

A Sociolinguistic Study of The Geeky Rationalist Persona

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Abstract

Religions often involve a commitment to certain linguistic practices such as prayer in a specific language such as Arabic in Islam or the use of glossolalia (Cartledge, 2016) during worship. Recently, Religion has been the topic of research as a separate factor of linguistic variation (Baker & Bowie, 2010; Mallinson & Childs, 2005; Versteegh et al., 2017; Yaeger-Dror, 2014). The present study uses a corpus of recorded dialogues among Iranian Persian speakers to analyze the features that contribute to the construction of the geeky rationalist persona as identified in the online community of Persian speakers of Iran. The present research is situated within the third wave sociolinguistic view of variation. On this view, of central importance, are indexicality and performativity which depending on ideological change, lead to linguistic variation (Eckert, 2008; Jaffe, 2016; Silverstein, 2003). This study seeks to explore the accommodation or oppositional stance of the geeky rationalist and its performances among believers and non-believers. In particular, this research investigates the strategies in vowel duration and use of English borrowed words by which the geeky rationalist attempts to find belonging among believers or signal his ideological opposition in a theocracy.

The most obvious finding of this study is that vowel duration was higher when the geeky rationalist was talking to believers as opposed to non-believers. Second, the use of English borrowed words was more frequent among believers compared to non-believers. Regarding the first finding, The imitation of vowel length dominant in religious linguistics seems to be in recognition of the gentle and slow speech that is ideologically significant among believers (Seyed-Gohrab, 2021). This imitation by the geeky rationalist is used to signal accommodation as an attempt to seek belonging in the dominant religious ideology. However, English borrowed words are used to create ideological distance between the geeky religious and the religious ideology. This study supports Shaery-Eisenlohr (2007, p. 19) hypothesis that “ethnic, national, or linguistic differences are not self-evident barriers between people but only appear as such through the ideological reworking and interpretation of perceived ethnic and linguistic difference”.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study investigates religion in Iran as a source of variation within a third-wave sociolinguistic framework. For analysis, the focus is limited to a single Persian-speaking individual representing what is known in the blogosphere as the “geeky rationalist”. By analyzing the speech of the geeky rationalist in three different contexts, the present study seeks to analyze the dynamics of indexical fields which contribute to the formation of this persona, and how its performances are ultimately linguistically expressed. Vowel length and borrowed words were selected as two elements that inform the construction and performance of this persona. This research investigates whether vowel length and the number of borrowed words have any potential relation to each of the different contexts of speech for the geeky rationalist.

This chapter first discusses the status of borrowed words and vowel length in religious linguistic ideology (section 1.1) followed by an account of religious linguistic features such as vowel length (section 1.2) before turning to the next section with a description of Iran’s general geopolitical and population profile and its linguistic transitions (section 1.3). The next section provides an overview of Iran’s linguistic ideology (section 1.4) before moving forward to a brief elaboration of contemporary post-1979 Islamic revolutionary ideology (section 1.5). In the final part, (Section 1.6) I outline some of the strategies of belonging and legitimacy that figure into the construction of the persona by dissenting or conforming to the religious ideological attitudes regarding foreign languages.

1.1 Borrowed words and Religious Language

While Persian is recognized as the official language of Iran, the post-1979 Islamic reimagining of a national language has important ideological implications for the status of language in general. Exploring its historical and social transitions is reserved for the following sections. In this section, I focus on the linguistic status and ideological associations of borrowed words and vowels as characteristic markers of contemporary Persian speakers. As (Riazi, 2005) notes, because the language of revelation in Islam is Arabic, Arabic is perceived to be an inherently religious language which has also remained in contact with Persian and its distinct Shia identity in the region (Riazi, 2005). Shiaism is a sect within Islam that believes the holiness of the prophet of Islam Muhammed, but also reveres the descendents of the prophet (Imams) as a source of divine revelation with theological significance. Within this Islamic tradition, closeness to native-like Arabic pronunciations is a marker of religious piety and respect for Koranic literature and tradition (Atwa, 2018). For example, one is required to pray in Arabic and relying on a non-Arabic language to prayer often leads to controversy (Aydar & Gökkir, 2007; Wiegers, 1995) Arabic

remains the authoritative language of the seminary and religious scholars who constitute and shape the underlying laws and interpretations of linguistic policy and ideology (Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010). Closeness to the Arabic language is seen as moving closer to one's religious roots and this is often marked by religious terms which is characteristic of religious language of official religious figures. These religious terms rely on Koranic verses, hadith (sayings of the prophet), or popular religious prayers and by any contemporary standards are now parts of the Persian speaker's language. What makes religious linguistic ideology different is the import of those religious terms, phrases, and Arabic borrowed words into the hadith which are not normally used in the everyday familiar speech of the native Persian speaker (Windfuhr, 1990). Among believers, the Arabic language is seen as a multilayered superior medium of God's communication (Farghaly, 2010, p. 46) and hence, it embodies a tradition of authority, rituals, and linguistic performances which ultimately take their legitimacy from this linguistic religious ideology.

Moving away from authentic Arabic pronunciations or expressing a neutral social, authoritative or moral stance toward these linguistically encoded religious values, is often the marker of what is considered to be politically suspicious, socially unacceptable by the status quo, or outright blasphemous and anti-religious (Jazayery, 1966; Mazlum, 2022). For example, referring to the supreme leader or other high clerical figures by their religious honorific terms such as Ayatollah or Hojatollah (literally meaning the sign of God and Reason of God) is one of the elements that move religious performances closer to iconization of these sets of linguistic values. These icons further figure into indexical fields and mark the boundaries for intragroup negotiations and the identification of outgroup members (Eckert, 2000). In Iran, one of the markers of a theocratic ideology is the notion of being brothers, good mothers, (Najmabadi, 2005) or good soldiers for the Islamic revolution. These soldiers are known as Basiji and often view brotherhood, nation and religion as their core identity leading to Arabic and its significant use in this group of people (Golkar, 2015; Wright, 2010, pp. 62–65). Given the centrality of religion to theocracy in Iran, it is not surprising that association of religious persona to dress and attire can potentially index the political and linguistic stance of speakers (Cohen, 2006; Wellman, 2018). To dress in a way that is deemed un-Islamic, to pray using a non-Arabic language, and to rely on only Persian or borrowed western words are therefore viewed as an oppositional stance by the dominant linguistic ideology.

One marker of moving away from the dominant framework of these linguistically encoded values is reliance on alternative linguistic practices and languages far from, independent of the official ideology. One well-researched area is the use of minority languages and reliance on ethnicities that move beyond the Persianization of the state such as embracing local Arabic languages connected to Sistan &

Baluchestan or using Turkish or Kurdish (Sanasarian, 2004, pp. 81–84). Since religious ideology is perceived to be all-inclusive and exhaustive of what Iranianness is, all such attempts religious or not, are perceived with extreme religious and political suspicion of separatism (Sanasarian, 2004, pp. 9–14). This means that locating an alternative social space for the construction of social meaning in a western language which is foreign to the official ideology is also seen as moving into dangerous territory. In this ideology, a move away from religion and Arabic is an alternative linguistic domain that incorporates heavily secularized concepts, values, and sources of authority far way, or even contrary to, the divine authority of the religious ideology. To the outsider, the passionate anti-colonialism of the Islamic republic might be surprisingly a bold feature that is only utilized for political purposes, but such a view misunderstands the centrality of anti-westernism and anti-imperialism that characterizes the broader sociopolitical ideology in Iran. For the revolutionaries and the Basiji, “western education or western ideas, the actual experience of western-style advertising, films, and clothing that were thrust at them in TV media and in the streets was offputting and crassly insensitive to Iran’s religious and cultural traditions... These complex attitudes were augmented and given form, especially among the leftist students and the younger generation, by the imported rhetoric of 1960s student radicalism, of anti-imperialism, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and so forth. But many younger Iranians who might have turned to leftism in an earlier generation, in the 1970s turned to Islam as the core of an authentic Iranian identity”(Axworthy, 2017, pp. 86–87). Given these ideological commitments, a move away from the established views of the theocracy regarding language and word choice is seen as conferring legitimacy to an alien anti-Islamic mindset that seeks to weaken the core authentic Iranian identity. This complexity is captured by Iran’s tumultuous relationship with English as the most popular second language among youth (Mazlum, 2022).

1.2 Vowel length and Religious Language

The connections of religious language to slow speech and embodied gestures signifying the gentleness of the content is one the most notable phonetic properties expressed in vowels by religious leaders, clerics, and even mystics in the Indian tradition. This performance embodies the care and sensitivity needed to respect the values of this community of practice (Seyed-Gohrab, 2021). The normative and social implications of this sensitivity stand in contrast to those who seek to use religious language with exaggerations typically expressed by vowel length in slow speech. This feature of religious talk has been the subject of multiple movie depictions. Among these are the very successful movie *Marmoulak* (The Lizard) which depicts a case of stolen identity by a thief impersonating a cleric. Religious language and metaphors are invoked to create irony and comedy by relying on vowel length. “[while impersonating a cleric] “God is a house,” he asserts, which “can be entered in many ways,” by the front door, over the

fence, down the chimney, or with a false key. Most of his listeners appear to delight in the original metaphor. His subsequent sermons both inspire and bemuse”(Mitchell, 2008, p. 92). Another function of vowel length is the authoritative status of this performance linked to the tranquility of religious figures or the supreme leader of Iran or the notion of brotherhood. As another example consider again the movie *Marmoulak* in which the impersonator “memorably refers to the American director Quentin Tarantino as “brother Tarantino”(Mitchell, 2008, p. 92). A movie that relies specifically on features of religious speech such as vowel length and careful pronunciations of Arabic words for comic effects. Vowel length in religious speech is so extremely rooted in Iran’s Islamic revolution that public television programs often include a person who is able to get into the role of the religious persona and mark this practice as a source of authenticity and authority. Mohsen Qara’ati is one such figure known and imitated for his use of vowel length as a television personality. All other identities, performances, and ways of knowing are legitimate and valuable to the extent recognized in the speech of these figures. In light of this, it is not unexpected that *Marmoulak*, despite its massive popularity as it was “shown in public for several weeks before opposition from certain clerical quarters led to its withdrawal from movie theaters”(Farhi, 2004, p. 10).

Given the above complexities of language and ideology, speaking French or English is seen to be a way of evading linguistic authority, an attempt in formation of an alternative community of practice, and hence, a way to confer legitimacy to outsider ways of knowing and performances that are westernized and secular (Mazlum, 2022). This explains why the recognition of linguistic diversity in Iran has remained controversial in all of its historical linguistic transitions (Elling, 2013, pp. 123–128). Utilizing other languages by neutralizing their political or religious associations, offers a neutral space for the negotiation of social meaning and alternative performances which might rely on the same index or phonological element that is expressed differently in each context of discourse (Jaffe, 2016; Podesva, 2007). Just as Persian remains the common ground and keeps the nation-state Persianized, the alternative neutral space also relies on Persian for belonging and seeks legitimacy and accommodation or opposition by incorporating phonological features differently in service of a neutral and safe alternative that is not inherently anti-religious or separatist.

1.3 Iran

Located in the Middle East, Iran has a population of 80 million and highly educated youth (Roudi et al., 2040). Iran recognizes Islam as the state religion and consists of a Muslim (98%) majority. This group is further divided into Shia and Sunni, with the former representing 89% of the population and the latter 9%. The other remaining 2% are reported as “others” which includes minority religious affiliations such as

Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and Baha'i (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 368). Given the status of Iran's political situation, obtaining accurate information on this matter remains contested. One more recent study reveals results considerably different from what the state presents (Maleki, 2021). Islam remains the majority religious affiliation with secular minorities remaining completely outside of any formal data by the state polling agencies. Iran recognizes Persian as its official language, but is home to a variety of other languages such as Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic and many other regional and ethnolinguistic variations (Anonby & Taheri-Ardali, 2015).

Map 1. Iran in the Middle East region



Contemporary Iran is characterized by two historical linguistic transitions. The Pahlavi Period (1925-1979) and the Islamic revolutionary period (1979 to present). The following sections provide a brief explanation of Iran's linguistic ideology and its subsequent transition under the Islamic republic.

1.4 Iran: Language and Ideology

Iran's historic relation with language is historically characterized as turbulent. Concessive and accommodating in some periods, and hostile to minorities on other cases (Elling, 2013). While Iran recognizes Persian as its national language, the dominance of state religion has led to the exclusive prestige of Tehrani Persian at the expense of restricting minority languages and other Iranian dialects

(Moradi, 2020). Prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution, The Pahlavi dynasty, starting with Reza Shah's linguistic policy, elevated nationalistic sensationalism and the Persianization of the nation. "Persian chauvinism was the basis of [Reza Shah's] nationalism, rather than Iranian-ness"(Elling, 2013a, p. 97) which enforced existing linguistic discrimination and linguistic separation. This separationist policy has very strong religious, and political connections to state ideology. Recognition of linguistic diversity is recognized as "a threat to a homogenized "nation-state" even after the 1979 Islamic revolution (Moradi, 2020).

Politically, linguistic diversity and its recognition are viewed by suspicion by the state as tactics surrounding separationist Kurds, Arabs, and other ethnicities (Elling, 2013a, pp. 136–140). Socially common rituals and customs such as Nowruz celebration, the start of the new year in Iran at the beginning of the spring, and spring holidays associated with pre-Islamic Zoroastrianism have been secularized by Mommahd Reza Shah in service of solidifying Iranian nationalism (Ringer, 2012), and continue to be used by the post-1979 Islamic state as a mark of bringing people together beyond all ethnicities under one unifying nation-state (Ram, 2000). Since Iran is a theocracy, politics is often infused with religion and this has led to the Islamization of the discourse surrounding the Persianized language of Nowruz and Iranian identity. The main motivation behind this long-standing policy has been an attempt to provide a strong cover for all pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Persian and non-Persian linguistics identities and ethnicities (Banakar, 2018).

The changing of language also meant changes in practice and embodied linguistic performances. For example, Instead of jumping over a small fire as a sign of courage or good luck, which was seen as an un-Islamic Zoroastrian linguistic practice by the state, people were encouraged to engage in religious practices such as Seleh rahem [seeing relatives]. In similar fashion, the main centerpiece of Haft-sin, a symbolic decoration which marks the beginning of the new year among Iranians, also remains a controversial choice. For some, using Shahnameh, the long epic poem book regarded as the savior and icon of the Persian language, seems to be the best choice. This choice however was quickly seen as disrespectful to the dominant Islamic ideology, which sought to replace the Shahnameh with The Koran (Loeffler & Friedl, 2022). As an example of this Islamization, we read in an early post Islamic revolution textbook that "henceforth, Nowruz would be celebrated on the very same day as the 'Islamic Republic Day' - enabling a contemporaneous observance of both 'spring' and 'freedom'"(Ram, 2000, p. 79).

