Azeri compound nouns:
The influence of Persian on a Turkic language

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This is a study of the effects of language contact on the structure of Azeri, a minority language spoken in Iran. Azeri, the second largest language in Iran, is a Turkic language, but it is heavily influenced by the national language Persian, an Indo-European language. Turkic languages are head-final: in noun phrases, modifiers appear before head nouns. In contrast, Persian is head-initial: modifiers follow head nouns. Notably, Azeri allows both head-final and head-initial structures. A field study conducted with ten Azeri speakers in Tabriz, Iran, revealed that in noun compounds the two types of structures are used almost equally. However, older and monolingual speakers prefer the head-final structure, while younger, educated bilingual speakers prefer the head-initial structure. This shows that Azeri is becoming persified in this domain, as predicted in such situations of language contact involving a politically-dominant language. However, all speakers accept head-final structure, showing the persistence of Turkic morphosyntax despite a millennium of intense social and cultural contact with Persian.
Keywords: Language contact; Azeri morphosyntax; Turkic language; bilingualism; noun compounding

1   Introduction

Iran is a diverse country, with people of many religious and ethnic backgrounds who speak different languages as their first language. Persian is spoken as a first language by only 53% of the population. Alongside Persian, there are several minority languages, e.g. Azeri and other Turkic languages are spoken by 23% of the population, Kurdish by 10%, Lori by 6%, Baluchi by 2% and Arabic by 2% (Mehriyar 2000). The following map illustrates where different minority languages are spoken in Iran.

Figure 1. Map of Iran with diverse languages[1]

Persian is the dominant language, and native speakers of Persian often do not learn a minority language. However, most speakers of minority languages in Iran also speak Persian to some degree. Over half of Iran's population is bilingual. Persian serves as a lingua franca in Iran, and most publications and mass media are in this language. There is only limited publication or broadcasting programs in the other relatively popular languages of Iran, such as Azeri and Kurdish. In some societies, people use one language in their families, local communities, and work, but another language for education and official business. This is the situation in Iran: the only official language of Iran is Persian, and it is the only language used for education, including in Azeri-speaking areas. Many educated Azeris are totally fluent in both Azeri and Persian. Equally comfortable in both languages, bilingual speakers often engage in code-mixing when speaking to each other.

Azeri is a Turkic language, but it is strongly influenced by Persian, an Indo-European language. Azeri, with approximately 15–20 million speakers, has more speakers than any other non-Persian language in Iran (Crystal 2010). Most Azeri speakers inhabit the four provinces in the northwestern part of Iran. Each province has its own dialect—the Ardabil dialect in Ardabil province, the Tabriz dialect in East Azerbaijan province, the Urmia dialect in West Azerbaijan province, and the Zanjan dialect in Zanjan province. The dialects are mutually intelligible, although they are distinguished by phonological and lexical criteria (Dehghani 2000). Among these dialects, the dialect of Tabriz is the prestigious dialect and serves as the norm for Iranian Azeri (Menges 1951, Johanson 1998). I am a native speaker of Azeri, born and raised in Tabriz, capital of East Azerbaijan

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[1] This map is retrieved November 1, 2012 and adapted from
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Iran_main_languages.png

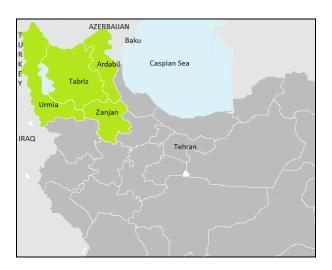province in northwestern Iran. The following map shows where different dialects of Azeri are located in Iran.

Figure 2. Map of Azeri-speaking areas in Iran[2]

Given the dominance of Persian, and the long period of intensive contact, a more interesting observation is that some Azeri speakers have remained monolingual.[3] Many people of the older generation in Azeri-speaking areas did not have a chance to attend school when they were children, especially in rural areas. These people can only speak Azeri, though they cannot read and write it. They also cannot read or write Persian, though some read a little Arabic due to their study of the Quran. That is why many older Azeri speakers and those who are living in rural areas do not know Persian, but are monolingual in Azeri. In sum, Azeri speakers differ in their fluency in Persian, ranging from monolinguals to fully functional bilinguals. People from the older generation who have little or no education are not able to read, write or speak Persian fluently. However, those who have higher education, which includes most of the younger generation, can read, write and speak Persian fluently. The reason is that they have been in contact with Persian for many years, they read academic publications in Persian, and of course, many of the educated people need to write academic texts.

Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 74–76) propose that when languages are in close contact with each other, borrowing lexical items is common, and in fact, many lexical items borrowed from Persian have become a part of the Azeri lexicon. Lee (2008) claims that, educated speakers tend to replace native Azeri

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[2] This map is retrieved November 1, 2012 and constructed using the map template from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Blank-Map-Iran-With-Water-Bodies.png

[3] I use the term 'monolingual' to refer to those who are able to communicate comfortably only in Azeri and the term 'bilingual' to refer to those Azeri people who use Persian in their daily life.

words with their Persian equivalents. For example, the following text is part of an e-mail to my cousin, who is bilingual in Azeri and Persian. The italic/bolds words are of Persian origin but have been borrowed into Azeri, undergoing phonological and morphological accommodation.

> bayram ***taʔtilat***i xoş geşdi? ***hesabi*** dolandin? inşalah ***ki hämişä şad vä sälämät*** olasiz. ***bahar*** havasinan neynisiz? burda ***ki*** hala ***bahar***di ***vä*** agaçlar gozäl ***gül***lar açiplar ***vä*** här yer ***şukufa***di. ***küçä***lärdän ***tamam*** gül iyi gälir, adam deyir durum baxim bu ***gül***lara ***vä äks*** salim. bizdä ***tebge maʔmul, zendagani***ğa ***mäşğul***ux ***vä*** günlarimiz gecir.
>
> How was your New Year's ***holiday***? Did you have ***much*** fun? I wish you ***happiness and health always***. How is your ***spring*** time going? ***Here*** it is still ***spring and*** trees have beautiful ***blooms***, everywhere is full of ***flowers***. The smell of fresh flowers is ***everywhere*** in the ***streets***, so you want to stop everywhere and watch ***them***, and take ***pictures***. ***As usual***, we are busy with ***life*** and the days are passing.

However, borrowing is not limited to lexical items. Myers-Scotton (1993) states that when two languages that are not genetically related share a geographical location, and there is a high degree of bilingualism or multilingualism, grammatical features of the dominant language may be adopted by the minority language. Since, Persian is the only official language in Iran it has political and cultural dominance over Azeri. This is exactly the sort of situation where one would expect the structure of a language to be influenced by another language, even if it is typologically dissimilar. Erfani (2012) explored this issue for a variety of morphosyntactic constructions in Azeri and found that several show signs of persification. For example, in Azeri compound nouns, the head noun follows the modifier in (1):

(1)   dämir   qapı
       iron   *door*
       'iron door'

However, it is also possible to have a compound in which the head noun precedes the modifier, as in (2):

(2)   ustad   -i   danişgah
       professor   *-EZ*   *university*
       'university professor '

The modifier-head order is the native Turkic word order, while the head-modifier order arises under influence from Persian:

(3) dar   -e   âhani
     door   -EZ   Iron
     'iron door'

The main objective of this paper is to examine patterns of language variation among Azeri speakers in their use of compound nouns in order to determine the degree of influence of Persian on Azeri structure. To do this, I designed a study to investigate Azeri compound noun constructions, collecting data from a variety of Azeri speakers. Section 2 gives an introduction to noun compounding in Azeri, as compared to Turkish and Persian. Section 3 describes the field study detailing the methodology and data coding. Section 4 analyses the compound noun data and discusses the results in terms of two sociolinguistic factors—the age and level of education of the speaker. Finally, section 5 summarizes the results of this study and discusses what it reveals for the future of the Azeri language.

2   Noun compounding

Compounding, which is probably the most common morphological process cross-linguistically, can be defined as a lexical item consisting of two or more words used for generic rather than referential function, e.g. English *garbage man* or *popcorn* (Fabb 1998: 66). Azeri compound nouns come in two forms: one can be regarded as the native Turkic variant and the other variant is borrowed from Persian. Thus noun compounding can serve as a measure of Persian influence on Azeri. Native Azeri has right-headed noun-noun and adjective-noun compounding:

(4)   märmär   daş   (Participant 3: 2012)
       marble   stone
       'marble stone'

(5)   gümüş   güldan   (Participant 9: 2012)
       silver   vase
       'silver vase'

(6)   taxta   qapı   (Participant 1: 2012)
       wood   door
       'wooden door'

(7)   böyük   -maman   (Participant10: 2012)
        big   -mother
        'grandmother'

(8)   sarı   -kök   (Participant 5: 2012)
        yellow   -root
        'turmeric'

(9)   boş   -qab   (Participant 4: 2012)
        empty   -container
        'plate'

