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A sociolinguistic study of Kashkay Turkic and its gradual extinction

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The following report concerns a study in which we have looked at different reasons for the gradual extinction of the Turkic Kashkay (Qaşqā'i) dialect in Shiraz and Firuzabad in the province of Fars. The aim has been to determine the factors that affect the use of the dialect in different contexts.

The participants in the study were 120 male and 90 female members of the Kashkay tribe living in Firuzabad, and the same number of participants in Shiraz, in the districts of Abiverdi, Sahlabad and Koshan. The participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire consisting of 18 questions selected in order to determine which language—Turkic or Persian—was used by informants in different contexts. Some parts of our findings are also based on direct observation. The data collected relate to the domains of family, friendship, education and employment, indicating which language is used in these domains depending on the setting and the participants' age, gender and social status.

Our analysis of the data collected in Firuzabad allowed the following conclusions: In the family domain, the language used is always Turkic when the addressee is a native speaker of Turkic. When the addressee is not a native speaker of Turkic, Persian is mostly used. This also happens when the parents have different native languages. In the friendship domain, Turkic is always used when participants are Turks and the setting is informal. When one of the participants is not a Turk, Persian is always spoken. There is no difference between the education and employment domain with respect to language use in these contexts and situations. In formal settings, the language used is always Persian, no matter what the participants' native language is. When the setting is informal and the participants are Turks, Turkic is often used. Age and gender play no role in selecting the language.

A comparison with the data obtained in Shiraz shows differences between the domains of language use in the two Turkic communities. Whereas the age factor is

not important in Firuzabad, its role in Shiraz is obvious. In Shiraz, young people below twenty years of age tend to speak Persian in all situations. In the education and employment domains Persian is dominant. This may relate to demographic factors and the negative attitudes of the population in big cities towards vernaculars.

The Turkic varieties used in the family domain differ as well. More borrowed words are used by Turkic families living in Shiraz than by those who live in Firuzabad.

The mother tongue of the members of the Kashkay tribe in the province of Fars is a dialect suitable for nomadic life. It is particularly rich within semantic fields that are of importance to tribesmen, and contains, for instance, numerous lexical items pertaining to animals and plants. The nomadic way of life is, however, declining, and the dialect has no function in cities. It is unable to express ideas in the field of science and technology, and it is not used in education or mass media. The new generations of Turks who grow up in cities see no need to use their dialect. The negative attitudes towards vernaculars make the matter worse. The dialect is only used at home. Moreover, the lexicon and certain structures of the varieties spoken by Turks in cities are strongly influenced by Persian.

Linguists and other educated people should do their best to prevent the extinction of dialects in Iran. It is hoped that our study will suggest some ways to prevent or at least slow down the processes. The dialect speakers themselves should take a more positive attitude towards their dialect and encourage their children to learn and speak their mother tongue. They should try to make their dialect richer by coining new words and expressions which are needed under the new circumstances.