**The Aim of My Postdoctoral Fellowship**

This synopsis is part of my application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies under the supervision of Professor Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi. For my postdoctoral fellowship, I plan to investigate the polarization of political space and the transformation of swearwords and satirical language published in Persian newspapers from early to mid 20th century. I argue that there is a shift in the use of swearwords and invective language in Persian newspapers from predominantly familial to non-familial themes between 1900-1953. I selected this historic era because of the escalation of conflict closer to the coup in 1953. This provides a unique opportunity to analyze the use of swearwords and political invectives, their evolution over time, and factors that shape their use in the Iranian political rhetoric.

My central argument is that the expression of emotion language through swearwords and invectives is shaped by the context, and specifically, it varies over time (reflecting the intensity of the political conflict) and as a function of the individual characteristics of the speakers (religion, political affiliation, ideological extremism). In this vein, I argue that, during this period, there is a shift in the nature of discourse and use of swearing language in Persian newspapers, with swearwords coming from a variety of sources (e.g., family, sexual activities, prostitution, scatological themes, animals, death). Similarly, I argue that emotionality and use of swearwords and invective language are expressed differently as a function of speakers’ characteristics such as religiosity, gender, political affiliation. My preliminary research from the newspapers “Hamleh”; “Atash” revealed an evolution of the use of swearwords by the political parties, with a shift from harsher swearwords focused on maternal relations, sexual activities, prostitution, and scatological themes to swearwords that focus on animals, death, religious themes and treacherous language such as: “گوسفند” [[1]](#footnote-1)(sheepish); “ افعي”[[2]](#footnote-2) (viper); “ زالو”[[3]](#footnote-3)(leech, bloodsucker); “شيره كش”[[4]](#footnote-4) (opiate Addict/ druggie); “ لات جلمبر”[[5]](#footnote-5) (filthy vagabond); “ نمك به حرام”[[6]](#footnote-6) (traitor); “رجاله مزدور”[[7]](#footnote-7) (venal scum); “اجنبي”[[8]](#footnote-8) (barbarian, alien).

This research will provide a rich analysis of how Persian swearwords and political invectives have varied over time, and across members of political parties during the first half of the 20th century in Iran. To my knowledge, this has not been studied to date and, as such, this work will make important contributions to Iranian studies, and, more generally, to Persian studies, linguistics, historical studies, and social science and humanities.

**Motivation for the Proposed Research**

My research is situated in the area of emotion language and its intersection with multiple contextual variables such as culture, historical and political circumstances, ideological orientations, and socio-biographical variables (age, gender, education, social class). I am particularly interested in investigating swearwords (my Master (Shakiba, 2003), and PhD (Shakiba, 2019)) and invective and satire language (my postdoctoral work) in the Persian language for two reasons: 1) both swearwords and invective language are significant indicators of emotion language and play a pivotal role in communication; and 2) both are used to express group membership and to create social boundaries.

Practically, swearwords are like a tool box which can be used for a variety of emotional expressions. There is no other way to express anger and frustration and convey the same level of contempt in polite language (Jay & Janschewitz, 2007; Stapleton, 2010; Jay, 2000). Swearwords also express habitual language and in-group slang in order to strengthen social harmony, cohesion or create social boundaries, this way becoming an isogloss between social groups (Dewaele, 2004). Similarly, the use of invective language serves as a way to express emotion and social affiliation. Invective language is shaped by context, particularly historic eras characterized by prominent ideological conflicts between political parties, such as the period 1900-1953 in Iran. When members of a political party use swearwords, this can jeopardise their public image. However, they may use it strategically to emphasize a particular argument while taking the associated risk for a potential reward. This way, invective language serves as a social signal and its use is associated with emotional arousal. There is a belief that when members of a political party use invective language, they are perceived as genuine, passionate, authentic, trustworthy, more emotionally involved in their statements, and easier to relate to ordinary people, which is likely to increase their popularity and acceptance among their supporters.

The fundamental argument of my research is that speakers’ context significantly shapes the intent, use and impact of swearwords and invective language. To this end, my Master and PhD work was an examination of the effect of socio-biographical variables on the use of swearwords by Persian speakers. My postdoctoral work will remain focused on the Persian language but it will expand and deepen my graduate research by 1) operationalizing emotion language as expressions of political satire and invectives during a historic period of significant conflict in Iran; and 2) defining the context more broadly (i.e., going beyond the socio-biographical characteristics of the speakers). Specifically, I will analyze the effect of the larger political context in Iran during early to mid 20th century and its effect on the use of invective language. During my postdoctoral fellowship, I plan to synthesize my doctoral research and combine it with the proposed postdoctoral work. My goal is to publish a book that provides a rich analysis of emotion language (swearwords, invective language) in the Persian language and how the discourse is shaped by various factors (individual characteristics of the speakers, but also larger contextual variables such as the historic period and ideological conflicts).

**Brief Methodological Approach**

For my postdoctoral work, I aim to explore patterns and relationships between political affiliation, social and power status, gender, religiosity, and possibly socio-economic status and the use of invective language among the political parties that were in conflict in Iran during 1900-1953. This will build on and extend my PhD research by looking at how emotion language is shaped by the characteristics of the historic period, and not only by individual characteristics of the speakers. For my postdoctoral work I will continue to explore the notion of acculturation (studied during my PhD) because it can reveal one’s ideological and political affiliation. However, an intriguing line of research, unexplored to date, is to examine how a specific political, ideological affiliation affects the use of swearwords and invective language. In addition, it is not clear how psychological factors such as religiosity and social-cultural factors (e.g., individuals’ cultural norms; gender, social class, and power) affect the use of invective and satire language. To fill these gaps, for my postdoctoral work, I plan to investigate the use of political invective language in Iranian newspapers such as “Atash” and “Hamleh” “Mard-e emruz”; and political satire journals “Towfiq” “Hajji Baba”, and “Chelenger” belonging to the 1900-1953 period.