    The above compounds are bare, but for noun-noun compounds, it is more common to use the linker –*(s)I*.[4]

(10)   Azerbaijan   türk   -ü   (Participant 3: 2012)
        Azerbaijan   turk   -LNK
        'Azerbaijani Turk'

(11)   Isfahlan   känd   -i   (Participant 2: 2012)
        Isfahlan   village   -LNK
        'Isfahlan village'

(12)   lobya   kükü   -si   (Participant 5: 2012)
        bean   omelet   -LNK
        'green bean omelet'

(13)   kitab   ev   -i   (Participant 4: 2012)
        book   house   -LNK
        'library'

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[4] The suffix –*(s)I* has the same shape as the third person singular possessive suffix –*(s)I* in Azeri , but it does not necessarily indicate possession. It may express the relation between the elements, for instance, in place names:

(i)   Eynali   Dağ   -ı
        Eynali   mountain   -LNK
        'Eynali Mountain'

In contrast, the possessive suffix –*(s)I* expresses possession, as in:

(ii)   Ali   -nin   kitab   -ı
        Ali   GEN   book   -LNK
        'Ali's book'

(14) qapı   qabaq   -ı   (Participant 1: 2012)
      door   front   -LNK
      'in front of the door'

Right-headed compound structures are typical in Turkic languages. As in Azeri, the most productive and frequently used compounds in Turkish are noun-noun and adjective-noun (Kornfilt 1997, Göksel and Kerslake 2005, Göksel 2009, Ralli and Bağrıaçık 2011, among others).

(15) ipek   Çorap
      silk   Sock
      'silk sock

(16) böyük   -anne
      big   -mother
      'grandmother'

(17) böyük   -baba
      big   -father
      'grandfather'

Noun-noun compounding can also be formed with an *–(s)I* suffix, as in:

(18) para   çanta   -sı
      money   bag   -LNK
      'purse'

(19) İngiliz   edebiyat   -ı
      English   literature   -LNK
      'English literature'

(20) kuş   yuva   -sı
      bird   nest   -LNK
      'bird nest'

Persian also has bare noun-noun and noun-adjective compounds:

(21) âb   -havij
      water   -carrot
      'carrot juice'

(22) pedar   -bozorg
      father   -big
      'grandfather'

(23) doxtar   -xâle
      girl   -aunt
      'cousin'

The above examples are left-headed, which is considered the default order of compounds in Persian (Kalbasi 1992, Shariat 2005, Anvari and Ahmadi-Givi 2006, Mahoozi 2006, Vahidian-Kamyar and Omrani 2006, Foroodi-Nejad and Paradis 2009), though right-headed compounds also occur.

(24) noxost   -vazir
      first   -minister
      'prime minister'

Another way of forming compounds in Persian is by means of the Ezafe construction.[5] The head noun is suffixed with the Ezafe *–(y)e* (the glide *-y-* occurs after vowels).

(25) daryâ   -ye   xazar
      sea   -EZ   Caspian
      'Caspian sea'

(26) miz   -e   utu
      table   -EZ   iron
      'ironing board'

(27) otâg   -e   nešiman
      room   -EZ   sitting
      'living room'

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[5] In Persian, the Ezafe construction with a vowel *-e* occurs with various kinds of post-nominal modifiers, including APs, descriptive NPs, genitive NPs, and some PPs (Samiian 1994).

Such compounds are left-headed. Persian is a language that has variable head positions in noun compound structures. Azeri speakers also frequently use the left-headed Ezafe construction:

(28) müdir   -i   mädräsä   (Participant 3: 2012)
director -EZ   school
'the school director'

(29) zäban   -i   türki   (Participant 6: 2012)
language -EZ   Turkish
'Turkish language'

(30) karmänd -i   bank   (Participant 7: 2012)
employee -EZ   bank
'bank employee'

(31) ädäbiyyat -i   maktüb   (Participant 8: 2012)
literature -EZ   written
'written literature'

(32) ustad   -i   danişgah   (Participant 9: 2012)
professor -EZ   university
'university professor'

These are formed with the Ezafe suffix, which is borrowed from Persian. The above phrases, which are direct quotation from Persian, could alternatively be expressed in Azeri by right-headed equivalents:

(33) mädräsä   müdir   -i
school   director   -LNK
'school director'

(34) türki   dil   -i
Turkish   language   -LNK
'Turkish language'

(35) bank   karmänd   -i
bank   employee   -LNK
'bank employee'

(36) yazılı   ädäbiyyat -i
written   literature -LNK
'written literature'

(37) danişgah   ustad   -i
     university   *professor* *-LNK*
     'university professor'

I consider the right-headed compound in Azeri to be the native Turkic pattern since Turkish generally lacks left-headed compounds.

