *Gowhar* (Gem), monographs, conference presentations, and memoir excerpts—representing purist, conservative, and moderate positions on language reform[1]. The corpus includes texts from language purists advocating for extensive reform, conservatives defending Persian's historical linguistic heritage, and moderate voices seeking balanced approaches.

Rather than employing quantitative frequency analysis, this study demonstrates metaphor pervasiveness through qualitative thematic analysis that traces how metaphorical frameworks organize thinking across different intellectual communities, textual genres, and temporal periods. The analysis involved close reading to identify instances where abstract linguistic concepts were expressed through concrete imagery, followed by coding according to source and target domains to create thematic clusters (LANGUAGE IS A BODY, LANGUAGE IS A SUBSTANCE, etc.). Within this process, deliberate metaphors were identified through extended elaboration, explicit metaphorical framing, and systematic development across paragraphs, while conventional metaphors appeared as brief, naturalized expressions. This distinction proves methodologically productive: even conventional metaphors reveal cultural patterns, as their invisibility demonstrates how deeply certain conceptual frameworks have penetrated intellectual discourse. Because of this familiarity and unconscious understanding of the source domain, readers could successfully decode the text, and thus the metaphors successfully resonated in the audience.

Particularly significant is how the two opposing discourses – the puristic and the antipuristic discourse – employ the same metaphors to express opposing views. Most often the target domain is the concept of LANGUAGE, along with related notions within its semantic field. As will be argued in the text, language history and development are understood differently by the two groups within the polemics, yet both conceptualize it through mappings to several common source domains. This illustrates Kövecses's observation that there are distinct aspects of a single concept in need of several source concepts and metaphors to address them

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, all translations are done by the author of this article.

(Kövecses, 2010, p. 135). While the presented four source domains under discussion in this paper are not the only ones employed by the authors, they are sufficient to reveal the fascinatingly creative ways through which the authors combine logos (logical arguments) and pathos (emotional appeal) to substantiate their positions. By using vivid imagery reflecting embodied experience they make a complicated topic such as language codification more comprehensible. The study reveals metaphor pervasiveness through conceptual depth and cultural embedding – examining how metaphorical structures provide persistent scaffolding for language debates across competing ideological positions rather than through statistical measurement.

Results

Language reform in Pahlavi Iran constituted a complex societal process that involved diverse actors who advocated for or against lexical purification and negotiated the socially acceptable level of foreign words in Persian[2]. Intellectuals and literary figures, politicians, the two official language institutions, along with their presidents and members—were all active participants in language reform. Debates about language generated a vast number of opinions, expressed in a wide range of publications. One of the most contested issues debated in them was the idea of a "pure Persian". Its genesis originated in the thought of nineteenth-century reformers and modernizers who were either in favor or against it such as Mirzā Fath-ʿali Akhundzada (1812–1878), Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni (1853–1896), Mirzā Malkom Khan (1855–1898), ʿAbd-al-Rahim Ṭālebuf (1834–1911)[3]. Already in the 20th century, the idea gained ground and spread through various periodicals such as *Nāme- ye pārsi* (Persian letter)*, Irān-e bāstān* (Ancient Iran), *Parcham* (Flag). These periodicals were written in an allegedly "pure Persian" with minimal Arabic words in them. The idea of a pure Persian coupled with official nationalism resulted in linguistic purism at the state level, reaching its peak during the nation-building era of the Pahlavi dynasty.

The metaphor "pure Persian"

The metaphor *fārsi-ye sareh* (pure Persian) is the most salient example of an intertextual and interdiscursive metaphor in language debates, highly contested by supporters and opponents. The conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS A SUBSTANCE or LANGUAGE IS A BLOODLINE draws from the source domain of *purity* and maps onto the target domain of Persian linguistic or cultural identity. It suggests that a pure or authentic form of a language can be contaminated by foreign influences. The metaphor of "pure Persian" is so pervasive because it actually denotes a cultural phenomenon, known as *sare-nevisi* (writing in a pure style without foreign words) that has a long history in Iranian intellectual thought. According to Sadriniya, the history of *sare-nevisi* can

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[2] For more on language reform see Perry (1985), Karimi-Hakkak (1989) and Kia (1998).
[3] For the 19th century reformers see Parsinejad (2003).

be divided into two periods: the first starting from the 5th century Hijri (11th century AD) to the 13th century Hijri (19th century AD), and the second period starting immediately after the end of the first and continuing until now. Unlike the first period, the second period can be described as an offshoot of a specific type of nationalism in Iran (Sadriniya, 2008, p. 100).