Iran has historically relied on Persian as the official language of the state. This has led to some complexities in the status of minority languages and the Arabic and Persian languages. The religious language of Shia

Islam has had to create a more or less neutral space that is both all-encompassing and unique in its religious status. Given tribal loyalties to other religious traditions and ethnicities (such as the Kurds and the Turks), and the extreme Persianization as being part of what an Iranian is, Arabic is not always regarded a legitimate newcomer to a pan-Iranian identity, and this has proven to be challenging. The problems arise in continuing discriminatory linguistic policies that ban the teaching of minority languages, which have also created a cultural bridge to Iran's pre-Islamic history. (Elling, 2013, p. 101). The Shia majority in Iran are not all Persians, and this means that the state ideology has to find a more or less neutral all-encompassing space for the core Iranian national identity. However, given the presence of different ethnicities and local loyalties to minority languages, the addition and acceptance of Arabic, within the Iranian population, has proven to be a very difficult task. "In fact, if language is utilized as the main distinguishing feature of ethnicity, Persian, despite being the official language, is the mother tongue of barely half of the population of Iran" (Sanasarian, 2004, p. 9). There are many other groups and communities whose speakers feel a sense of detachment from their own linguistic and cultural heritage such as Turkish, Kurdish, Baluchi, Luri, Arabic, Gilaki, Assyrian, and Armenian groups. Each of these groups have some specific religious history and identity which is often times deeply rooted in religious commitments, language and culture that cannot be fully captured in the dominant ideology of the country.

1.5 Post-1979 Linguistic Ideology in Iran

Considering the dominance of Persian language in Iran, language goes hand in hand with a change in ethnic loyalties. These changes have been thought by the officials to be suspicious since they are perceived to be importing or relying on potentially separatist motivations. For example, If you speak too much Armenian, you are seen to be Christian, and politically suspicious of complicity against the regime by the state (Nazir-Ali, 2009). Similarly, if you speak too much Arabic, but associate this linguistic practices with your own ethnicity in the South (such as Sistan and Baluchestan), you are seen as a potential Sunni separatist by the state (Elling, 2013; Sanasarian, 2004). These charges of separatism have long been leveled against those who seek to move away from the dominant Islamic republic ideology of a nation state. It should be noted however that charges of separatism have also been leveled against Kurds, Baluch and Arabs in Iran, but the evidence suggests these charges to be historically inadequate and mainly motivated by linguistic hegemony (Sanasarian, 2004, pp. 9–14).

Relying on Iran's pre-Islamic heritage and an exclusively Persian identity stripped away of its post 1979 Islamic aspect is also a politically controversial stance against this linguistic hegemony. In this case, if you

use too many Persian hyper-corrections, you are seen as being opposed to the 1979 religious revolutionary ideology. These differences lead to linguistic as well as cultural variations such that “Each tribal group [is] composed of people of diverse ethnolinguistic origins, yet each group forged its own customs and created legends of origins” (Gheissari, 2009, p. 309). This means that the post-Islamic version of Persian is simply not able to capture the rich cultural or historical practices that inform each of these groups.

The post-Islamic version of Persian relies on religious and Islamic expressions along with their faithful Arabic pronunciation as a sign of respect for state religion. One aspect of this linguistic characterization is “slow speech and gentle movements which had become a symbol for the fight against western imperialism” during and after the 1979 revolution (Seyed-Gohrab, 2021). This type of speech is very much associated with a religious persona among Iranians these days, and even within the whole North Africa and Middle East region (J. M. Martin, 2011). This type of speech is usually seen and used by the state TV or religious programs or in public broadcasts of different public officials. Reputable clerics, the supreme leader of Iran and many others are in the same category, forming a religious persona. This type of speech signals the political and religious ideologies of the speakers toward a version of linguistic nationalism that preserves Persian overall with some mixture of Arabic or its religious language. What makes this linguistic ideology different from its predecessors is hostility towards welcoming a secular past, and perceiving Western languages and its linguistic additions (be it borrowed words or phrases) as imperial and anti-revolutionary.

The attitude to Western languages is more prevalent in terms of national attempts in Persianization of English borrowed along with formal and semi-formal policies pushing for more Russian and Chinese language education as opposed to English (Banakar, 2018; Mazlum, 2022). To speak Persian with a mixture of Western languages and borrowed words, is to cut ties from the established linguistic unification of Islamic Prisonization and to side with a secular past devoid of any religious links to state religion (Ram, 2000).

1.6 Navigating Belonging and Legitimacy

As already pointed out, the above religious stance, close to the established regime, marks its anti-imperialistic and revolutionary character in opposition to English, French, and other Western languages and views their linguistic and cultural import with great suspicion (Axworthy, 2017, pp. 86–87). This means that Iran’s foreign language policy is also an element shaping the religious persona by providing an anti-trust stance toward teaching English while encouraging learning Chinese and Russian. Iran has developed

its political relations with Chinese and Russia (Koolae et al., 2020) in recent years and loyalty to the English or French language is viewed negatively, conveying a linguistic ideology similar to that of the Pahlavi Period. This can be seen by looking at the foreign language policy making. “Foreign language policymaking in Iran is torn between the religious and state officials’ English demotion rhetoric rooted in post-Revolutionary de-Westoxication¹ and anti-imperialism ideology and the need of the state for defused English to meet its neoliberal globalization goals on the one hand, and the growing obsession of policy arbiters with English viewed by officials as soft power asset of the West, on the other (Mazlum, 2022, p. 1)”.

The theoretical and methodological framework of third wave sociolinguistics that underlies this understanding will be presented in the next chapter. However, to summarize the features that make up linguistic performances and practices in this study, two main parts of religious persona in Iran need to be mentioned. One feature is creating a linguistic space that justifies belonging and legitimacy of state linguistic ideology via the Persian language as the only perceived neutral option. The second feature of this linguistic performance is utilized and magnified by the state and official policy to mark an oppositional stance (one of anti-imperialism and anti-Westernism). The former relies on Persian with slow speech, careful pronunciation of Arabic words in religious language, and conferring legitimacy to ways of knowing and performing social and linguistic identities and personas (such as celebrating the Nowruz and choosing the “correct” decorative centerpiece) so far as they conform to its ideology. The latter oppositional stance is known by its relation to Western languages, ways of knowing and performing social and linguistic identities and personas, such as heavy reliance on English language or mispronouncing Arabic religious terms or perceived cultural insensitivities of western culture and media to the 1979 revolutionaries (Axworthy, 2017; Najmabadi, 2005) such as religious hostilities or being insensitive toward religious concepts. Given associations of language with different sociopolitical and linguistic ideologies, exploring the interplay of religion and sociolinguistics in the geeky rationalist persona, can offer a solid foundation for the present study.

¹ Ghaebzadegi or Westoxication is an intellectual attitude that gained momentum and popularity among certain political figures due to Pahlavi’s promotion of modernity. In their eyes, ideological alternatives were needed “to modern and Western-inspired cultural attitudes, these influenced Persian identity politics and projected Iranian modernity as a “mistaken modernity, despite the regime’s own ferocious modernization programmed” (Mirsepassi, 2019). Westoxication embodies an anti-imperialistic ideology that became the cornerstone of the post 1979 Islamic republic (Mehran, 1989; Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 2021).

1.7 The Geeky Rationalist

The geeky rationalist is a set of linguistic performances and expressions that form a secular persona which seems historically related to an umbrella of labels for this persona such as Bache Susul, Bidard or Fokuli that was used pejoratively by a group of intellectuals who embodied western ideologies or hostility toward religions. Kharkhune Kheradgera (geeky rationalist), Kharkhun (geeky) or Kharkhun eynaki (Geeky with glasses), is used more recently online by Persian speakers to label those who are perceived as being secular or nonbelievers. “[The state] usually puts youths into two categories, either as zealous revolutionaries and faithful Muslims who, through heroic efforts, will save the country and build a decent future, or as deceived and bidard hedonists. It creates an image of an army of young people ready to execute their leaders’ directives (ummat-e hamishe dar sahneh). They forge the ideal image of an “Iranian Muslim youth,” a conscious (agah) warrior (mobarez), ready for self-sacrifice (isargar) and a “guardian of values” (Khosravi, 2008, p. 24).

The recent labels of Zhesteh Roshanfekri (intellectual pose), Bache Kharkun (geeky child), and Geeky rationalist (kharkhune Aghlekol) are all pejoratives for the same constellation of linguistic features that were previously known as Bidard. “The stereotype of bidard youth is also a recurrent theme in soap operas. For instance, Khat-e Ghermez (The Red Line) is about the “identitylessness” (bihoviyati) of two young men. Free from “family ties and norms” (gheyd va bandhay-e khanevadegi), the two embark on an aimless journey. Anti-bidard youth propaganda is also a central theme in staterun youth magazines, such as Iran-e Javan, Omid-e Javan (Hope of Youth), Javanan-e Roosta (Village Youth), Javan-e Khanvadeh (Family Youth), Donya-ye Javanan (World of Youth), Roshd-e Javan (Youth’s Growth), Javanan-e Emrooz (Today’s Youth), Fazilat-e Javanan (Youth’s Virtue), and Mo’oud-e Javan (The Promise of the Young)”(Khosravi, 2008, p. 24).

In this study, a 31-year-old recent PhD graduate is taken as the representative role of the geeky rationalist. In general, the geeky rationalist persona is perceived as standing in opposition to religious ideologies of speech and tradition. Instead of alignment with seminary schools and religious theology, he is seen as academically inclined and linguistically reliant on English for his medium of communication. The label is used “to refer to Shahraki youths [children of cities]. It refers to the wealthy and comfortable life Shahraki young people are supposed to lead. These bidard youths are regarded as deviants, not “authentic” Iranian youth. The virtue of youth is seen to be endangered by the “Weststruckness” that today is embodied in the bidard youths” (Khosravi, 2008, p. 78). Just as religious attire has a public or perceived image, the use of glasses, suits and ties are also linked to the geeky rationalist who has little to no regards to religious

values or sentiments. Initially only an online persona, the geeky rationalist has more recently been transferred to the real world and is often linked to those close to academia and a secular worldview, historical non-religious figures or scientists. Unsurprisingly, the geeky rationalist scores low on both religious affiliation (2/7) and religious conviction (1/5) (see section 3.9.4 on how to interpret the scores). Of further importance is the minority status of the geeky rationalist as a non-believer in a theocratic country who dresses and talks differently.

These embodied differences have been shown to exist alongside linguistic variation. As D’Onofrio and Eckert (2021, p. 36) mention, by relying on Pratt’s (2019), these embodied differences lead to different perceptions in the social order. For example, “In the student social order, The technical theater (or ‘tech’) program was distinct from other arts programs in the school with its focus on manual labor, constructing sets, and working with lighting and audio equipment”. This meant that The tech students were perceived “as handy, tough, and rowdy, adopting a ‘badass’ and reticent affective style, wearing black clothing and work boots, and carrying work knives indicating their toughness and readiness for manual work”. This means that linguistic practices can lead to perceptions of embodied differences. The same embodied differences are associated with the geeky rationalist. Wearing suits and ties, plain or checkered “geeky” clothes, and usually wearing reading glasses. This stands in stark contrast to the Islamic dress code in Iran among the religious conservatives or the state officials who regard these as western or sign of imperialism.

The geeky rationalist is perceived to encapsulate certain western influences that are too insensitive of Iranian religious concern and are taken to be signs of ideologically hostile to the 1979 Islamic revolutionary ideals such as the elevation of Arabic and religion. One researcher captures the initial historic changes: “During the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, western-educated elite men created and promoted a new model of Iranian masculinity by means of mass communication, cultural production, modern education and governmental reforms. These men were educated in Europe or in western-style institutions in Iran, instead of in religious institutes of higher education. They traded traditional Iranian garments for western-inspired attire; supported new ideologies such as nationalism and constitutionalism, as well as new notions regarding women, sexuality and marriage and adopted western (mostly French) words in order to express these ideas” (Balslev, 2015, p. 546). Religious concerns with language, dress code and politics have been a continuous and highly controversial issue in Iran (Farhi, 2004; Golkar, 2011; Najmabadi, 2005; Ram, 2000), and it is in relation to this ideology that the geeky rationalist has emerged. Historically, western and anti-Islamic ideas have been associated with Europe, anti-religious sentiments and the growth of English language speakers among educated Iranians.

(Axworthy, 2017; Behtash et al., 2017; Mazlum, 2022; Ringer, 2012). The use of English and secularism as a western idea are associated with the geeky rationalist. Since the geeky rationalist is committed to a different ideology, and religious outlook, he has to negotiate his legitimacy and belonging among other Iranians who are mostly religious. This negotiation is partially done via the features that make up the geeky rationalist persona.

The present study is focused on feature of this persona, seeking to analyze its features within a third wave sociolinguistic framework. The next section provides the linguistic and ideological background of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter first explores the literature on religion and sociolinguistic variation (section 2.1) and then discusses the relationship between Iran and religious affiliation (section 2.2). Section 2.3 shows how religion has been used as a separate area of exploration. A brief view of Indexicality and meaning negotiation is presented in section 2.4 before turning to section 2.5 which provides an overview of performativity as a constituent of a persona construction. Finally, I will provide an overview of religion in the third wave (section 2.6) before introducing the central research questions of this study (section 2.7).

