

## **Iranian language policy: a case of linguistic purism**

## **Irańska polityka językowa: przypadek puryzmu językowego**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to describe Iranian language policy from its officially recognized birth in the XVIII century up to today. It will focus on one particular aspect of language policy – linguistic purism. Firstly, the concept of *vatan* ‘Iranian nationalism’ will be defined. This article will try to explain the role of nationalism in Iranian language policy as well as its direct relations with purism. Then, the history of Iranian puristic movement will be addressed. It is divided into two separate periods on the basis of different elements that were considered unwanted. Therefore, the period before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 will be analyzed separately. Finally, certain conclusions will be drawn.

## **1 Introduction**

The reason for undertaking the subject of Iranian language policy comes from the Author’s interests in loanwords in Farsi which resulted in writing MA thesis “English borrowings in Farsi: a lexicography and corpus-driven study of technical vocabulary”<sup>1</sup>.

The Persian language, also called Farsi is said to have borrowed more than fifty percent of its vocabulary. The great majority of these loanwords is of Arabic origin. What is more, many of the Arabic loanwords have already become so established in Farsi that they are no longer perceived as borrowings. Apart from borrowings from Arabic, there are also early Turkish and Greek borrowings. Moreover, Farsi has also been influenced

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<sup>1</sup> I am eternally grateful to my MA supervisor prof. Arleta Adamska-Salaciak for her invaluable help and patience.

by European languages such as French, Russian, and finally, English. As the main topic of this paper – linguistic purism – is mainly preoccupied with getting rid of foreign elements, it would be helpful to define them first.

### **1.1 Borrowings in Farsi**

The beginning of the Arabic influence can be traced to the 7<sup>th</sup> century – the time of the Muslim Conquest. The fall of the Sasanian dynasty and the Zoroastrian religion, two main promoters of the Middle Persian language, facilitated the entrance of Arabic borrowings into Farsi. The Arabic conquest lasted until the 11<sup>th</sup> century. During that time Arabic became the language of intellectuals. It was used by poets, writers, scholars, and philosophers. The Arabic influence was very strong and between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century most of the Pahlavi scientific, literary and administrative terms were replaced by their borrowed Arabic equivalents, which are still in use today. It is estimated that until the 10<sup>th</sup> century the proportion of Arabic loanwords in Farsi was about thirty percent and in the 12<sup>th</sup> century it was even fifty percent. What is more, the end of the Muslim conquest did not mean the end of Arabic borrowing. After the 12<sup>th</sup> century, considerable use of adorned and rhymed style in Persian prose also triggered borrowings from Arabic.

Nowadays, in Farsi, the Arabic presence can be detected on different linguistic levels: phonological, morphological and lexicological. The introduction of Arabic lexical elements can be chronologically divided into three stages. During the initial contact between Iranians and Arabs, the majority of borrowed lexical items were of religious, common and administrative stock. In the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century they belonged mainly to scientific terminology. After the 11<sup>th</sup> century the majority of loanwords belonged to literary language (Sādeqi 2009: 1).

Persian borrowings from Greek can chronologically be divided into two periods: those before the Muslim conquest and post-conquest ones. Before the Arabic conquest, Greek borrowings entered Pahlavi either directly or via Aramaic, whereas post-conquest borrowings were introduced via Arabic. The main channels were commerce, administration, astronomy and ancient philosophy (Bernburg 2009: 1).

Also Turkish-Iranian contacts resulted in linguistic borrowings. Their beginning can be traced to pre-Islamic times, and to be more precise to the Silk Road times. Yet, the main influence of the Turkish language on Farsi is dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Turcophone family of Safavid conquered Iran. As a consequence, Turkish was established as the language of the court and the military, and it started to be perceived as the language of the upper classes. The semantic domains of borrowings from Turkish are connected with the military, pastoral, domestic and technology (Perry 2006: 1).

Contact between Iran and Western Europe started in the Safavid period (1501/1502-1722). Thus, borrowings from western languages into Farsi can be diachronically studied in respect to four periods: the Safavid

period, the Qajar, the Pahlavi period, and the Contemporary period. Over 150 years western languages such as French, Russian and English have greatly influenced the Farsi language. It accounts for the process of modernization and development in Iran.