3   Methodology and data coding

In order to investigate the morphosyntax of Azeri and the influence that Persian has on it, I travelled to Tabriz, Iran, to conduct a field study. This project is a qualitative/quantitative study designed to compare Azeri as spoken by the younger and older generations.

3.1   Participants

This field research involved ten participants divided into two groups. The participants in the older generation (aged 65+) were mostly monolingual in Azeri and the participants in the younger generation (aged 20–35) were mostly bilingual in Azeri and Persian. They can be further sub-divided by their level of education (basic education or higher education). The following table summarizes the basic biographical information on each participant:

Table 1. Participants' information

Participant	Age	Language (Mono/Bilingual)	Level of Education
1	88	monolingual	basic reading
2	72	monolingual	basic reading
3	69	bilingual	higher education (BS)
4	65	monolingual	basic reading/writing
5	65	monolingual	none
6	36	bilingual	higher education (MS)
7	35	bilingual	higher education (PhD)
8	28	bilingual	higher education (PhD)
9	26	bilingual	higher education (MA)
10	22	bilingual	higher education (BS)

3.2   Procedure

The interviews were recorded with a high quality digital voice recorder (Olympus WS 801). The participants were each involved in a 30-45 minute free conversation in an informal setting in a quiet room at the participant's home. The interviews resulted in a total of 6 hours and 50 minutes of speech (189 minutes by older speakers, 221 minutes by younger speakers). Selected data were transcribed and translated and these formed the basis of my dataset.

3.3 Data coding

As stated earlier, the native Azeri compound noun construction is right-headed and formed with or without the linker *–(s)I*:

Right-headed compounds:

(38) äbrişäm   färş   (Participant 3: 2012)
     silk   *rug*
     'silk rug'

(39) Tabriz   püstä   -si   (Participant 1: 2012)
     Tabriz   *pistachio* *-LNK*
     'Tabriz pistachio'

(40) ät   maşın   -ı   (Participant 4: 2012)
     flesh   *machine*   *-LNK*
     'meat grinder'

(41) dars   kitab   -ı   (Participant 7: 2012)
     lesson   *book*   *-LNK*
     'study book

(42) ev   şirni   -si   (Participant 5: 2012)
     home   *sweet*   *-LNK*
     'homemade sweet

In comparison, the Persian-style compound is left-headed with the Ezafe *–(y)I*:

Left-headed compounds:

(43) istgâh   -i   ahoodäşt   (Participant 1: 2012)
     station   *-EZ*   *ahoodasht*
     'Ahoodasht station'

(44) zäban   -i   madäri   (Participant 7: 2012)
     language *-EZ*   *motherhood*
     'mother tongue'

(45) danişkäde -ye   fänni   (Participant 10: 2012)
     faculty   *-EZ*   *engineering*
     'the faculty of Engineering'

(46) näzär   -e   şäxsi   (Participant 8: 2012)
     idea   *-EZ*   *personal*
     'personal idea'

(47) kitab   -i   dastan   (Participant 6: 2012)
     book   *-EZ*   *Story*
     'story book'

The noun compound data were analyzed on these grounds.

4   Data analysis

Over the last forty years, language variation theorists have developed a methodology for applying sociolinguistic analysis to the variation found in the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic structure of a language. Labov (1972c) defines a linguistic variable as simply "two ways of saying the same thing." Tagliamonte (2006: 70) refines this notion, saying that the variants should not result from performance anomalies, but be linguistically well-formed. Furthermore, the frequency of variation should be robust: both variants must occur with sufficient frequency. A variationist approach to linguistic analysis can then look for factors that elucidate the systematic distribution of the variants. Ferguson (1959), Calteeaux (1994), Thomason and Kaufman (1998) and Thomason (2003) are among those to discuss the effect of social factors in language contact. When speakers of different languages live in close contact, their languages influence each other, but they do so in piece-meal fashion, leading to complexities in the synchronic language structure and differences among speakers. Variations that gain popularity can gradually lead to loss of a variant and result in language change. According to Labov (1994, 2001), some of the socio-cultural factors that can affect the use of linguistic variables are age, sex, social class, ethnicity, race, and community size.