George Thomas, in his seminal work *Linguistic Purism*, argues that purity is the central notion in linguistic purism (Thomas, 1991, p. 24) and shows how linguistic purists across diverse national contexts and historical periods refer to their own self-imagery using metaphors from several domains of human activity (Thomas, 1991, pp. 19-31). These metaphorical representations convey the idea that the purist is separating the "pure" or "desirable" elements from those perceived as "impure" or "undesirable." Thomas examines how linguistic purification is conceptualized through analogies with everyday practices: the miller separating the "pure" grain from the "impure" bran; the gardener removing choking weeds; the metallurgist refining precious metals from ore; the physician cutting off diseased portions of the anatomy, etc. (Thomas, 1991, p. 19-31). Thomas's comparative analysis demonstrates that botanical, metallurgical, and medical metaphors appear consistently across disparate linguistic contexts (Thomas, 1991, pp. 19-31), suggesting these conceptual frameworks may be inherent to nationalist discourse about language itself, perhaps arising from shared cognitive patterns or circulating through intellectual networks, translated texts, and institutional models. The metaphor LANGUAGE IS PURE thus operates transregionally through the source domains of horticulture, metallurgy, and medicine. Building on Thomas's framework, this study examines how these metaphorical schemas manifest specifically in the Iranian context and, crucially, how the same metaphors are appropriated by both purists and their opponents to serve opposing ideological purposes.

In the Iranian case, folk beliefs about Persian hold that a "pure Persian" existed prior to contamination through language contact. This aligns with Watts's analysis on the history of English, which traces how myths about standard language emerge, based on several conceptual metaphors. One of the myths he discusses with regards to the English language history is the "myth of language contact leading to corruption" (Watts, 2012, p. 594). This myth proves particularly prevalent in Iran, with historical events such as foreign invasions of Arabs and Mongols, are perceived as sources of this linguistic corruption. However, just as in other contexts, Iranians also believed that the imagined original linguistic state can be again intentionally restored through purification of undesired foreign words and through creating native equivalents. This discourse coincides with what Andreas Gardt refers to as "structural discourse of purism" – the conviction that a pure state of the language, which existed in the past, was damaged due to the use of foreign words, but can be restored by "replacing foreign with autochthonous elements, using archaic or dialectal forms or creating neologisms based on indigenous morphology" (Gardt, cited in Langer and Nesse, 2014, p. 611).

The purification project in Iran was perhaps most famously articulated by the militant language purist Ahmad Kasravi, who proposed not only lexical cleansing but also a complete grammatical reform of Persian[4]. His project of re-creating "pure Persian" is articulated in the monograph *Zabān-e pāk* "Pure Language". At its very beginning he describes the mixing of Persian with Arabic as the language's greatest defect and outlines a plan to reconstruct Persian as a simplified and unadulterated idiom (Kasravi, 1943, p. 4).

Opponents of linguistic purism strongly challenged the notion of a "pure language" as mythical and misguided and believed that Persian has been enriched exactly through language contacts. They argued that the popularity of the "pure Persian" writing style was detrimental to the language's vitality. The trend toward such puristic writing, accompanied by the arbitrary creation of neologisms, intensified during the early decades of the twentieth century. In response to these individual language engineering efforts, the Language Academy was established in 1935 to centralize and regulate lexical innovation. Nevertheless, the Academy's activities encountered fierce resistance from a diverse coalition of writers and scholars (Kia, 1998, 28). Prominent figures including Sayyed Hasan Taqizādeh (1878–1970), Mohammad Qazvini (1878–1949), ʿAbbās Eqbāl Āshtīānī (1896/7–1956), and Hasan Vahid Dastgerdi (1880–1942/3) emerged as vocal opponents of both grassroots puristic movements and the institutionalized efforts of the Language Academy.

The linguistic purist as a gardener weeding the language garden

One of the sharpest critiques of purification, ʿAbbās Eqbāl Āshtiāni characterized the "pure Persian" as an "artificial language" in a 1933 article also titled, *Fārsi-ye sākhtegi* (The Artificial Persian). He attacked purists for producing an unintelligible written language that no one has ever spoken and that even purists themselves do not use in their daily interactions (Āshtiāni, 1933, p. 437). In the article, Āshtiāni deliberately used the gardener metaphor to critique the purists' self-image. Through metaphorical language, he manages to veil his criticism of both radical purists and Reza Shah's official language policy. It is worth noting that in the 1930s the regime was repressive towards oppositional voices, and Āshtiāni's figurative language likely served as a protection against censorship. He sarcastically portrays the purist's self-perception as a gardener who imagines that through strictly controlled gardening techniques he can arrange a symmetrical garden:

> One of the great lexicographers likens the creation of languages and the style of false writings to the work of a gardener who wants to arrange a perfectly symmetrical garden based on an imaginary map. Pursuing this goal, he plants completely identical seeds in the ground, cares for them in an identical way, and expects all the trees in his garden to reach the same height, develop in an identical way, and bear the same number of flowers and fruits (Āshtiāni, 1933, p. 439).

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[4] For Ahmad Kasravi's language reform see Jazayery (1983).