French lexical items started to be borrowed during the Qajar period (1794-1925). The French influence, although France was not the biggest political and military power of that time, was enormous. For Persia, it was the most important model of modern secular culture. The high position of French in Persia was strengthened by the creation of modern educational institutions like Dar al-Fonun. Dar al-Fonun was the first institution of higher education in Persia. It was founded in 1851 and it still exists today as the University of Tehran. The French language was there the main vehicle of transmitting modern European culture as well as technical and scientific vocabulary. What is even more important, the educational system of Persia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was modeled completely on the French one. Furthermore, French was virtually the only language that was taken by secondary-school students in order to meet the European-language requirement. Only after the Second World War was it replaced by English. The importance of French on the educational level resulted in a situation where almost all scholars in scientific and technical, as well as in other disciplines, studied in French-speaking countries or otherwise received a French-influenced education in Persia. It all resulted in many loanwords from French that exist in Farsi (Deyhime 2009: 1). The significance and stability of French in contemporary Iran is easily visible in the common use of French *merci* instead of its Farsi counterparts for expressing gratitude.

Borrowings from Russian entered Farsi mainly at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were mainly in the sphere of military and of civil word stock and they are seen as the result of the Anglo-Russian rivalry for sociopolitical and economic dominance in Iran. Consequently, the Russian language was included in the curriculum of the already mentioned Dar al-Fonun. The Russian involvement in Iran after its reduction in territory after 1813 is also worth mentioning. As a result, words of military and civil field entered Farsi. Moreover, the importance of media and the appearance of Russian-made press in 1860's contributed to further borrowings (Bashiri 1994: 109).

English borrowings in Farsi can be said to be the most recent borrowings in that language. Their number was estimated at about 300 by Bashiri (1994: 109) but this tendency is developing and this number is growing rapidly. English borrowings in Farsi seem to fall into certain semantic fields. These semantic fields are food, sport, vehicles and car devices, education, kitchen devices, technology, medicine, months and taboo. The current tendency when it comes to lexical borrowings in Farsi is favourable to the English language. Although English borrowings do not constitute the majority of Farsi loanwords, more and more of them are entering language today (Marszałek-Kowalewska 2009: 40).

## **2 The role of nationalism in language policy**

*Vatan* meaning homeland or fatherland is the main concept forming Iranian nationalism. It describes nationhood as well as Iranian national identity. The concept of *vatan* was formed around the idea of *khak-i pak-i vatan* ‘the pure soil of homeland’ (Najmabadi 2005: 106). Thus, it does indicate the importance of territory in the notion of nationalism. Nevertheless, *vatan* was used by various Persian artists and poets, who did not only equal it with territory but also presented *vatan* as a spiritual concept. The latter is present mainly in Sufi<sup>2</sup> writings, where *vatan* is described as the abode of unity with the divine. What is more, fatherland in Sufi literature reflects also the love of Allah – *hub al-vatan min al-iman* ‘love of homeland is of the faith’ (Najmabadi 2005: 101). Therefore, it could be defined as follow: “Vatan is a piece of land on which a person is born and is his place of growth and life....Then it expands from the soil and stone....to include the home, the neighbor, the city, the country and the whole existence” (Nikki R. Keddie, Rudolph P. Matthee 2002: 166). The reason for starting the article on language policy with the concept of Iranian nationalism is due to the fact that the phenomenon of language policy can and often is shaped by nationalism.

The character of language policy in most cases depends on country’s attitude towards nationalism. Iranians or Persians have developed strong sense of nationalism over the centuries. There are two aspects of Iranian nationalism: historical and political one. The former perspective divides the history of Iran into ancient (pre-Islamic) and Islamic period, often glorifying splendor of The Great Persian Empire. The political perspective focuses on improving and asserting Iran’s present political position. These two aspects are highly connected. Political nationalism often stresses the importance of the nation referring to the glory of the ancient Persia. There are elements reflecting the connection between Iran today and 2000 years ago that are often called in nationalistic rhetoric. One of them is language. It is claimed that although Persia was both invader and invaded country, constituting a mixture of nations and cultures, the Persian language has survived. Therefore, nationalism emphasizes the role of language in shaping national identity.