2.1 Religion As A Source of Variation

Sociolinguistic variation has often focused on demographic information which codes for gender, education, age, and/or race rather than religion explicitly. In some cases, religion has been subsumed under identity or ethnicity (Bosakov, 2006; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Yaeger-Dror, 2014). More recently however, Religion has been the topic of research as a separate factor of linguistic variation in which coding is realized in the relevant demographic information (Yaeger-Dror, 2014). While religion as a source of variation receives less attention in comparison with other variables such as age, class, and gender (Versteegh et al., 2017), it has received some attention. For example, Mallinson and Childs (2005), focused on two different groups of people believing to have formed relationships with different social networks. The first group were women attending church each week (“church ladies”) and the second group were those who did not attend church, and used their time to instead remain together as “porch sitters”. Since each group had developed different ties to social networks because of their religious affiliation, sound changes were evident in one group that were absent in the second. As they state: “morphosyntactic variables show a clear split by community of practice, with the church ladies showing higher levels of the Appalachian English feature, 3'd plural -s attachment, than the porch sitters. In contrast, the porch sitters show higher levels of the African American English features (3'd singular -s absence, *is* copula absence, and habitual *be*) as well as the general vernacular feature of past tense, *be* leveling”(Mallinson & Childs, 2005, p. 9). A specific area of research in recent years has been the Utah Mormon community. Drawing from the sociophonetic analysis of Utah speech (Di Paolo, 1993; Malcah & others, 1992), Baker and Bowie (2010, p. 6) draw on this literature to investigate “religious affiliation as a correlate of linguistic behavior”, finding among other examples, variation between Mormons and non-Mormons in pre-nasal /ɪ/, pre-lateral /e/, pre-obstruent /æ/, pre-lateral /u/, and the merger (or near-merger) of /ɑ/ and /ɔ/. In another study, Rosen and Skriver (2015) show that while /æ/ is significantly raised before /g/ in Southern Alberta, Mormons generally do not show as much raising. Furthermore, religious commitment plays a significant

role in word choice among individuals (Yaeger-Dror, 2015). Karimi & Afghar (2015) found that religious commitment among Iranians also plays a significant role in word choice specifically when religious terms are the focus of interactions between individuals. The present study is focused on the Persian language in Iran. In the next section, I will provide a general view of religion and religious affiliation in Iran in connection to language ideologies associated with religion and religious affiliation.

2.2 Iran: Religion and Religious Affiliation

Located in the Middle East, Iran has a population of more than 80 million and has a theocratic constitution based on Islam. “According to [Iran’s] constitution, a Shi’a cleric must fill the office of the leader, the highest de facto and de jure position in the country; a Shi’a jurist should also fill the head of judiciary; and Islam should be the main source of law-making in the country” (Kadivar, 2017). According to official sources of the country, The majority of the religiously affiliated in Iran are Shia Muslims who constitute about 99.98% of the total population (Azar, 2011). Judaism and Christianity are legally recognized within the country’s constitution and their right to practice their religion has been recognized under the law (Elling, 2013). This applies to Sunni Muslims as well as the Zoroastrian community, currently another minority sect in Iran. Official figures do not seem to be consistently reflected in different studies of recent years (Maleki & Arab, 2020) and have not been reliably replicated in other studies. Given the presence of high-speed internet, the popularity of satellite media and the growing literacy of the younger generation of Iranians, there appears to be significant changes in the religious landscape of the country. Since religion is a political as well as a theological issue in a theocracy, it is not always easy to obtain enough accurate data regarding the general public and their religious affiliation. With more secular studies (Abbott, Mollen, et al., 2020; Abbott et al., 2022; G & Steven, n.d.; Ritter et al., 2014; Tomlins, 2015; Zuckerman, 2008, 2009) being undertaken, there exists some data on Iranian religious identity, affiliation and deconversion. This data often involves a more fine-grained approach to research, explicitly identifying atheists and agnostics as opposed to subsuming all individuals under a single label (non-believers). These studies are accompanied by self-reporting options for religious affiliation and enough anonymity to ensure the safety of the participants. Recent studies not only challenge figures reported by the state (Maleki & Arab, 2020), but also incorporate interviews, fieldwork and research on Ex-Muslims within the Middle East and Iran (Cottee, 2013, 2015; Nieuwkerk, 2018; Streib, 2021). This work further incorporates insights into the formation ideologies, and identities of non-believers and ex-Muslims.

2.3 Persianization, Ideology and Negotiation

Consider going to a Friday prayer in Iran. A huge gathering of people come together with the Arabic call to prayer to listen to an official sermon by an Ayatollah (a religious honorific given to a clerical expert – literally translated as the sign of God). This person is highly regarded due to his mastery of theological knowledge of Islam and Koran which is ultimately rooted in Arabic. This person is also an expert in the Fiqh (the rule of law under Islam) and has the power to confer legitimacy, issue religious decrees (fatwas), deem certain practices as haram (banned or impure) and others as valuable and pious. The act of praying in Arabic, the slow and respectful enunciation of religious Arabic terms by the cleric, are “acts [that] constitute a limited number of culturally salient transactions whose success resides in the speaker, in their personal and situational legitimacy”(D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 32). In order to better understand the importance of this religious ideology, I will re-state an important aspect of the common linguistic ideology of Iran known as Persianization.

In order to understand the common linguistic ideology in Iran between all members of society (section 2.2), it should be understood that Persian and Persianization in Iran are taken to be the core of Iranian identity. The religious ideology adds the Arabic language and religious ideology to this Persianization process (Loeffler & Friedl, 2022; Ram, 2000) that has been ongoing since the 20th century prior to the Islamic 1979 revolution (Rosenhouse & Kowner, 2008, p. 12). This later addition has followed a sense of unease toward Western languages, Western culture and Western imperialism by the dominant religious ideology (Behtash et al., 2017; Mazlum, 2022). Another controversy surrounding this Persianization process has been the inadequate space of this linguistic hegemony for minority languages, and their cultural and religious legitimacy. This means that communities who embrace their own language, and thereby, confer legitimacy to other items outside this pan-Persian Iranian identity, are viewed with extreme suspicion by the state and are often accused of being separatists (Khouri et al., 1990, p. 206; Sanasarian, 2004, pp. 81–84). It should be clear that given these conditions, Persian remains the only common ground even for individuals who are seeking to reform and advocate for linguistic recognition.

The same issue is true of Persianization extremism known as "Farsi chauvinism", a tendency that associates Iranian-ness and being Persian with Iran’s nationalistic icons such as the historical period of the Great Cyrus, the centrality of Shahnameh and the hyper correction of borrowed words into Persian words. This trend has its origins in 20th century linguistic policies (Atabaki, 2014; Elling, 2013; Khouri et al., 1990, p. 206; Tohidi, 2006). A few points of significance have to be mentioned before the next section.

First, Persian remains the only common ground for all linguistic negotiations and attempts to gain legitimization or recognition. This is true for religious believers who, in agreement with the official policy, want the addition of Arabic to be a highly valued language among Iranians. Also, true, is the need for other ethnicities to keep Persian as their national icon and heritage, but to seek to import the addition of their own language to be recognized among Iranians and the official language policy. Finally, secular individuals sometimes have an affinity with Iran's pre 1979 Islamic revolution (Pahlavi era) and are also aware of being charged with "Farsi chauvinism" if they disregard religious or ethnic sensitivities of other groups (Farzaneh, 2007; Juergensmeyer, 2017; Litvak, 2017; V. Martin, 2013). This means that all groups seek legitimization via engagement and negotiation in the common linguistic field of Persian language before moving on to add or advocate for their own legitimacy and linguistic ideology. Of central importance is therefore, seeking legitimacy for one's identity by negotiating a linguistic addition (of Arabic language, minority languages or western languages) and ideology without threatening the common core Persian identity embraced by all Iranians.

2.4 Religion and Its Conflation With Other Variables

Religion is often subsumed under ethnicity or national heritage in sociolinguistic research (Benor, 2011; Yaeger-Dror, 2014). In fact, the role of religion after the migration of Anglican English and Presbyterian Scots to the Northern island was so significant that "religion became the main indicator of ethnic difference in Ireland" (Hepburn, 2001, p. 199). This means that religion can be of such a significance that identification and affiliation with it can drive ideological tensions that might lead to linguistic variation. Another similar area is Tabriz and Azerbaijan which make up the ever present case of linguistic and national conflict. However, despite the importance of the Turkish, and the effects of the local dialect on their speech, religion has not been the central or the "motor" of language variation or change in these areas (Sedghi et al., 2021). The situation is starkly different when the same area was studied by focusing on a single community, it was found that language was "reported to be somewhat important for religion since many religious topics are discussed in Lezgi² or Azerbaijani" (Clifton et al., 2005). This means that in this region, ethnicity has been more important than religion for the Turkish community. While Parisa Switzer (Switzer, 2021, p. 90) shows in her research on language identification in Iran, "All participants identified their "religious priorities" as affecting their linguistic perspectives", there is some conflicting evidence given the confounding of religion with other variables such as national heritage or linguistic heritage (Yaeger-Dror & Cieri, 2013). This means that religion and ethnicity cannot be regarded as the

² Lezgi or Lezgin, is a Northeast Caucasian language (Minahan, 2016, p. 242)

same as well. One reason that religion and ethnicity cannot be the same is that both used to be regarded to be inherited and or be part of one government, but with the rise of the “nones” (the religiously unaffiliated), the connection between ethnicity and religion has also been weakened, as shown by some studies (Baker & Bowie, 2010). Previous work on the sociology of religion has been aware of this separation (Hammond & Warner, 1993) and has developed to include gender (Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2012), race, and perception of individual, when researching religion (Galen et al., 2015; Howard, 2022). Although research on religion can be uninformative when “religion does not seem to be a factor where the surrounding population is of the same religion” (Safran, 2008, p. 187), given the promotion of religion in Iran, this area offers enough stability for linguistic exploration. Given the strong presence of Islam considering religion independently as a factor of analysis seems to be adequately motivated. This focus on areas where religion has a prominent position has proven to be useful. For example, Burdin (2016) reveals variation in distinctive productions with higher peaks, and a wider pitch range in the speech of the Yiddish speaking participants where Yiddish figures prominently. Similarly, findings on the Mormon community of Utah also reports that religion can be considered a significant factor of variation among the Mormon community (Baker & Bowie, 2010; Benor, 2011).

2.5 Indexicality and Meaning Negotiation

Contrary to the variationist methodology which tries to keep social categories as stable markers of social categories (Hall-Lew, Moore, et al., 2021, p. 14), in the third-wave tradition, these markers afford the speaker the flexibility of negotiating their own persona resources in the construction of social meaning. Indexicality underlies this anthropological view of language use and is an important concept for third wave. Briefly, indexicality states that a single linguistic feature will be deployed to evoke or make use of a different potential meaning (Eckert, 2008, p. 464). Negotiation always takes place in an ideological field. “In order to understand the meaning of variation in practice, we need to begin with this ideological field, as the continual reconstrual of the indexical value of a variable creates, in the end, an indexical field”. It is the ideology that limits, shapes or requires constant negotiation and reconstructions of meaning and persona (explained in the next section). Briefly, “An indexical field is a constellation of meanings that are ideologically linked. As such, it is inseparable from the ideological field and can be seen as an embodiment of ideology in linguistic form” (Eckert, 2008, p. 464). For example, Zenner et al (2019, p. 2) show how loanwords and word choice have religious as well as ideological motivations as “selecting particular variants in particular contexts, language users also reveal their language regard [which] defines such

language regard as a speaker's cultural knowledge and belief systems concerning the social meaning of the language variants and varieties in their repertoire”.

The indexical field is not static and hence, the same variable is not taken to ‘mean’ or ‘denote’ the same thing regardless of the ideological field or the context of use. Change in context might change the meaning of variables. Since variation is understood ideologically as well as linguistically, indexicality is to be constituted by levels of indexicality (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021; Eckert, 2000, 2008). On one level of indexicality, the focus is on the speaker, the groups, and the linguistic features, these same resources are used in service of second-order indexicality which captures the ideological values and identity formation of individuals (such as being middle-class, gay speech or ways of knowing in speaker’s community) (Silverstein, 2003). “A first-order index simply indexes membership in a population – it designates people as Martha’s Vineyarders, Beijingers, Detroiters. In the case of Labov’s (1966) New York City study, which Silverstein uses as his example, the populations may be social class strata. But the social evaluation of a population is always available to become associated with the index and to be internalized in speakers’ own dialectal variability to index specific elements of character. At that point, the linguistic form becomes a marker, a second-order index, which figures stylistically as speakers position themselves with respect to the elements of character selected out for internal use” (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 463).

This means that speakers “co-construct their social reality, to express and create group affiliations, to delineate the boundaries between ingroups and outgroups” (Zenner et al., 2019, p. 2). Given these two orders of indexicality, a single linguistic feature can be held fixed on one level, but index a different social meaning in another context. For example, Podesva (2007, p. 490) is focused on a single speaker called Heath who uses a single falsetto feature “for five primary purposes: to yell; to express surprise or excitement; to offer evaluative commentary; to enliven a direct quotation; and to engage his audience when telling a narrative”. Another example is the use of pharyngeal phonemes in Hebrew which might index potentially conflicting meanings based on the same feature such as historical and prescriptive accuracy; Mizrahi ethnicity, and even low socioeconomic status (Sharma, 2021, p. 5).

Since social variation is linked to ideological fields, ideological conflicts that lead to variation, include ways of positioning the individual, their view of world, their authority or even, their own ways of knowing via language. For example, Eckert (2003, p. 42) uses the example of The Martha’s Vineyard fishermen in Labov (1963) too further explain this. At the time when Labov was doing his field work, the central ideological struggle in the local community was “the issue of mainland control vs. the traditional island culture” [which was part of] a struggle among islanders with respect to their relation to the mainland. Labov

showed that the pronunciation of /ay/ had been appropriated as a symbolic resource in this struggle, as lowering of the nucleus came to be associated not simply with the mainland but with the local implications of a mainland orientation. Those engaged in the local fishing community, and youngsters who planned to remain on the island for their adulthoods, were resisting—and reversing—this lowering and showed a high rate of nucleus raising”. In another article, Eckert (Eckert, 2008, p. 464) states the ideological import of this variation as “a way of asserting one’s local authority and/or loyalty in a range of utterances that gave specificity to the source of authority and the object of loyalty: an argument about the fate of the island; recounting heroic or nostalgic stories about the fishing life; taking a negative stance towards the tourist industry or towards mainland or mainland-oriented individual; etc”.

The same ideological motivations have also been linked to negotiating self-identification and word choice. For example, research on the French Guyana-Suriname border shows that “on the French Guyanese side, children frequently used language cum ethnic identifiers when naming the Maroon languages and also showed a strong preference for the locally used indigenous names. Thus, instead of using the names employed in French discourse, e.g. Boni, Paramaka and Saramaka, they used the local forms, e.g. Aluku, Pamaka and Saamaka. This indicates that the traditional Maroon ideology, which asserts intra-Maroon differences and the salience of Maroon identities, is still salient for French Guyanese Maroon children”(Léglise & Migge, 2021, p. 12).

In each context, the linguistic ideology informs the range of potential social meanings and performances that is available to the speaker in each context and it is in these contexts that social meaning is negotiated to obtain a desired result (accommodation, opposition or solidarity among other things). As another example, consider prayer in the context of religion. In Islam you cannot pray using another language because Arabic is the language of the divine. To pray in another language is to parody, or disrespect the status of Arabic and its theological importance within the religious ideology (Atwa, 2018). These ideological aspects of language continue to cause controversy among the religious for language of prayer among non-Arabic speakers (Aydar & Gökkir, 2007; Wiegers, 1995). Another example is glossolalia or speaking in tongues. To speak in tongue is of great religious value in the Pentecostal tradition, and in fact, theologically, while one can pray and engage in religious practice in this faith even without speaking in tongues, for believers, speaking in tongues is what confers more value to prayer and closeness to God and the Holy Spirit (Cartledge, 2016, pp. 6, 65). This means that speaking in tongues is not simply a linguistic performance devoid of any ideological significance. Speaking in tongues is a linguistic practice by which people can claim justification for sensing the Holy Spirit and being close to God.