My research seeks to examine language change in progress in the Azeri language by comparing the data from monolingual Azeri speakers to the data from bilingual Azeri-Persian speakers. This study shows that two socio-cultural factors, age and level of education, are relevant to morphosyntactic variation in Azeri. First, we look at the effect of the age and next the effect of education. The age of the speaker has been demonstrated to be an important social factor in language variation (Labov 2000). Differences between generations in linguistic behavior illustrate clear examples of language change in progress. Thus, the age of the speaker becomes an important factor when investigating the status of a linguistic structure in a community. One goal of my field study was to see whether the factor of age influences the choice of compound noun variant.

As stated earlier, Azeri has two compound noun variants: the left-headed variant, in which the head precedes the modifier, and the right-headed variant, in which the head follows the modifier. In this study, right-headed and left-headed compounds are both robustly attested, with a slight preference for the latter. My

data yielded 225 tokens of CNs: 43% were right-headed (96 CNs) and 57% were left-headed (129 CNs). In other words, the persified left-headed CNs was slightly preferred over the native Turkic right-headed construction. See Figure 3.
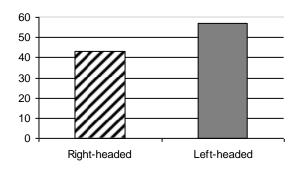

Figure 3. Percentage of right-headed and left-headed compound nouns

These results suggest that compound nouns provide a good linguistic variable to investigate because both variants are produced frequently in daily speech. Given the results of the CN data above, an obvious question to ask is whether the social factors of age and education influence the choice of variants in noun compounding.

4.1 Effect of age

The following gives a break-down in the results of the two types of the compound nouns as produced by older and younger groups of speakers.

Table 2. Number and percentage of right-headed and left-headed compound nouns by older and younger groups

Participants	right-headed		left-headed		Total
	#	%	#	%	#
older group	51	58	37	42	88
younger group	45	33	92	67	137
Total	96	43	129	57	225

As Table 2 illustrates, the older speakers produced 51/88 right-headed compounds and 37/88 left-headed compounds, whereas the younger speakers produced 45/137 right-headed compounds and 92/137 left-headed compounds. Therefore, the results show that older participants tend to produce more of the right-headed compound noun variant (58%), whereas the younger participants tend to produce more of the left-headed borrowed variant (67%). The older participants tend to produce slightly more compounds with native Azeri structures than with the borrowed Persian order, whereas the younger participants

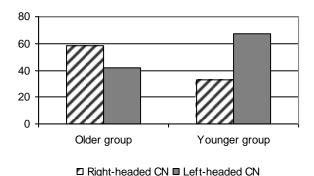tend to produce more compounds with the borrowed structure than with the native one. See Figure 4.

Figure 4.   Percentage of right-headed and left-headed compound nouns by older and younger groups

4.2   Effect of education

In the sociolinguistic literature, many studies have been done on the effect of education on language variation. Education may be the best factor measuring the social evaluation of features in a community, with higher levels of education correlating with linguistic features held to have prestige (Labov 2002: 60). In this study, the effect of education has been investigated differentiating between participants with little or no education versus those with some post-secondary education. The following Table 3 presents the number and percentage of right-headed versus left-headed compound nouns tabulated for two groups of speakers—those with little or no education and those with higher education.

Table 3. Number and percentage of right-headed and left-headed compound nouns by level of education

Participants	right-headed		left-headed		Total
	#	%	#	%	#
less educated	40	71	16	29	56
higher educated	56	33	113	67	169
Total	96	43	129	57	225

Table 3 illustrates, the less educated speakers produced 40/56 right-headed compounds and 16/56 left-headed compounds, whereas the more highly educated speakers have produced 56/169 right-headed compounds and 113/169 left-headed compounds. The results show that the less educated participants tend to produce more of the right-headed variant (71%), whereas the more highly educated participants tend to produce more of the left-headed variant (67%). See Figure **5**5. This statistic shows that the less educated participants favor the native Azeri structure. In contrast, the behavior of the educated speakers shows that they tend to produce more compounds with the borrowed structure.
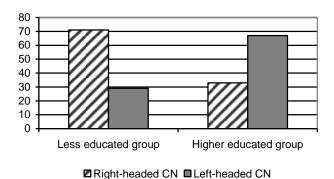
Figure 5. Percentage of right-headed and left-headed compound nouns by less educated and higher educated groups

Investigating the behavior of individual participants may reveal the linguistic and non-linguistic characteristics of a variation more clearly (Labov 1972, 1994, 2001; MacLagan, Gordon and Lewis 1999; among others). Therefore, when I divided the participants based on their level of education, I moved participant 3 to the group of participants with higher education. It is insightful to examine the results for participant 3, who is an older but highly educated participant. His results for compound nouns more closely resemble the results of the younger highly educated group than those of the other older speakers. This participant produced more left-headed compound nouns, whereas the other participants in the older group with less education produced more right-headed compound nouns. If we compare his behavior with the younger educated speakers, we see that his choice of variants is in the same range as the other participants in the educated group. In other words, the result from participant 3 suggests that the factor of education is stronger than the factor of age. The following table gives the results for participant along with their level of education.