The distinction of history into pre-Islamic and Islamic time does not mean that Iranian nationalism rejects or neglects Islam<sup>3</sup>. What is more, nationalism in Iran is not secular that can be in contrast to the generally accepted definition of nationalism. To be more precise, Shii Islam is today considered to be, beside language, a main factor forming national identity.

Language policy can be regarded as a combination of linguistics and politics dealing with a number of processes, such as language planning, language cultivation, establishing rights to language minorities or attempting to get rid of foreign elements form language. The last process is

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<sup>2</sup> Sufism can be defined as mystical dimension of Islam.

<sup>3</sup> At least today. In the past nationalism was of course connected with opposing Arabic influences.

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generally known as linguistic purism. Language policy in this article will be identified mainly with the process of purifying a language. The reason for focusing only on that specific area reflects simply the attempts of purifying Farsi that were undertaken over the years. Moreover, nationalism as the main factor shaping language policy is closely related to purism, as they both emphasise the dichotomy between elements that are desirable and undesirable. What is more, they reject and neglect foreign elements while simultaneously praising native ones. Finally, purism and nationalism are also similar in the phases in which they occur. Let us examine the three phases of nationalism proposed by Hroch (1968: 124):

1. A phase of scholars collecting information about their national culture.
2. A phase involving small groups of patriotic individuals.
3. A mass movement.

Now they can be compared with the three stages of purism on the level of social organisation:

1. The first phase involves individuals who collect undesirable words.
2. Small groups of individuals or even national institutions like language academies try to introduce language reform.
3. Finally, if purism's aims are achieved, the reception of the replacements suggested is positive and they become accepted by the whole speech community.

From that comparison it is clear that nationalism and purism are directly parallel (Thomas 1991: 111).

Defining purism is difficult as there is no agreement as to what the term in question means. Early linguistic reflection on this phenomenon could be summarized by one sentence by Horalek, one of the representatives of the Prague School, (1948: 65, as quoted in Thomas 1991:6): "Le purism se manifeste comme une tendance qui, au fond, n'est pas extralinguistique, mais qui interprète la langue d'une façon erronée" [Purism is manifested as a tendency which is basically not extralinguistic but which interprets language in an erroneous way]. Until the birth of sociolinguistics, purism had been either neglected or considered as a harmful interference into language. Sociolinguistics standpoint on language as a form of social communication started to perceive purism in terms of language planning and cultivation. Thus, for the purpose of this article the following definition of purism will be used:

Purism is the manifestation of a desire on the part of a speech community (or some section of it) to preserve a language form, or rid it of, putative foreign elements or other elements held to be undesirable (including those originating in dialects, sociolects and styles of the same

language). It may be directed at all linguistic levels but primarily the lexicon. Above all, purism is an aspect of the codification, cultivation and planning of standard languages (Thomas 1991: 12).

The concept of Iranian language policy officially emerges in 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, a long time before that, attempts of conscious restrictions in the usage of certain elements could have been noticed. The policy of former Persia regarding the Farsi language may be divided in two periods: before the Islamic Revolution and after the Islamic Revolution.

### **3 Before the Islamic Revolution of 1979**

The need for lexical transparency was felt quite early as more than one thousand years ago Iranian scholars such as Avicenna (Abu Ali Sina) and al-Biruni rejected already existing Arabic words, devised Persian equivalents, and created neologisms (Perry 1985: 296). One of the first ardent supporters of the process of purification of Persian was the Qajar prince, Jalal od-Din Mirza (1832-71). He was an Iranian writer who encouraged his compatriots to study pre-Islamic history. What is more, Jalal od-Din Mirza tried to write only in Farsi, using very simple language devoid of Arabic words. He wrote *Nome-ye Khosrawan* 'The Book of Kings', the history of Iran from the pre-Islamic period up to his times. In order to write a book using Arabic-free language, Mirza replaced many Arabic loanwords with already forgotten Persian words from the glorified pre-Islamic era. He did it with the help of *Dašatir* – a book written in India that was supposed to present historical record of the time before the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Its author, Azar Keyvan, claimed that *Dašatir* contained original, pre-Islamic Persian words. However, as it turned out later, these ancient lexical items as well as the account of Iran's prophets and kings were simply made up by Keyvan. Jalal od-Din Mirza as a consequence of claiming that they were original, pre-Islamic words was ridiculed and his campaign to purify Persian criticised. Yet, his attitude towards the idea of regaining national identity through purifying the Persian language influenced a small group of writers who tried to use only Persian words in their writings (Mehrdad 1998: 12).