In this citation, Āshtiāni attempts to convey that a similar approach to language is unlikely to succeed because there are many "hidden factors" that a "naïve gardener" could not anticipate, just the way a purist could never predict the natural evolution of language (Āshtiāni, 1933, p. 439). However, the subsequent decades have demonstrated that deliberate language engineering can indeed contribute to language change. Iran's institutional efforts along with other language reforms such as those in Turkey are examples of this success[5]. Nevertheless, the gardener metaphor here reveals the antipurists' opposition to such interventions. This position further reveals the fundamental tension in language codification between the descriptive and prescriptive approaches to language policy. The former acknowledges languages' natural development while contending that intentional interventions in the lexical corpus ultimately harm the language system, while the latter positions language reform as an indispensable measure towards language development.

The same conceptual metaphor PERSIAN IS A GARDEN is, paradoxically, appropriated in defense of a prescriptive language policy. George Thomas claims that "the image of language as a garden in need of careful cultivation is one of the more popular themes in the apologetics of purism" (Thomas, 1991, p. 21). The following example from ʿAli Asghar Hekmat (1893–1980), Minister of Education and one of the presidents of the First Academy, serves as a perfect illustration of this point. In his *Si khaterah az ʿasr-e forkhāndeh-ye Pahlavi* (Thirty Memories from the Glorious Pahlavi Era) (1976), he devotes special attention to language as one of the constitutive elements of the Iranian nation. He characterizes the Shah's institutional efforts to regulate the Persian vocabulary as necessary cultivation rather than destructive interference[6]. By deliberately evoking the image of Persian as a "flower garden whose fragrant and beautiful flowers fill the world with their aroma," he naturalizes the puristic language policy of Reza Shah by presenting him as a gardener who has always tried to "keep that garden free from unwanted weeds, thorns, and dry grass" (Hekmat, 1976, p. 146). This naturalizing effect is achieved by justifying two linguistic purification campaigns enacted by the Shah as indispensable measures to preserve Persian's purity. The first campaign involved banning French, English, Russian and German words as names for shops and institutions. This ban was enacted through the Tehran police in 1938 when it "cleaned the streets of Tehran

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[5] On the concept of success of the First Academy see Paul (2010).

[6] The Shah ordered the establishment of the First Academy to address the rapidly encroaching foreign words and to centralize and control neologism-creation activities. Similarly on the Academy's agenda was the substitution of numerous French and Arabic words in Persian. The latter is the most contested layer of Persian lexicon over which intellectuals remained divided. While the First Academy's approach to language reform was moderate, largely due to the moderate attitudes of its members, and primarily its first president Mohammad Forughi, the Shah remained dissatisfied with the speed of purification, dismissed Forughi and pressed for more rapid reforms.

from such tablets" (Hekmat, 1976, p. 146). The second campaign was enacted by the First Language Academy, which replaced the names of cities and towns in Iran, especially in Azerbaijan, Khuzestan and Gorgan with pure Persian names. Hekmat dismisses these names as: "(…) relics of the time and rule of Arabs and Turks" (Hekmat, 1976, p. 146). Despite this apparent anti-Arab stance, Hekmat paradoxically represents a moderate approach towards language reform. While he supported institutional purification efforts, he opposed the more extreme measures advocated by radical purists in society and acknowledged the positive role of the Arabic language in enriching Persian as well as the need for selective reforms in its lexical corpus (Hekmat, 1976, p. 145).

In the broader political context of the time, the Persian language reform was central to the Shah's project to modernize and centralize Iran. This project involved consolidating the nation around a homogeneous Iranian identity anchored in the Persian language, often at the expense of minorities' linguistic rights. The state initiated educational and language reforms to promote nation-building. Persian-language education expanded throughout the linguistically diverse country and the language underwent systematic purification, with many foreign elements being replaced by native equivalents.

Hekmat's description of the Shah's efforts to purify the language can be explained with the objective necessity for drastic intervention in the lexical corpus of Persian. In the first decades of the 20th century, the rapidly changing style of Persian writing created a pressing need for state language policy and planning. Ehsan Yarshater describes the state of the written Persian during the 1930s as suffering from an indiscriminate influx of foreign borrowings and calques (particularly French), combined with uncoordinated word-creation activities across numerous publications, resulting in the dominance of European mode of thinking (Yarshater, 1994, p. 1). Hekmat's garden imagery implicitly depicts this "linguistic chaos" requiring urgent state intervention as overgrowth which requires pruning.

The gardening metaphor is used in both puristic and antipuristic discourse as a eulogy and as a critique of purism and in this sense, it is a clear illustration of Kövecses statement that a metaphor can be "usurped" against the original intentions of the user and thus be used in a debate over contentious issues (Kövecses, 2010, p. 288). By portraying the purist in negative terms, as simplistically believing in the unfeasible success of artificially improving the language, Eqbal Āshtiāni's metaphorical analogy directly challenges the popular rhetoric in apologetics of purism of the gardener as a savior of language.