Table 4. Number and percentage of right-headed and left-headed compound nouns by level of education

Participant	Age	Level of Education	right-headed		left-headed		Total
			#	%	#	%	#
5	65	None	6	100	0	0	6
1	88	basic reading	12	60	8	40	20
2	72	basic reading	10	83	2	17	12
4	65	basic reading	12	67	6	33	18
		SUB-TOTAL	*40*	*71*	*16*	*29*	*56*
3	69	higher education, BSc	11	34	21	66	32
10	22	higher education, BSc	4	33	8	67	12
9	26	higher education , MA	5	33	10	67	15
6	36	higher education, MSc	2	7	27	93	29
7	35	higher education, PhD	14	42	19	58	33
8	28	higher education, PhD	20	41	28	59	48
		SUB-TOTAL	*56*	*33*	*113*	*67*	*169*
		TOTAL	**96**	**42**	**129**	**58**	**225**

To summarize, the findings in the present study show that noun compounds are a good sociolinguistic variable in Azeri because both right-headed and left-headed compound nouns are well attested. The data show that the factors of age and education influence the choice between variants. Summarizing the results overall, young and educated speakers, who have more contact with Persian through media, education and social contact, are more influenced by Persian structure. In contrast, older speakers, who are mostly monolingual and have less education in the Persian language, retain more native Azeri structures in their speech.

5   Conclusion

This study examines linguistic issues in Azeri, a minority language spoken in Iran, specifically, the effect of Persian on Azeri morphosyntax. Iranian Azeri has been strongly influenced by Persian, an Indo-European language. Intensive linguistic and cultural contact has led to considerable convergence between the two languages. Northwestern Iran is an ethno-linguistic contact zone where Azeri and Persian have been spoken side by side for more than a millennium.

We saw that in noun compounding, left-headed and right-headed compound nouns were used with almost equal frequency by the participants. However, the choice of structure differed slightly by the age and education of the participants. The finding of the current study is compatible with the findings of other studies on languages of the region. Johanson (1998) claims that persification in the Irano-Turkic area is promoted by increased education and communication. These findings also show that Azeri is becoming persified, as predicted in situations of language contact involving a politically-dominant

language. An interesting future study would be to compare the status of Azeri to other varieties of the Azerbaijan language, particularly Northern Azerbaijani, the official language in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

According to the results of my study, the influence of Persian is seen to be greater among young, educated speakers. With respect to the factor of age, Sankoff and Thibault (1981) claim that if a syntactic variant is correlated with age, this may be evidence of language change in progress. For example, left-headed variant correlates with the younger group and thus this might be an indication of an evolution in the grammar of Azeri toward Persian structure. Sankoff and Thibault (1981) further argue that when variants coexist for a long time, it should be expected that this equivalence will be grammaticalized at a later time. Therefore, we should expect structures such as left-headed compound nouns, which has been borrowed from Persian and has coexisted with native Turkish structure for a long time, will be eventually be considered as canonical structures in the grammar of Azeri.

Furthermore, the difference between the two groups of speakers in my study suggests that the rate of persification of Azeri is accelerating. However, due to the small number of participants and tokens, these conclusions can only be suggestive. Additional quantitative studies with sufficient data are required to verify these results. This discovery is an issue of some concern. The topic of language endangerment often focuses on languages with small populations of people, e.g. indigenous languages of North America. But even when a language is spoken by millions of people, it can undergo rapid change in the face of contact.

Language use and attitudes towards language use are tied to issues of cultural identity. The Azeri people maintain a Turkic cultural identity even though they live in Iran. If they lose their language, they will lose the link to this heritage. Unfortunately, there is much pressure—both from society at large and from families who desire their children to be upwardly mobile—to focus on learning Persian rather than Azeri. As fluency in the language is lost, so is the tie to Azeri culture. The future of Azeri, the Azerbaijani language as it is spoken in Iran, remains to be seen.

Acknowledgements

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