Another purist and Mirza's peer was Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadze (d.1878). His attempt to purify Farsi was at first directed at reforming the Arabic script and then on substituting it completely with the Latin one. Opposite ideas were presented by Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani (1853-1896), who, although shared Jalal's hatred towards the domination of Arabic over Persian, did not really support the actual replacement of Arabic words with ancient Persian ones. He claimed that they were artificial items that would be useful neither in education nor in everyday interactions. His own solution to the problem was the idea of collecting words from different Iranian dialects.

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Another opponent of the purification of Farsi was the constitutionalist writer Talebof (1834-1911). He claimed that every language is natural and thus expresses national identity. Instead of purifying their language, Iranians should respect and preserve it. What is more, Talebof noticed that in a country where one out of a thousand men was illiterate, the process of language purification was of less importance than, for instance, common education. He strongly opposed Jalal od-Din Mirza's standpoint, and openly expressed his view that Iranians should not only retain Arabic words but also adopt new European terminologies.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Naser od-Din, minister of Press and Publication, started to express his strong opposition to the process of borrowing foreign words. He also felt dissatisfaction with those borrowings that were already well established in Farsi. He can be perceived as the first man who advocated the creation of a language academy: "I lament that our present Persian language has mixed with foreign languages. There is no academy in Asian countries that could rectify this problem so that we could have thirty to forty thousand [new] Persian words in our hands and then we would not have the need to use non-Persian words in speaking and writing" (E'atamad us-Saltane 1985: 18, as quoted in Mehrdad 1998: 16).

Before the Constitutional Revolution (1906-11) there was an attempt to establish an academy responsible for dealing with language matters. In 1903, a body called *Majlis-i Akadimi* was established, with Nadim al-Sultan as its chair. Yet, this fact is rarely quoted in the literature on the Iranian language policy as any modernisation that occurred during the Qajar period was neglected<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the forerunner of Farhangestan – The Academy of Persian Language – is hardly discussed (Tavakoli-Targhi 1990: 93). The Constitutional Revolution resulted in major transformations of Farsi. The right of free speech led to the boom in journalism. Only one year after the victory of the Constitutional Revolution more than 80 newspapers were published. The language used in the press was in most cases simplified Persian. As a consequence of this journalistic boom, written language stopped being reserved for the elite. In some articles, certain constitutional writers expressed the need for new words that would stand for new concepts, ideas and institutions (Mehrdad 1998: 17). It was also the time when literary societies in Tehran with the aim of promoting modern ideas were simultaneously coining new words for them. These organizations fitted into the journalistic boom and published their own newspapers, e.g. the scholarly biweekly *Asr-e Jadid* or the first purist periodical *Nomeh-ye Parsi* (Perry 1985: 297).

In 1919 the nationalistic movement was strongly against the Anglo-Persian Agreement. It was a document guaranteeing British access to oil in return for a 2 million sterling loan for reforms. In the atmosphere of anti-British feeling, the idea of purifying Farsi became more popular. One of the representatives of this attitude was the founding father of the

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<sup>4</sup> That time was perceived as the age of unawareness.

Communist Party, Taqi Arani (1903-1940). He believed not only in the purification of Farsi but also in reviving the ancient religion of Zoroaster<sup>5</sup>. His strong nationalistic feelings met with equally strong opposition, e.g. the scholar Mohammad Qazvini (1877-1949) saw the purification process as both irrational and meaningless. In Qazvini's view, Arabic words had been in use for thirteen hundred years and their replacement would result in losing strength, beauty and vitality of the Persian language.

The reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-41) resulted in more organized attempt to purify Farsi. The Shah began his reform of modernising Persia with the army and police. Soon it became obvious that Farsi lacked the vocabulary needed for new terminologies. Therefore, one of the first tasks of the army was to create new words that would convey the meanings of European terms. Reza Khan gave the order to create a committee that would deal with that in 1924. Thus, the persianisation of the language was a straightforward consequence of the modernisation of the army. Although the members of the committee were not linguists, their achievements were impressive. The first year of their activity was very productive, as the committee created 300-400 new words. Most of them are in use today, e.g. فرودگاه [forudgah] for borrowed اردرمه [aerodrome] 'airport'. In 1925 the second committee was established. Its tasks were not only confined to creating new words but it was also involved in translating military rules and ranks.

The creation of the new type of education, e.g. state-sponsored schools and colleges, pointed to the lack of scientific vocabulary in Persian. In order to fill this shortcoming, a special society was formed at the Teacher's Training College. This institution was quite successful because during the eight years of its existence it created 3,000 words, 400 of which were used in everyday speech (Mehrddad 1998: 20). The organization functioned until 1941 and for five years its activities overlapped with the performance of the Academy of Persian Language.

In 1934 a very important event for the awareness of the importance of Farsi took place: the conference devoted to Ferdowsi, the most significant Iranian poet. It was a meeting during which various scholars exchanged opinions on Persian literature, language and culture. Stressing Ferdowsi's conscious choice not to use Arabic words, professor Rezazadeh Shafaq announced the manifesto of the Persian language reform movement. In 1935, on the Shah's order, Farhangestan-e Zabane Iran 'The Academy of Iranian Language' was established. It was seen as the purists' victory in the battle for the Shah's favour. In order to get Pahlavi's support, the purists issued an editorial *Soxan-e Sah Sah soxan ast* 'A Persian King speaks the King's Persian'. The aims of the Academy were to compile a list of classical and dialect words, compile a Persian dictionary, standardize the derivational morphology, and, most importantly, coin and propose new Persian terms. The purists were also to set rules of creating these new words (Perry 1985: 299). The first president of the Academy was Prime

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<sup>5</sup> Before the Arabic conquest, Zoroastrianism was the main religion of Persia.

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Minister Foroughi (1877-1943). Yet, his own views on the role of the Academy were rather moderate. He did not reject all borrowings, and even postulated the use of certain Arabic roots. Moreover, he stated that he loved all those who love Arabic, as it was the language of theology and science. Despite his moderate attitude towards language purification, Foroughi proposed the following six steps for purifying Farsi:

- Avoid an Arabic word whenever there is a close Persian word.
- When you have a common borrowing and an unknown Farsi equivalent, the latter should be popularised.
- If there is no equivalent in Persian, Farsi word should be created.
- If there is no equivalent, use the borrowed until Persian equivalent is not created.
- When there is no Persian equivalent and the concept expressed by a borrowing belongs to the material domain<sup>6</sup>, accept the loanword.
- If there is a foreign word that belongs to the spiritual domain, then a Persian equivalent should be manufactured.

Foroughi was forced by the Shah to resign at the end of 1935. Pahlavi was dissatisfied with the slow progress the Academy made in order to purify the Persian language (Mehrddad 1998: 21).

Indeed, Farhangestan did not achieve its all aims. Although it started publishing its journal *Nomeh-ye Farhangestan* with scientific articles on the Persian language and literature, it soon changed into a catalogue of minutes of meetings and obituaries. Neither the promised dictionary nor grammar appeared (Perry 1985: 303). Hasan Vosuq was appointed as Foroughi's successor. Vosuq, unlike Foroughi, was a strong advocate of purifying Farsi. Nevertheless, he was also aware that the mixture of languages was hardly to be avoided and stressed that six centuries of Islamic rule influenced the scientific vocabulary of Farsi to such an extent that it would be extremely difficult to get rid of it. As a consequence, Vosuq was also dismissed due to the Shah's dissatisfaction with the progress of the Academy.