It is the speaker's motivation, social pressures, religion and its ideological commitments (among other factors), which leads them to negotiation of social meaning in each indexical field. This means that the same linguistic feature might be useful as it can index religiosity, accommodation or respect for the divine reality of Arabic on the one hand, and parody or more liberal versions of Islam on the other. Interestingly, intentionally "false" pronunciations can also be ideologically motivated. As Panero (2019, p. 1) reports, English speaking students in Spain have an awareness of the fact that forms typically associated with "good" English (i.e. not having "an accent") do not just 'carry' one single meaning but may index multiple competing meanings at once. On the one hand, these perceived standards of pronunciation are presented as ways of indexing correctness/perfection and possible associated attributes (e.g. being a successful student). On the other, they are also said to signal pedantry (i.e. an undesirable attribute)". The present study keeps the linguistic features fixed in all context, but interprets the results of each context depending on how each context changes the second order indexicality of speech based on the audience of the speaker. The next section introduces persona and performativity.

2.6 Performances as Constituents of A Persona

The first important concept in this section is *persona*. "Persona is the individual's continual self-presentation with respect to the landscape, and the locus of gradual social change" (D'Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 31). For example, in the study mentioned above by Labov (1963), a fisherman might use centralizing the nucleus of /ay/ for an oppositional stance to "position himself as an opponent to the incursion of the mainland economy on the island" (Eckert, 2008, p. 456). Since the social context of language can vary depending on the audience or the ideology of the landscape, persona is not a fixed linguistic item, but a dynamic and changing landscape (D'Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 31). In each interaction, different semiotic resources for the stylization of a persona are identified as the set of features that inform the performances associated with the persona. Third-wave sociolinguistic understands language as a vehicle that carries social meaning (Eckert, 2000; Slobe, 2018). Since a persona is expressed via linguistic practices and performativity, I will provide theoretical basis of this concept with some examples.

Before presenting some examples, it is important to understand performativity. "Performativity is the power of a speaker to make change in the world through language ... canonical performatives involve highly conventionalized acts—promising, threatening, conferring civil and official status. These acts constitute a limited number of culturally salient transactions whose success resides in the speaker, in their personal and situational legitimacy" (D'Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 32). Understanding variation means

focusing on embedded variables in our linguistic and social performances. Therefore, To understand variation third wave sociolinguistic, is to understand individual variables as they become embedded in our interpretations of their role in a given style.

These styles are included in performances of the speaker and their negotiation of social meaning. Style in language picks out “locations in the social landscape such as Valley girls, cholos, Cow boys, jocks, burnouts, Italian hoods. Variables occur only as components of styles, and interpreting variables requires an analysis of these components” (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 32).

The stylistic variation is expressed through different performances (mentioned in section 2.5). It is the continuation of these performances via linguistic features which ultimately leads to the construction of a persona (Eckert, 2003). Relying on different phonological features (such as yelling, or vowel length) while expressing a performance stylistically “opens up a safe space for experimentation and interpretation” and it is via these interpretations between speakers that indexical fields are shaped and the speaker is then able to position themselves accordingly to the audience and to convey their desired social meaning during speech (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, pp. 31–33). Performances are not devoid of ideologies, social meanings and political significance. Performativity also confers legitimacy. This in turn, means different performances use different linguistic features and ideologies for negotiation of social meaning. These social meanings confers legitimacy to speakers so far as they can engage with what the dominant ideology of the situation is. I will conclude this section with an example. Imagine gathering in a mosque for Friday prayer. While there is nothing inherently wrong with praying in English and citing the Koran during the prayer in English, the dominant linguistic ideology of religion in Iran deems this attempt to be disrespectful, theologically problematic and devoid of legitimacy. In other words, it is the divine language of Arabic, Islam and God that can confer legitimacy to ways of knowing. It is the original sayings of the prophet (the hadith), and the original labels of the prophet (such as *صلى الله عليه وسلم* -peace be upon him) that convey a sense of sincerity, piety and respect for the Koran and prayer in general. It is not that English is the “wrong” language for prayer, but that it lacks the ideological significance of Arabic which legitimizes certain linguistic practices and performances (such as prayer in Arabic and theological understanding of revelation). If someone wants to pray in English, they have to negotiate another space in the indexical field that can be perceived to be legitimate (Eckert, 2011; Ennser-Kananen et al., 2021; Hall-Lew, Cardoso, et al., 2021). This means that certain practices when interacting with believers might/might not be able to capture a desired social meaning and ideology capable enough to include religious sensibilities of the dominant ideology. This attempt in negotiation for social meaning and creating other ways of knowing,

justification and legitimacy conferring will be explained in connection to the geeky rationalist (the subject of the present study) in the last section (Chapter 5).

2.7 Religion In and Out of The Third Wave

The “third wave” in sociolinguistics as conceived by Eckert (Eckert, 2000, 2003, 2008, 2011, 2012) is focused on social meaning, persona or the linguistic features utilized by speakers based on how they wish to be ideologically aligned or opposed to in their linguistic practice (Eckert, 2012). While this focus on the social aspect had been present within sociolinguistics, the third wave has formulated a theoretical background and an empirical framework which seeks to explore the how social, ideological and personal information is encoded in language in different interactions (Eckert, 2018; Hall-Lew, Moore, et al., 2021). As third wave sociolinguistics advances, research has come to be focused on individual speakers and how their ideological as well as their social and habitual linguistic features are linked to the persona of the individual. For example, (Podesva, 2007) looks at phonation in a single speaker and shows five primary functions for falsetto (to yell; to express surprise or excitement; to offer evaluative commentary; to enliven a direct quotation; and to engage his audience when telling a narrative). This means that not only each function is of importance, but also the topic and the discourse where these functions are used can each index a different social meaning (Ihalainen, 2020).

Considering the influence of linguistic features of Iran’s religious dominant ideology, and the linguistic ideology that informs individual’s linguistic performances, focusing on non-believers and minorities can lead to further insight in the formation of secular identities and personas. The main focus of the present study is the geeky rationalist, a non-believer. This persona will be explained in more detail in the next chapter, but in this section, I point to some central features of this persona. One feature closely connected to the speech of the geeky rationalist is his oppositional stance toward the religious ideology.

Besides vowel length, another focus in this study is borrowed words of the geeky rationalist and their different function in each discourse context. Borrowed words can often be used in order to mark one’s identity. “Put differently, linguistic features, including alternations between borrowed words and receptor language alternatives, carry the social meaning” (Zenner et al., 2019, p. 2). Given that word choice and religious affiliation have been linked (Sami, 2017; Yaeger-Dror, 2015) and that communities of practice often involve a set of characteristics that the speaker is associated with, this provides fertile ground for a third wave analysis of the geeky persona. These two features, vowels and borrowed words, are the linguistic variables that will be explored in the present study.

2.8 Research Questions

Given that the geeky rationalist as a non-believer is negotiating his identity and has to form associations and oppositions to different ideologies, there are two questions that are of interest in the formation of the geeky rationalist.:

- 1- Will the speaker exhibit longer vowel duration when addressing believers?
- 2- Will the speaker use more borrowed words when he is addressing believers?

First, closeness to authentic pronunciation of words along with slow gentle speech is ideologically significant in Iran. As one researcher writes about the leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, "One could see his self-confident smile and picture his slow speech and gentle movements which had become a symbol for the fight against western imperialism" (Seyed-Gohrab, 2021). To take an oppositional stance toward this use, helps mark the opposition of the individual toward this aspect of religious ideology. To explore how this can relate the geeky rationalist and the formation of his persona, vowel length was selected for analysis.

Second question relates to the use of borrowed words. Since the religious ideology of the Islamic republic views Western language, media and culture as Westoxication and anti-imperialism (Mazlum, 2022), word choice such as borrowing or using a western language has both linguistic and ideological importance in the formation of the geeky rationalist. I will be relying on borrowed words to see how they are used in the formation of accommodation or oppositional stance of the geeky rationalist. The expectation is to see more English borrowed words when talking to believers as it is ideologically significant. This the reason for the importance of borrowed words in the present study.

Since vowel duration and its imitation is closely related to the dominant linguistic ideology, moving away or closer to is expected to be ideologically significant in accommodation or opposition of the geeky rationalist and in explaining the resulting variation in each context. As mentioned above, since imitation of vowel length in religious language is ideologically important, I expect to see variation in vowel duration depending on the religious affiliation of the audience. This variation is significant to the geeky rationalist secular persona which goes against the Islamic ideology of the country.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This section describes the corpus that I extracted my data from, including the makeup of the audience (section 3.1). Next, transcription (section 3.3), and data extraction (section 3.4) is described in detail. Subsequently, examples are presented (section 3.5) and followed by exclusions (section 3.6) and coding (3.7). Lastly, section 3.8 includes data analysis and is followed by a brief summary of the chapter (section 3.9)

For a period of one month, a part of a book club was dedicated to data collection with 60 individuals.

3.1 Design

A book café with a book club was selected. Participation in this book club was open to all Persian speakers in Iran. Prior to entering the café, participants filled out a consent form (in Persian) and then filled out a form asking for their demographic information as well as their degree of religious conviction. The participants' last names and other possible identifiers (such as phone numbers and emails) were written on headers collected by the book club only. As the researcher, I did not ask for this information, and could not get access to this data. This was done as part of the rules of the book club as well as a measure to keep all participants anonymous. Each participant was instead assigned a code that was later used as identification in the recorded file only based on their religious affiliation. The participants were not aware that the data collected would be used for linguistic analysis in order to avoid affecting the judgments of participants. At the end of data collection, the participants were debriefed about the real purpose of the study, its aim, and objectives through the book club. The next sections include details about the makeup of the audience.

3.2 Sampling: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The sampling method consisted of quota sampling and convenience sampling.

3.2.1 Quota sampling

Quota sampling chooses certain participants depending on predetermined characteristics. Given that the study was committed to including nonbelievers in the study in order to avoid sampling bias present, a group of 30 nonbelievers (atheists and agnostics) was randomly selected from 109 individuals who were nonbelievers and were included in the total population. All these individuals were members of a Facebook group. Randomly selected individuals were invited to participate via Facebook. The maximum allowed population in the book club was 65-70 total individuals and the goal was to rely on the general attendance of individuals to try to reach the maximum number of the book club.

3.2.2 Convenience sampling

Given the general population is most often Shia Muslims, there was no need to specifically control for the inclusion of the religious population within the total population of the study and hence, convenience sampling was utilized for this purpose in conjunction with the previous methods.

3.2.3 Exclusion criteria for participants

Aside from the above methods, the only criteria for the exclusion of participants was anyone below the age of 20.

3.3. The Corpus

The recordings obtained are made up of 60 speakers from different cities (Isfahan n=40, Ahvaz n = 5, Tehran n= 2, Yazd n = 3, Khomeini-Shahr n = 5 and Kashan n=5). The speakers all lived in Isfahan since the age of 3 (n=36) and 4 (n= 24). Each recording was approximately 90 minutes. The recordings were obtained during the summers and springs of 2019 to 2021. The demographic information of each person (linked to a numerical code for each person) was obtained which included, gender (male, female), age, ethnicity (Persian, Turk, Kurd, Arab, and Lur) along with religious affiliation and religious conviction. The religious affiliation conviction was assessed via 2 questions. The first question asked how many times a week each participant attended mosque or worship services of any kind (including Hoseinieh, Prayer houses, or Koranic gatherings). The other question asked the participants how high or low would they rate their own religious convictions in a 5-point Likert scale from not very certain to very certain. The speakers were recorded with a Sony ICD-ux560 handheld recorder at 44 kHz in uncompressed WAV format. All sessions of the book club were recorded by the researcher, but the researcher himself did not participate in the book club or any of the discussions. The total population of the sample was limited to only those living in Isfahan in order to limit the variety of accents of the speakers. After data collection, the researcher focused on a single speaker, the geeky rationalist, in two different contexts within the obtained recordings. A detailed description of the speaker will be provided (section 3.7) after providing the contexts of speech for the geeky rationalist that is the focus of this present study.

3.4 Three contexts of analysis

The speech of the geeky rationalist is analyzed in three different contexts. When talking to believers (GtB), when talking to non-believers (GtN), and when he is not addressing any specific group of people in a recording (GtH). In each context, vowel duration and the number of borrowed words will be analyzed for possible variation that informs the construction of the geeky rationalist persona.

It is important to note that the geeky rationalist did not know the religious affiliation or convictions of the participants he was talking to in each of these contexts. The ideological conflicts that lead to negotiations arise from the topics of the discussions in the book club (Is there a need to be religious, What is the best way to accrue knowledge?, How can life be meaningful?). During the discussions, individuals make their ideological commitments clear through accommodating toward the religious ideology or moving away from it. Similarly, none of the participants knew the geeky rationalist's religious affiliation or each other's religious backgrounds or degrees of conviction. All conflicts were therefore the results of individuals voicing their opinions on the above topics. It is in these ideological conflicts that an increased level of borrowed words might indicate a strategy in negotiating ideologies, signaling distance, or belonging to a "rationalistic" ideology versus that of the state or the religious speaker. To this end, an analysis of vowels and borrowed words is also done to test the relevant research questions for each of these three contexts. These variables will be discussed in section 3.7. The next section offers information on the make-up of the audience in all contexts not as factor of analysis, but to make clear the religious conviction and age of individuals.