Cutting off the root with an axe

Another frequently used metaphor from the plant world is *tishe be rishe zadan* (cutting the root with an axe). In discussions about Persian language, this metaphor serves as a linguistic representation of a perceived break in cultural continuity, though the nature of this break is conceptualized differently depending on the ideological position. Employed by both purist and antipurist camps, this

metaphor serves opposing discourses in referring to entirely different conceptualizations of authentic Iranian identity. For linguistic purists and nationalists such as Abu'l-Qāsem Azad Maraghe'i (1882–1946), Ahmad Kasravi (1890–1946), Tāqi Arāni (1902–1940), and Zabih Behruz (1889–1971), the metaphor denotes an ontological break from ancient and middle Iranian civilizational ethos in the aftermath of the seventh-century Arab-Muslim conquest of Sassanid Iran. These figures locate "authentic" Iranian identity in pre-Islamic Iran, viewing the Arab invasion as severing connections to a "pure Persian" language and cultural identity. For their opponents the same metaphor denotes a rupture in continuity with classical Persian literature, particularly the poetry of Saʿdi and Hafez, which they regard as the pinnacle of Persian-Arabic linguistic and literary synthesis. This perspective casts contemporary language purists, through their promotion of a 'pure Persian' style, as creating a rift with the classical literary language associated with Saʿdi and Hafez. Thus, both groups employ the identical metaphor of "cutting the root with an axe" to represent breaks with differently conceptualized versions of an "authentic" past.

En early example of a purist usage of this metaphor can be found in the article *Rāz o niyāz bā mādar-e mihan* (Intimate dialogue with the motherland) by Abu'l-Qāsem Azad Maraghe'i published in the journal *Nāme- ye pārsi* (Persian Letter)[7]. Maraghe'i claimed that all the articles in the journal were written entirely in "pure Persian," without "a single Arabic word from beginning to end" (Maraghei, 1916, cited in Sadr Hashemi, 1984, p. 263). The title page of each issue bore the slogan: "The first newspaper in Parsi (Persian) in Iran." The text expresses the author's nostalgia for Ancient Iran and his attitude towards translingual borrowings in Persian:

> Iran, oh, beloved mother! Oh, the first and the best among the countries of the world! Oh, the mausoleum of kings and lords! Oh, homeland of brave warriors… They mixed your melodious and sweet language with foreign bitter languages. They cut off your root with an axe (Maraghei, 1916, cited in Sadr Hashemi, 1984, p. 263).

Here the metaphor of the axe refers to those Iranians who, throughout history, chose to write their scientific, literary and historical treatises in Arabic, or who, even when writing in Persian, employed numerous Arabic borrowings. For linguistic purists and modernizers, this flood of foreign vocabulary presents a profound linguistic wound – a painful consequence of centuries of translingual influence.

This theme is eloquently expressed in Tāqi Arānī's article *Tahqiqāt-e lesāni: zabān-e fārsi* (Linguistic investigations: The Persian language) (1924)[8],

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[7] The journal was published in Tehran between 1916 and 1918 (Sadr Hashemi, 1984, 263).
[8] Tāqi Arānī was an ultranationalist in his early years. Later in life he embraced communist ideals and is known as the ideological founder of the Iranian communist party *Tudeh*

where he combines the metaphor of "cutting off the root with an axe" with the conceptual framework of PERSIAN IS A GARDEN. Written during the early period of Arānī's intellectual development while he lived in Germany, the article reflects the influence of two key figures on his nationalist thinking: Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, chief editor of *Iranshahr* magazine, and the German orientalist Friedrich Rosen (Mirsepassi, 2021, pp. 85-92). The piece is composed exclusively in the spirit of Aryanist ideology, offering pseudoscientific and openly racist observations about the etymology of kinship terms – specifically "mother" and "father" – in "Aryan" versus Semitic languages.

Tāqī Arānī begins by presenting evidence from Persian grammar to support his claim that Persian exemplifies the Aryan language family. According to this framework, Persian differs essentially from Semitic languages and therefore requires reform through the removal of Arabic elements and the establishment of normative grammar reflecting its Indo-European origins. As Arānī laments:

> Iranians have failed to pull out the root of foreign words from the sugarcane fields of Persian, and to pluck the thorns of foreign words from the flower garden of Ancient Persia. Even worse, they cut off the root of their national heritage with an axe and failed to prevent the mixing and loss of independence of their language (Tāqi Arānī, 1924, p. 358).

Like Maraghe'i, Arānī criticizes Iranians who historically failed to prevent the incorporation of Arabic words into New Persian, thereby severing the connection with an authentic identity rooted in Ancient Iran. This passage reveals the contradictions within the root-cutting metaphor. While meant to signal preservation, the imagery invokes violence and destruction – suggesting that protecting Persian requires the very severance it claims to oppose. The organic metaphors of roots and invasive species align with nationalist and racialized ideas about purity and contamination, casting foreign words as threats to an authentic linguistic heritage. Yet ironically, both purists and their critics end up advocating for "cutting away" different elements they deem harmful. The metaphor also shifts blame inconsistently – sometimes targeting external forces like Arabic influence, other times criticizing Iranians themselves for historical negligence. These tensions reflect deeper anxieties about who bears responsibility for Persian's current state and what constitutes authentic identity.