Successors changed very often, always due to Pahlavi's discontent. During the presidency of Esmail Mera't, the process of creating new words accelerated. Foreign words in Farsi were divided into four groups. The first group consisted of Arabic words that had been used for a very long time. Thus, they had become so established in the language that there was no point in replacing them. The second group were the so-called 'heavy' Arabic words that entered Farsi in the past sixty years as a by-product of their intensive use by scholars. They were to be replaced. The third group consisted of internationalisms and they were not to be replaced. Finally, the fourth group consisted of European words, mainly from the field of

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<sup>6</sup> According to Mehrddad there are two domains shaping Iranian identity: material and spiritual one. The former reflects technology whereas the latter is identified with Shii Islam and language.

technology. These were to be changed. In 1941 Shah Reza Pahlavi had to abdicate. Simultaneously, the first Academy stopped producing new words (Mehrdad 1998: 28).

The Persian purist movement of the First Academy seemed to have had little success<sup>7</sup>. There are several reasons for its failure. First, Persian had been assimilating the Arabic words for such a long time that most of them underwent heavy persianisation. Secondly, the diglossia between the written and spoken forms in Iran contributed to the lexical variation. Moreover, the Arabic script facilitated the retention of Arabic elements. Finally, Iran was, and actually still is, a multilingual country. It is also worth remembering that presidents of the Academy such as Foroughi were rather moderate purists. (Perry 1985: 307).

However, there were also purists outside Farhangestan. Ahmad Kasravi may serve as a good example. He was a controversial figure, perceived by some as a dangerous nationalist and by others as the main historian of the reform movement. Having completed his theological education, Kasravi shocked a lot of people by preaching not in standard Arabic but in Farsi. He was also an opponent of linguistic minorities. Kasravi proposed to replace minority languages and to substitute them with purified Persian: “The minorities must understand that diversity causes disunity and including their own, they must give up their own languages and adopt Persian” (Kasravi 1945, as quoted in Abrahamian 1973: 287). However, Kasravi’s ideas did not meet with great enthusiasm.

Mohammad Reza Shah, son of Reza Pahlavi, in order to revive his father’s word, established the Second Academy in 1971. Founded on the basis of a royal decree for establishing the Royal Foundation of Iranian Academies, the Second Academy pursued a clearly defined goal: “to maintain the beautiful and powerful Persian language in its perennial high position, ready to fulfill all the diverse and ever-increasing cultural, scientific and technical needs of the country” (Bonyād 1972, as quoted in Karimi-Hakkak 1985: 102). However, due to political changes in Iran (the Islamic Revolution of 1979), the Academy stopped working.

#### **4 After the Islamic Revolution of 1979**

The 1979 Revolution (or the Islamic Revolution) resulted in overthrowing Shah’s regime and introducing the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. Ayatollah became the Supreme Leader and in October 1979 the country approved new, theocratic constitution. For the purpose of this article, Chapter II, and to be more specific articles 15 and 16, of that legal

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<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the performance of, e.g. Teacher’s Training College. I am grateful for this remark to students and professors of the Iranian Institute from the Jagiellonian University during my lecture in Kraków on 3rd December 2009.

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text will be analyzed<sup>8</sup>. Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states:

The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.

It does confirm the importance and superiority of Farsi as national language. Article 16 of the Constitution confirms the use and importance of the Arabic language:

Since the language of the Qur'an and Islamic texts and teachings is Arabic, and since Persian literature is thoroughly permeated by this language, it must be taught after elementary level, in all classes of secondary school and in all areas of study.

Thus, Arabic being so far the target of purists' activities, in 1979 became officially recognized language being indispensable part of Iranian education system and therefore life.