3.5 Participants

The 60 speakers who were part of this study all spoke Persian as their native language, but a few others in the same sample also spoke other languages given their closeness to their ethnicities (Turkish n=3, Kurdish n=1, and Lurish n =4) however no individual used these languages in the book club setting. It should also be noted that all of them lived in Isfahan only. the participants were divided into four different age generations based on the 1979 revolution. Each generation represents a different political and social condition either prior to or post 1979 Islamic revolution. This type of classification of generations by political area is typically utilized by other researchers (Amanat, 2019; Arjomand, 2009; Devos & Werner, 2013) based on changes in the political landscape of Iran. The revolution generation "Nasleh Enghelab" (born 1979 and before), the second generation, the so-called 'Pas az Enghelab' or after revolution (born 1980 to 1985), the third generation, the reformers generation or 'Nasleh Eslahat' (born 1986 to 1995), and the fourth generation 'Nasleh Pasa Enghelab' or post-revolution (born 1996-2001). Table (1) below collapses the speakers into social generations to show the overall social stratification of the present sample:

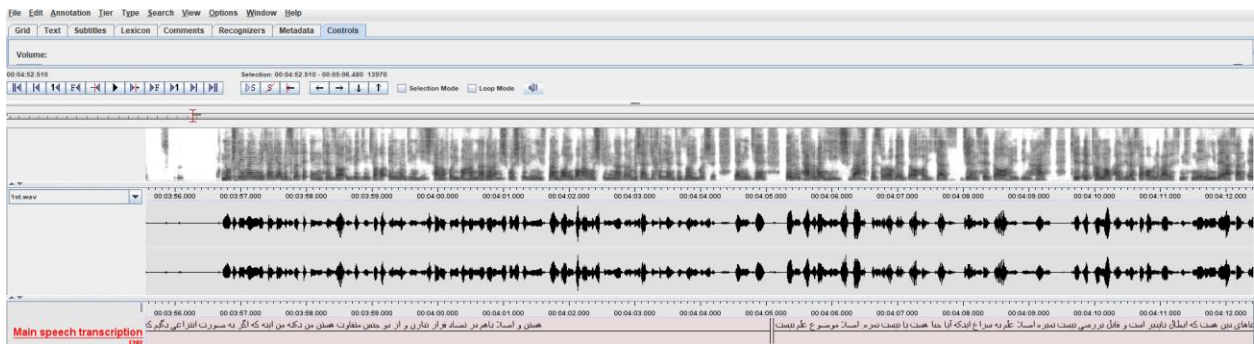
Table 1. Distribution of participants by gender

Age groups	Gender	
	Male	Female
1979 and before	4	4
1980- 1985	11	10
1986-1995	9	9
1996-2001	5	8
Total	29	31

3.6 Data Transcription

The recordings were first imported to an audio editing software called Reaper, a digital workstation by Cockos in order to separate the geeky rationalist’s speech from the audio file and, silence all other speech segments by other speakers. Additionally, from the three recordings, three random 20-minute intervals were selected for analysis. The .WAV output file from this software was then utilized for data transcription. Elan version 6.5 (Brugman & Russel, 2004) was utilized for data transcription as it has become the standard annotation program for coding various linguistic sets of data. Since the software does not support RTL (right to left) languages, for data transcription in Elan, each set was annotated in two tiers. The first tier was the speech of the geeky rationalist and the second tier contained comments and notes related to the focused variant in the segment. Image 1 shows the right to left Persian transcription of each segment.

Image 1. Example of Elan software



3.6.1 Data transcription

Each recording was carefully transcribed in order to extract vowels for duration measurement (section 3.8) and English borrowed words (section 3.7) in all three contexts. An hour of recording for each context of speech was gathered and analyzed. Given that the transcription involved different speech segments from different timestamps in the recorded file in between silent periods, I had to listen to each file and mark each segment's number and its context (see section 3.9 Coding). Additionally, to avoid some data due to errors in transcription, I also listened to each file. At this stage, some errors had to be corrected in the transcription from formal language to informal language so as to exactly match the speaker's speech (e.g., midanam; midunam). Further, another native Persian speaker also helped verify the transcription of each file. These actions were taken with the aim of increasing the accuracy and reliability of my analysis.

Finally, as a way to code for different social factors and the variants needed for my analysis, an Excel spreadsheet was created to categorize each token based on social and linguistic features. The first column included the geeky rationalist context of speech ID (the audience of the geeky rationalist), followed by the *gender and religious affiliation* of the participants in each context for each token. Finally, one column was added to identify each word that is the target of analysis (including borrowed words or phrases) and their nearest possible Persian substitutes with another column for any possible tokens of vowels for recording the length of each token. I selected segments that had one of the two variants: vowels in stressed position and borrowed words and added them in a spreadsheet divided by contexts. Image 2 below shows borrowed words in each context in the spreadsheet.

Image 2. Example of borrowed words divided based on each context

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1201	Geeky to believers	فايث	Faith		M&F	Islam/Shia	faith
1214	Geeky to believers	فايث	Faith		M&F	Islam/Shia	faith
1223	Geeky to believers	پرساپوزيسناليست	presuppositionalists		M&F	Islam/Shia	presuppositionalists
1240	Geeky to believers	لاچيک	logic		M&F	Islam/Shia	Logic
1242	Geeky to believers	لاچيکال	Logical		M&F	Islam/Shia	Logical
1478	Geeky to believers	ساينتفيک	Scientific		M&F	Islam/Shia	Scientific
1479	Geeky to believers	ريليسزم	release		M&F	Islam/Shia	Realism
1506	Geeky to believers	ساينتفيک	Scientific		M&F	Islam/Shia	Scientific
1507	Geeky to believers	متد	method		M&F	Islam/Shia	Method
1514	Geeky to believers	نال	null		M&F	Islam/Shia	Null
1515	Geeky to believers	هايپوسيس	hypothesis		M&F	Islam/Shia	Hypothesis
1525	Geeky to believers	کرلېشين	correlation		M&F	Islam/Shia	correlation
1833	Geeky to believers	ايجکت	object		M&F	Islam/Shia	Object
1973	Geeky to believers	مثميشن	mathematician		M&F	Islam/Shia	Mathematician
1978	Geeky to believers	ساينتنيست	Scientist		M&F	Islam/Shia	Scientist
1981	Geeky to believers	ديپارتمان	Department		M&F	Islam/Shia	Department
2150	Geeky to believers	نال	null		M&F	Islam/Shia	Null

3.7 The variable

3.7.1 Borrowed words

Borrowed words in Persian from English were among the tokens appearing mostly as adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and phrases. Each example below shows one of the tokens in bold:

- 1) From English as a noun (GtB 123-143):

Hodudeh 8800 **patient** ro bimar ro dar boimarestan hayeh mokhtalef va dar kelisahayeh mokhtalef barayeh inha doa kardan.

About 8800 **patients** and sick people were prayed for in different hospitals and in different churches.

- 2) From English as a phrase (GtB 4284-4293):

At some point, you need to take a leap of faith.

- 3) From English as an Adjective (GtB 5191-5203):

Ma be onvaneh adam hayeh **skeptic** birun vaysadim.

We as **skeptics** have stood outside.

- 4) From English as an Adverb (GtB 3107-3118):

Reasonable expecting ro ya nemidunam be Farsi chi bayad goft.

Reasonably expecting or I don't know how this should be said in Persian.

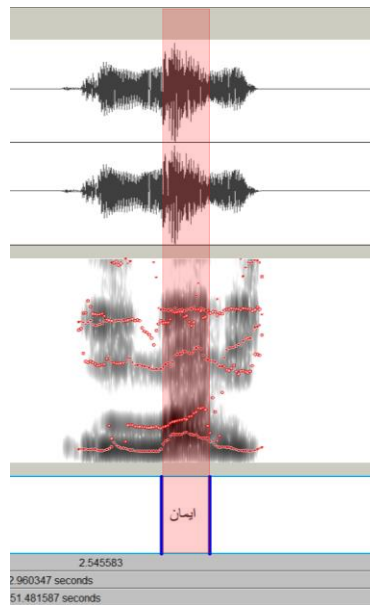
3.7.2 Exclusion Criteria for Borrowed Words

There are many different English, Arabic, and French borrowed words (Alqahtani, 2018; Kambuzya & Hosseinzadeh, 2014; Moghaddam, 2013) that have been integrated into the Persian language. The present study is only focused on English borrowed words. All these borrowed words are not part of the Persian language, as they do not figure in any dictionaries, public or newspaper corpuses, but they are now part of the native Persian speakers' vocabulary. As these words are not part of the Persian dictionary or any Persian corpus they are therefore easily recognized as borrowed words with distinct English pronunciations. All other borrowed words that have become an integral part of Persian have been kept in the corpus but are not part of the present analysis. The main distinguishing criteria for this decision has been the inclusion or exclusion of a word in Dekhoda dictionary, Dadegan corpus and the written and spoken corpuses of Peykaregan (Daadegan, 2020; Dekhoda & Moin, 2020; Peykaregan, 2020).

3.8 Vowels

As mentioned in the previous section (2.4), since one feature of religious discourse is vowel length, tokens of Persian stressed vowels (/ɒ:/, /æ/, /e/, /i:/, /o/, /u:/) were selected for measurement. Since high amplitude periodicity associated with vowels correlate to the beginning of the vowel (Grosjean, 2008, pp. 168, 176; Gussenhoven & Riad, 2009, p. 83; Solé & Vives, 2012, p. 106), the duration of vowels was measured by marking the beginning of periodicity of vowels. This periodicity is correlated with the start of F2. Similarly, the end of periodicity is often correlated with the end of F2 which was used to mark the end of the vowel where the vowel was no longer audible. In this way, I used the duration of the periodicity in vowels to measure durations in each case. It should be noted that selected vowels of borrowed words were also included in the measurement. These measurements will form the basis of the comparison of vowel length in each different context.

Image 3. Praat screenshot showing the vowel duration for /imân/



Separate from duration measurements, F1 and F2 measures of each vowel were also obtained in each context using Praat to analyze any possible significance that they might have for the speech of the geeky rationalist in each context. Since this result was not significant, these models are presented in appendix A.

3.8.1 Exclusion Criteria for Vowels

Given occasional cross-talk and misplacement of the microphone at times away from the speaker or the speaker walking away from the microphone, some vowels had to be excluded. After applying exclusions to vowels and borrowed words, I ended up with a total of 461 borrowed words. Further, 40 tokens for

each vowel in for every context were obtained resulting in a total of 720 tokens. In section 3.9 , I provide the basis I used for coding the data.

3.9 Coding

3.9.1 Issues with Character Encoding

After applying exclusions, the transcription which included all tokens for analysis was added to an Excel spreadsheet (Figure 4). The corpus consists of 32907 words. Upon adding the corpus to the Excel file, however, I encountered character encoding issues because the original corpus was written in Persian software. Since most software for linguistic or textual analysis relies on English characters, it is encoded by ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) (Anatol, 2020, p. 42), but Persian is encoded to use UTF-8 Unicode and this results in significant errors in textual analysis or even in some cases, typing plain text (Sedighi & Shabani-Jadidi, 2018, p. 466). To bypass this issue, Arabic letters were used in place of some characters.

3.9.2 Borrowed words

Since the present study is mostly focused on words, the corpus was not created on a sentence unit, but rather was constructed word by word. This means that each sentence is given a starting ID and an ending ID as an identifier of each sentence (e.g. 3093-3101). This was done to overcome RTL problems when transcribing in Persian. Furthermore, a literal English translation of each token was included beside each word in an additional column for easier identification of context for meta-commentary. A final column was also added for the original English borrowed words used in each sentence. A total of 461 tokens of borrowed were obtained from the data.

Image 4. An example of an Excel spreadsheet

3093	Geeky to believers	خوب Okay		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3094	Geeky to believers	کلمه Word		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3095	Geeky to believers	ایمان the faith		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3096	Geeky to believers	رو Face		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3097	Geeky to believers	دارید you have		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3098	Geeky to believers	دو two		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3099	Geeky to believers	تا until the		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3100	Geeky to believers	معنی meaning		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3101	Geeky to believers	مختلف Different		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3102	Geeky to believers	ا من		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3103	Geeky to believers	ا من		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3104	Geeky to believers	جاستیفاید Justify		M&F	Islam/Shia	Justified
3105	Geeky to believers	اکسپکتیشن Expectation		M&F	Islam/Shia	Expectation
3106	Geeky to believers	یا Or		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3107	Geeky to believers	ریزنبل reasonably		M&F	Islam/Shia	Reasonably
3108	Geeky to believers	اکسپکتیشن Expectation		M&F	Islam/Shia	Expectation
3109	Geeky to believers	رو Face		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3110	Geeky to believers	یا Or		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3111	Geeky to believers	یا Or		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3112	Geeky to believers	یک One		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3113	Geeky to believers	نمیدونم I do not know		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3114	Geeky to believers	به To		M&F	Islam/Shia	
3115	Geeky to believers	فارسی Persian		M&F	Islam/Shia	

3.9.3 Context of Speech

A column was added in each spreadsheet for each context of speech that indicates whom the geeky rationalist is addressing in each context. As is clear above (image 5), you can see the context ID as (GtB: Geeky to believers) which shows the context in which the geeky rationalist was talking to believers. Other contexts of speech follow the same logic in each spreadsheet (GtN: Geeky to non-believers, GtH: Geeky to himself).

3.9.4 Religious Affiliation

Given that I needed to keep track of the audience of the geeky rationalist in each context in terms of their religious affiliation, another column (RA) was dedicated to specifying the religious affiliation of the audience in each speech context. The number reported as religious affiliation is the average of individual choices reporting a number from 1 to 7 for each days of the week that they engage in religious ceremonies or rituals. The number reported as religious convictions is the average of scores between individuals choosing from a spectrum of certainty options from very certain to not certain at all with each option corresponding to a letter.

Table 2. Religious affiliation and conviction

Number of people in each group	Religious affiliation	Religious conviction
13	6/7	4/5
17	5/7	3/5
11	2/7	2/5
19	2/7	1/5

The above table shows the distribution of participants in the study based on levels religious affiliation. Since both affiliation and conviction are important (Yaeger-Dror, 2014), I decided to have one questions for each. Choosing from 1 to 7 on a Likert scale that asked “how religiously affiliated are you?”. 1 being not at all and 7 being very religious. I also decided to also include the same question on a 5 point Likert scale asking for religious conviction (how often does this person actively participate in religious activities?) 1 being not at all to 5 being very often.

3.10 Analysis of data

I employed Quantitative to analyze my data. Using SQL I combined each spreadsheet to explore any potential relation between vowel length in each context using R. The SQL code to combine all tables from spreadsheets was the following:

```
SELECT Context of speech ID, word/phrase, Literal English, Persian Substitute, gender (M/F),  
rel_aff (RA), Loanwords FROM context1  
UNION  
SELECT Context of speech ID, word/phrase, Literal English, Persian Substitute, gender (M/F), rel_af  
(RA), Loanwords FROM context2  
UNION  
SELECT Context of speech ID, word/phrase, Literal English, Persian Substitute, gender (M/F), rel_af  
(RA), Loanwords FROM context3
```

The final combined table was exported as .EXL/.CSV file to be added to R for logistic regression analysis (section 3.10.1). Additionally, the percentage of borrowed words in each context was also obtained and categorized based on its part of speech as obtained from the corpus. Any potential difference between the number of borrowed words in each context will be figured in the discussion (Chapter 5) of the present study as part of what informs the construction of the geeky rationalist.