This modernist and nationalist view of Iranians who wrote in Arabic or used Arabized registers as committing "national treason" against Persian is sharply contested by a more moderate perspective. According to moderates, writing in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age, when it functioned as a transregional *lingua franca* of the Islamic world, was a pragmatic choice by Iranians who aimed to contribute to Islamic sciences and civilization. The

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(1941). For his work and life see the following monographs: Jalali (2019) and Mirsepassi (2021).

prominent scholar of Persian history and literature Mohammad Qazivini deploys the same gardening imagery in his autobiography *Bist maqāle* (Twenty articles), written in 1924. In *Maktub-e avval az Pāris* (The First letter from Paris), he inverts the "cutting the root with an axe" metaphor to critique not past generations of Iranian scholars but contemporary nationalists and language reformers. Reflecting on the reasons that led to the "crisis in Persian language" in the 20th century, Qazvini describes how the Constitutional Revolution (1906–1911) sparked an increase in patriotic sentiment among Iranians and heightened a desire to preserve Iran's national independence (Qazvini, 1924, p. 86). He recognizes that language is a crucial factor in national identity and identifies a paradox in patriots' activities who, while struggling for the country's independence, are at the same time "cutting the root of their nationality with an axe". He further compares them to someone who is "cutting off the branch on which he is sitting", alluding to self-destruction inflicted on one's own identity – an accusation directed toward modern purists who purge Persian of Arabic elements while simultaneously introducing European words and phrases (Qazvini, 1924, p. 87).

The metaphors from the domain of plant world reveal the deep ideological contestation and divergent interpretations over past linguistic agency of Iranians. This results in diverging conceptualization of the current state of Persian as either in need of purification or as shaped by centuries of interaction with neighboring cultures and languages. These contestations materialize in conflicting attitudes toward official language policy.

Natural world metaphors

Besides metaphors from the plant world, the texts written on the topic of language contain diverse metaphors from the natural world, natural disasters and catastrophes, conflict and war. Here, we will present a striking example of an animal metaphor used by the prominent publicist, writer, and poet Hasan Vahid Dastgerdi, who published the monthly journal *Armaghān* (Souvenir) in Tehran from 1919 to 1942. In a 1941 article ʿĀdat tabiʿat-e sanāvi ast (Habit is a second nature) Vahid Dastgerdi sharply criticizes the activities of the First Academy[9] by describing it in an unconventional way, mapping it to the domain of animal slaughter:

> For almost eight or nine years now, we have become accustomed to the slaughter of the sweet Persian language in the slaughterhouse of the First Academy and the hanging of the carcasses of its vocabulary in the butcher shops of state institutions and periodical press (Dastgerdi, 1941, p. 399).

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[9] After the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, a ten-year political détente occurred in Iran, and it became possible to publish critical materials against the activities of the First Academy. Its main activity was to purge foreign words and create local equivalents for them. For this reason, its critics often call it a "word factory."

As the title of the article suggests, an action – no matter how unpleasant it may be at first – becomes a "second nature" when performed regularly. To illustrate the gradual process of acceptance of the Academy's neologisms into Persian language, Dastgerdi uses figurative language designed to provoke a strong reaction of disgust for purism. He compares the Persian language, its vocabulary, and the activities of the First Academy to sheep slaughter and skinning. Dastgerdi argues that such actions are unbearable to watch for an unaccustomed observer but for the butcher they are an everyday routine.

This metaphorical analogy mapping word-creation with animal-slaughtering is exceptionally evocative. The metaphor operates within the broader conceptual schema of LANGUAGE AS A LIVING ORGANISM, where Persian vocabulary becomes a living being capable of suffering and death. This framing resonates with other metaphorical representations of language endangerment – such as illness, pollution, or erosion – yet Dastgerdi's choice of sacrificial slaughter proves particularly potent in the context of 1941 Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran. Writing during World War II and at the background of the intense nation-building pressures from the recently abdicated Reza Shah, the imagery of systematic, institutional killing evokes both contemporary wartime violence and the ritualized destruction of the sacred. By using zoomorphism Dastgerdi succeeds in crafting a powerful rhetorical strategy for opposing the official language policy of Reza Shah. Through vivid language he represents violence and destruction by transforming vocabulary into a living body that can be wounded. Another important and frequently employed metaphorical domain in language debates maps vocabulary to questions of national belonging and legitimacy. Through these political metaphors authors compare words to citizens in possession or not of a legal status to remain in the linguistic polity.

The metaphor "right of citizenship"

Endre Brunstad (2003) argues that the concept of purity depends on the way we conceptualize and subjectively categorize what constitutes foreignness and impurity. For him these are conceptual constructions rather than objective realities (Brunstad, 2003, p. 54). In Iran language polemics about foreignness revolved, on the one hand, around Arabic, Turkic and Mongolian lexical elements in Persian vocabulary, and on the other hand, around European loanwords. The first set of words are conceptualized as foreign by purists, while due to their centuries-old presence in Persian they are considered "nativized" by antipurists. The ideas of foreignness, nativeness and linguistic belonging in language debates are presented with political metaphors from the domain of state borders, citizenship and national independence. Let us examine how these ideas appear in discourses about language and structure them.