Third Farhangestan was established after the Third Supreme Council of the Iranian Revolution in 1991. The members, twenty-five language experts and professors, among whom were also two Tajiks, were preoccupied with studying grammar, orthography, manuscripts and various Iranian dialects. They also identified the channels responsible for frequent neologisms. The influence of the Internet and the media was given as the main culprit. The policy of the Third Academy is as follows:

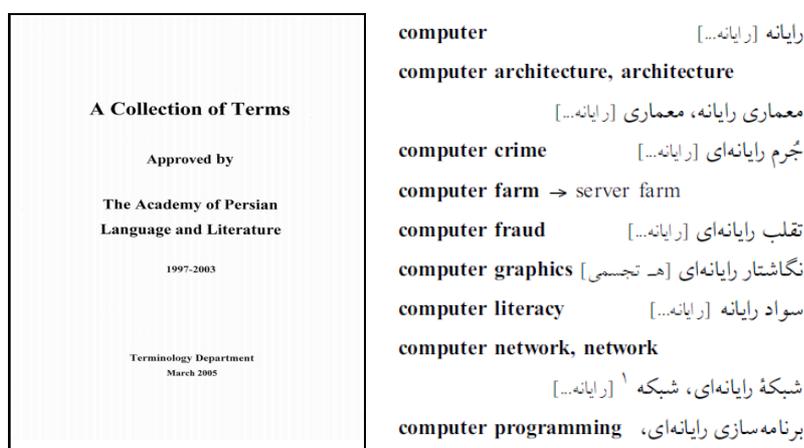
1. In coining and choosing a new word, Persian phonetic rules and learned speakers' way of talking and Islamic points of views should be regarded as the main criterion.
2. Phonetic rules should be obeyed according to the Persian way of talking.
3. New words should follow the Persian grammatical rules for coining nouns, adjectives, verbs and so on.
4. New words should be chosen or coined out of the most common or frequent words that have been used since 250 AD.
5. New words can be chosen from among the most frequent and common Arabic words as used in Persian.

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<sup>8</sup> Full text of the Constitution in English can be found here, <http://www.alaviandassociates.com/documents/constitution.pdf>

6. New words can be chosen from the Middle and Old Persian stages of the language.
7. There should be only one equivalent in Persian for any of the Latin words, particularly technical ones.
8. It is not necessary to adapt or create new Persian words for those Latin words which have been used internationally and globally (Farhangestan-e Zaban 2001 as quoted in Monajemi 2010:5).

It is important to point to the fifth point on this list. As has been stated, the main target of the First and Second Academy was the Arabic language. The current language policy is, for obvious reasons, no longer hostile towards this language. Iran is the Islamic Republic and Arabic is the holy language of Islam. Today's purism perceives Arabic as a way of purifying Farsi. So far, the Academy has been successful in issuing seven lists of *Collection of Terms Approved*. These are, as the name suggests, words that are allowed to be used and, what is more, should be used by the speakers of Farsi. The first collection was published in 2003 and the last one in May 2010. Each contains between 500 and 700 words. Thus, without judging the successfulness of this work, it has to be stated that purists in the Islamic Republic in Iran are quite productive.



*Fig. 1 Title page of the first Collection of Terms Approved along with an example page.*

In 2006 the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ordered the government and all official Iranian bodies to use only Persian words approved by the Academy of Language instead of foreign ones. Changes introduced by Ahmadinejad are mandatory for all schoolbooks, documents and newspapers (Dujardin 2006).

## **5 Conclusion**

Being in Iran in 2008<sup>9</sup>, the outcome of the Farhangestane was hardly noticeable. On the entrance to the park, it was written *park* and not مانک [manak] as proposed, the newest dictionary contained loanwords such as *fax* or *page*, but not their Farsi counterparts and far and wide verbal compounds like *bye bye kardan* ‘to say bye bye’ or *check kardan* ‘to check’ could be heard. Yet, the aim of this article is not to assess the successfulness of the present Iranian language policy.

The history of Farsi is full of contacts with other languages that resulted in borrowings. The need of preventing language from or getting rid of unwanted elements is as early as first contacts.

Taking into consideration cultural aspects of Iran, it can be stated (metaphorically, of course) that language is an Iranian woman and language policy is her veil. Veil is by some seen as a way of protection, respect or virtue while by others as a kind of abuse and subordination. The question whether the metaphorical veil prevents or abuses the metaphorical woman is left to the Reader.

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<sup>9</sup> The Author would like to thank the Centre for Development of Persian Language and Literature for the scholarship in Tehran in 2008.

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