3.10.1 Logistic Regression

In order to assess whether or not there is any statistical significance between vowel length in all tokens and the context of use, logistic regression was used to construct three different generalized linear models comparing each context with the other. Generalized linear models are used when the main focus is on the prediction of a set of expectations. In each model, context predicted by vowel length was used as the dependent variable, to test for any relations that might exist in each of the three contexts. The first model tested GtB and GtN, the second model is focused on GtB and GtH, and the third model is focused on GtN and GtH. The p-value in coefficients is used in order to establish or reject the null hypothesis. The following is the R code used in this study:

```
geeky %>% mutate(length = scale(length, center = TRUE, scale = TRUE),  
                F1 = scale(F1, center = TRUE, scale = TRUE),  
                F2 = scale(F2, center = TRUE, scale = TRUE)) -> geeky
```

```
geeky %>% filter(context != 3) -> geeky_bnb  
geeky %>% filter(context != 2) -> geeky_bself  
geeky %>% filter(context != 1) -> geeky_nbself
```

```
geeky_bnb$context = as.factor(geeky_bnb$context)
geeky_bself$context = as.factor(geeky_bself$context)
geeky_nbself$context = as.factor(geeky_nbself$context)

m1_bnb = glm(context ~ length, data = geeky_bnb, family = "binomial")
summary(m1_bnb)
m2_bself = glm(context ~ length, data = geeky_bself, family = "binomial")
summary(m2_bself)
m3_nbself = glm(context ~ length, data = geeky_nbself, family = "binomial")
summary(m3_nbself)

(contrasts(geeky_bnb$context))

(contrasts(geeky_bself$context))

(contrasts(geeky_nbself$context))
```

The same tests adding F1 and F2 as predictors was also done in order to see if they had any significance for the final results. This was shown not to be the case. The results of this model and a brief explanation are included in appendix A.

3.11. Summary

The present study focuses on the speech of the geeky rationalist persona to understand how variation in his speech contributes to this persona in each context of speech. To analyze this, an hour of recording for each context of speech was gathered and analyzed. The corpus led to 461 tokens of borrowed words and 720 vowels. The possible relation between the context of speech and vowel length was analyzed using logistic regression. The results of this analysis in combination with the number of borrowed words in each context figures into how the geeky rationalist draws on linguistic resources to form different stances in each context as discussed in the discussion section (chapter 5). The following chapter presents the findings of this study.

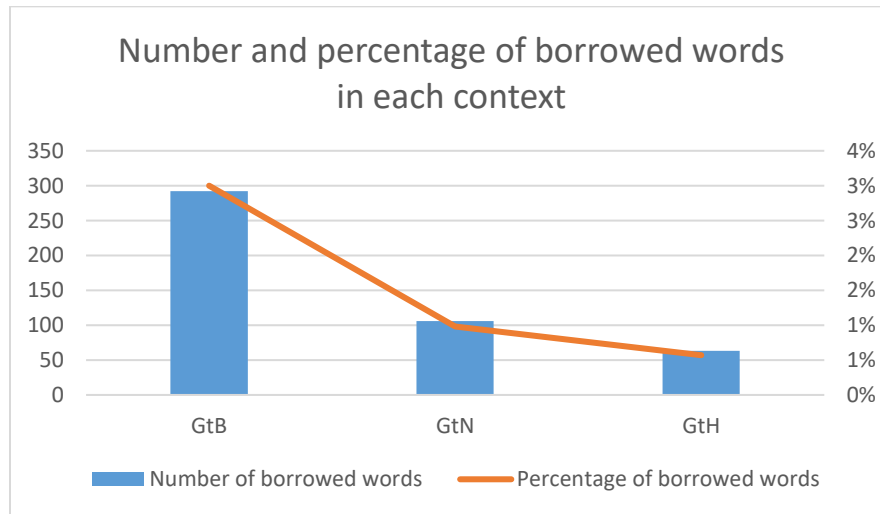
Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I present the results of the vowel analysis and borrowed words in three different contexts of use: when the geeky rationalist is talking to believers, when he is talking to nonbelievers and when he is talking to himself (addressing unknown audience). First, I will provide the overall distribution of borrowed words (section 4.1) and the results of vowel length statistical analysis in relation to borrowed words (section 4.2). Additionally, I discuss the statistical analysis of F1 and F2 levels for vowels in each context of use (section 4.3) before providing the correlation results of borrowed words and vowel length (section 4.4). Finally, I provide a brief summary of the results (section 4.5).

4.1 Overall Distribution of Borrowed Words

As seen in figure (1), the overall frequency of borrowed words indicates that while borrowed words appear in the GtN context (0.98% of the whole dataset consisting of 11160 words), they are more much likely to be used in the GtB context (3% of the whole dataset consisting of 10771 words). In the GtH context, where the audience is not clear to him, there are significantly fewer borrowed words (0.57% of 10198 words). The number of borrowed words from the speech of the geeky rationalist in GtB is especially significant in comparison to GtN and GtH. This will be discussed in the next section (Chapter 5: discussion).

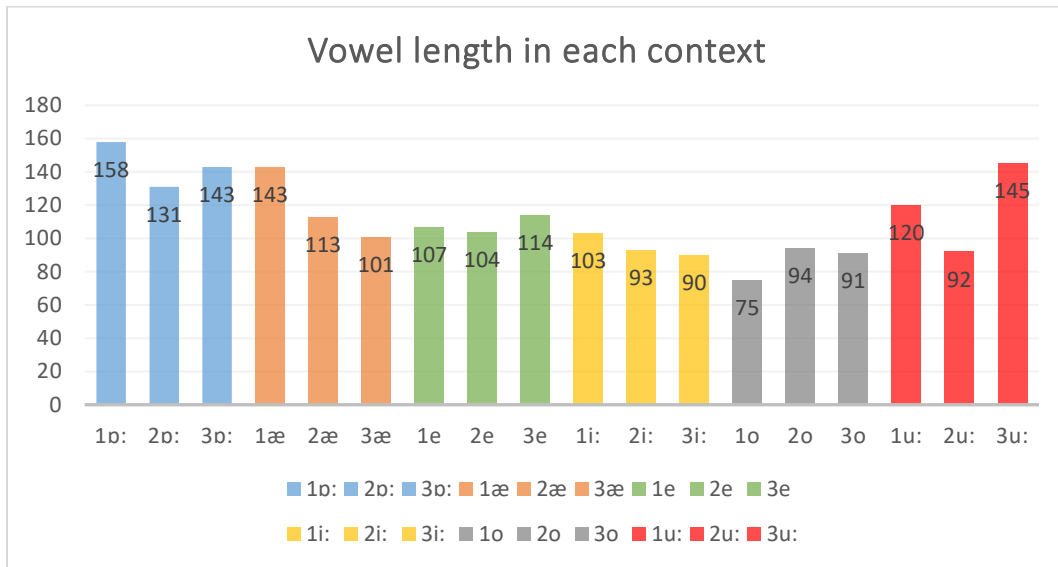
Figure 1. Distribution of borrowed words in each context



4.2 Vowel Length

Vowel length in all three contexts of speech as measured for of all Persian vowels under consideration (/p:/, /æ/, /e/, /i:/, /o/, /u:/). (Figure 9) shows the overall distribution of average vowel length for the geeky rationalist in all three contexts of speech. For each column in the chart below, the first context (GtB) is written as 1, the second context (GtN) as 2, and the third context (GtH) as 3.

Figure 2. Distribution of vowel length separated type of vowel



The first thing to note with regard to the above chart is that the vowels are almost always consistently lengthier in GtB and shorter in GtN. The only exception to this is for /o/, which shows the contrary, but even in this case, the average length (2o=94) is closer to GtH (3o=91). In short, the lengthier the vowel, the more likely it is to be in GtB. Additionally, vowel length in GtN is always closer to GtH. In order to explore possible connections between vowel length and the context of speech, a logistic regression analysis was conducted. Section 4.3 provides the results of this test.

4.3 Vowel Length and Context of Use

In order to determine whether the distribution of vowel length and context of use (section 4.2) is statistically meaningful, logistic regression was used to analyze the length of vowels in each context. The results show a significant relationship between vowel length and the context of speech. Since the analysis consists of three different models comparing each context to the other, the following presents the findings for each of these models.

In each model, two contexts of use (GtB/ GtN) are compared. The coefficients in the logistic regression below relate a dependent variable to an independent variable (length). The coefficient length shows the change in the dependent variable (context) for every one-unit increase in the independent variable (vowel). In this case, the coefficient for vowel length is -5.0361, which means that for every one-unit of increase in length, the dependent variable shows a reduction by 5.0361. The last column "Pr(>|z|)" provides the p-value for the estimated coefficient. This shows the probability of observing a z-, assuming the null hypothesis (i.e. that the true coefficient is zero). As the results show, the p-value is less than 0.05

for both coefficients in this case, which means that we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a statically significant relationship between the contexts variable and vowel length. All of the results, divided by contexts, are presented in table 3.

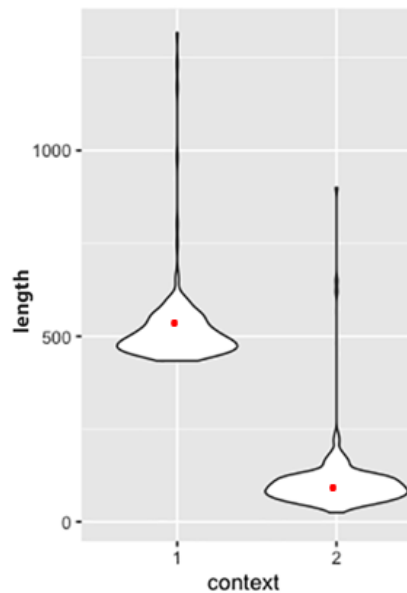
Table 3. Statistical summary of logistic regression

Coefficients:				
GtB/GtN	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	1.7799	0.4886	3.643	0.00027 ***
length	-5.0361	0.5363	-9.39	< 2e-16 ***
GtB/GtH	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	1.4848	0.351	4.231	2.33e-05 ***
length	-4.0687	0.3723	10.928	< 2e-16 ***
GtN/GtH	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	-0.006111	0.1635	-0.037	0.970179
length	0.037491	0.212	0.177	0.859626

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

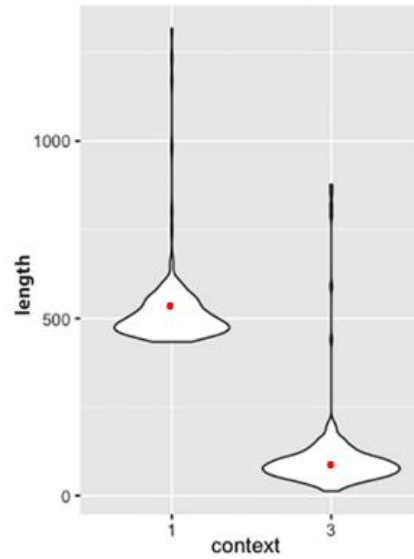
The following Violin plots show the results for each of these contexts. In each context, length is measured in milliseconds.

Figure 3. Vowel length in GtB and GtN



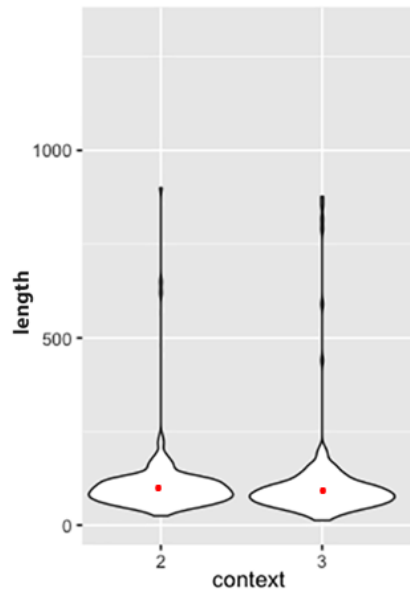
In the first model, GtB, is compared to GtN. As it is clear from the figure above, vowel duration was higher when talking to believers with a mean average of 517 milliseconds as opposed to only 104.40 milliseconds when talking to non-believers.

Figure 4. Vowel length in GtB and GtH



The second model compares GtB with GtH, not knowing the audience. The results are similar to the previous model with higher vowel lengths associated with believers with a mean average of 517 milliseconds as opposed to only 104. Milliseconds in GtH.

Figure 5. Vowel length in GtN and GtH



The third model looks at GtN, versus GtH, talking when the audience is unknown. In this case, there is no statistically significant difference between the two contexts.

4.4 Summary of Results

I conclude this chapter by summarizing the findings. First, the overall frequency of borrowed words indicates that they are more likely to be used in the GtB context (3% of the whole dataset consisting of 10771 words). In GtH, where the audience is not clear to him, there are significantly fewer borrowed words (0.57% of 10198 words).

Logistic regression was used to analyze the relation between vowel length and the contexts of speech. In all contexts, the speech of the geeky rationalist in terms of vowel durations is closer to GtH. To put it more simply, vowel duration is longer when talking to believers, shorter when talking to non-believers, and shortest in GtH. The next chapter discusses the implications of these findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter begins by providing an overview of vowel length usage in each context (section 5.1), and then moves to discuss the significance of its use among believers (section 5.2) and non-believers (section 5.3). In section 5.4, I will discuss the use of borrowed words and their ideological significance among believers before explaining the similar usage among non-believers (section 5.5). In section 5.6, I will discuss how all features of the geeky rationalist persona come together as a way for negotiate situational legitimacy. Section 5.7 addresses the main questions of the present study. Finally, in section 5.8, I will discuss some suggestion for further research surrounding religion, secularism and language.

5.1 Vowel Length

Results show the longest vowel duration in GtB context (i.e when talking to believers), with a mean average of 517 milliseconds. Vowel duration also is significantly reduced in GtN context (i.e when talking to non-believers) with an average of 104 milliseconds. I will explain this variation linguistically and ideologically through second order indexicality.

Variation in third wave sociolinguistic is understood ideologically as well to be constituted by levels of indexicality (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021; Eckert, 2000, 2008; Silverstein, 2003). A first-order indexicality simply indexes membership in a population. Here, the first-order indexicality is fixed in all contexts for the geeky rationalist as an Iranian individual. The only change between GtN and GtB is the presence or absence of religious ideology in second-order indexicality (see section 2.4 on orders of indexicality). The ideology “figures stylistically as speakers position themselves with respect to the elements of character selected out for internal use”(Eckert, 2008, p. 463). Linguistically, the presence or absence of religious ideology affects vowel duration and can explain the variation linguistically as an accommodation stance in GtB, and as a feature of oppositional stance in GtN. Religion explains the motivations of the geeky rationalist for taking an oppositional or accommodation stance in each context. In both cases, changes in the second order indexicality (religious ideology) explains the variation of linguistic features (vowel duration) and what ideologically constitutes the performative stance of the geeky rationalist.