The metaphors of *haqq-e tavatton* (right of citizenship) and *shenāsnāme-ye fārsi daryāft kardan* (obtaining a Persian identity document) have been used steadily to describe the Arabic words in Persian as fully adapted to the Persian language (Amini, 2016, p. 216). This metaphorical framing operates within the

broader conceptual schemas of LANGUAGE AS NATION-STATE and WORDS AS CITIZENS, where the Persian language is conceptualized as a bordered, sovereign territory with the power to grant or deny membership to lexical elements. Within this framework, Arabic borrowings are depicted as having "earned" their belonging through centuries of residence and integration, thus acquiring legitimate status within the linguistic polity. The effectiveness of these metaphorical schemas lies precisely in their ability to naturalize a particular ideological framework. The moment participants in language debates begin discussing what type of "legal status" Arabic or Turkic words possess within Persian – whether they hold full citizenship, permanent residency, or remain foreign guests—they have uncritically accepted the core premise that language should be governed like a nation-state. This legalistic metaphor both affirms inclusion for certain borrowings while simultaneously reinforcing the conception of language as a policed territory requiring border control and citizenship verification. What becomes obscured in these pro- and antipurist debates is the fundamental question: why should the political and legal apparatus of an emerging nation-state be applied to the domain of language at all? Both purist and antipurist camps, despite their opposing positions on which words deserve citizenship, remain bound to the same underlying metaphorical framework that treats linguistic diversity as a matter of national security and territorial integrity. This shared conceptual foundation reveals how metaphors shape ideologies of linguistic purity, legitimacy, and control, often determining the parameters of debate before substantive discussion even begins[10].

The extent to which this nation-state metaphor pervades antipurist discourse becomes evident in specific examples from prominent intellectuals. In "The First letter from Paris" Mohammad Qazvini defends the "right of citizenship" of Arabic words by personifying Arabic lexis to the Arabic-speaking minority living in Iran (Qazvini, 1924, p. 88). He rhetorically asks if the Arab population that settled in Iran thousand years ago should be considered foreign and thus expelled or given a foreign passport. If this is the case, he argues, then the Arabic words that they brought with themselves should also be expelled; but if not, then the Arab population should be considered Iranian and Arabic words should be considered Persian (Qazvini, 1924, pp. 88-89). Similarly, Seyyed Hasan Taqizādeh in his famous article *Lozūm-e hefz-e fārsi-ye fasīh* (The Necessity of preserving the eloquent Persian) from 1948, poses the question: why, if normally a foreign citizen would be granted citizenship and nationality in another country after five to ten years of residence, are the Arabic words, which have been part of Persian for thousand years, not granted such rights (Taghizadeh, 1948, cited in Amini 2016, p. 216).

Another instance of how this metaphor appears in discourse is in the 1959 article by Mahmud Afshar *Yegānegī-ye irāniān va zabān-e fārsi* (Unity of Iranians

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[10] For an analysis of similar debates unfolding on the pages of Persian periodicals but dividing Iranian intellectuals on pro- and anti- camps regarding the place of Persian's classical poetry in the development of modern Iran, see Fani (2019, pp. 124-131).

and the Persian language), published in *Āyandeh* journal. Afshar expresses his satisfaction that Arabic has not replaced Persian as the national language of Iran but at the same time admits that its vocabulary has enriched Persian (Afshar, 1959, p. 129). Similarly, there are European words that have phonetically fully adapted in Persian, and thereby Afshar considers both adapted Arabic and European loanwords as having acquired the "rights of citizenship" (Ibid). Nevertheless, he warns that "the doors of the country and the language should be guarded" against excessive borrowing, which can create "chaos" in the public sphere (Afshar, 1959, p. 129). Thus, this metaphor of doors reveals a deeper conceptualization of language as a bounded territorial space in need of lexical gatekeeping, just the way the nation-state needs border patrol.

The imagery from the domain of national sovereignty and state borders is also used in puristic discourse. The Iranian linguist Shadravan Mohammad-Ali Emam-Shushtari, who advocates for revival of lexical material from ancient Iranian languages as a tool for modern terminology building, deliberately develops this parallel in his speech *Ārāyesh va pirāyesh-e zabān* (Embellishment and refinement of language) (1973):

> The national language of every nation is like the national state of every nation. As long as it has borders and independence, it is alive. Just as every foreigner cannot freely enter the state, so every foreign word or foreign phrase cannot unconditionally enter the language […]. To preserve the independence of the language, which is the most important and respected basis for national independence, having borders, keeping them tightly closed and constantly guarding them, is among the utmost conditions for a proud national life (Emam-Shustari, 1973, p. 9).