I aim to highlight the significant role of the language used in newspapers and journals, ultimately serving as a platform for social and political change in a country. I am interested in how censorship law regulates the public discourse and use of invective and satire language in politics. In this pursuit, for my methodology, I employ the triangulation of invective and satire swearing usage, reading newspaper and journals texts from 1900- 1953 in Iran, and applying deep contextualized, cultural, historical, linguistic understanding of Iran’s complexity to ensure rigor and in-depth understanding of the texts.

There is a distinct rise in the usage of invective language which is the outcome of political crisis in Iran between 1900-1953 due to the intensification of ideological conflicts between major parties such as the notables, the socialist movement (Tudeh party), the nationalist movement which creates National Front (Jebe’ eh-e Melli), and Fedayan-Islam (self-sacrifices of Islam) (Abrahamian, 2008). The challenges they have provided for the opposing parties have caused rise in employing swearwords that appear to violate social norms. In fact, these parties use offensive language to express high emotional arousal and for drawing attention to their particular arguments. The use of lampoons, invective and satire language was not private, it was open to the public and was used even in public sphere through newspapers. As Katouzin (2013; 2015) has noted, invectives and satirical languages were used even in Constitutional Era, their use was politically motivated, often scathing and libelous. In early 1920s, explicit use of obscenity became very frequent. There are many swearwords with prostitution, sexual activities theme, such as: “جنده باز” (whore-mongers)” (Katouzian, 2015, p. 164); or scatological theme such as: “گوز ميزنند” (fart out); (Katouzian, 2015, p. 168); “ريدي” (shat on) (Katouzian, 2015, p.169). From 1940s to the coup in 1953 satirical weeklies like *Chelengar* used satirized and scandalized language to opponents of Tudeh party. Similarly, *Bâbâ Shamal* was nationalist, *Tawfig*, and *Hajji Bâbâ* were pro- Mosaddeq satirical weeklies and were also scathing towards their opponents. My work to date showed that political discussions between the parties became increasingly more offensive closer to the coup. Interestingly, while offensive arguments between the opposing parties are increasingly common, there is no such increase in non-political headlines and news which signifies the importance of the use of swearwords at the time of profound emotional arousal.

It is important to keep in mind that political invectives appear to be at rise among elites and those who are literate since the data is taken from the newspapers. Thus, it is less clear whether this is equally true among the general public. I plan to explore several contextual influences such as whether the use of invective language is the response to the dynamics of the political crisis and if it continues among the parties in conflict after the coup; whether there is a more general trend toward offensive language; and whether each political party uses specific swearwords that distinguish it from the opposing party. I intend to show the entire process of how this new discourse of moving from extremely obscene language to traitorous language becomes consolidated; to identify crucial conflictual times such as the height of 1941 and examine the use of vindictive political language during these times and the evolution of various elements of the discourse formation of swearing and othering; to explain how the political rhetoric is shaped by various contextual factors and provide exemplary pieces of writings (i.e., three different pieces, one from leftist, nationalist and another one from Kashani, a more Islamic group); and, finally, to conduct comparative analyses, examine differences and similarities, and deeply describe and explain change over time and how different political circumstances shape emotion expression in Persian political language.

**Anticipated Impact and Novelty of the Work**

Although, this research focuses on a few selected newspapers, my findings will provide a unique mapping of the evolution of invective and satire language during 1900-1953 in Iran. This will fill a significant gap in the literature with respect to the use of invective language in Persian studies. I believe that this work will provide a unique contribution to the current literature by exploring the dynamic between high ideological conflict and emotional arousal and how this affects the political rhetoric.

This research is based on the idea that analysis of political invective and satire language requires a wider perspective that goes beyond a merely linguistic one. To this end, my postdoctoral work will link the use of swearwords with political affiliations, and will investigate their relationship with socio-biographical background, acculturation orientation, and censorship. This hints at the possibility that use of swearwords may reflect the speakers’ social status and be influenced by cultural norms, emotional attitudes, and many more factors which are all deeply embedded in their affiliation. Acknowledging that swearwords serve multiple functions, the proposed research focuses on the use of swearwords for expressing emotions, in particular anger and satire. Thus, this research will seek to deeply describe and explain the complex and dynamic relationships between swearword usage and individual levels of political affiliation or acculturation. This will contribute to the existing knowledge by providing new insights on issues concerning the impact of political circumstances, cultural, and ideological orientations on the use of political invectives and satire language and the possible effect of censorship law on regulating the public discourse and use of invective language in politics.

**Postdoctoral Supervision and Host University**

Professor Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi has kindly agreed to supervise my postdoctoral research. Dr. Tavakoli-Targhi is the director of Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Iranian Studies and professor of Historical Studies at the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilization University of Toronto. His globally recognized research focuses on Persian studies, political discourse, and political rhetoric. His expertise in Persian studies complements my current and future work and it will enrich my theoretical approach in the next stage of my academic career. In addition, I will have full access to the Tavakoli Archives, which are rich collections of newspapers and journals that are not available elsewhere. The university is home to many faculties and departments, inspiring and encouraging interdisciplinary research and academic exchange. I look forward to have closer interactions with Professor Neda Maghbouleh, Professor Sharzad Mojab, Professor Victoria Tahmasebi and Professor Azita Taleghani, to complement my theoretical and methodological approaches.

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