5.2 Vowel Length Among Believers: Indexing Accommodation

Lengthier vowels in GtB are closely related to a type of speech which is the norm among religious leaders such as the 1979 revolutionary leader Ali Khomeini or the current supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. Seyed-Ghorab writes about this type of speech in Khamenei’s speeches: “One could see his self-confident smile and picture his slow speech and gentle movements which had become a symbol for the fight against western imperialism”(Seyed-Ghorab, 2021). Imitation of this type of speech is ideologically significant as

an attempt toward an accommodation stance in GtB context. The same type of speech figures prominently in the speech of other clerics who lead Friday prayers, or well-known religious tv presenters in Iran. Among many others, are Ahmad Alamolhoda, Friday prayer leader in Mashhad, and Hassan Rouhani, the former president of Iran. Imitation is an attempt in reaching a common ground with believers by the geeky rationalist.

As mentioned in section 2.3, groups seek legitimization via engagement and negotiation in the common linguistic field of Persian language before moving on to add or advocate for their own legitimacy and linguistic ideology. Of central importance for the religious ideology is therefore, seeking legitimacy for one's identity by negotiating a linguistic addition (of Arabic language, minority languages or western languages and ideology) without threatening the common core Persian identity embraced by all Iranians. Since the dominant ideology is an Islamic theocracy, the geeky rationalist should also bypass anti-Islamic and imperialist perceptions of atheism as offputting and crassly insensitive to Iran's religious and cultural traditions (Axworthy, 2017, pp. 86–87). The idea that being an atheist is Western, or a white identity, or stems from a Western philosophy is heavily present in the theological and political foundations of the Islamic republic (Howard et al., 2021; Mohsenpour, 1988). For the geeky rationalist, "consequences associated with the declaration of atheism in Iranian communities, can result in discrimination, persecution and withdrawal of legal status" (Calluso et al., 2020). The high cost of outright atheism in Iran when negotiating a secular identity is another reason that vowel duration is more significant in GtB. Ideologically, the secular ideology associated with the geeky rationalist is perceived to be devoid of religious significance or lack the required religious sensitivity for believers, the geeky rationalist has to engage in performance which express his understanding of religious sensitivities. This performativity relies on long vowels and is done to preserve the neutrality of the kind of secular identity that the geeky rationalist is seeking to construct. In order to express this understanding and acceptance of religion, the geeky rationalist engages in performative imitation of religious speech which indexes an understanding of religious sensitivities and ideology.

5.2 Vowel Length Among Non-believers: Indexing Opposition

In GtN, vowel duration is on average 104 millisecond in comparison to 517 milliseconds in GtB. Since the religious ideology is less salient when talking to non-believers, the reduction in vowel duration is due to change in the second order of indexicality from a religious ideology to a secular one. As Shaery-Eisenlohr reports, "ethnic, national, or linguistic differences are not self-evident barriers between people but only appear as such through the ideological reworking and interpretation of perceived ethnic and linguistic

difference. That is, perceived difference has to be actively made relevant for the construction of ideologically significant boundaries between populations” (2007, p. 19). In this context, the imitation of slow and careful speech is rare because ideological conflicts that activate perceived linguistic differences are absent. While rare, these instances of lengthier vowels are used humorously by the geeky rationalist to distance himself from the religious ideology and accommodate his position to his secular audience (see examples below). The humor and satirical nature of this performance applies to some of the most highly valued, respected practices and subjects that are religiously valuable. These are concepts that require delicacy and sensitivity when approached for analysis from within the religious ideology. Consider the following examples. The first example is where he comically views theologians as marginalized stamp collectors who are not taken seriously:

GtN 7253-7268 Shoma aslan ina ro nemibinid, migoft ina mesleh tamber jam kona hastan, in **elahidana...**

...7275-7280 tu masjidam harfayeh ina shenideh nemisheh

You won't even see them, he said they are like stamp collectors, these **theologians...** even

In mosques they don't listen to what they have to say.

In another example as he is talking about a theologian, he states the following about his reasoning capabilities ironically:

GtN 7455 Tu zehness nemitunest **yani panjta** gozare **manteghi** tu zehness string beshe.

-7469 In his mind, **even five logical premises** couldn't have been stringed together.

A classic example of this kind of satirical work, is another person associated with the geeky rationalist persona, Sadegh Hedayat, the Persian novelist and poet. In his book, *Kārevān-e Eslām* [The caravan of Islam], Hedayat utilized a deeply nationalistic ideology which engages in satirical comedy of virtually every aspect of Islam (Hedayat, 2002; Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016, pp. 186–187). This humorous imitation has also been featured in well-known comedy movies of *Marmulak*, a controversial best seller in Iran based on a prisoner who is involved in a case of identity thief of a cleric (Mitchell, 2008), and trilogy of *Gasht-e Ershad*, which depicts a humorous account of the religious morality police. Both movies caused great controversy and were banned for a period of time, but despite these, they enjoyed enormous popularity (Langford, 2015).

To grasp the core idea of my argument reading the imitation of religious speech, consider the religious ideology of the state. Just as the religious ideology establishes its opposition towards western ideology

and pre-Islamic Persian identity by its use of Arabic language and religious performances (long vowels, seeking legitimacy from holy books), it nevertheless engages in performances that seek an acceptance of pre-Islamic culture and ideology of Iranian identity. This is done by engaging in performances which convey an ideological acceptance and sensitivity regarding a long-secularized cultural Zoroastrianism by Mommahd Reza Shah prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution. This means that Nowruz would be celebrated on the very same day as the 'Islamic Republic Day' - enabling a contemporaneous observance of both 'spring' and 'freedom'"(Ram, 2000, p. 79). In the same fashion, borrowed words index the geeky rationalist opposition regarding the state's dominant linguistic and political ideology while at the same time, engaging in performativity that seeks to index acceptance and sensitivity of religious ideology among believers. In absence of religious ideology, this imitation is no longer useful and functions as accommodation toward the secular ideology of the audience.

5.3 Talking to Believers: Borrowed Words and Identity

Concerning GtB, the data shows the highest percentage of borrowed words when talking to believers: 292 words or 3% of 11164 words in total (Figure 6), Borrowed words in GtB are part of the oppositional stance of the geeky rationalist. Since Persian is the only common space for all speakers, all linguistic negotiations take place in the Persian language and the core Iranian identity that is associated with it. In light of this, only some linguistic strategies can index belonging within the official nation-state of the Islamic republic. All other performances must seek to negotiate their belonging and identity by relying on this common Persian/Iranian identity. It is this struggle for recognition and belonging that gives rise to the formation of the geeky rationalist persona and his attempt in highlighting his ideological opposition, or sometimes accommodation to the dominant linguistic ideology.

The geeky rationalist uses English borrowed words to distance himself from the religious ideology. Borrowing therefore is in service of an opposing stance that actively moves away from the religious ideology. To better understand this, consider that the religious linguistic ideology consists of commitments regarding its foreign language policy stated previously (Chapter 2) which also informs religious identity and performances. Performances that deem non-Arabic prayer as illegitimate or controversial (Aydar & Gökkir, 2007; Wiegers, 1995) as not seen as genuine or real recognition of religious values. This religious linguistic ideology enjoys its legitimacy by being aligned with the state religion and its politics which embodies an anti-trust stance toward the western world (as "offputting and crassly insensitive to Iran's religious and cultural traditions" (Axworthy, 2017, pp. 86–87). In recent years, loyalty

to English or French language has continued to be negatively associated with Westoxication and imperialism (see section 1.6).

The most important use of borrowed words is for an alternative identity that avoids connotations of being off-putting and crassly insensitive to Iran's religious and cultural traditions, and is not perceived to be outright hostile to the dominant religious ideology of the country. One example is the use of the label atheism or atheist for self-identification as opposed to pejorative religious terms such as Mulhed or Ilhad³. Religious laws against apostasy coupled with the dominant sociological and psychological prejudice, have very significant and costly religious and socio-political penalties and are part of the linguistic ideology of the state (Abbott, Ternes, et al., 2020; Altemeyer, 2003; Brand, 2020; Gervais, 2013; Gervais et al., 2011). The above penalties in the perception of non-belief together with the linguistic ideology create ways of classifying belonging and legitimacy relating to "intergroup attitudes on divergent and convergent tendencies in a given speech community" (Yaeger-Dror, 2015, p. 73). To circumvent these limitations and challenges, the geeky rationalist relies on words, phrases, and performances which are located outside the circle of this linguistic ideology. Consider the example below from the corpus showing an attempt by the geek rationalist to defend the possibility of spiritual experiences for someone who identifies as an atheist:

GtN 6054- Migi in tajrobeh adieh. Hameh mitunan dashteh bashan. Ye **atheist** ham mitune dashteh
6071 bashe.

 You tell that this experience is normal. Everyone can have them. An **atheist** too can have
 them.

Consider the following example from the corpus. It is clear from the example that preferable to the geeky rationalist is also the Persian term Khodanabavar (one who does not believe in a God) for self-identification as it is similarly devoid of pejorative connotations. Regarding this usage, consider these examples from the corpus:

GtB **Khodabavari** va **Khodanabavari** vaghean zoreshun yeki nist.

10216- 10222 **Theism** and **atheism** do not really have the same force.

³ Mulhead meaning apostate and Ilhad meaning heresy "that distorts the fundamental teachings of Islam, especially within the community. Behavior does not become ilhad until it publicly manifests itself in the form of rebellion or blasphemy. The term is almost always employed in polemical texts or situational" (Esposito, 2004, p. 134).

GtB Besiari az ahleh elm hastand ke hanuz **khodabavar** hastan.

577-585 There are many keen on science that are still **theists**.

GtB Tamameh in daneshmandani ke be zaher khodabavar budand, yani inha belakhareh shoru
2735- 2457 kardan be pasokh hayeh jaded be jahan dadan.

All these scientists who appear to be religious, I mean that these eventually began to offer new answers to the world.

The relevance of the above Persian words is that when religious concepts are involved, the geeky rationalist tries to use language that is religiously neutral. This reliance of Persian is also important because it helps the geeky rationalist to avoid charges of westoxication. There are other similar instances in the corpus (GTB, 2759-2769). In all context, Persian remains dominant, this reliance on Persian (instead of Arabic) can also be a sign of tendencies toward nationalistic Persian identity, Persian chauvinism, and non-religiousness that is sometimes associated with it in more recent studies of religious demographics (Maleki & Tamimi Arab, 2020). This later connection to nationalism however need not be an immediate entailment of non-belief, and should be explored further in other studies.

It is interesting that instead of the Persian term “khodabavar” (one who believes\ in god), the geeky rationalist also uses the English word “theism”. This is interesting because it shows how this persona is seeking to form a religious value neutral stance, one that is not actively hostile or insensitive or careless regarding Iranian values, but that is nevertheless free from negative religious connotation (such as being morally corrupt or actively choosing to deny God and religion, like a Murtad [apostate]). While the term Khodabavar carries the positive attributes of piety, loyalty to religious sensitivities and Iran’s official political ideology, the English equivalent term of “theism”, lacks these connotations. These linguistic performances serve as a suitable alternative for the geeky rationalist because it seeks to move the first order indexicality (being a believer or a nonbeliever) to a more neutral ideology. Consider the following relevant examples from the corpus regarding the use of “theism”:

GtB 10285- Elm dare ye chizi mige, **theism** dare ye chizeh digeh mige.

10292 Science is saying one thing, **theism** another.

GtB 296- Be **open theism** ya khodashenasi eshare kardan.

304 They have pointed to **open theism** or theology.

It is important to note that in most cases, the indexical field of the borrowed words is used in order to invoke a different or neutral ideology in place of the religious one. For example, reason in English is used instead of Vahy (revelation) when the target is justification of knowledge or how one might live a moral life. The English term worldview and hypothesis is used when referring to religion as opposed to the usual Persian word din (religion). These changes inform the indexical space that is available to the geeky rationalist in negotiating his position among believers. Because linguistic ideologies need to participate in the dominant ideology to establish their legitimacy, performances engage with “the structures that confer legitimacy”. In the religious indexical field, association, belonging, and solidarity are made clear by opposing English language and Western scientific worldview (Balslev, 2015; Behtash et al., 2017; Mazlum, 2022). Given this fact, words that figure into the geeky rationalist’s speech are also words that are ideologically relevant to the dominant indexical field⁴. For example, in cases where his social acceptability and scientific legitimacy are threatened by the audience, he finds himself in need of negotiating a different social meaning. This explains his heavy reliance on English words such as logic, science or philosophy instead of reliance on revelation (vahy), and Sunna (religious tradition) when talking to believers. Consider examples below from the corpus:

GtB 137-151 Dar kelisahaye mokhtalef baraye ina doa kardan va haselesh in shod ke hich **correlationi** Nabud.

In different churches they prayed for them and the result was that there was no correlation.

GtB 1503- man moshakhasan manuram **scientific method** va model kardan jahan az tarighe
18528 **null hypothesis** va test va test [hast]

⁴ It is crucial to remember that indexical field should not be mismatched “with the term semantic field, which refers to a field of words of similar semantic content rather than to polysemy. Indeed, it might be better to use the term indexical field to refer to the various variables that might have related indexical value” (Eckert, 2008, p. 473).

I specifically mean the **scientific method** and modeling the world by **null hypothesis** and test and test and test.

Similarly, iman (faith) stands in contrast to aghl (reason) for the geeky rationalist. In addressing the audience who worries about his sources of morality that has no regard for ayateh Ghoran (verses of the Quran) he uses the English words premise and sound argument to establish an alternative that is irreligious. Consider the following examples from the corpus explaining what a premise is or what a good argument is:

GtH 2397-2409 Ye seri mafruzateh avalieh ya **premise** dare k behesh migim mafruza avalieh

It has a set of initial assumptions or **premises** that we call initial assumptions.

GtH 2822- **Sound argument**, argumente, estadalie ke motabare va dar eyneh hal mafruzatesh
2833 ham darston.

As sound argument, is an argument that is valid while its assumptions are also true.