In this citation Emam-Shushtari systematically constructs a comprehensive analogy between language and state, foreign words and foreign nationals, lexical borrowings and immigration. The uncontrolled entry of foreign elements threatens national independence and thus entry into the country should be subjected to strict control by using the apparatus of the country-passport, visa, border checks, local laws and customs, implying that the state should exert control over foreign linguistic influence just the way it does on foreign nationals.

The metaphorical analogy employed by Emam-Shushtari between language and nation-state is even more revealing if placed within the political context in which this speech was delivered during the Persian Language Congress (1970). The event was part of the larger state-led initiatives, known as the Shiraz Arts Festival (1967–1977). It was attended by scholars and linguists from all over the country, who presented reports on various topics related to Persian language, literature and culture. The holding of the Congress can be considered as practically a prelude to the establishment of the Second Academy. It was inaugurated with speeches by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Prime minister Abbas Hoveida, and the future president of the Academy Sadeq Kia. During their speeches the formation of the regulatory body of the Persian language was announced publicly.

Mohammad-Ali Emam-Shushtari's speech constructs a vision of a Persian in need of state control and protection. His rhetorical strategy likens the survival of the national language to the survival of the nation, which is presented as being exposed to a deadly threat by foreign words. Thus, the action of heavily guarding the borders of language is presented as a kind of national defense, which serves as a strategy to legitimize the upcoming prescriptive official language policy, implemented by the Second Academy.

The border and sovereignty metaphors imagine foreign words as external invaders and language as a territory requiring defense against foreign incursion. The last set of metaphors that will be examined here are the biomedical metaphors, through which language is conceptualized as a body suffering from a disease.

When Language Falls Ill: Medical Metaphors in Persian

Both purists and antipurists employ metaphors from the medical domain to conceptualize the current state of the Persian language as being "sick" though their interpretations of the reasons for this remain diametrically opposed. These medical metaphors also operate within the broader conceptual schema of LANGUAGE AS A LIVING ORGANISM, where Persian is conceived as a biological entity capable of health, illness, injury, recovery and death. Within this framework, the specific metaphor THE PERSIAN LANGUAGE IS SICK is deployed to designate divergent linguistic ideologies, with each camp diagnosing different causes for the language's purported ailment and prescribing opposing remedies.

Linguistic purists attribute the language's "sickness" to past lexical contacts predominantly with Arabic. In *Pure language,* Ahmad Kasravi states that Persian was "polluted" by foreign words in the past and therefore now it is "sick" (Kasravi 1943, p. 4). Through this framing, he positions his own project of creating a reformed "pure language" as a therapeutic intervention into the body of Persian. Similarly, Mohammad-Ali Emam-Shushtari in *Sarnevesht-e zabān-e fārsi che khāhad būd?* (What will be the fate of the Persian language?) is optimistic that "despite its ailments and the fact that it has failed to keep pace with modern advances in the last three hundred years" with the proper scientific interventions, based on the language's internal rules, Persian again can "rise to the rank of the living and vibrant languages of the world and be freed from its current state of helplessness" (Emam-Shushtari, 1972, p. 1586).

Antipurists use medical metaphors to critique both linguistic purism and the influx of European words into the body of Persian. Mohammad Qazvini characterizes the constant influx of European loanwords as "an incurable pain" and as "a crime against independence". The medical metaphor appears vividly as the entry of foreign words into the language is compared to "injecting tuberculosis or plague germs into a healthy body", which by force of will divert the course of development of that body from its natural course and deliberately push it towards destruction and decline (Qazvini, 1924, p. 90). Eqbāl Āshtiāni compares the "pure Persian" to an "infectious microbe" (Āshtiāni, 1933, p. 439), while Hasan

Taqizādeh critiques the idea of "cleansing races and languages which were popular in Europe but also among Eastern nations during that time", as a "deadly disease" (Taqizādeh, 1948, p. 12). By reversing the medical metaphor antipurists achieve a rhetorical effect of presenting purism itself as a pathology.

More recent examples of the deployment of medical metaphors reflect sociolinguistic conditions in the decade, preceding the Islamic revolution from 1979. In his 1974 article *Tajāvoz-e birahmāneh-ye zabān-e fārsi* (Merciless aggression against the Persian language), Farhang Farahi characterizes lexical borrowing from European languages and the naming of commercial and industrial objects as a form of pandemic:

> We see that despite the special importance of the Persian language and alphabet, we have rushed towards foreign words with astonishing persistence, and this contagious and widespread disease has infected our state institutions to such an extent that even the capital municipality, when mentioning the central bus station, uses the unfamiliar word "bus terminal" (Farahi, 1974, p. 190).

Farhang Farahi further explains that although Persian is not initially susceptible to foreign lexical infiltration, it is precisely official institutions that facilitate and propagate foreign borrowings, creating a danger that in mere decades the "language of Saʿdi and Hafez" (another metaphor used by them) could disappear and be replaced by an international linguistic hybrid (Farahi, 1974, p. 194).