Words that appear in each context are therefore important as they index different social meanings. While worldview, hypothesis and reason are used addressing believers. when talking to nonbelievers, their Persian counterparts are used: din, religion, vahy. When talking to believers, borrowed words help the formation of an oppositional stance, but the geeky attempts to do so by relying on the formulation of a more accepting alternative separate from the perceived hostilities of atheism as western , anti-religious or religiously insensitive (Axworthy, 2017, pp. 86–87; Calluso et al., 2020).

5.4 Talking to Non-Believers: In-group Identification and Belonging

Only 63 words, or 0.98% of the total 10779 words in GtN are English borrowed words (Figure 6). Since “perceived difference has to be actively made relevant for the construction of ideologically significant boundaries between populations” (Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2007, p. 19), and the only change between GtB and GtN is the presence or absence of the religious ideology, there is no need for indexing an oppositional stance toward religion when talking to non-believers as ideological conflict is absent. This explains the lower percentage of borrowed words among non-believers. Furthermore, the use of the borrowed words are also aimed at in-group identification as well as self-identification. Consider the following example from the corpus that not only includes the use of atheist for self-identification but also for identification of other in-group members (in this case a friend):

GtN 49-57 MigeH “agha shoma atheist ha akhlaghetuno az koja miarid?”... Kafieh be yek dindar
...63-70 begam yek dusteh **atheist** daram.

“Sir, where do you get your morals from?” he says... It’s enough to tell a religious person that I have an **atheist** friend.

Consider also the following example from the corpus. In this instance, not only the word atheist is used for self-identification, but the geeky rationalist moves on to include the audience in total as atheists who share his attitude regarding stereotypical religious perceptions of themselves:

Gtn 140-157 Yek tasviri dindarha az ma darand, yah ala az ma, man shomaro nemidunam, vali ma **atheist** ha.

The religious have a certain image of us, or us I mean, I don’t know about you, but us **atheists**.

It should be clear from the above example how both out-group and in-group strategies are present in his performance among non-believers. The word atheist indexes both his belonging to “us atheists” and the people he is addressing. The dominant indexical field in this context is the secular ideology and hence, the use of previous strategies is no longer beneficial for shaping the social meaning and ideology. The same performances that relies on borrowed words among believers, changes among non-believers to index belonging and recognition in solidarity with other likeminded non-believers.

5.5 The Geeky Rationalist: Navigating Legitimacy

The geeky rationalist is a persona that relies on different linguistic features for self-presentation and situational legitimacy. Different performatives feature in the formation of the geeky rationalist persona. “Performatives involve highly conventionalized acts—promising, threatening, conferring civil and official status. These acts constitute a limited number of culturally salient transactions whose success resides in the speaker, in their personal and situational legitimacy” (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 32). For the geeky rationalist, almost all such performatives that were the focus of this study are based on vowel length and borrowed words. In all performances, Persian still enjoys its dominant position. This is because performances engage with “the structures that confer legitimacy” (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 31) and Persian is part of the core ideology of being an Iranian. Given the ideological associations of secular ideology and the danger of “Farsi chauvinism” (Atabaki, 2014; Tohidi, 2006), the geeky rationalist relies on Persian to seek legitimacy, but he also relies on English borrowed words to evade associations with the

charge of “Farsi chauvinism”. Linguistically, there is value in preserving the common Persian ideology in relation to one’s identity. This remains true even for the Iranian diaspora in Canada. For example, Rafat (2010, p. 673) reports that for Iranian-Canadians, even though “they are fluent in English and Persian, they identified Persian as their dominant language. They also stated that they continued to use Persian at home and with friends in Toronto”. Ramezanzadeh has aptly captured the significance and even danger of linguistic ideology for Iranian-Americans by stating that “Telling the truth about one’s identity can also include using one’s heritage language; if even admitting to any connection with Iran or Islam is risky, then openly speaking Farsi is like wearing a bull’s-eye on one’s forehead. The truth, in such cases, can influence personal relationships and put Iranian-Americans in uncomfortable positions when their identification with their heritage – even in the most casual conversations – can literally change existing relationships” (2010, p. 104). Within this Persian identity, performances are legitimate and justified so long as they conform to the linguistic ideology of being Persian.

Another feature of the geeky rationalist is the imitation of slow and gentle speech closely related to the religious ideology of the country. Since in all contexts the first order indexicality remains the same, it is the changes in the second-order indexicality that explains the usage of vowels and imitation. If the dominant ideology is religious, vowels are longer and vice versa. Ideologically, vowels are part of a “continual reconstrual of the indexical value” (Eckert, 2008, p. 464). This reconstrual is more pronounced when “perceived difference has to be actively made relevant for the construction of ideologically significant boundaries between populations” (Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2007, p. 19). This means that when religious ideology is present, indexing accommodation is important since in Iran, this is the dominant ideology of “being an Iranian”. However, this accommodation stance for indexing acceptance of the religious ideology is coupled with an oppositional stance through borrowed words. While acceptance preserves this Iranian identity, borrowed words help the geeky rationalist to negotiate his oppositional stance toward religion while still being an Iranian. In all negotiations Persian and being an Iranian remains the common ground.

The dominance of Persian in all contexts can also account for changes in the percentage of borrowed words in each context. The geeky rationalist can use Persian as a common ground by which he is recognized as an Iranian citizen, but one which uses English words to open up a secular linguistic friendly ideology for self-identification and markers of belonging. This type of secular friendly ideology construction is also present both formally and informally in other countries with Muslim populations (Atwa, 2018). For example, Arabic is the common language in Lebanon and while francophones are still

the dominant language users among Lebanese individuals, “Lebanese Muslims are more likely to consider French to be associated with Christianity than are Lebanese Christians themselves, who are more likely to say French is associated with neither Islam nor Christianity” (Atwa, 2018, p. 18). French in this way serves as the function of a neutral secular ground that is still Lebanese but not Western or even Christian. This connection to an alternative English linguistic space is so deep for the geeky rationalist that in some cases he finds himself searching to provide a Persian replacement for some of his ideas (see example (4) in section 3.7.1) This means that competition for a sociolinguistic space is focused on the importance of how each index is to be marked by its social meaning inside the common Persian language. These linguistic strategies and “can be seen as an embodiment of ideology in linguistic form” (Eckert, 2008, p. 464) that make possible an opening for a neutral identification. The geeky rationalist is willing to risk Westoxication and being perceived as bidard or geeky because of its reliance on English, but in this way, overcomes the heavy price of apostasy laws and charges of Farsi chauvinism.

This difference in linguistic ideology can also show why the geeky rationalist attire and gestures seem also stand in contrast to its religious counterpart. Ties, suits and academic language contrast with the open-shirt, clerical attire, and slow speech among the markers of social conformity to religious linguistic ideology. This means that attitudes toward foreign languages, linguistic performance, and their distinct function in different contexts, each occupy a distinct role within the indexical field. The strong or weak presence of each is negotiated by the religious commitments of the geeky rationalist and his audience. The following table shows an overview of how each context leads to variation:

Table 4 Summary of variables in each context with an explanation of variation for each context

Common linguistic ideology	Persianisation (Persian language as Central to being Iranian)	
Context	GtB	GtN
Context dominant ideology	Islamic: Persianisation + Arabic	Secular: Persianisation + English
1st Variable: Vowel length	Frequent usage	Rare usage
The reason for variation	<p>Accommodation to religious ideology</p> <p>As recognition of the dominant Islamic ideology to get closer to the religious ideology of his audience</p>	<p>Opposition to religious ideology</p> <p>Used humorously by the geeky rationalist to distance himself from the religious ideology and</p>

	and find belonging in the dominant ideology.	accommodate his position to his secular audience.
2nd variable: Borrowed Words	Frequent usage	Rare usage
The reason for variation	<p>Opposition to religious ideology</p> <p>Uses English borrowed words to distance himself from the religious ideology: Persianisation + English as opposed to using Arabic.</p> <p>For an alternative identity that avoids connotations of hostility and insensitivity to Iran’s religious and cultural traditions.</p>	<p>Accommodation to secular ideology</p> <p>Aimed at in-group identification as well as self-identification.</p> <p>For showing solidarity among like-minded secular individuals and indexing belonging.</p>

5.6 Conclusion

In order to explore the linguistic construction of the geeky rationalist persona, and his identity negotiation, the present study was focused on linguistic features and their associations to different ideologies which result in variation depending on the audience of the geeky rationalist. In order to gain a better understanding of this process of persona construction, the speech of the geeky rationality was analyzed in three different contexts of speech. Based on slow speech and attitudes to foreign languages within the religious linguistic ideology, two questions were the focus of analysis:

- 1- Will the speaker exhibit longer vowel duration when addressing believers?
- 2- Will the speaker use more borrowed words when he is addressing believers?

The first question addressed connections to slow speech and its negotiation of belonging and opposition in different contexts. Logistic regression was used to explore any possible relation that might exist between vowel length and the context of speech. The results show a significant relationship between vowel length and the context of speech. The more religious the audience is, the longer the vowel duration

is for the geeky rationalist. One function of vowel duration was an accommodation stance when talking to believers. This was done by imitation of slow and gentle speech associated with religious ideology. Vowel duration was significantly lower when talking to non-believers and is indexed differently to mark accommodation to non-believers. The absence or presence of religious ideology predicts vowel durations. Since this ideology is absent when talking to non-believers, vowel duration is reduced. Longer vowels are rare when talking to non-believers and are typically used for humorous purposes. This type of indexicalization of belonging as a “kind of humor is often about the recontextualization of semiotic relations that circulate as icons” which might be racial, ethnic (Jaffe, 2016, p. 98) or in this case, nationalistic and religious. In case of humor, this recontextualization is done by leaning towards an ideological stance that regards science and philosophy as higher domains of legitimacy and ways of knowing among non-believers.

The reason borrowed words were selected as potentially important in the construction of the geeky rationalist was due to his usage of English. This reliance on English is in tension with the dominant linguistic ideology and informs the performativity of the geeky rationalist in “to express and create group affiliations, to delineate the boundaries between ingroups and outgroups” (Zenner et al., 2019, p. 2). To speak Persian with a mixture of Western languages and borrowed words, is to cut ties from the established linguistic unification of Islamic Prisonization and to side with a secular past devoid of any religious links to state religion (Ram, 2000). The results show the highest usage of English borrowed words among believers and lowest among non-believers. Relying on borrowed words for self-identification also helps the geeky rationalist to avoid connotations of being offputting and crassly insensitive to Iran’s religious and cultural traditions. When talking to non-believers, the dominant indexical field in this context is the secular ideology and hence, the use of previous strategies is no longer beneficial for shaping the social meaning and ideology. In this context, borrowed words serve for self-identification as well as in-group identification which indexes belonging. The main idea that accounts for the change in patterns of borrowed seems to be that the geeky rationalist can also use Persian as a common ground by which he is recognized as an Iranian citizen, but one which uses English words to open up a secular linguistic friendly ideology for self-identification and markers of belonging. The geeky rationalist persona is ultimately a constellation of acts which constitutes “a limited number of culturally salient transactions whose success resides in the speaker, in their personal and situational legitimacy” (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, p. 32). Borrowed words and vowel length as features of this persona change in response to the audience and the commitments the geeky rationalist in order position the speaker “accordingly to the audience and to convey their desired social meaning during speech” (D’Onofrio & Eckert, 2021, pp. 31–33).

This study also seeks to show how religion and secularity can be fertile ground of linguistic exploration. As Yaeger-Dror puts it “while addressee design and social network influences often appear indistinguishable from referee design, the two may be more easily distinguished from each other when religious denomination and ideology are factored into a study”(Yaeger-Dror, 2015). While others have attempted studies in this area, much remains to be fully explored outside the western hemisphere.

5.7 Recommendations for Further Research

Given the dynamic changes of indexical fields and differences in how the same indexical expression might be marked differently by believers and non-believers, there are related areas in which religion and linguistic variation can be further researched. One such area is humor. Some have speculated that there might be differences that in humor when it happens in connection to or against religion. (Adam, 2020; Guenther et al., 2015; Schweizer & Ott, 2016) even though anti-clerical, blasphemous, and disparaging jokes remain a source of difference. Given the common Iranian anti-clericalism among non-believers and believers alike, it is a matter of debate how far linguistic features can be taken to be a feature of secular linguistic ideology alone. This is a question in need of further analysis.

Since, previous sociolinguistic work has shown linguistic variation to be more pronounced in individuals who are in the periphery of worldviews as opposed to those who are convinced believers or non-believers (Baker & Bowie, 2010), another area that requires more attention involves the identity of the so-called “nones”. These are individuals who do not self-identify as non-believers, but simply as religiously unaffiliated. Both groups have experienced a significant rise inside and outside of Iran (Maleki & Arab, 2020; Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2020). This means that other studies should mostly focus on individuals who do not identify as convinced non-believers (or believers), but rather those who remain dynamic and open to change and movement in between different communities of linguistic practice. The relation between the degree of belief is also present as an ingroup religious tool within believers in the formation of the linguistic persona which further complicates the dynamic (Adam, 2020) and remains to be further researched both inside and outside of Iran.

Another important aspect that needs to be further analyzed is gender and specifically female religious members of the linguistic community. Women have been consistently found to be more religious than men (Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2012) and in the context of Iran, perhaps factoring into our analysis could point to a more specific and informative analysis of borrowed words. Will the gender of the audience change the type of borrowed, their number, or vowel length? Or will there be different linguistic features that figure into non-belief among women? A much wider sample is needed to answer to further explore

these areas. These further investigations might inform us better as to how identity and performativity changes in relation to religion as a source of variation.

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Appendix A

As mentioned in chapter 3, F1 and F2 measures of each vowel were obtained in each context using Praat to analyze any possible significance that they might have for the speech of the geeky rationalist. The results show that F1 and F2 were not significant as a factor which informs variation. Below are the results of a regression model that only focuses on F1 and F2 in each case.

Table 5. Statistical summary of logistic regression including F1 and F2

Coefficients:				
GtB/GtN	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	1.7799	0.4886	3.643	0.00027 ***
F1	-0.7018	0.8428	-0.833	0.40501
F2	-0.3773	0.4455	-0.847	0.39702
GtB/GtH	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	1.4848	0.351	4.231	2.33e-05 ***
F1	-0.7479	0.4862	-1.538	0.124
F2	0.1649	0.1777	0.928	0.354
GtN/GtH	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	-0.00611	0.1635	-0.037	0.970179
F1	0.036738	0.167317	0.22	0.826206
F2	0.449843	0.115747	3.886	0.000102 ***
Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1				

The only context in which these were significant was GtH in which the audience is knowing to the geeky rationalist. The reason for this only significant F1 and F2 level correlations are not clear. One way to account for this is to rely on much larger samples in future studies. Regardless of this only significance, since F1 and F2 were not overall significant at all, they were not included as factors as variation in this study.