A year later, Nosratollah Kasemi, the editor-in-chief of the journal *Gowhar* (Gem), who was also a prominent physician, characterized the Persian language as "sick". In his 1975 article *Zabān-e pārsi-ye darī: Rāz-e baqā va qāʾemeh-ye esteqlāl-e Īrān* (The Language Parsi-ye Dari: The Secret of Survival and the Pillar of Iran's Independence) Kasemi diagnosed the *malady* in language as a result of two simultaneous forces: first, excessive borrowing from foreign languages; and second, radical attempts to purge Persian of its Arabic vocabulary. Kasemi found widespread illiteracy among the population, affecting everyone: students who could not write a line without a spelling error; high-ranking officials in state institutions who could not read a line of official statements without mispronouncing a word; and university professors who translated texts from foreign languages "sloppily" (Kasemi, 1975, p. 512).

Medical metaphors have proven to be effective rhetorical tools that serve both opposing ideologies. For purists, the historical entanglements of Persian caused its contemporary ailments. Antipurists inverted the metaphor presenting purism itself as a disease. More importantly, however, both groups conceptualize Persian as a body in need of serious treatment. An emergent institutional intervention to cope with the influx of European words seems vital for the survival of the language, and, by extension, the nation.

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated how language codification and reform in Pahlavi Iran were negotiated and contested through figurative language that functioned simultaneously as rhetorical strategy and cognitive infrastructure. Both linguistic purists and their opponents employed metaphors from botanical, zoological, political, and medical domains to conceptualize language contact, purity, and reform. Despite opposing ideological positions, both camps drew from identical source domains – purists depicting Persian as a garden requiring weeding or a sick body needing purification, while antipurists inverted these metaphors, portraying purism itself as the threatening disease. Through these analogies, purists framed linguistic survival as depending on systematic reform, while antipurists framed reform as linguistic destruction, revealing fundamental tensions between prescriptive and descriptive approaches to language policy.

These metaphorical schemas are not merely decorative but constitute the conceptual architecture through which Iranian intellectuals articulated competing visions of national identity and linguistic authenticity. When Persian was pathologized as "sick" or depicted as a territorial state requiring border defense, these metaphors naturalized particular understandings of national belonging and historical rupture, transforming abstract ideological questions about Iran's relationship to its pre-Islamic past, Islamic heritage, and position in a changing geopolitical landscape into visceral, embodied experiences of threat and survival. Medical metaphors suggested language was conceptualized as bodily health susceptible to infectious agents, while political metaphors of citizenship and borders made linguistic debates proxies for anxieties about national independence. By the 1970s, these metaphorical frameworks, functioning as invisible conceptual architecture, had acquired force in legitimizing linguistic policy as national security. ʿAli Asghar Hekmat's explicit analogy of lexical borrowing to weeds requiring systematic pruning by a gardener – cast as Reza Shah himself – naturalized state intervention in language as both necessary cultivation and sovereign duty. When Emam-Shushtari subsequently analogized lexical borrowing to immigration, extending the metaphor to position foreign words as migrants threatening national borders, the progression was complete: language policy had been fully reframed through the lens of territorial sovereignty and demographic control. These conceptual frameworks actively construct reality, making certain interventions feel not merely justified but necessary and urgent, transforming linguistic prescription into an act of national defense.

Several key patterns emerge from this study. First, metaphors function both intertextually –structuring discourse across decades—and interdiscursively, as authors appropriated opponents' metaphors sarcastically to belittle their activities. Āshtiāni's deployment of the gardener metaphor to mock purists, or Qazvini's inversion of "cutting the root," exemplify this strategic appropriation. Second, while conceptual structures can be deliberately manipulated for rhetorical purposes, they simultaneously retain their fundamental conceptual nature. Whether deployed earnestly or sarcastically, metaphors of illness, borders, and

cultivation continued naturalizing Persian as a vulnerable entity requiring protection. The transregional nature of these schemas, documented by Thomas (1991) across diverse reform movements, finds particular expression in Iran through local inflections shaped by specific historical anxieties. What is characteristic of the Iranian case is the bidirectional deployment by both camps, revealing how metaphorical frameworks can be contested and inverted while their underlying structure remains stable.

The limitations of this study present opportunities for further research. It focuses on published texts, excluding oral discourse and institutional documents. It examines four metaphorical domains, but others, such as religious, economic and technological domains, merit investigation. It emphasizes radical positions over moderate perspectives. It spans fifty years, but there is no fine-grained analysis of how political transformations, such as Pahlavi authoritarianism, the 1953 coup, the White Revolution and the approaching 1979 revolution, may have shifted conceptual frameworks.

Ultimately, studying metaphorical schemas illuminates how linguistic nationalism operates at the level of thought itself, naturalizing ideological positions through pre-existing embodied knowledge. These are not mere rhetorical flourishes but the cognitive machinery through which competing visions of Iranian national identity and linguistic authenticity—with all their inherent tensions and anxieties—were made thinkable, feelable, and actionable in twentieth-century Iran.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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